

RELATIONAL UNCERTAINTY AND COMMUNICATION EFFICACY AS PREDICTORS
OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSATIONS AMONG ROMANTIC PARTNERS

by

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among Romantic Partners

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This study investigated the associations among relational uncertainty, communication efficacy, and the frequency and comfort of discussing religious topics in romantic relationships. Participants included 204 young adults currently involved in a romantic relationship. Preliminary analyses (i.e., bivariate correlations) revealed a positive association between time dating and the frequency with which respondents discussed religious topics, as well as a positive association between the frequency of discussing religious topics and the perception that one shares a similar religious affiliation with one's romantic partner.

Primary analyses revealed a negative relationship between relational uncertainty and the frequency and comfort with which partners discuss religious beliefs. Though anxiety from uncertainty discrepancies yielded no meaningful association with the discussion of religious beliefs, communication efficacy was positively associated with comfort levels and frequency of such conversations in dating relationships. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that relational uncertainty and communication efficacy combine to predict the comfort level and frequency with which romantic partners discuss religious topics. Furthermore, a suppressor effect emerged for coping efficacy on the frequency with which respondents discussed religious topics, such that those individuals who lacked confidence in their abilities to cope with their romantic partner's religious beliefs, but perceived that their partners would be honest about their beliefs when asked, were more likely to engage in discussions about said beliefs. The results also

provided some support for the effects of relational turbulence on the comfort level associated with discussing religious topics. Specifically, the associations between relational uncertainty, communication efficacy, and the comfort associated with discussing religious topics were more robust at moderate levels of intimacy rather than at low or high levels of intimacy. Collectively, the results provide evidence that relational uncertainty and communication efficacy are meaningful factors that potentially influence the frequency and comfort level associated with discussing religious topics in romantic relationships.

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Relational Uncertainty and Communication Efficacy as Predictors of Religious Conversations among Romantic Partners

Politics, religion, and money— individuals are socialized at an early age to avoid these topics in the presence of polite company and in social settings. Due to the potentially quarrelsome responses from such intimate self-disclosure, conversations involving these sensitive topics present a challenge in interpersonal relationships. Baxter and Wilmot (1985) suggested that conflict-inducing topics, including politics, religion, and attitudes toward parents, are considered “taboo” and consequently off-limits in dyadic relationships. However, factors such as relational uncertainty and intimacy may heighten a partner’s desire and need for highly personal information, information that is typically thought of as privileged and/or inappropriate (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002a). Though highly controversial, the impact and role of religion in an individual’s life makes it one taboo topic that romantic partners often confront.

Researchers have established the importance of religion in personal relationships (e.g. Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Harris, Marshall, & Schvaneveldt, 2008; Marks, 2006; Myers, 2006). Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) noted that a myriad of lifestyle choices are affected by religious preference, including “the education and upbringing of children, the allocation of time and money, the cultivation of social relationships, the development of business and professional networks, and even the choice of place of residence” (p. 386). Previous researchers have also established a relationship between religious conversations in marital relationships and positive relational outcomes. For instance, Myers (2006) found that a couple’s religious preference is as important in determining marital quality as their attitudes toward gender, work, and family roles. Increased religious commitment and church attendance, in turn, can increase marital dependency and marital monogamy, as well as marital satisfaction (Wilson & Musick, 1996; Bahr &

Chadwick, 1985). Clearly, romantic partners must grapple with approaching and engaging in initial conversations about taboo topics. However, the enactment of information seeking behaviors as a result of this uncertainty-producing information has become an area of inquiry in the past two decades (Afifi & Weiner, 2004).

Although religious viewpoints are often discussed before marital commitments are made (Krain, 1975), researchers have yet to explore how romantic partners engage in religious conversations during the formative years of their relationship. In earlier research, Krain (1975) suggested that dating partners often negotiate similarities and differences in their religious viewpoints. More recently, Lambert and Dollahite (2006) argued that as a result of these discussions, relational unity is established and couples are able to deal more effectively with conflict. What remains unanswered, however, is how individuals come to initially engage in a topic that is often taboo in day-to-day interaction (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). Whether partners hold a particular set of religious beliefs or not, even the choice to eschew a spiritual way of life in favor of an atheistic worldview may influence the various ways in which romantic partners talk about, and negotiate, religious topics. Due to the potential risk of discussing religious beliefs with a romantic partner, such as discovering incompatibilities that may lead partners to question the future of the relationship (Afifi & Guerro, 2000; Baxter & Wilmot, 1985), it stands to reason that certain factors, such as relational uncertainty, may influence religious conversations in romantic dyads.

Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) interdependence theory contends that expectations derived from past relationships influence one's evaluation of the costs and benefits associated with a current relationship. Referred to as a comparison level (CL), these expectations serve as standards by which the current relationship is measured. One pre-existing notion about what

constitutes a good relationship is the expectation of shared goals and values (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). When these standards are met, partners are likely to report higher levels of relational satisfaction (Vangelisti, Crumley, & Baker, 1999). If these expectations are not met in a relationship, however, negative consequences such as disappointment and stress may arise (Larson, 1992). In fact, individuals in dating relationships may ignore the problem or end the relationship when their standards are not met (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Stafford and Canary's (2006) research on married couples indicated, however, that satisfaction resulting from met expectations impacts relational maintenance behaviors between partners, such as openness and positivity. Yet dating partners may need to seek information during the early stages of the relationship in order to determine if their expectations will be met. Berger and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction theory suggests that the desire to determine if compatible goals and values exist between partners is motivation to decrease the resulting uncertainty and increase predictability, thereby establishing mutual understanding. Romantic partners are often faced with the decision of how best to manage uncertainty regarding religious viewpoints, and thus, may either seek information or avoid uncertainty-producing topics (Knobloch & Solomon, 2003).

Consequently, relational uncertainty may impact information-seeking behaviors specific to religion and faith by encouraging the avoidance of such potentially sensitive topics. Likewise, romantic partners may doubt their own abilities to discuss religion, faith-based topics, and/or general worldviews. Afifi and Weiner's (2004) theory of motivated information management (TMIM) expands on this, suggesting that perceptions of one's communication effectiveness (i.e., communication efficacy) is useful for predicting an individual's decision to seek or avoid information (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Thus, this study sought to extend the understanding of

religious conversations in early romantic relationships by investigating the unique and combined contributions of relational uncertainty and communication efficacy to spiritual and/or faith-based conversations in dating relationships.

This study also explored the degree to which the associations among relational uncertainty, communication efficacy, and religious conversations are moderated by the level of intimacy in romantic relationships. Baxter and Wilmot (1985) suggested that perceived similarity in viewpoints decreases perceived risk, which in turn, fosters a sense of assurance that results in positive information management actions. Mikkelsen and Hesse (2009) also noted that perceived relational closeness and religious similarity reduce the feelings of risk involved in religious conversations. However, this perception of risk may be affected by the level of intimacy experienced within the romantic relationship. In their relational turbulence model, Knobloch and Carpenter-Theune (2004) advanced the idea that moderate levels of intimacy often result in turbulent relationship conditions for the romantic couple, as the couple transitions from a casual dating relationship to an established romantic partnership. This period of moderate intimacy has been marked with high levels of episodic relational uncertainty and topic avoidance behaviors (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Knobloch & Solomon, 2002b). Given these assumptions, it stands to reason that the decrease in perceived risk associated with low or high levels of intimacy would have a positive impact on communication efficacy and religious conversation in those phases of the relationship. On the other hand, relationships characterized by moderate levels of intimacy may also be characterized by relatively high levels of relational uncertainty, and thus, partners may be much less likely to engage in religious conversations. Therefore, in the present study, relational uncertainty and communication efficacy were tested as predictors of religious conversations (i.e., frequency and comfort level) in romantic relationships,

and the results were compared across individuals who report low, moderate, and high levels of intimacy in their romantic relationships.

Theoretical Perspective

Religious Conversations in Romantic Relationships

Most of the research on religion and romantic relationships has examined the impact of religious beliefs on the partnership, with a specific focus on established relationships (e.g., marriage). Previous researchers have suggested that married couples experience increased satisfaction, commitment, and positive conflict-coping skills as a result of mutually held religious beliefs (Khodabakhsh, Esfandiari, Ashrafi, 2008; Hunt & King, 1978; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Interfaith couples, on the other hand, are less stable, more prone to divorce, and reported higher frequencies of disagreement than same-faith couples (Bahr, 1981; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Reiter & Gee, 2008). Individuals in an interfaith relationship are likely to lead separate lifestyles, including how they decide to spend time with family, select friends, and use free time (Kalmijn & Bemasco, 2001). Given that married couples derive positive outcomes from shared religious beliefs, it stands to reason that dating partners may experience positive outcomes as well. Similarly, divergent religious values may serve as a source of conflict or disagreement for a dating couple, one that ultimately creates stress and/or threatens the future of the relationship.

Though researchers have examined the effects of religion in marital relationships, little is known about the communicative process by which romantic partners discuss religious ideologies, especially during the formative years of the relationship. Williams' (2002) research on interchurch couples (e.g., Christian couples who hold denominational differences in church preference and ideology) explored the various ways in which interchurch couples discuss

opposing religious viewpoints during a couple's engagement period, while other researchers have examined the way religious youth engage in faith-based conversations with their parents (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008). These two examples offer some insight into how faith-based conversations may be enacted during the developing stages of a personal relationship. More than three decades ago, Krain (1975) suggested that dating couples negotiate similarities and differences in religious viewpoints, yet researchers have generally neglected how often such conversations occur, as well as factors that might influence the frequency of religious conversations in romantic relationships. Given this dearth of research, as well as the potential impact religion may have on individuals in the early stages of a romantic relationship, research investigating communication constructs that may influence faith-based conversations in the formative years of a romantic relationship is warranted. Two such constructs that are likely to influence dating partners' comfort levels and willingness to engage in religious conversations are relational uncertainty and communication efficacy.

Relational Uncertainty and Religious Conversations

Berger and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction theory (URT) posits that individuals desire to decrease uncertainty in interpersonal interaction. Uncertainty exists when there is an inability to predict another person's behavior. Indeed, Mongeau, Serewicz, and Therrien (2004) established that reducing uncertainty is a priority as early as the first date, yet individuals decide whether or not to reveal information partially based on the perceived level of trust in their relational partner (Rawlins, 1983). Partners who neglect to reveal information may induce feelings of uncertainty in their romantic partner, and the consequences of uncertainty may affect the romantic dyad in a number of ways. For example, lower levels of uncertainty lead to more

effective communication, whereas heightened levels of uncertainty may decrease attraction (Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

Although URT specifically addresses general uncertainty in the context of initial acquaintances, Knobloch and Solomon (2002a) conceptualized *relational* uncertainty as “the degree of confidence people have in their perceptions of involvement within interpersonal relationships” (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002a, p. 245). Specifically, there are three sources of uncertainty that contribute to relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). *Self uncertainty* refers to individuals’ abilities to describe and predict their own behavior and attitudes within a romantic relationship. Individuals experiencing self uncertainty may doubt their commitment to the relationship and therefore lack a desire to discuss a sensitive topic such as religious viewpoints. *Partner uncertainty* results from an individual’s perceptions of his or her partner’s involvement within the relationship. According to Berger (1979), partner uncertainty often arises in situations characterized by a lack of information about a partner’s values and preferences. This lack of knowledge may lead individuals to eschew religious conversation in favor of topics that are deemed safe or favorable considering the partner’s known attitudes and values. The third type of uncertainty, *relationship uncertainty*, pertains to the relationship itself and encompasses doubt about the status of the relationship. A volatile relationship, characterized by high levels of uncertainty regarding the status of the partnership, would not likely be conducive for conversations about deep-seated values and beliefs. Though self, partner, and relationship uncertainty may individually impact information-seeking about sensitive topics in romantic relationships, collectively, relational uncertainty may hinder information seeking behavior. While relational uncertainty may stem from three sources, it occurs at two levels: global and episodic levels (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). In other words, partners may

experience uncertainty about their general engagement in a relationship (i.e., global uncertainty), yet specific events, such as discussing religious viewpoints, may also trigger relational uncertainty (i.e., episodic uncertainty).

Knobloch and Satterlee (2009) have argued that relational uncertainty affects message production and message processing in interpersonal communication. When producing messages, relational uncertainty can lead to greater face threats as individuals may unintentionally damage the relationship and/or their personal image (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Likewise, Knobloch and Carpenter-Theune (2004) found that relational uncertainty affected conversations about sensitive topics (e.g., the state of the relationship, prior romantic relationships, conflict-inducing topics, negative life experiences) and heightened the degree to which such topics were perceived as face-threatening. Thus, the desire to reduce uncertainty through seeking information may yield negative results for romantic partners. For instance, partners may be confronted with the possibility of discovering fundamental incompatibilities in their relationship, or they may choose to avoid such conversations all together (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). Knobloch and Satterlee (2009) noted that individuals are more inclined to avoid direct communication about sensitive matters for fear of the potential damage to the relationship, partner, or self. Researchers have already established that individuals experiencing relational uncertainty tend to engage in more topic avoidance (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), and thus, individuals experiencing relational uncertainty may avoid the issue all together or evade responding to the topic should it come up in conversation (cf. Baxter & Wilmot, 1985).

In addition to message production, Knobloch and Satterlee (2009) have also posited that relational uncertainty impacts message processing by affecting individuals' perceptions of their communication ability. They have suggested that uncertainty decreases people's confidence in

their ability to communicate with their partners. For example, Knobloch (2006) examined romantic partners' date-request messages and determined that individuals who perceived high levels of relational uncertainty had a more negative view of their communication abilities. Individuals who reported high levels of relational uncertainty communicated less effectively in their date request messages and indicated that they believed they communicated poorly compared to third-party observers, who reported more favorable views of the date-request messages. Moreover, Knobloch and Solomon (2005) found that the presence of relational uncertainty mediated partners' perceptions of the level of difficulty ascribed to dyadic conversations. Consequently, scholars are now beginning to examine how relational uncertainty affects the way information and questions about the relationship are produced and processed (Knobloch & Satterlee, 2009).

In addition to message production and processing skills, researchers have also suggested that relational uncertainty impacts the topics people discuss (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Partners have the option to seek or avoid information, and as Knobloch and Solomon (2002a) noted, reducing uncertainty may be beneficial for partners due to the opportunity it provides to clarify and strengthen the relationship. Situations in which individuals *anticipate* relational certainty are likely to be handled with behaviors that encourage closeness, such as constructive information-seeking behaviors. On the contrary, relational uncertainty inducing events that are *unexpected* are more likely handled with avoidance or destructive communication patterns (Knobloch & Solomon, 2003). For fear of negative consequences such as face threats and relationship termination (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Parks & Adelman, 1983), the decision to forgo information-seeking strategies in favor of topic avoidance seems highly plausible in relationships characterized by relational uncertainty.

In general, researchers have examined the role of religion in marital relationships (e.g., Goodman & Dollahite, 2006; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Sullivan, 2001; Wilson & Musick, 1996), yet much less is known about the various ways in which religious preferences are discussed and enacted within dating relationships. Such an oversight is critical, given that romantic partners are perhaps more likely to discuss, negotiate, and/or coordinate their religious beliefs long before they are married. Despite this oversight, religion has been categorized as a conflict-inducing topic within interpersonal relationships in past research (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Baxter and Wilmot (1985) suggested that partners fear conversations about religion because such discussions may lead to a discovery of differences in beliefs, which may in turn lead to arguments or the dissolution of the relationship. The participants in their study desired similarity in personal preferences with their partner, and any topic that could jeopardize that status was considered taboo and consequently avoided. Based on extant research, then, it stands to reason that an inverse relationship exists between relational uncertainty in a dating relationship and an individual's willingness to discuss sensitive topics, such as religion. Thus, the following hypotheses were advanced to test this line of reasoning:

H1: Relational uncertainty (i.e., self, partner, and relationship uncertainty) is inversely associated with an individual's level of comfort in discussing religious (or spiritual) topics with a romantic partner.

H2: Relational uncertainty (i.e., self, partner, and relationship uncertainty) is inversely associated with the frequency with which an individual discusses religious (or spiritual) topics with a romantic partner.

Uncertainty Discrepancies, Communication Efficacy, and Religious Conversations

A second, but equally important goal of this investigation was to examine the association between an individual's communication efficacy regarding his or her worldviews and the frequency with which that individual discusses religious topics in a dating relationship. Afifi and Weiner (2004) have advanced the theory of motivated information management (TMIM) as a framework for understanding the process of information management in the face of uncertainty. According to TMIM, the process of information management is characterized by three distinct phases: interpretation, evaluation, and decision. Though limited to interpersonal interactions in which partners are actively seeking information of value, this theory outlines the cognitive process through which an individual (a) recognizes his or her desire for information, (b) makes a set of judgments based on predicted outcomes, and (c) enacts or refrains from an information-seeking strategy.

First, the interpretation phase begins when one realizes that a discrepancy exists between the amount of information one may have about an important topic and the amount of information one desires (Afifi & Afifi, 2009). Referred to as uncertainty *discrepancy*, this gap in information is often problematic and may lead to feelings of anxiety. TMIM proposes that individuals seek to reduce the feelings of anxiety that result from uncertainty, rather than their evaluation of the uncertainty discrepancy per se (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). In other words, it is not until a person is confronted with this discrepancy *and* experiences a heightened sense of anxiety that one decides how to manage his or her feelings of ambiguity (Brashers, 2001; Afifi & Weiner, 2004). In the case of religious viewpoints, an individual's lack of knowledge about his or her partner's religious viewpoints contrasts with the amount of information the partner desires about this subject, and this resultant sense of discomfort with insufficient information may lead one or both

partners to consider further action by discussing their viewpoints. However, just because an individual is motivated by anxiety from uncertainty discrepancy to discuss his or her religious viewpoints with a romantic partner does not necessarily mean that that person will be comfortable doing so. To explore this line of reasoning, then, a third hypothesis and a research question were advanced for consideration:

H3: An individual's anxiety from uncertainty discrepancy regarding knowledge about his or her romantic partner's religious beliefs is positively associated with the frequency with which an individual discusses religious (or spiritual) topics with his or her partner.

RQ1: To what extent are anxieties from uncertainty discrepancies regarding religious beliefs associated with individuals' comfort levels in discussing religious topics with romantic partners?

At the point when individuals experience anxiety, they begin to evaluate their predicament and consider outcome assessments and communication efficacy associated with information seeking. During this evaluation phase, outcome assessments are used to assess the costs and benefits associated with pursuing uncertainty reduction. Efficacy judgments require individuals to evaluate their ability, as well as their partner's ability, to successfully reach the desired outcome (Afifi & Weiner, 2004; Bandura, 1997). There are three types of efficacy: communication efficacy, coping efficacy, and target efficacy (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Afifi and Weiner (2004) defined communication efficacy as "individual's perception that they possess the skills to complete successfully the communication tasks involved in the information-management process" (p. 178). Coping efficacy is an individual's perception that he or she has the ability to emotionally and instrumentally deal with the information seeking process and

consequence. Target efficacy is one's perception that the target individual will provide honest and accurate information (Afifi & Weiner, 2004).

Efficacy judgments serve as a positive force in determining one's course of action regarding uncertainty (Afifi & Weiner, 2002). Other researchers lend support to this assertion, as Knobloch and Satterlee (2009) argued that relational uncertainty impacts an individual's confidence in his or her ability to communicate with his or her partner, and that individuals make efficacy judgments regarding their target's ability to respond to the information-seeking behavior. Afifi and Weiner (2004) suggested that efficacy assessments are more salient when individuals anticipate negative outcomes as a result of the information search.

From these two evaluative processes (outcome and efficacy assessments), individuals determine how to handle the uncertainty discrepancies they experience in their dating relationships (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002a). According to TMIM, individuals generally use one of three tactics for managing their uncertainty (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). They may seek information, avoid information, or reassess the importance attributed to the anxiety-producing information gap.

Despite the opportunity for constructive information-seeking behaviors, researchers have clearly demonstrated a positive and meaningful relationship between relational uncertainty and topic avoidance (Baxter & Wlimot, 1985; Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). TMIM suggests that avoidance behaviors are determined by outcome assessments and efficacy judgments (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). The theory further proposes that efficacy impacts individuals' decisions to seek information in uncertainty reducing situations, and that more emphasis is placed on efficacy assessments (over outcome expectancies) in situations where potential negative outcomes are expected. Previous researchers investigating

taboo topics in romantic relationships (e.g., Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004) and topic avoidance (e.g., Baxter & Wilmot, 1985) have suggested that religion, spirituality, and/or other topics related to one's values, morals, and worldviews represent a domain of conversations with potential to either unite and galvanize, or divide and polarize, relational partners. Thus, in the case of religious conversations, it stands to reason that a positive relationship will exist between an individual's communication efficacy about religious topics and his or her comfort levels and willingness to engage in religious conversations with a romantic partner. To test this line of reasoning, then, two additional hypotheses were advanced for consideration:

H4: Communication efficacy regarding religion (faith, and/or spirituality) is positively associated with an individual's level of comfort in discussing religious (or spiritual) topics with a romantic partner.

H5: Communication efficacy regarding religion (faith, and/or spirituality) is positively associated with an individual's frequency of discussing religious (or spiritual) topics with a romantic partner.

Given that relational uncertainty, uncertainty discrepancies (or anxieties), and communication efficacy regarding one's religious viewpoints may coalesce to influence the various ways in which dating partners approach religious conversations, two additional hypotheses were advanced for consideration:

H6: A linear combination of relational uncertainty (i.e., self, partner, and relationship), uncertainty discrepancies (or anxieties), and communication efficacy (i.e., regarding religious beliefs) will predict an individual's level of comfort in discussing religious (or spiritual) topics with a romantic partner.

H7: A linear combination of relational uncertainty (i.e., self, partner, and relationship), uncertainty discrepancies (or anxieties), and communication efficacy (i.e., regarding religious beliefs) will predict an individual's frequency of discussing religious (or spiritual) topics with a romantic partner.

Intimacy as a Moderator of Uncertainty, Efficacy, and Religious Conversations

The final purpose of this study was to test the degree to which relational intimacy moderates the associations among relational uncertainty, uncertainty discrepancies, communication efficacy, and religious conversations. Solomon and Knobloch (2001, 2004) suggested that partners in romantic relationships experience dramatic and reactive emotions and chaos as they transition from a casual dating relationship to a committed and exclusive relationship. Referred to as *relational turbulence*, Knobloch and Carpenter-Theune (2004) posited that this transition period, “render(s) individuals more reactive and relationships more tumultuous” (p. 175). In essence, their relational turbulence model posits that such turbulence is most likely to occur at moderate levels of intimacy, as partners begin to coordinate shared activities and future plans for the relationship. Intimacy describes “feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness in loving relationships” (Sternberg, 1997, p. 315). In romantic relationships, this construct may include sexual intimacy, feelings of closeness, exchanging ideas, and sharing leisure activities (Patrick, Sells, Giordano, & Tollerud, 2007).

According to the relational turbulence model, feelings of intimacy and connection may heighten partners' perceptions of uncertainty and their information-seeking behaviors. For example, irritating behaviors, such as a partner flirting with another member of the opposite sex, one partner teasing the other, or a partner's indecisiveness, are perceived as more threatening and severe during periods of moderate levels of intimacy due in part to the experience of relational

uncertainty (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). Knobloch and Carpenter-Theune (2004) proposed that moderate levels of intimacy are characterized by high levels of relational uncertainty. This heightened uncertainty, along with the inability to rationally appraise behaviors and reign in emotional responses, could have an impact on one's communication efficacy. Likewise, Afifi and Weiner (2004) suggested that efficacy assessments are more salient when individuals anticipate negative outcomes as a result of their information search. In other words, if a partner's judgment about the outcome of seeking information is clouded by the experience of relational turbulence, his or her efficacy perceptions may be impacted as well. Thus, the relative contributions of uncertainty discrepancies (and anxieties) and an individual's communication efficacy to an individual's comfort level and willingness to engage in religious conversations with a romantic partner are likely to vary as a function of the amount turbulence present in the relationship.

Finally, researchers have demonstrated that communication efficacy and relational intimacy are positively associated with information-seeking behaviors. For instance, Afifi and Afifi (2009) found that communication efficacy, along with outcome expectancy, are significant predictors of information seeking behaviors. Knobloch and Solomon (2002b) found that intimacy is inversely associated with avoidance in episodic uncertainty events, while Knobloch and Solomon (2002a) proposed that intimacy motivates partners to use direct information seeking behavior. The relational turbulence model proposes that moderate levels of intimacy and high levels of relational uncertainty during the period in which romantic partners negotiate the option of exclusive commitment will result in a volatile relational state. As one potential consequence, this turbulent period in the relationship timeline may lead to distinct, yet impaired perceptions of one's communication efficacy, similarities and differences in partners' religious

viewpoints, and more general discussions of a taboo topic such as religion. With this in mind, then, a final research question was advanced for consideration:

RQ2: How, if at all, does intimacy moderate the unique and combined contributions of relational uncertainty (i.e., self, partner, and relationship), anxiety from uncertainty discrepancies, and communication efficacy to the comfort level and frequency of discussing religious (faith-based and/or spiritual) topics in dating relationships?

Method

Participants

Participants included 204 young adults currently involved in romantic relationships and enrolled in communication courses at a medium sized private university in the southwestern United States. The sample included 129 females and 75 males, ranging in age from 18 to 37 with a mean age of 19 ($SD = 1.85$). When asked to identify their religious affiliation, 34 percent identified their partner as having an identical religious affiliation, whereas 57% identified their partner as having a different religious affiliation. Most participants were Caucasian ($n = 161$), though 14 were African American, 14 were Hispanic American, and seven were Asian American. Length of the dating relationships ranged from one month to nine years with a mean length of one year.

Procedures

Approval for this study was granted by the Institutional Review Board and students were invited to complete an online questionnaire using Qualtrics software. After obtaining informed consent, participants were given a link to the online questionnaire (see Appendix). Participation in the survey was completed anonymously, and in classes where instructors granted permission, students were awarded minimal class credit (less than 2%) for participation in the research. All

participation took place outside of regular class time. Upon completion of the survey, students were thanked for their participation and debriefed.

Measures

Relational uncertainty. Relational uncertainty was measured using Knobloch and Solomon's (1999) relational uncertainty scale. The instrument consisted of three subscales measuring participants' levels of *self* uncertainty (e.g., "How certain are you about your feelings for your partner?" "How certain are you about how much you are romantically interested in your partner?"), *partner* uncertainty (e.g., "How certain are you about whether or not your partner wants this relationship to work out in the long run?" "How certain are you about how much your partner likes you?"), and *relationship* uncertainty (e.g., "How certain are you about the definition of this relationship?" "How certain are you about whether or not you and your partner feel the same way about each other?"). Responses were solicited using a five-point, Likert-type scale that ranged from (1) *Completely uncertain* to (5) *Completely certain*. Previous reliabilities for the three subscales have ranged from .90 to .97 (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002a; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Knobloch, 2006; Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006). In this study, the relational uncertainty scale produced excellent internal reliability estimates, with alpha coefficients of .97 for self uncertainty, .98 for partner uncertainty, and .97 for relationship uncertainty.

Anxiety regarding uncertainty discrepancy. Afifi and Afifi's (2009) measure of anxiety from an uncertainty discrepancy was used to measure what a respondent knows and what s/he would like to know about his or her partner's religious beliefs. The original scale was developed to measure anxiety produced by an uncertainty discrepancy in adolescents' knowledge about their parents' relationship. In this study, the scale was modified to measure anxiety

produced by an uncertainty discrepancy in an individual's beliefs about his or her partner's religious viewpoints. The modified scale consisted of three items: (a) "When you compare how much you *want* to know and how much you *actually* know about your partner's (religious/spiritual/faith) beliefs, how anxious does it make you?", (b) "How anxious does it make you to think about how much/how little you know about your partner's (religious/spiritual/faith) beliefs?", and (c) "The size of the similarity/difference between how much I know and how much I'd like to know about my partner's (religious/spiritual/faith) beliefs is _____." Responses were solicited using a five point Likert-type scale that ranged from (1) *Not at all anxious/anxiety producing* to (5) *Extremely anxious/anxiety-producing*. For the original scale, Afifi and Afifi (2009) reported an alpha coefficient of .87, and in this study, the scale produced an alpha coefficient of .94.

Communication efficacy. Participants' perceptions of communication, target, and coping efficacy regarding religion were measured using Afifi and Afifi's (2009) communication efficacy scale. Afifi and Afifi (2009) developed the original measure to assess efficacy in adolescents who were seeking information about their parents' relationship. In this study, the communication efficacy measure (three items) asked respondents to consider their ability and comfort associated with talking to their partner about the issue of religion/spirituality/faith (e.g., "Regarding the issue of religion/spirituality/faith, I am able to ask my partner what s/he thinks about this issue"). Target efficacy (using three items) measured participants' perceptions of their romantic partner's willingness to provide truthful responses to the issue of religion/spirituality/faith (e.g., "Regarding the issue of religion/spirituality/faith, my partner would be completely honest about this issue"). Coping efficacy (using four items) assessed respondents' perceptions of their ability to cope with or manage information about their partner's

religious beliefs (e.g., “Regarding the issue of religion/spirituality/faith, I feel confident that I could cope with whatever I discover about my partner’s beliefs on these issues”). Afifi and Afifi (2009) reported alpha coefficients ranging from .82 to .90 for the three efficacy measures, and in this study, the scales produced acceptable internal reliabilities of .93 for communication efficacy, .92 for target efficacy, and .72 for coping efficacy.

Intimacy. Intimacy was measured using Rubin’s (1970) Love Scale. This 13-item scale measured relational intimacy by assessing an individual’s affiliative need (e.g., “It would be hard for me to get along without my partner”), willingness to help (e.g., “I feel responsible for my partner’s well-being”), and exclusiveness toward one’s partner (e.g., “I feel very possessive toward my partner”). Responses were solicited using a 9-point Likert scale that ranged from (1) *Strongly disagree* to (9) *Strongly agree*. Previously reported alphas for Rubin’s (1970) Love Scale have ranged from .89 to .93 (Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006; Knobloch & Solomon, 2002b; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), and in this study, the scale produced excellent reliability with an alpha coefficient of .90.

Religious conversations. In order to measure the frequency and comfort associated with discussing religious or faith-based topics, a list of religious topics was generated. Three individuals participating in romantic relationships were recruited to participate in a focus group. During the focus group, an exhaustive list of all possible terms used to describe different kinds of religious topics was generated. Care was taken not to prioritize one particular religion or faith-based perspective over another, as the topics were intended to transcend specific religious or faith-based backgrounds. Example topics included God, good and evil, fate, spirituality, life after death, right and wrong, eternity, the supernatural, attending worship services, etc. The same topical list, which consisted of 24 topics total, was used for both measures. Responses to

the frequency measure were solicited using a five-point frequency scale that ranged from (1) *Never* to (5) *Very often*. To measure respondents' comfort with discussing religious topics with their romantic partners, the same list of topics was used and responses were solicited using a five-point, Likert scale that ranged from (1) *Very uncomfortable* to (5) *Very comfortable*. In order to test the psychometric properties of both pilot inventories, a two-factor measurement model was tested using confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood estimation procedures in LISREL 8.80. The results produced acceptable model fit, $\chi^2(1079, N = 204) = 4435.89, p < .01$, NNFI = .94, CFI = .94, SRMR = .06, with each set of items loading on their respective latent constructs of *frequency* (ranging from .75 to .91) and *comfort* (ranging from .72 to .87) associated with discussing religious/faith-based topics. Consequently, items for each scale were averaged to create composite scores for the frequency with which participants discussed religious topics with their dating partners and their comfort levels in doing so. The scales produced excellent internal reliability with alpha coefficients of .98 for both scales.

Data Analysis

To analyze the first five hypotheses, as well as the first research question, Pearson's product-moment correlations were obtained. To test H6 and H7, multiple regression analyses were conducted using relational uncertainty (i.e., self, partner, and relationship), uncertainty discrepancy anxiety, and communication efficacy as predictor variables and comfort-level and frequency of discussing religious or faith-based topics as separate dependent variables. Finally, the second research question was addressed by comparing correlation coefficients across three groups of participants based on low, medium, and high levels of intimacy in their dating relationships. The three groups of participants were classified as follows: participants scoring below one-half of a standard deviation on the intimacy scale were classified as having "low

intimacy,” those scoring between one-half below and one-half above the mean were classified as having “medium intimacy,” and those scoring one-half above the mean were classified as having “high intimacy.” This classification procedure (a) provides greater precision than using the median split technique, (b) ensures more equal cell sizes among the three groups than using cutoff values of one standard deviation, and (c) allows for the most parsimonious test of the relational turbulence model, which focuses specifically on moderate levels of intimacy in romantic relationships.

Results

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and Pearson’s product-moment correlations for all variables in this study, are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlations (N = 204)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. RU-Self	2.11	.90	--								
2. RU-Partner	2.16	1.06	.67**	--							
3. RU-Relationship	2.29	1.00	.79**	.84**	--						
4. ANX-UD	1.93	1.00	.12	.12	.17*	--					
5. CE-Personal	4.34	.72	-.40**	-.32**	-.37**	-.11	--				
6. CE-Target	4.34	.69	-.37**	-.33**	-.38**	-.26**	.65**	--			
7. CE-Coping	3.95	.80	-.24**	-.14*	-.24**	-.33**	.25**	.47**	--		
8. REL-Comfort	4.19	.87	-.29**	-.26**	-.35**	-.14*	.43**	.45**	.26**	--	
9. REL-Frequency	2.75	1.02	-.21**	-.31**	-.27**	-.05	.33**	.34**	.02	.27**	--

Note. RU = relational uncertainty. ANX-UD = anxiety from uncertainty discrepancy. CE = communication efficacy. REL = religious topics.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Preliminary Analyses

A series of preliminary tests were conducted to determine if certain demographic items were associated with the two dependent variables in this study. Age of the respondents was not correlated significantly with the dependent variables, nor were there significant differences based on biological sex. There was, however, a significant association between time dating and the frequency with which respondents discussed religious topics with their partners ($r = .20, p < .01$), as well as a positive association between time dating and respondents' comfort levels that approached statistical significance ($r = .13, p = .065$). Relationship classification was then re-coded (based on unequal cell sizes) to reflect low, moderate, and high levels of emotional attachment. A one-way ANOVA using emotional attachment as the independent variable produced significant differences for both comfort with discussing religious topics, $F(2, 201) = 8.11, p < .01, \eta^2 = .07$, and the frequency with which respondents discussed religious topics, $F(2, 201) = 4.60, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$. In both cases, post hoc comparisons revealed a similar pattern such that, an individual's comfort level with, and frequency of, discussing religious topics with their romantic partner increased in ascending order from low emotional attachment ($M = 3.95$ for comfort; $M = 2.52$ for frequency) to moderate attachment ($M = 4.12$ for comfort; 2.73 for frequency) to high attachment ($M = 4.48$ for comfort; $M = 3.00$ for frequency). Finally, perceived similarity in religious affiliation produced a significant difference in the frequency with which respondents discussed religious topics with their romantic partners, $F(1, 185) = 8.78, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05$. Respondents who perceived that their partners shared the same religious affiliation discussed religious topics more frequently with their partners ($M = 3.00$) than those who did not ($M = 2.57$). However, no such difference emerged for respondents' comfort levels

with discussing religious topics. Consequently, each of these control variables were entered into the appropriate analyses for hypotheses six and seven below.

Primary Analyses

The first two hypotheses predicted that relational uncertainty (i.e. self, partner, and relationship) would be inversely associated with an individual's level of comfort discussing religious (or spiritual) topics with a romantic partner, as well as the frequency with which an individual discusses religious topics with a romantic partner. Pearson correlations revealed that relational uncertainty was negatively correlated with both comfort levels and frequency of discussing religious topics (see Table 1). Specifically, the results indicated that self uncertainty ($r = -.29, p < .01$), partner uncertainty ($r = -.26, p < .01$), and relationship uncertainty ($r = -.35, p < .01$) are all negatively associated with an individual's comfort level in discussing religious topics with their romantic partners. Similarly, self ($r = -.21, p < .01$), partner ($r = -.31, p < .01$), and relationship ($r = -.27, p < .01$) uncertainty were inversely associated with the frequency of discussing religious topics in romantic relationships. Thus, both hypotheses were supported.

The third hypothesis predicted that an individual's anxiety from the uncertainty discrepancy in religious information about his or her romantic partner would be positively associated with the frequency of discussing religious topics with said partner. The results revealed no significant association between anxiety from the uncertainty discrepancy and the frequency of discussing religious topics (see Table 1). Thus, H3 was not supported. There was, however, a small, but negligible inverse association between anxiety from uncertainty discrepancies and an individual's comfort level with discussing religious topics with a romantic partner (RQ1). Taken together, the results provide little evidence to suggest that a meaningful

association exists between anxiety from uncertainty discrepancies about a romantic partner's religious beliefs and the tendency to further discuss said beliefs.

Hypotheses four and five predicted that communication efficacy regarding religion (faith and/or spirituality) would be positively associated with an individual's level of comfort in discussing religious topics with a romantic partner, as well as the frequency of such discussions. The results largely supported both hypotheses, as communication efficacy ($r = .43, p < .01$), target efficacy ($r = .45, p < .01$), and coping efficacy ($r = .26, p < .01$) were positively associated with an individual's comfort in discussing religious topics with a dating partner. Likewise communication efficacy ($r = .33, p < .01$) and target efficacy ($r = .34, p < .01$) were positively associated with the frequency of discussing religion, though coping efficacy had no significant relationship with the frequency of discussing faith-based topics.

Hypotheses six and seven predicted that a linear combination of relational uncertainty, anxiety from uncertainty discrepancies, and communication efficacy would predict an individual's level of comfort, as well as the frequency of, discussing religious topics with a romantic partner. Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted using length of relationship and emotional attachment as control variables (at step one), and relational uncertainty, uncertainty discrepancy anxiety, and communication efficacy as predictor variables (at step two) of the comfort level and frequency with which respondents talked about religious topics with their romantic partners. Given no association between anxiety and the frequency of discussing religious topics, anxiety was only included in the model for comfort levels. In addition, the three dimensions of relational uncertainty were strongly correlated with each other (see Table 1), which could introduce problems of multicollinearity in the regression analyses. Thus, the three subscales were averaged together to create a composite score of relational uncertainty.

The first regression model, using comfort level as the dependent variable, produced a significant multiple correlation coefficient. At step one, the model accounted for 7.5% of the total variance in comfort associated with discussing religious topics, $R = .27$, $F(3, 200) = 5.38$, $p < .01$, as emotional attachment emerged as the only significant predictor in the model.

Participants with a high emotional attachment to their partners were more comfortable discussing religious topics than those with moderate or low emotional attachments ($\beta = .20$, $t = 2.18$, $p < .05$). Step two produced a statistically significant change in the model, F -change (5, 195) = 9.68, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .18$, bringing the total variance accounted for in the model to 26%. After controlling for nonsignificant effects for length of the relationship, emotional attachment, relational uncertainty, coping efficacy, and anxiety, personal efficacy ($\beta = .20$, $t = 2.37$, $p < .05$) and target efficacy ($\beta = .23$, $t = 2.53$, $p < .05$) emerged as the only significant predictors in the model. Thus, the sixth hypothesis was supported.

The second regression model, using frequency as the dependent variable, also produced a multiple correlation coefficient that was significant. At step one, the model accounted for 7.3% of the total variance in frequency of discussing religious topics, $R = .27$, $F(4, 182) = 3.57$, $p < .01$, as perceived similarity in religious affiliation emerged ($\beta = .20$, $t = 2.75$, $p < .01$) as the only significant predictor in the model. Step two produced a statistically significant change in the model, F -change (4, 178) = 7.13, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .13$, bringing the total variance accounted for in the model to 20%. After controlling for the nonsignificant effects of length of the relationship, emotional attachment, and personal efficacy, as well as the significant effect of perceived similarity in religious affiliation ($\beta = .17$, $t = 2.52$, $p < .05$), target efficacy ($\beta = .34$, $t = 3.37$, $p < .01$) and coping efficacy ($\beta = -.20$, $t = -2.64$, $p < .01$) emerged as the only significant predictors in the model. Relational uncertainty produced an inverse effect that approached statistical

significance ($\beta = -.18, t = -1.88, p = .062$). Thus, the seventh hypothesis was supported.

Although the correlation between coping efficacy and the frequency with which participants discussed religion with their dating partners was statistically nonsignificant, in the regression model, a statistically significant, inverse effect emerged for coping efficacy after controlling for target efficacy and relational uncertainty. This suggests the presence of a suppressor effect (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). In essence, the model suggests that target efficacy (and to a lesser extent, relational uncertainty) suppresses the irrelevant variance in coping efficacy so that this form of efficacy produces a negative effect on the frequency with which participants discussed religion with their dating partners.

To address the last research question (RQ2), participants were categorized as having low, medium, or high levels of intimacy in their dating relationships using Rubin's (1970) measure. Participants scoring below one-half of a standard deviation on the intimacy scale were classified as having "low intimacy ($n = 67$)," those scoring between one-half below and one-half above the mean were classified as having "moderate intimacy ($n = 73$)," and those scoring one-half above the mean were classified as having "high intimacy ($n = 64$)." Pearson correlations among relational uncertainty, communication efficacy, and both dependent variables were then calculated separately for each group of participants. Tables 2 and 3 reveal distinct patterns in the associations among the independent and dependent variables in this study across the three levels of intimacy.

Table 2
Bivariate Correlations between Relational Uncertainty, Communication Efficacy, and Comfort Levels Associated with Discussing Religious Topics across Levels of Intimacy

Variables	Low Intimacy ^a	Moderate Intimacy ^b	High Intimacy ^c
1. RU-Self	.03	-.34**	-.13
2. RU-Partner	-.11	-.25*	-.05
3. RU-Relationship	-.14	-.39**	-.13
4. ANX-UD	-.03	-.21 [†]	-.12
5. CE-Personal	.27*	.42**	.36**
6. CE-Target	.40**	.44**	.20
7. CE-Coping	.18	.21 [†]	.20

Note. RU = relational uncertainty. ANX-UD = anxiety from uncertainty discrepancy. CE = communication efficacy.

^a $n = 67$. ^b $n = 73$. ^c $n = 64$.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3

Bivariate Correlations between Relational Uncertainty, Communication Efficacy, and Frequency of Discussing Religious Topics across Levels of Intimacy

Variables	Low Intimacy ^a	Moderate Intimacy ^b	High Intimacy ^c
1. RU-Self	-.07	-.03	-.10
2. RU-Partner	-.30*	-.14	-.22 [†]
3. RU-Relationship	-.25*	-.06	-.18
4. ANX-UD	.04	-.04	-.10
5. CE-Personal	.15	.41**	.21 [†]
6. CE-Target	.30*	.26*	.22 [†]
7. CE-Coping	-.08	.01	-.09

Note. RU = relational uncertainty. ANX-UD = anxiety from uncertainty discrepancy. CE = communication efficacy.

^a*n* = 67. ^b*n* = 73. ^c*n* = 64.

[†]*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

In terms of the comfort associated with discussing religious topics with a romantic partner, the results indicate that all three dimensions of relational uncertainty are inversely associated with comfort at moderate levels of intimacy (see Table 2). At low and high levels of intimacy, however, relational uncertainty is relatively unrelated to participants' comfort levels with discussing religious topics. Anxiety from uncertainty discrepancies is inversely associated with comfort discussing religion in moderately intimate dating relationships at a level that approaches statistical significance. Although personal efficacy is positively associated with comfort discussing religion at all three levels of intimacy, target efficacy is positively associated with comfort levels only at low and moderate levels of intimacy. On the other hand, coping efficacy is largely unrelated to comfort with discussing religion across levels of intimacy, though of course, the positive correlations that did emerge may be significant with a larger sample of dating partners. Taken as a whole, the results provide some support for the relational turbulence model, as relational uncertainty, anxiety, and communication efficacy were all significantly correlated with comfort discussing religious topics at moderate levels of intimacy in dating relationships, but not necessarily at low or high levels of intimacy.

In terms of the frequency with which participants discuss religious topics with their romantic partners, the results reveal a different trend, as partner uncertainty is inversely associated with frequency at low levels of intimacy and, to a lesser degree, at high levels of intimacy (see Table 3). Relationship uncertainty is also negatively correlated with frequency at low levels of intimacy, though it is relatively unrelated to frequency at moderate and high levels of intimacy. Likewise, anxiety from uncertainty discrepancies is unrelated to frequency at all three levels of intimacy, as is coping efficacy. Personal efficacy, however, is positively correlated with frequency at moderate and, to a lesser degree, high levels of intimacy. Finally,

target efficacy is positively correlated with the frequency of discussing religious topics at all three levels of intimacy in dating relationships. In contrast to the results for comfort levels, the results for frequency provide less support for the relational turbulence model, with the notable exceptions being the positive correlations between personal and target efficacy, and frequency of discussing religious topics at moderate levels of intimacy.

Discussion

The principal goal of this study was to explore the associations among relational uncertainty, communication efficacy, and the frequency and comfort of discussing religious topics in romantic relationships. Overall, the results suggest that the presence of relational uncertainty and possessing communication efficacy predict an individual's comfort with, and frequency of having, conversations about religious topics in romantic relationships. As individual's perceptions of message production and processing are clouded by the uncertainty about what they want (or what one's partner wants) in their romantic relationship, they are less likely to engage in religious conversations, and less likely to feel comfortable doing so. However, positive perceptions of communication efficacy are correlated with the discussion of religious topics and enhanced comfort levels associated with such a potentially sensitive topic. This study also revealed unique patterns of communication regarding religious topics at moderate levels of intimacy, further expanding our understanding of religious or faith-based conversations in light of the relational turbulence model (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004) and the theory of motivated information management (TMIM, Afifi & Weiner, 2004).

The first two hypotheses predicted that relational uncertainty would be negatively associated with comfort levels and frequencies of discussing religious topics in romantic relationships. Consistent with past research, the results of this study indicate that relational

uncertainty may contribute to perceived face-threats and consequently, thwart information seeking behaviors (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Knobloch & Solomon, 2003).

Researchers have established that relational uncertainty affects message production and message processing (Knobloch & Satterlee, 2009), and that sensitive topics, like religion, are perceived as more face threatening in the presence of uncertainty because unintentional damage to the relationship, partner, or self may occur as a result of discussing the taboo topic (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). When romantic partners are unsure of what they want from their relationship, of what their partner may want from their relationship, and/or of the future direction of their romantic relationship, such feelings are likely to reduce the comfort levels that partners experience in discussing faith-based topics. Baxter and Wilmot (1985) noted that partners fear conversations about religion because the discussions may result in the discovery of divergent beliefs that could threaten the relationship. This fear of negative consequences, which is heightened as a result of relational uncertainty, may heighten the degree to which romantic partners feel less comfortable engaging in conversations about religious topics, and thus, decrease the overall frequency with which these conversations occur.

Unlike what was predicted in the third hypothesis and explored in the first research question, however, anxiety from uncertainty discrepancies was not associated meaningfully with the comfort and frequency of discussing religious topics in romantic relationships. One possible explanation for this result may be that a romantic partner's religious beliefs are less important at early to middle stages of relational development as partners explore common areas of interest. Rather, the discussion of religious and/or faith-based topics may become much more salient and important as couples move into higher levels of relational intimacy and begin to contemplate long-term commitment. Furthermore, a discrepancy between the information one has regarding

a romantic partner's religious beliefs and the information he or she would like to have may not produce anxiety if that individual already has an idea about his or her partner's religious beliefs (Mikkelsen & Hesse, 2009). As noted in the preliminary analyses of this study, individuals who perceived that their partners shared similar religious affiliations were more likely to discuss religious topics with their partners, and thus, discovering what one's partner believes about a variety of religious or faith-based topics may occur more so indirectly than directly as a function of information-seeking behaviors. The TMIM suggests that in interpersonal relationships, individuals only experience anxiety from uncertainty when they recognize a discrepancy between the information they have and the information they would like to have regarding a particular topic (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Participants in this study reported relatively low levels of anxiety from uncertainty discrepancies, and thus, this result may also simply be a function of a floor effect in the anxiety measure. If the findings related to uncertainty discrepancy anxieties are generalizable, however, the results suggest that just because an individual may like more information about his or her romantic partner's religious beliefs does not necessarily mean that he or she will engage in information seeking behavior. Extension of research into the third and final phase of the TMIM, the decision phase, could shed light on this observation. The decision phase is the crucial point at which individuals experiencing anxiety determine whether to seek information, avoid information, or cognitively reappraise the situation (Afifi & Weiner, 2004).

Consistent with the TMIM, the fourth and fifth hypotheses predicted that communication efficacy would be positively associated with the comfort level associated with, and the frequency of having, religious conversations in romantic couples. Religion has been categorized as a conflict-inducing topic (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985); therefore, an individual's ability to seek and cope with information about this potentially volatile topic is instrumental in determining the

comfort associated with discussing religion, as well as the frequency with which individuals are willing to have religious or spiritual conversations with their romantic partners. Efficacy is a positive force in driving one's actions (Afifi & Weiner, 2002) and this study further supports this assertion. One's confidence in his or her ability, or his or her partner's ability, to engage in a particular behavior positively correlates with information seeking behavior. Intriguingly, the findings from this study indicate that personal and target efficacy may be more meaningful predictors of the tendency to discuss religious topics in romantic relationships than assessments of coping efficacy. In other words, the more people possess confidence in their abilities to ask for information about their partner's religious beliefs, and the more they believe their partner will provide honest information when asked, the more comfortable they feel discussing religious or faith-based topics and the more likely they are to engage in such conversations with their romantic partners. Lambert and Dollahite (2006) noted that negotiating religious similarities and differences in romantic relationships may result in relational unity for the couple. Though individuals must possess the ability to seek information from their partners about their religious beliefs, in order for the conversation to yield positive relational outcomes, both parties must be engaged in the discussion. Individuals may perceive conversational outcomes as contingent upon their partner's willingness to participate in religious conversations, which serves as a predictor of one's comfort level and frequency of engaging in religious conversations with a romantic partner.

In addition to the bivariate relationships noted above, the sixth and seventh hypotheses predicted that relational uncertainty, anxiety, and communication efficacy would coalesce to predict the comfort and frequency with which romantic partners discuss religious topics. By and large, the results supported both hypotheses, though differences emerged among the predictor

variables in each model. Specifically, after controlling for length of the relationship, emotional attachment, relational uncertainty, coping efficacy, and uncertainty anxiety, personal efficacy and target efficacy emerged as positive and unique predictors of comfort levels associated with discussing religious topics. Given that the model accounted for 26% of the shared variance in the comfort associated with discussing potentially sensitive, religious viewpoints, these results are meaningful. To the extent that romantic partners feel confident in their abilities to broach the subject of religion and/or spirituality with their partners, as well as confident that their partners would be forthcoming and provide honest answers about their religious beliefs, romantic partners may experience greater levels of comfort in discussing religious topics. This, in turn, holds implications for the role of communication efficacy in the development of romantic relationships. If taboo or potentially sensitive topics (e.g., religious viewpoints) are perceived as face-threatening by romantic partners (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985), and thus reserved for discussion in the later stages of the romantic relationship, then perhaps communication efficacy may function as a barometer of intimacy and trust in romantic relationships, gauging how well partners know each other and trust each other to provide honest answers and opinions to potentially sensitive topics of conversation.

In terms of the frequency with which partners discuss religion, however, a different pattern of results emerged. After controlling for perceived similarity in religious affiliation, target efficacy and coping efficacy emerged as the only significant predictors in the model, though relational uncertainty approached statistical significance. Consistent with the model for comfort levels, an individual's belief that his or her romantic partner would be honest and forthcoming with their religious viewpoints positively predicted the frequency with which that individual discussed religious topics. On the other hand, coping efficacy, or the degree to which

individuals felt confident that they could cope with information about religion from their romantic partners, was an *inverse* predictor of the frequency of discussing religious or faith-based topics. The suppressor effect that emerged for coping efficacy suggests that, in the presence of target efficacy and relational uncertainty, the less one believes he or she can cope with information about his or her partner's religious beliefs, the more frequently one may discuss religious topics with his or her romantic partner.

When combined, experiencing relational uncertainty but possessing a belief that one's partner would provide honest and forthcoming information about his or her religious viewpoints renders coping efficacy a meaningful, negative predictor of the frequency of discussing such views in romantic relationships. Perhaps individuals who know they may not be able to handle the information disclosed by their partner regarding such a sensitive topic are motivated to seek information rather than avoid discussion of this often highly personal topic (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). Indeed, religion may serve as a core value that results in major implications for personal relationships (Harris, Marshall, & Schvaneveldt, 2008; Marks, 2006), and therefore necessitates frequent discussion as partners move through the relational uncertainty that often complicates the intermediate stages of relational intimacy. If partners perceive that they possess discrepant views on core values and/or worldviews, then the inability to cope with additional information on those discrepant viewpoints may fuel further (rather than less) discussion of religious topics as partners attempt to make sense of how their differing opinions may impact the future of their relationship (if at all). At a minimum, Berger and Calabrese (1975) argued that individuals are motivated to determine if their partner shares compatible goals and values in order to create mutual understanding. Consistent with their claim, the results of this study underscore coping efficacy

as one factor that may influence the degree to which romantic partners are motivated to create mutual understanding regarding their religious viewpoints.

The final purpose of this study was to extend current research on the relational turbulence model by examining how, if at all, the associations among relational uncertainty, communication efficacy, and the discussion of religious topics between romantic partners change as a function of intimacy (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). More support for the relational turbulence model emerged when examining comfort levels associated with discussing religious topics than for the frequency of discussing religious topics with romantic partners. The general pattern of results to emerge across low, moderate, and high levels of intimacy (see Tables 2 and 3) suggests that relational uncertainty and communication efficacy are perhaps most salient for individuals' comfort levels in discussing religious topics at moderate levels of intimacy, when relational partners are theorized to be moving from more casual to more committed stages of romantic involvement. As couples transition from a casual dating relationship to a more serious and committed romantic relationship, they often experience turbulence as a function of coordinating shared activities and future plans together (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Previous research suggests that this turbulence is characterized by higher levels of uncertainty, dramatic and reactive emotions, and a greater likelihood that individuals perceive partner indiscretions as threatening to the relationship (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). Consistent with previous findings, the results of this study tend to suggest that it is during this turbulent time that relational uncertainty and communication efficacy function as stronger predictors of the comfort one feels when discussing religious topics with his or her romantic partner than at low or high levels of intimacy. In terms of the frequency of discussing religious topics, however, much less evidence in support of the relational turbulence model emerged.

It is worth noting that past research in support of the relational turbulence model has cited the cognitive and emotional ramifications (i.e., negative emotions and extreme cognitive appraisals) of transitioning from a casual dating relationship to a committed romantic partnership (Knobloch, Solomon, & Cruz, 2001; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), yet little has been mentioned regarding how these feelings are enacted in a behavioral context. One study in particular noted that individuals are more likely to confront romantic partners with relational irritations at moderate levels of intimacy (Cloven & Roloff, 1994). These findings suggest that though individuals in dating relationships may be less comfortable discussing religious topics at moderate levels of intimacy due to levels of relational uncertainty, this does not necessarily negatively impact the frequency with which they engage in said conversations. Future researchers should examine how the volatile emotional state that characterizes the relational turbulence model at moderate levels of intimacy manifests itself in communicative behavior and exchanges between romantic partners.

Theoretical Implications

Taken as a whole, the results of this study provide at least three theoretical implications worth noting. First, this study provides more insight into the role that relational uncertainty plays in discussing taboo topics between romantic partners. Baxter and Wilmot (1985) noted that partners may experience negative outcomes as a result of discussing taboo topics, and therefore, may avoid such conversations altogether. Though religion is only one of many topics considered “taboo,” scholars may find that conversations involving sensitive topics are likely to occur less frequently and to be less comfortable for individuals experiencing relational uncertainty. As one of the first inquiries into this area of research, this study provides meaningful insights into the role that relational uncertainty plays in specific communicative

contexts. Furthermore, it explores the way religion is discussed at various levels of relational intimacy and serves as a springboard for further delving into the way religion is discussed across relational stages.

Second, communication efficacy emerged as one of the strongest predictors of the comfort level and frequency associated with discussing religious topics in romantic relationships. Target efficacy, in particular, emerged as a predictor of both outcomes, suggesting that perceptions that one's partner will be honest and forthcoming is a meaningful predictor of the extent to which people discuss religious topics in their romantic relationships. If individuals perceive that their romantic partners will be honest about their religious beliefs, they are more likely to engage in conversations about religious topics and feel comfortable doing so, especially in the early to moderate stages of relational intimacy, suggesting that target honesty is especially salient when the relationship is in the early developmental stages. Furthermore, target efficacy shares a unique relationship with coping efficacy in that the former suppresses the irrelevant variance in the latter, allowing coping efficacy to emerge as an inverse predictor of frequency. Theoretically, this suggests that in situations where individuals perceive that their partner will provide honest information and that they cannot cope with the information they may receive, they are more likely to engage in information seeking behavior by discussing their religious beliefs. Thus, the motivation to establish similarity in religious viewpoints is further impacted by one's perceived ability to handle such information.

Finally, this study provided preliminary evidence supporting one of the fundamental tenets of the relational turbulence model, namely that relational uncertainty is more likely to be negatively associated with individuals' comfort levels in discussing religious topics with their romantic partners at moderate levels of intimacy. Clearly, in the early stages of relational

development, partners may view the discussion of religious or faith-based topics as premature given how little time partners have had to get to know each other. At high levels of intimacy, however, romantic partners may have already discussed their views on religion, spirituality, and faith. It is at the moderate level of intimacy, where partners may be engaging in a process of making sense of their desires for romantic relationship development and negotiating relational commitment, that self, partner, and relationship uncertainty are most likely to undermine their comfort with discussing religious viewpoints. In particular, it is the comfort associated with engaging in religious conversations, rather than the actual frequency of discussing religious topics, that lends further support for the disruptive relationship transition described by the relational turbulence model.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the contributions of this study, the results should be interpreted within the limitations of the research design. The self-report survey only captured individual responses and did not account for partners' perceptions. In the absence of established measures, two measures were created to assess the comfort levels and frequency of discussing religious topics in romantic relationships. Although confirmatory factor analyses provided preliminary evidence supporting the convergent and divergent validity of both scales, additional research is needed to further validate both inventories. In addition, the homogenous sample used in this report was taken from an affluent, private university in the southwest region of the United States with loose ties to a religious denomination (i.e., Disciples of Christ). Although participants self-reported a variety of religious affiliations (including those who self-identified as being agnostic or atheistic), most of the participants were Caucasian and all of them reported on heterosexual dating relationships. Additional work is needed to determine whether romantic partners' discussions of their religious

beliefs vary as a function of ethnicity, sexuality, and culture. Finally, researchers might address the limitations of using the individual as the unit of analysis by employing dyadic research designs and analyzing the couple as the unit of analysis. Doing so would enable researchers to examine both actor and partner effects of relational uncertainty and communication efficacy on the comfort and frequency of discussing religious topics in romantic relationships.

These limitations aside, this study has shed some light on the interpretation and evaluation phase of the TMIM with regard to the comfort that individuals feel when discussing religious topics with their romantic partners, as well as the frequency with which they engage in the discussion of religious topics. Future researchers might extend these efforts by examining the third and final phase, the decision phase, and how assessments occurring during the interpretation and evaluation phase are used in determining how to proceed in managing information. Researchers should also explore the information seeking behaviors associated with discussing religious topics in romantic relationships. Specifically, they should consider how these conversations unfold and how further information-seeking may, or may not, be driven by specific conversational cues and/or particular religious opinions and viewpoints. Scholars might also consider the impact of one's religiosity on religious discussions between romantic partners. For instance, intrinsically religious individuals are more tolerant of others' religious viewpoints, whereas extrinsically religious individuals are characterized as intolerant of others' religious beliefs (Allport & Ross, 1967). It stands to reason that romantic partners who identify as extrinsically religious would be more likely to engage in faith-based conversations and perhaps feel less comfortable doing so, possibly fearing the potential to discover incompatibility with their romantic partner. However, intrinsically religious individuals who respect the religious viewpoints of others and are more devoted to their faith-based beliefs may be more comfortable

engaging in such conversations, and more likely to report higher levels of communication and coping efficacy.

Clearly, the impact of religion, spirituality, and faith on personal attitudes and values, relational outcomes, and lifestyle choices is worthy of closer examination. Given the potentially divisive nature of one's religious affiliation in our society today, researchers should continue to examine the communication behaviors that romantic partners employ as they navigate this sensitive issue. Although dialogue at the societal and organizational levels calls for tolerance, understanding, and acceptance of religious beliefs, religion remains a sensitive and potentially taboo topic in many interpersonal relationships. Thus, scholars should continue to advance research that aims to understand how intimate partners navigate this potentially conflict-inducing topic. Through these types of investigations, interpersonal communication scholars can not only advance our understanding of the role of religion in romantic relationship development, but also enhance our understanding of the various processes by which romantic partners approach and evaluate information seeking for controversial topics in romantic relationships.

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Appendix

Religious Conversations Questionnaire

DIRECTIONS: In the following spaces, please circle or write the most appropriate response to each question. If there is a separate set of directions, please read those directions carefully and answer each question according to the directions for that section of the questionnaire.

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your biological sex (please circle one)?
 - 1 Male
 - 2 Female

3. What is your current classification in school?
 - 1 First-year student
 - 2 Sophomore
 - 3 Junior
 - 4 Senior
 - 5 Graduate student
 - 6 Other (please specify): _____

4. What is your ethnicity or race?

1 White	4 Native American
2 African American	5 Asian American
3 Hispanic American	6 Other (please specify): _____

5. Which of the following terms best describes *your* religious affiliation?

1 Disciples of Christ	7 Presbyterian
2 Mormon	8 Non-Denominational
3 Baptist	9 Agnostic
4 Catholic	10 Atheistic
5 Methodist	11 Other (please specify): _____
6 Lutheran	

6. Which of the following terms best describes *your partner's* religious affiliation?

1 Disciples of Christ	7 Presbyterian
2 Mormon	8 Non-Denominational
3 Baptist	9 Agnostic
4 Catholic	10 Atheistic
5 Methodist	11 Other (please specify): _____
6 Lutheran	12 Unknown

7. How would you best classify your *current* romantic relationship?
 - 1 Romantic potential
 - 2 Casual dating but little emotional attachment
 - 3 Frequent dating but little emotional attachment
 - 4 Some emotional attachment
 - 5 Emotional attachment but not in love
 - 6 In love
 - 7 In love and would like to marry but have never discussed marriage
 - 8 In love and have discussed marriage but have not made marriage plans
 - 9 Engaged to be married
 - 10 Spouse

8. How long have you been dating your partner? _____ years _____ months

Directions: Listed below are a series of statements concerning your religious (or faith-based) beliefs. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements using the following scale:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree				
1	2	3	4	5				
				Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree		
1. I enjoy reading about my religion.				1	2	3	4	5
2. I go to church because it helps me to make friends.				1	2	3	4	5
3. It doesn't much matter what I believe so long as I am good.				1	2	3	4	5
4. It is important to me to spend time in private thought and prayer.				1	2	3	4	5
5. I have often had a strong sense of God's presence.				1	2	3	4	5
6. I pray mainly to gain relief and protection.				1	2	3	4	5
7. I try hard to live all my life according to my religious beliefs.				1	2	3	4	5
8. What religion offers me most is comfort in times of trouble and sorrow.				1	2	3	4	5
9. Prayer is for peace and happiness.				1	2	3	4	5
10. Although I am religious, I don't let it affect my daily life.				1	2	3	4	5
11. I go to church mostly to spend time with my friends.				1	2	3	4	5
12. My whole approach to life is based on my religion.				1	2	3	4	5
13. I go to church mainly because I enjoy seeing people I know there.				1	2	3	4	5
14. Although I believe in my religion, many other things are more important in life.				1	2	3	4	5

Instructions: We would like you to think about your relationship with your partner over the last month. Please circle the number that most closely describes your feelings toward *your partner* over the past month.

Miserable:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	: Enjoyable
Hopeful:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	: Discouraging
Free:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	: Tied Down
Empty:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	: Full
Interesting:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	: Boring
Rewarding:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	: Disappointing
Doesn't give me: much chance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	: Brings out the best in me
Lonely:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	: Friendly
Hard:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	: Easy
Worthwhile:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	: Useless

All things considered, how satisfied have you been with your relationship with your **partner** the past month?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 Completely Neutral Completely
 dissatisfied satisfied

Directions: Next, we would like for you to think about how certain you are about your relationship with your dating partner. Please indicate your level of certainty for each of the following questions using the following scale:

Completely Mostly Neutral Mostly Completely
 Uncertain Uncertain Certain Certain
 1 2 3 4 5

How certain are you about...

	Completely Uncertain	Mostly Uncertain	Neutral	Mostly Certain	Completely Certain
1. how committed you are to the relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
2. your feelings for your partner?	1	2	3	4	5
4. whether or not you want this relationship to last?	1	2	3	4	5
5. how much you like your partner?	1	2	3	4	5
7. how important this relationship is to you?	1	2	3	4	5
8. how you feel about the relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
9. how much you are romantically interested in your partner?	1	2	3	4	5
10. whether or not you will want to be with your partner in the long run?	1	2	3	4	5
11. how much you want to pursue the relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
12. your goals for the future of the relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
13. how ready you are to get involved with your partner?	1	2	3	4	5
14. whether or not you are ready to commit to your partner?	1	2	3	4	5
15. whether or not you want to stay in a relationship with your partner?	1	2	3	4	5
16. whether you want a romantic relationship with your partner or to be just friends?	1	2	3	4	5
17. your view of this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
18. where you want this relationship to go?	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Next, we would like for you to think about how certain you are about your partner's view of the relationship with your dating partner. Please indicate your level of certainty for each of the following questions using the following scale:

Completely Uncertain	Mostly Uncertain	Neutral	Mostly Certain	Completely Certain
1	2	3	4	5

How certain are you about...

	Completely uncertain	Mostly Uncertain	Neutral	Mostly Certain	Completely certain
1. how committed your partner is to the relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
3. whether or not your partner wants this relationship to work out in the long run?	1	2	3	4	5
4. whether or not your partner wants this relationship to last?	1	2	3	4	5
5. how much your partner likes you?	1	2	3	4	5
6. how much your partner wants this relationship right now?	1	2	3	4	5
8. how your partner feels about the relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
9. how much your partner is romantically interested in you?	1	2	3	4	5
10. whether or not your partner will want to be with you in the long run?	1	2	3	4	5
11. how much your partner wants to pursue the relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
12. your partner's goals for the future of the relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
13. how ready your partner is to get involved with you?	1	2	3	4	5
14. whether your partner wants a romantic relationship with you or to be just friends?	1	2	3	4	5
15. whether or not your partner wants to maintain your relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
16. your partner's view of this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
17. where your partner wants this relationship to go?	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Next, we would like for you to think about how certain you are about the future of your relationship. Please indicate your level of certainty for each of the following questions using the following scale:

Completely Uncertain	Mostly Uncertain	Neutral	Mostly Certain	Completely Certain
1	2	3	4	5

How certain are you about...

	Completely uncertain	Mostly Uncertain	Neutral	Mostly Certain	Completely certain
1. the definition of this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
2. whether or not you and your partner feel the same way about each other?	1	2	3	4	5
3. whether or not you and your partner will stay together?	1	2	3	4	5
4. how you and your partner would describe the relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
5. the future of the relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
6. what you can or cannot say to each other in this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
7. the boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior in this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
8. whether or not this relationship will end soon?	1	2	3	4	5
9. how you and your partner view this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
10. the state of the relationship at this time?	1	2	3	4	5
11. whether or not your partner likes you as much as you like him or her?	1	2	3	4	5
12. the current status of this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
13. whether or not this is a romantic or platonic relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
14. the norms for this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
15. where this relationship is going?	1	2	3	4	5
16. how you can or cannot behave around your partner?	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Next, we would like for you to think about how you and your partner communicate about issues of *religion/spirituality/faith*. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements using the following scale:

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree nor Disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
<u>Regarding the issue of religion/spirituality/faith...</u>				Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree
1. I am able to ask my partner what s/he thinks about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I could approach my partner to ask about his/her beliefs on this issue.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am able to approach my partner to talk about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5

Regarding the issue of religion/spirituality/faith ...

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree				
1. My partner would be completely honest about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5					
2. My partner would give me truthful information about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5					
3. My partner would be completely forthcoming about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5					
4. If approached, my partner would be upfront about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5					

Regarding the issue of religion/spirituality/faith ...

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree				
1. I feel confident that I could cope with whatever I discover about my partner's beliefs on these issues.	1	2	3	4	5					
2. I couldn't deal with what I might find out about my partner's beliefs on these issues.	1	2	3	4	5					
3. I can handle whatever I would find out about my partner's beliefs on these issues.	1	2	3	4	5					
4. I would not be able to deal with what I might find related to this issue.	1	2	3	4	5					

Regarding the issue of religion/spirituality/faith ...

	Not at all anxious					Extremely anxious				
1. When you compare how much you want to know and how much you actually know about your partners beliefs on these issues, how anxious does it make you?	1	2	3	4	5					
2. How anxious does it make you to think about how much/little you know about your partner's beliefs on these issues?	1	2	3	4	5					
3. The size of the similarity/difference between how much I know and how much I'd like to know about my partner's beliefs is _____?	1	2	3	4	5					

Regarding the issue of religion/spirituality/faith ...

	A lot more negatives than positives							A lot more positives than negatives						
1. Talking to my partner directly about these issues would produce_____.	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3							
2. Asking my partner what s/he thinks about these issues would produce_____.	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3							
3. Approaching my partner to ask about his/her beliefs about these issues would produce_____.	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3							

Regarding the issue of religion/spirituality/faith ...

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree				
1. I have sought information on this subject from my partner.	1	2	3	4	5					

	SD				SA
2. My partner's views on this topic are no longer important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I intend to seek information on this subject from my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
4. It is acceptable for my partner and me to have different views.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Religion does not need to be discussed.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I avoid talking to my partner about this topic.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My partner and I don't discuss this topic.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My partner's views on this topic are less important to me than they used to be.	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Next, we would like for you to think about how you would be discussing the following topics with your partner. Please indicate the degree of comfort for each of the following topics using the following scale:

Very Uncomfortable	Uncomfortable	Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	Comfortable	Very Comfortable
1	2	3	4	5

How comfortable would you be discussing the following with your partner?

	Very Uncomfortable		Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable		Very Comfortable
1. God	1	2	3	4	5
2. The meaning of life	1	2	3	4	5
3. Morals	1	2	3	4	5
4. Higher Powers	1	2	3	4	5
5. Fate (why things happen the way they do)	1	2	3	4	5
6. What happens after death	1	2	3	4	5
7. Good and evil	1	2	3	4	5
8. Spirituality	1	2	3	4	5
9. Right and wrong	1	2	3	4	5
10. Religion	1	2	3	4	5
11. Religious texts	1	2	3	4	5
12. Prayer	1	2	3	4	5
13. Meditation	1	2	3	4	5
14. Personal enlightenment	1	2	3	4	5
15. The supernatural	1	2	3	4	5
16. Religious icons (i.e. people and/or locations)	1	2	3	4	5
17. Personal spiritual health	1	2	3	4	5

	Very Uncomfortable 1	2	Neither 3	4	Very Comfortable 5
18. Faith	1	2	3	4	5
19. Purpose	1	2	3	4	5
20. Meaning	1	2	3	4	5
21. Attending Worship services	1	2	3	4	5
22. Eternity (time)	1	2	3	4	5
23. Church/Synagogue/Temple	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Next, we would like for you to think about how often you discuss the following topics with your partner. Please indicate the degree of frequency for each of the following topics using the following scale:

Never 1	Occasionally 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Very Often 5
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Religious Topics

How often do you and your partner discuss...

	Never 1	Occasionally 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Very Often 5
1. God	1	2	3	4	5
2. The meaning of life	1	2	3	4	5
3. Morals	1	2	3	4	5
4. Higher Powers	1	2	3	4	5
5. Fate (why things happen the way they do)	1	2	3	4	5
6. What happens after death	1	2	3	4	5
7. Good and evil	1	2	3	4	5
8. Spirituality	1	2	3	4	5
9. Right and wrong	1	2	3	4	5
10. Religion	1	2	3	4	5
11. Religious texts	1	2	3	4	5
12. Prayer	1	2	3	4	5
13. Meditation	1	2	3	4	5
14. Personal enlightenment	1	2	3	4	5
15. The super-natural	1	2	3	4	5
16. Religious icons (i.e. people and/or locations)	1	2	3	4	5
17. Personal spiritual health	1	2	3	4	5
18. Faith	1	2	3	4	5
19. Purpose	1	2	3	4	5
20. Meaning	1	2	3	4	5
21. Attending Worship services	1	2	3	4	5
22. Eternity (time)	1	2	3	4	5
23. Church/Synagogue/Temple	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Now, we would like to assess your health. Please think about your state of mind over the past two weeks and identify how often you have felt the following ways on a scale from 0 (never) to 3 (three or more times the past two weeks).

In the past two weeks, how often have you:

	Never	Once	Twice	Three or more times
1. Felt over-tired.	0	1	2	3
2. Felt nervous or worried.	0	1	2	3
3. Felt "low" or depressed.	0	1	2	3
4. Felt tense or irritable.	0	1	2	3
5. Had trouble sleeping.	0	1	2	3
6. Lost your appetite.	0	1	2	3
7. Felt apart or alone.	0	1	2	3
8. Felt like running away from everything.	0	1	2	3
9. Felt as if you were eating too much?	0	1	2	3

Directions: The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate *how often* you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer each question fairly quickly. That is, don't try to count up the number of times you felt a particular way, but rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate. For each question, choose from the following alternatives:

	Never 1	Almost never 2	Sometimes 3	Fairly often 4	Very often 5
1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	1	2	3	4	5
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	1	2	3	4	5
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?	1	2	3	4	5
4. In the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?	1	2	3	4	5
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?	1	2	3	4	5
6. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	1	2	3	4	5
7. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?	1	2	3	4	5
8. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	1	2	3	4	5
9. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?	1	2	3	4	5
10. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?	1	2	3	4	5
11. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?	1	2	3	4	5
12. In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?	1	2	3	4	5
13. In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time?	1	2	3	4	5
14. In the last month, how often you have felt difficulties were piling up so high	1	2	3	4	5

that you could not overcome them?

Directions: Romantic partners often have varying degrees of closeness with one another. We are interested in your level of closeness with your romantic partner. Please read through all of the questions carefully.

	Not at all			Very	
How openly do you talk with your partner?	1	2	3	4	5
How careful do you feel you have to be about what you say to your partner?	1	2	3	4	5
How comfortable do you feel admitting doubts and fears to your partner?	1	2	3	4	5
How interested is your partner in talking to you when you want to talk?	1	2	3	4	5
How often does your partner express affection or liking for you?	1	2	3	4	5
How well does your partner know what you are really like?	1	2	3	4	5
How close do you feel to your partner?	1	2	3	4	5
How confident are you that your partner would help you if you had a problem?	1	2	3	4	5
If you needed money, how comfortable would you be asking your partner for it?	1	2	3	4	5
How interested is your partner in the things you do?	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Now we would like you to consider your feelings for your partner. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements using the following scale:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree		Agree	Strongly Agree				
1	2	3	4	5	6				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
				SD	D	N	A	SA	
1. If my partner were feeling badly, my first duty would be to cheer him/her up.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. I feel that I can confide in my partner about virtually everything.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. I find it easy to ignore my partner's faults.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. I would do almost anything for my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5. I feel very possessive toward my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. If I could never be with my partner, I would feel miserable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. If I were lonely, my first thought would be to seek my partner out.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. One of my primary concerns is my partner's welfare.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9. I would forgive my partner for practically anything.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10. I feel responsible for my partner's well-being.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
11. When I am with my partner, I spend a good deal of time just looking at him/her.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12. I would greatly enjoy being confided in by my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
13. It would be hard for me to get along without my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Directions: Please think about your state of mind **over the past month** and identify how often you have felt the following ways on a scale from 1 (*A little*) to 4 (*Most of the time*).

	A little	Some	A good part of the time	Most of the time
1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me.	1	2	3	4
2. I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor.	1	2	3	4
3. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends.	1	2	3	4
4. I felt that I was just as good as other people.	1	2	3	4
5. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.	1	2	3	4
6. I felt depressed.	1	2	3	4
7. I felt that everything I did was an effort.	1	2	3	4
8. I felt hopeful about the future.	1	2	3	4
9. I thought my life had been a failure.	1	2	3	4
10. I felt fearful.	1	2	3	4
11. My sleep was restless.	1	2	3	4
12. I was happy.	1	2	3	4
13. I talked less than usual.	1	2	3	4
14. I felt lonely.	1	2	3	4
15. People were unfriendly.	1	2	3	4
16. I enjoyed life.	1	2	3	4
17. I had crying spells.	1	2	3	4
18. I felt sad.	1	2	3	4
19. I felt that people disliked me.	1	2	3	4
20. I could not get "going."	1	2	3	4

Directions: For each item, please circle the number that best represents your level of agreement using the following scale:

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree nor Disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
1. In our family we often talk about topics like politics and religion where some persons disagree with others.	SD	N	SA		
2. When anything really important is involved, my parents expect me to obey without question.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My parents often say something like "Every member of the family should have some say in family decisions."	1	2	3	4	5
4. In our home, my parents usually have the last word.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My parents often ask my opinion when the family is talking about something.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My parents feel that it is important to be the boss.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My parents encourage me to challenge their ideas and beliefs.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My parents sometimes become irritated with my views if they are different from theirs.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My parents often say something like "You should always look at both sides of an issue."	1	2	3	4	5
10. If my parents don't approve of it, they don't want to know about it.	1	2	3	4	5

	SD	N			SA
11. I usually tell my parents what I am thinking about things.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I can tell my parents almost anything.	1	2	3	4	5
13. When I am at home, I am expected to obey my parents' rules.	1	2	3	4	5
14. In our family we often talk about our feelings and emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
15. My parents often say things like "You'll know better when you grow up."	1	2	3	4	5
16. My parents and I often have long, relaxed conversations about nothing in particular.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I really enjoy talking with my parents, even when we disagree.	1	2	3	4	5
18. My parents often say things like "My ideas are right and you should not question them."	1	2	3	4	5
19. My parents encourage me to express my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
20. My parents often say things like "A child should not argue with adults."	1	2	3	4	5
21. My parents tend to be very open about their emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
22. We often talk as a family about things we have done during the day.	1	2	3	4	5
23. My parents often say things like "There are some things that just shouldn't be talked about."	1	2	3	4	5
24. In our family, we often talk about our plans and hopes for the future.	1	2	3	4	5
25. My parents often say things like "You should give in on arguments rather than risk making people mad."	1	2	3	4	5
26. My parents like to hear my opinion, even when I don't agree with them.	1	2	3	4	5