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# Minority Groups and Communication Apprehension

## An investigation of Kurdistan

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### Abstract

This study explores communication apprehension among the Iranian Kurdish minority group. Based on a sample of 157 self-administered surveys, the study investigates the relative communication apprehension (CA) score of Iranian Kurds and the influence of sex, age, and education on CA. Results revealed Kurds are relatively less apprehensive than many other cultures. It was also revealed that women have significantly higher levels of dyadic, public, and total CA. Moreover, all CA contexts (dyadic, groups, meeting, and public) and total CA tended to increase after grade 9 and decrease after completing high school. Age however, only had a modest effect on meeting CA. The findings propose higher levels of social encounters reduce the amount of CA among Kurds. Implications, limitations, and areas of future research are posited.

**Keywords:** *Communication Apprehension, Socioeconomic status, Kurdistan, Culture, Regression*

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### Introduction

Communication apprehension (CA), a “broad-based fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated [oral] communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey 1977: 78) is one of the most studied communication traits. Research has consistently shown American college/university students to have less CA than students from East-Asian nations (e.g., China, Japan, Korea, etc.) (Burroughs & Marie 1990; Hsu 2007; Zhang, Butler, & Pryor 1996) and from European nations (Finland and Sweden for example) (Mansson & Myers 2009; Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey & Richmond 1991). A focus of CA research has been to understand how it relates to an individual’s communicative competence (McCroskey & McCroskey 1988). The literature on CA is rich, exploring many populations in various national cultures, e.g., Australia, China, England, Finland, France, Germany, India, Iran, Israel, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Micronesia, Philippines, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, and the United States (Barraclough, Christophel & McCroskey 1988; Croucher 2013; Hsu 2004; Neuliep, Chadoir, & McCroskey 2003; Zarrinabadi 2012).

On the other hand, CA research is mostly restricted to a limited number of cultures and this trend does not take into consideration the varieties in CA of less-studied cultures. Self-reporting of communication traits like CA varies considerably depending on the sample tested. A sample collected in the US for example cannot and should not be generalized to any population other than the US. Levine and McCroskey (1991) reported that a factor analysis for the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA), the most used measure of CA, in a US American sample does not hold in another sample from Puerto Rico. They assert that although based on only one culture, the validity of the PRCA-24 should not be generally questioned in intercultural contexts, the results should be interpreted with caution. A study of content validity of US American and Japanese samples revealed differences that could prevent generalization of results based on a specific culture to other cultures (Pribyl, Keaten, Sakamoto, & Koshikawa 1998). While numerous national cultures have been studied, many are still left unexplored. The current study adds to this body of literature by exploring CA among the minority Kurdish society in Iran, which due to political, social and economic reasons is of a low socioeconomic status (SES). Increasingly researchers are analyzing communication in the Middle East (Heisey 2011; Landis & Wasilewski 1999; Merkin 2012; Semati 2011). However, except for research on mass communication (Baydar 2013; Sheyholislami 2010, 2012) there is little research on Kurdistan.

## CA of Minority groups

Different factors can affect CA levels of minority groups. Linguistic differences (Chesebro et al. 1992; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope 1986) and religious variations (Croucher 2013) can raise CA among minority groups. Lower socioeconomic status can also make the minority groups be more anxious. This lower SES is more likely the result of immigration (Prevo et al. 2014), less access to educational and medical opportunities, and less functional skills (Smith, Wolf, & Wagner 2010; Thomas 2013). Such factors affect individuals' interactive strategies, and communication characteristics and traits such as individualism and collectivism, and CA (Kim, Tasaki, Kim, & Lee 2007; Rodríguez, Hines, & Montiel 2006, 2009; Triandis 1989).

Economically, Kurdish society in Iran is underdeveloped and marginalized (Yildiz & Taysi 2007). A previous investigation in the Kurdistan province in Iran showed lower literacy and higher unemployment rates than the rest of the country (Groohi, Rossignol, Barrero, & Alaghebandan 2006). Various social, linguistic, and political differences with the majority groups, not only in Iran, but also in the countries where the Kurds reside have resulted in the perception of the Kurds as a danger to national integrity and sovereignty, and kept the Kurdish community in a lower socioeconomic position. This could affect CA among the Kurds. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H1: Kurds in Iran will rate highly on communication apprehension.*

But this lower SES has not prevented the Kurds from developing their ethnic identity. Kurdish language, religion, and political attitudes are aspects of a distinctive identity manifested in various cultural characteristics.

# The Kurds

Kurdistan is the homeland of an estimated 25 to 30 million Kurds, also linguistic and ethnic minority in Turkey (13 – 15 million, up to 23% of the population), Iran (5.7 – 5.6 million, up to 11% of the population), Iraq (3.5 – 4.2 million, up to 20% of the population), and Syria (1 – 1.1 million, up to 9% of the population) (Gunter 2003) with a common ethno-national identity and a high level of solidarity (Tejel 2009) who believe they are the largest stateless nation in the world (McDowall 2004; Mojab 2001). Kurds' unique language, religion, and cultural characteristics make them distinct from their neighboring societies.

Linguistically, Kurdish language is different than the neighboring Persian, Arabic, and Turkish languages. As a member of the Indo-European language family, Kurdish is considered to be a western Iranian language similar to Farsi (Persian) but different than Arabic and Turkish (Kreyenbroek 1992). The Kurdish language has four main dialect groups of Kirmanji, spoken in Turkey and the Northwest of Iran by 60 – 65% of all the Kurds, Sorani, spoken in Iran and Iraq by 25 – 30% of all the Kurds, Kirmashani, spoken in Iran, and Zazaki/Dimli and Hawrami/Gorani, respectively spoken in Turkey and across the Iranian and Iraqi border (Hassanpour 1992). Although some researchers reported considerable phonological and morphological differences between the major dialects of the Kurdish language (Kreyenbroek 1992), most Kurdologists consider them varieties of the same language (Sheyholislami 2011). Except for Iraq after 2003, Kurdish is not an official language anywhere (Iraqi Constitution n.d.).

Religiously Kurdistan is a diverse society. Kurds are mostly Sunni Muslims with a minority Shiite living in Southern Iranian Kurdistan, but Assyrian and Armenian Christians, Jews, Yazadis, Alavis, and Yaressanis also live there (Dahlman 2002). Kurdistan has solidarity with its religions and linguistic minorities (Skutnabb-Kangas & Fernandes 2008) and it has been a safe haven for non-Muslim refugees after the 2003 religious clashes in Iraq (Hanish 2009).

Historically, after the first break-up of Kurdistan in the 16th century until World War I, Kurds partly could continue their autonomous political and social lives within the borders of the Persian and Ottoman Empires in the form of local dynasties (McDowall 2004). Nevertheless, in the redrawn map of the Middle East after 1918, Ottoman Kurdistan was divided among three newly formed countries of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Since then, the centralized policies of these three countries and Iran have sought to implant a comprehensive national identity by melting down minority identities to surmount the danger of possible territory separation. For example, in Turkey, oral or written usage of Kurdish was prohibited and the existence of Kurdish identity was denied (Marcus 2007; Skutnabb-Kangas & Fernandes 2008). In Syria, many Kurds were excluded from having Syrian citizenship (Tejel 2009). This marginalization of the Kurdish community resulted in poverty, low SES, social and military unrest to rectify assimilating Kurdish identity (Gunter 2011; Romano 2006), and immigration of about 1.5 million Kurds to mostly North America, Nordic, and Western Europe (Skutnabb-Kangas & Fernandes 2008).

Recently, Turkey's application for admission in the European Union has brought attention to its conflict with the Kurds (Gunter 2011) and in Iraq, Kurds managed to form the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) (Natali 2010). This autonomous administration has recently gained a lot of economic and political attention because of its reserves of oil, 45 billion barrels (Mearns 2011), its potential role in hydrogeopolitics of the Middle East (Soffer 1999), and especially its role in the international fight against the terrorist group of the Islamic State (IS) (Phillips 2014). In eastern

Iran, Kurds have been struggling to preserve their identity through having the right of education and media in Kurdish and establishing other institutions to maintain different forms of Kurdish traditions. Yet, the educational system in Iran does not use Kurdish as a mean of instruction where Kurds reside. Kurds are thought to have originated from nowadays Iranian Kurdistan and the only Kurdish state ever existed was formed there during 1945-1946, but Iranian Kurds have received less media attention compared to other parts and there is less information available about them (Yildiz & Taysi 2007).

These different cultural characteristics in Kurdistan resulted in the formation of a unique Kurdish identity, manifested in specific cultural aspects, such as the culturally distinctive role of women in the Kurdish community compared to neighboring cultures. Described as being more liberal, Kurdish women have been reported to be important public figures and rulers who have shadowed over their male relatives (Bruinessen 1993). According to Bruinessen, having a Kurdish woman in the position of commanding and ruling has been generally accepted, as it is depicted in Kurdish folklore and described in the records of commentary law during the time when the Ottoman Empire ruled over southern, western, and northern Kurdistan. This matriarchal influence is rare among other Middle Eastern cultures. In recent cases, Kurdish women's participation in the war against IS terrorists in Syrian and Iraqi presented a different image of the Middle Eastern women. However, the role of Kurdish women is reported as a distinctive characteristic of Kurdish society to designate the specifications of the Kurds from those of neighboring cultures, but generally Kurdish society, just like most other Middle Eastern cultures, is a patriarchal society where there is a high power distance between the sexes (Bruinessen 1993). For example, investigating the role of women in the Kurdish Republic of 1946 in Iranian Kurdistan, Mojab (2001, p. 71) indicated the educational and political presence of women in both pre-modern forms of Kurdish statehood and in the Kurdish republic were generated by "a thoroughly masculine politics".

## **Communication Apprehension Contexts**

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension Scale (PRCA-24), which is regularly used to measure CA, measures both trait and contextual CA across four contexts: dyadic, meetings, public, and small groups. While CA research has been extensively conducted throughout the world, in many of these studies US participants have regularly been compared with non-US participants in cross-cultural analyses (Croucher 2013; Neuliep et al. 2003).

Trait CA deals with the anxiety someone has across different contexts while contextual CA measures discomfort someone may experience while communicating in various situations such as dyadic, small groups, meeting and public (McCroskey 1977). Trait CA is measured through the accumulative amount of anxiety someone feels in each one of the four anticipated unique and not dichotomous contexts (Russ 2012). Cross-cultural comparison of CA necessitates reporting total (trait) CA of a sample, however contextual investigations of CA are of importance because the perception of these contexts could be different cross-culturally (Vinson & Roberts 1994). On the intragroup level, a contextual investigation of a cultural group is necessary to explain its communicative predispositions (Sue, Ino, & Sue 1983) and it has been recommended for further research (Kim, Tasaki, Kim, & Lee 2007). This is exemplified in the work undertaken by Pribyl et al. (1998) who reported as opposed to US Americans, the Japanese do not differentiate meeting context from group context and rarely do they have the opportunity to speak publicly. Other studies have reported examples of the incongruity of the different contextual subscales of the

PRCA-24 among cultures (Pederson, Tkachuk, & Allen 2008). Many previous studies have applied a contextual approach to investigate CA (Edwards & Walker 2007; Honeycutt, Choi, & DeBerry 2009; Jung 2013; Russ 2012). In addition to state CA that provides with cross-cultural comparison of the Kurds with other cultural groups, the study of contextual CA in the present study will provide a better understanding of CA among a minority community.

Numerous demographic variables have been studied in collaboration with CA, such as sex, age, and level of education (Baus & Welch 2008; Donovan & MacIntyre 2004; Dwyer 1998). In the US, research has found slight differences between the sexes on CA (Canary & Hause 1993). Research shows women tend to be more apprehensive than men (Donovan & MacIntyre 2004; McCroskey, Simpson, & Richmond 1982), except for Lin and Rancer's research (2003) that found men to be more apprehensive. However, there is less information available about this possible difference in other cultures. Differences in the level of apprehensiveness of men and women are often ascribed to the cultural biases resulting from social roles (Allen, O'Mara, & Andriste 1986) and psychological stereotypes of the genders (Greenblatt, Hasenauer, & Freimuth 2006). Although as already mentioned, Kurdish women experience more freedom in comparison to other Middle Eastern societies, this relative freedom of Kurdish women is related to their social position as mothers and wives of the elite and not to their sheer womanhood (Bruinessen 1993), and Kurdish society is traditional, male-dominated, and patriarchal. Men control families and social, political, and military institutions. This different status between men and women in Kurdistan may influence apprehension levels as social roles differ between the sexes, which may promote more communication for women. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H2: Women in Iranian Kurdistan will report higher communication apprehension than men.*

Research examining the relationship between age and CA has shown conflicting results. Some studies have shown a significant negative relationship between CA and age (Donovan & MacIntyre 2004). Other studies have shown a positive relationship between CA and age (Watson, Monroe, & Atterstrom 1989; Watson, Monroe, Fayer, & Aloise 1988). Other studies have shown no relationship between CA and age (Dwyer 1998). Previous studies of age in more collectivist cultures have shown older people are venerated due to their knowledge, sageness, and experience resulting from age (McCann, Kellermann, Giles, Gallois, & Viladot 2004). As one of the Middle Eastern cultures, Kurdish community values age as a prominent element to determine the social place of the individuals (Tang & Ibrahim 1998). As people get older, they experience higher social importance and respect. Thus, due to an increase in social confidence, aging could affect apprehension. Thus, to further our understanding of the effect of age on CA, the second research question is put forth:

*RQ1: To what extent does age affect communication apprehension levels in Kurdistan?*

Education is also reported to be related to CA levels. The educational environment and the amount of perceived educational and behavioral error correction during grade school can affect the amount of CA in the latter part of individuals' lives (Daly & Friedrich 1981). Furthermore, another study showed that CA levels of elementary students markedly changed from their kindergarten CA levels, possibly due to teacher behavior or peer contact, among some other factors (McCroskey, Andersen, Richmond, & Wheelless 1981). Kasemkosin and Rimkeeratikul's

research (2012) indicated lower CA among individuals with higher education and higher CA among individuals with lower education. Nevertheless, it is difficult to separate the effects of schooling on CA as teenage students could actually become of higher CA as the result of “biological and/or social maturational elements unrelated to the school” (McCroskey et al. 1981: 129). It is important to test any possible relationship between education, especially among the holders of higher educational degrees, and CA.

In the Iranian educational system, a higher number of individuals have found the chance to pursue higher education in recent decades, which means more Kurds have also attended higher educational institutions (Bazargan 1999). However, the Kurdish language is not a means of instruction in Iran. The basic educational system in Iran includes 12 years of public education, which leads to a high school diploma and consists of six-years of elementary school followed by two three-year periods of junior high school and high school, which are exclusively taught in Persian. When one holds a high school diploma, it is possible to apply for a university degree. Based on the aforementioned literature on the relationship between education and CA, one can expect engaging in higher educational levels will provide individuals with more knowledge and confidence and less anxiety to participate in different interactional contexts. This does not necessarily mean education can modify CA as a trait, but education can be one of the many elements of a process in which trait CA forms. Thus, to further the understanding of the effects of educational level on CA, the third research question is put forth:

*RQ2: What is the relationship between educational level achieved and communication apprehension levels in Kurdistan?*

## Method

### Participants

After appropriate institutional review board approval, in 2014, the principal researcher distributed 157[1] self-administered paper and online surveys in Bokan, Iran, which is in Iranian Kurdistan and a center for Kurdish nationalism. Bokan along with Mahabad, are the cities included in Kurdistan Republic in 1945-1946. The surveys were distributed via previously-established social networks and via Facebook. Overall 21 people filled out the digital version of the questionnaire and 136 people filled out the paper version. In terms of the variables and the items, the digital and paper versions were identical. Thus, the principal investigator used a snowball sample. This kind of sampling technique is standard, and in many cases necessary in intercultural/cross-cultural communication research. The participants did not receive financial incentive for their participation.

Participants ranged in age from 17 to 61[2] ( $M = 34.27$ ,  $SD = 9.55$ ). Men accounted for 57.8% ( $n = 89$ ) of the sample, women for 41.9% ( $n = 65$ ), and 1 (.6%) person did not report their sex. The sample's educational background was diverse: 6.5% ( $n = 10$ ) reported having completed up to grade 9, 16.8% ( $n = 26$ ) had a high school diploma, 45.8% ( $n = 71$ ) an undergraduate degree, 20.6% ( $n = 32$ ) a graduate degree, and 10.3% ( $n = 16$ ) did not report their highest completed education.

## Instrument – Personal Report of Communication Apprehension

Surveys and consent documents were initially written/prepared in English and then translated into Persian because the only official reading education Kurds in Iran receive is in Persian. Although the Kurdish language is one the most immediate indicators of Kurdish identity (Sheyholislami 2011), lack of education in Kurdish language could distort the results of the survey due to possible perception difficulties among subjects. After the documents were written in English, a Persian speaker translated the documents into Persian. Bilingual Persian-English speakers then back-translated the documents. After the translation was completed, translations were compared for accuracy through comparing semantic similarities of corresponding Persian and English phrases ( $\kappa = .89$ ).

The survey included the following demographics questions: sex, age, and highest educational level achieved. Participants were asked to circle their sex (male or female). Regarding age, participants were asked to write their age. Participants were asked to write their highest educational level achieved. Based on these results the following categories were compiled: up to grade 9, high school diploma, 2-year degree, BA or equivalent, MA or equivalent, and PhD. The survey also included the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) (McCroskey 1982). The PRCA-24 is a 24-item scale that measures trait-like communication apprehension across four contexts: small groups, public, meetings, and dyadic. The scale measures CA using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 *strongly agree* to 5 *strongly disagree*. It has emerged as the main instruments to measure CA. The scale has shown high reliability in the past, with alphas for the four contexts ranging from .80 to .92 (Croucher 2013; Dwyer 1998; McCroskey et al. 1982). In this study the alphas were: .70 for dyadic, .76 for meeting, .80 for small group, and .80 for public. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations and correlations for the four contexts of CA in Kurdistan.

**Table 1:** Means, standard deviations, and correlations of CA contexts in Kurdistan

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Dyadic CA	13.68	3.98	-			
(2) Small Group CA	14.28	4.74	.43**	-		
(3) Meeting CA	13.75	4.45	.67**	.60**	-	
(4) Public CA	15.65	4.90	.62**	.37**	.62**	-
(5) Total CA	57.36	14.67	-	-	-	-

Note: \*\*  $p < .01$ .



## Analysis and Results

*H1* investigates an intercultural perception of CA among the Kurds. A comparison of the results of the CA test of this culture with the previous results from the US, the most studied context of CA studies (Croucher, Sommier, Rahmani, & Appenrodt 2015), will be the most helpful to this aim. As the following studies of CA in the context of US show, different samples of US Americans have already been compared with various other cultures in the Caribbean region, East Asia, and Europe. Thus, to test *H1*, the total CA of this sample was compared to previous studies in the context of the United. Based on 20 randomly published studies of CA using the PRCA-24, US-American CA scores ranged from 51.39 to 71.72[3] (Allen, O'Mara, & Long 2014; Beatty et al. 2011; Fall, Kelly, MacDonald, Primm, & Holmes 2013; Gearhart & Bodie 2012; Hsu 2007, 2010; Limon & La France 2005; Madlock 2012; Madlock & Martin 2011; Madlock, Martin, Bogdan, & Ervin 2007; Maki et al. 2009; Malachowski & Martin 2011; Malachowski, Martin, & Vallade 2013; Mansson & Myers 2009; Pearson, Child, DeGreeff, Semlak, & Burnett 2011; Roby 2009; Shimotsu & Mottet 2009; Stockstill & Roach 2007; Vevea, Pearson, Child, & Semlak 2009; Wrench, Brogan, McCroskey, & Jowi 2008). The Kurds averaged 57.36 on CA, which is lower than most of the American samples. This is consistent with other studies that have shown CA in Middle Eastern samples (Middle Easterners in the US and Turkey) to be relatively lower than other groups/nations (Allen & Andriste 1984; Allen, O'Mara, & Andriate 1986; Üstünel & Yüksel 2011). Thus, the hypothesis is not supported.

To confirm *H2* and answer the two research questions, four separate linear regressions were constructed. In each regression, a context of CA (small group, public, meeting, and dyadic) served as the criterion variable. The following variables were predictor variables in all of the regressions: sex (female as the reference group), age, and highest educational level achieved (BA level as the reference group). The regression for dyadicCA was significant:  $F(3,134) = 4.30, R^2 = .09, p = .01$ . See Table 2 for the full regression results. Females had significantly higher dyadicCA ( $b = .23, p < .01$ ), while individuals with more than a BA degree had significantly lower dyadicCA ( $b = -.18, p < .05$ ). As this sample was collected in one city in Kurdistan, a cross-validity coefficient was calculated to estimate the validation of these results in different (hypothetical) samples. The results reveal the combination of sex, age, and education to still be significant predictors of dyadicCA,  $R^2_{cv} = .04, p < .05$ .

Table 2: Regression for Communication Apprehension

Regressor	Unstandardized beta	Standardized Beta	T
<b>DyadicCA</b>			
Intercept	12.89		8.22
Female	1.98	.23**	2.78
Age	.06	.03	.33
BA-Level Education	-.59	-.18*	-2.18

<i>F</i>		4.30**	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.09	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj</sub>		.07	
<b>MeetingCA</b>			
Intercept	16.40		9.56
Female	.66	.07	.84
Age	-.04	-.02	-.20
BA-Level Education	-.98	-.28***	-3.30
<i>F</i>		4.06**	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.09	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj</sub>		.06	
<b>PublicCA</b>			
Intercept	17.01		8.96
Female	1.89	.18*	2.19
Age	-.13	-.05	-.58
BA-Level Education	-.98	-.25**	-2.98
<i>F</i>		5.13**	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.11	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj</sub>		.09	
<b>GroupCA</b>			
Intercept	15.93		8.46
Female	.53	.05	.61
Age	-.16	-.06	-.72

BA-Level Education	-.55	-.15	-1.69
<i>F</i>		1.42	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.03	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj</sub>		<u>.01</u>	

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

The regression for meetingCA was also significant:  $F(3,134) = 4.06$ ,  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $p < .01$ . See Table 2 for the full regression results. Individuals with more than a BA degree had significantly lower meetingCA ( $b = -.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The cross-validity coefficient revealed the combination of sex, age, and education to still be significant predictors of dyadicCA,  $R^2_{cv} = .04$ ,  $p < .05$ .

The regression for publicCA was significant:  $F(3,134) = 5.13$ ,  $R^2 = .11$ ,  $p < .01$ . See Table 2 for the full regression results. Females had significantly higher publicCA ( $b = .18$ ,  $p < .05$ ), while individuals with more than a BA degree had significantly lower publicCA ( $b = -.25$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The cross-validity coefficient revealed the combination of sex, age, and education to still be significant predictors of publicCA,  $R^2_{cv} = .06$ ,  $p < .05$ .

The regression for groupCA was non-significant:  $F(3,134) = 1.42$ ,  $R^2 = .03$ ,  $p = .24$ . See Table 2 for the full regression results. The cross-validity coefficient revealed the combination of sex, age, and education to be non-significant predictors of groupCA,  $R^2_{cv} = .02$ .

## Discussion

### Trait CA in Kurdistan

The first hypothesis of the study anticipated that Kurds would rate highly on CA. Despite the prediction of the hypothesis, Kurds in Iran rated as less apprehensive on the communication apprehension continuum. One explanation for this low amount of the CA is the shift toward individualism. Kurdistan is located in the Middle East; the Middle East is culturally considered relatively collectivist and high-context (Kaynak & Kara 2013; Merkin 2012; Pons, Pons, Laroche, & Mourali 2006). However, the trend is changing in recent years and Iranian society is getting more individualistic (Moaddel 2010). Kurdish society is also getting more individualistic. Sanandaj, the center of Kurdistan province in Iran, is one of the most individualist cities in the country (Rastgar-Khaled & Mohammadi 2015).

Cultural elements unique to Kurdistan might also be reasons for lower CA scores in comparison to other nations. Within the social context of the Kurdish culture, religion, family, and other social ties play an important role in people's everyday communication (Bruinessen 1992; McDowall 2004). Modernization and urban life have not been known to the nomadic and rural culture of the Kurdish people until recently (McDowall 2004). In this culture, tribal and family relationships are

considered of high importance and priority. Kurds living in the small concentrated villages and cities know each other very well and frequently meet and talk. This social presence is not confined to Kurdish men but women's social presence and their intra/intersexual communication is historically approved and accepted (Bruinessen 1993). Previous research showed higher frequency of communication is significantly related with lower CA (Pederson et al. 2008).

Religion can be another explanation for the lower amount of CA. Different religions vary in their level of individualism and collectivism (Cohen & Hill 2007). Islam emphasizes collectivist tendencies more than other monotheistic religions such as Judaism and Christianity (Cukur, de Guzman, & Carlo 2004). Under the influence of Islam, Kurds gather daily in the mosques and within the family to follow their religious practices, and as a result, to have more social and communicational contacts. People get ready for these kinds of close relationships from childhood when they practice communication behaviors in different social occasions. These skills gained from communication engagements could lead to lower levels of CA.

## **Contextual CA**

The analysis for *H2* revealed that there is a significance difference in CA levels between Kurdish men and women. While women tend to be more expressive in Kurdistan than in neighboring cultures (Mojab 2000), which suggests lower levels of CA among women, this was not the case. Women had significantly higher dyadicCA and publicCA than males, which is consistent with previous literature (Donovan & MacIntyre 2004). Higher levels of apprehension are correlated with lower self-perceived communication competence (Bandura 1988; MacIntyre, Noels & Clement 1997). Higher public CA could represent less access to public positions and reveal the barriers women face while promoting their position in society.

Regarding *RQ1*, the analysis revealed that, similar to the findings of Dwyer (1998), there was no significant difference in CA levels among age groups. It is difficult to definitively separate the effect of education on CA from age. However, it is clear that the basic culture acquisition that takes place in early childhood and during the first years of schooling provide stable communicative ability. However, future work should continue to explore the relationship between societal factors, such as social and religious conventions, human development (age), and communication traits.

In regards to *RQ2*, analysis showed education was negatively related to CA. Consistent with Kasemkosin and Rimkeeratikul's (2012) research, having a university education was negatively correlated with CA. A higher degree of education provides students with more social encounters and at the same time the confidence to communicate with more knowledge and expertise. Previous studies have also shown the importance of higher education in lowering CA levels (Croucher et al. 2015). On the other hand, the fact that there was no significant difference in group CA levels based on educational level could refer to cultural aspects of the newly-modernized Kurdish society, which is influenced by traces of its tribal structure (Gunter 2011). This tribal structure entails different social and religious gathering that trains people to be more relaxed in group communication.

# Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

This study is an examination of CA among an unexplored cultural and geographic population. While an abundance of CA research has been conducted on various cultural groups, no CA research has explored the Kurdish people. It is imperative to study this population to improve existing understanding of CA in a global context and establish research methods and standards of evidence particular to different cultural contexts and intercultural patterns (Arasaratnam 2006; Croucher 2013; Durant & Shepherd 2009; Watson et al. 1988).

This study promotes CA research among diverse participants. Most CA studies have analyzed data acquired from elementary aged or undergraduate students; while the present study targeted people from various social groups with different ages, and educational backgrounds. This diverse group provides a more representative picture of CA in Kurdistan, as a student sample inherently excludes a great proportion of the population.

There are five potential limitations to this study. The first relates to the translation of the PRCA-24. Even though the translation showed high reliability, and the scale had high alpha reliabilities, there is a possibility of discrepant meanings due to language. The survey language was Persian. While people in Kurdistan speak Kurdish, there is not an official program of Kurdish education and instead Persian is the language of schooling in Iranian Kurdistan. Thus, the questionnaires were prepared and given out in Persian, which could have led to discrepant meaning among these Kurdish-Persian speakers. On the other hand, these language issues could be contributing to some of the effects of education on CA. Second, the data for this study came from one city in Iranian Kurdistan. While some of the participants were drawn from the suburbs of the city, the overwhelming majority of the participants came from this city. Future research should work for more geographic representativeness. Third, although this study was an exploratory investigation of CA in Kurdistan, more subjects could have been beneficial, especially in conducting comparisons. Fourth, although the results from this study were compared to other studies from the US, and the comparison provides a proper understanding on the intercultural place of Kurdish community in Iran in the continuum of communication apprehension, a comparison with the majority Persian speaking Iranian population would provide a better understanding of role of social status in formation of communication apprehension. Previous research has shown minorities feeling less secure in their communication than the majority (Giles, 1978; Giles & Johnson, 1987). This is potentially an area of future research. The fifth limitation regards the difference found in the CA of men and women, which could be a result of higher levels of self-criticism among the women in the morning. Future research could explore whether self-reports of CA correspond to how CA of the participants is judged by the people who interact with them.

Another area of future research is the need for further research on Kurdistan itself. Previous studies on Kurdish communication are confined to studies of Kurdish media (Baydar 2013; Sheyholislami 2010, 2012). These studies have shown how Kurds use media to construct their national identities while facing the threat of assimilation by majority and dominant groups. Except for the current study on CA, there is no study dealing with other communication traits/behaviors in the area. To understand the culture of a nation it is vital to understand the communication of that nation (Dilbeck, McCroskey, Richmond, & McCroskey 2009). Future research could explore communicative traits/behaviors in Kurdistan to improve our understanding of this population.

The goal of this study was to explore the relationship between SES of individuals and their communication apprehension in the context of Iranian Kurdistan. The study examined the influence of sex, age, and education on CA in Kurdistan. More research investigating CA and other communication traits/behaviors in Kurdistan and the rest of Iran is warranted to better understand Kurdish communication and culture.

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[1] Two surveys were removed as the participants were under the age of 17.

[2] The institutional review board approved data collection among participants between the ages of 17 and 70.

[3] All studies that use the PRCA are based on a Likert type scale that ranges from 1-5.

