

God(s) in Minds: Understanding Deity Representation in Christian and Hindu Families Through Social Relations Modeling

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The purpose of the present research is to evaluate the sources of variation across family members' cognitive representation of deity figure(s) via social relations modeling (SRM). Using SRM, this study identifies the degree to which family members' beliefs about the deity are due to differences in the reporting member (actor effects), the member being perceived (partner effects), or the uniqueness of the dyad (relationship effects). The inclusion of American Christian ($n = 90$) and Indian Hindu ($n = 85$) families enabled the examination of patterns in two cultures and belief systems (monotheistic vs. polytheistic). SRM permitted the evaluation of actor, partner, and relationship sources of variance regarding deity representations. Similarities were found in deity representations explained by different family roles and dyads among Christian and Hindu families. Findings underscore the interplay of mothers and children in their shared beliefs and understanding of one another's beliefs. In contrast, fathers' beliefs tended to reflect only actor and relationship effects. These findings confirm the importance of family relationships in religious socialization, highlighting the prominence of mothers' religious views. Implications extend to researchers interested in religious socialization and clinicians interested in family processes involving religion.

Keywords: culture, family, religion, social relations model

Religion has often been a route through which people seek to describe the divine. This desire is born of a need to better understand, belong in, and even predict, one's environment (Seul, 1999). Individuals attribute characteristics to deity figures as a means of creating an internal schema, or cognitive structure for both monotheistic (Lindeman, Pysiainen, & Saariluoma, 2002) and polytheistic religions (Barrett, 1998). Schemas determine how people perceive and interact with their environment and one's deity representation (i.e., how they describe or understand God[s]) shapes religious explanations (e.g., God will help me through this vs. God is punishing me; Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick, 1985). Therefore, the study of deity representation helps advance understanding of how people attribute religious meaning, aiding researchers' exploration of how deity beliefs help people understand their place in the world.

Of equal importance is how individuals learn about religion. Scholars who study religion have often asserted the interdepen-

dence between the family and religious beliefs. However, as the nuclear family adapts to cultural shifts the relationship between the family and faith is challenged (Edgell & Docka, 2007; Sherkat & Ellison, 1999). Changes in gender roles leave unanswered questions as to how families, particularly different family members, help shape religious perceptions. Belief that the father is the spiritual leader of the household is a popular rhetoric historically echoed in the Abrahamic faiths that center around a single God. Despite the inclusion of patriarchal, matriarchal, and androgynous theologies, Hinduism also embraces the role of the husband/father figure in leading the family (Kumar, 2000). However, women have long been found to be more actively involved in religion (i.e., organizational participation; Walter & Davie, 1998). Despite the historical and popular assumption that the father acts as the religious leader of the family (Clarke, 2013; Johnson, 2012), it is important to consider empirically the influence of different family roles on family members' beliefs. The consideration of family members' understanding of one another's beliefs about the defining characteristics of God(s) enables exploration of variability in reports of beliefs of different family roles. Identifying sources of such variability (e.g., actor, partner, and relationship effects) can provide useful insight for researchers interested in the interdependence of family members' religious beliefs.

Cultural expectations facilitated by religions seem to promote patriarchal gender norms, and encourage values in women that are more aligned with nurturing tendencies (Becker & Hofmeister, 2001). Thus, even though fathers are popularly painted as the religious leader of the family, mothers are reportedly more engaged in religious activities because they are aligned with the

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values of motherhood (particularly for American Christians; Sul-lins, 2006) and are more involved than fathers in conversations about God with their children (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003). As such, it is important to clarify these gender differences, which are related to different family roles (i.e., mother vs. father). Doing so may help illuminate how the beliefs of certain family roles are represented in the beliefs of other family members. This can be helpful for clinicians and families in bolstering family resilience through the use of religion because it encourages awareness of the roles of different family members in the family belief system.

Therefore, the current study attempts to understand the sources of variation in different family members' deity representation and their relation to other family members' representations, in general, as well as their relation within specific family dyads. Further, family patterns are examined in cultures and religions with different theistic structures in regard to deity figure(s) by investigating Christians living in the United States and Hindus living in India.

Deity Representation

Individuals tend to create moral typecasts for others (Gray & Wegner, 2009), and the same can be said of deity figures. Attribution theory has helped researchers articulate how individuals draw conclusions about the personality of others as well as the causes of events (Kelley & Michela, 1980). This theoretical approach has largely driven attempts to understand the religious meaning people create in response to their experiences (Spilka et al., 1985). Religious attributions provide meaning, offer a sense of control over events, and bolster self-esteem by providing a sense of self within a greater context (Spilka et al., 1985). People tend to attribute someone/something as the cause of events around them, including God, and these attributions relate to the traits assigned to the protagonist (e.g., God; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003). The traits attributed to God, in turn, impact the supernatural attributions people make (Vonk & Pitzén, 2016). Thus, the investigation of how family members align with and relate to one another's perceptions of deities is a novel and important topic of interest that aids understanding of the development of attributions in families.

While the image of God(s) is a layered and complex construct (Hall & Fujikawa, 2013), social-cognitive research on schemas provides a theoretical framework for investigating cognitive representations of deities. Comprised of exemplars and prototypes, schemas are cognitive structures that represent knowledge about a concept including its attributes and the relations among those attributes that influence important cognitive functions such as attention, memory encoding and retrieval, and decision-making processes (Baldwin, 1992; Fiske & Linville, 1980; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Gardner, 1985; Taylor & Crocker, 1981). In essence, schemas help determine how people perceive and interact with their environment, influencing how they think and behave. Because of the complexity of religion and spirituality, constructs are best captured in prototypes which encompass clusters of characteristics that vary across contexts (Oman, 2013). Despite progress in work on religious schemas/concepts (Davis, Moriarty, & Mauch, 2013; McIntosh, 1995) and descriptive accounts of features of the Christian God (Lindeman, Pysiainen, & Saariluoma, 2002) and Hindu deities (Barrett, 1998), systematic empirical investigations into the cognitive structure of deity representations is lacking (see Barrett,

2007). Recent prototype analyses, however, have provided a means of measuring not only what characteristics are assigned to a construct (e.g., gratitude, Lambert, Graham, & Fincham, 2009), but also the centrality of these characteristics to the construct. The prototype approach has also been utilized to investigate individuals' internal working models of deity figures (Fincham, May, & Kamble, 2018; May & Fincham, 2018). Therefore, we utilize centrality based ratings derived from prototype research in measuring deity representation of family members' beliefs about God(s), a central component of a potentially overarching religious schema (Rosch, 1975).

Religion and Family Roles

Decades of research document the interdependence of family and religion (for a review, see Mahoney, 2010; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001;). The importance of the family in shaping religious beliefs is widely accepted and has been repeatedly supported (King, Furrow, & Roth, 2002; Myers, 1996). The transmission of religious beliefs is evident across multiple generations (Bengtson, Copen, Putney, & Silverstein, 2009) and the family is important in shaping conceptualizations of a deity concept (Alston & McIntosh, 1979; Cornwall, 1988). In fact, the God image is arguably defined in the context of early attachment figures, creating a God image that mimics that of one's maternal and paternal figures (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2013; Moriarty & Davis, 2012). God is among the most popular of religious topics discussed between parents and children (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003) and religious imagery and behaviors are subjected to modeling similar to how religious behaviors and beliefs are influenced by exemplar figures (Meagher & Kenny, 2013; Oman & Thoresen, 2003).

However, amid changes in gender socialization seen in the broader cultural context, the definition of the nuclear family has been adapting (Inglehart, Norris, & Ronald, 2003). Similar pressure for adaptation in religious understanding of gender norms is also apparent (Edgell & Docka, 2007). These trends suggest that the link between religion and the family is subject to cultural shifts. In fact, it has been already argued that religious prototypes are subject to cultural contexts in the family and greater societal norms (Oman, 2013). As such, it is important to continue to test assumptions regarding similarities and differences across different family members' deity representations. Such information could provide insight into how individuals' religious schemas are shaped within the family amid changing family values.

Social Relations Modeling (SRM)

One way to examine relations among deity representations in different family members is through the use of SRM (Kenny, 1994; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). SRM enables researchers to attend to nonindependence in data and identify variance components within a group (i.e., the family). It permits the exploration of actor, partner, and relationship sources of variance. Actor and partner effects are individual-level variables, as opposed to relationship effects which are specific to the dyad. In addition, SRM allows the identification of reciprocity at the individual level (generalized reciprocity) and dyadic level (dyadic reciprocity).

Actor effects for each member of the family constitute the individual's response across partners and are calculated for each

role a person plays in the family (e.g., mother, spouse). In contrast, partner effects reflect the way others view the family member, or a member's tendency to elicit similar responses from other members of the family. Like actor effects, partner effects are identified for each role a member plays in each dyad (e.g., mother, spouse), so in a family with three members there is a partner effect for each member (e.g., mother, father, and child). Finally, relationship effects describe the unique relationships of each member of the family to each other member of the family, after accounting for both actor and partner effects.

As an illustration, if "love" is a feature central to the concept of God, then within a three-person family (husband, wife, child) SRM, a husband's idea of God's love is a function of three main components: the husband's actor effect (i.e., how loving he believes God is toward others), the husband's partner effect (i.e., the extent to which others see him as believing God is loving), and relationship effects (i.e., the unique propensity of the husband's relationship with his wife [child] over and above his actor effect and partner effect). In this example, generalized reciprocity would provide an estimate of the extent to which a husband who believes highly in the love of God fosters a sense of belief in God's love with all his family members. However, dyadic reciprocity would describe the degree of association between the husband's beliefs in God's love with any particular other family member's belief in God's love.

Use of SRM is virtually nonexistent in religious studies. To the best of our knowledge, only one other religion-based study has partitioned variance using SRM (Meagher & Kenny, 2013). Meagher and Kenny (2013) examined spiritual leadership via the perception of religious commitment and faith development between fellow church congregants. Their findings suggested that while there was appreciable actor and partner variance, most of the variance regarding spiritual leadership ("modeling" in their terms) was found to be highly relational and reciprocal in nature, suggesting that spiritual leadership is largely characterized by mutual processes shared between peers. The present study expands this limited body of research by using SRM within a family context to identify the sources of variation in the features attributed to a deity (to explore expanded uses of SRM; Kenny, Gomes, & Kowal, 2015; Meagher & Kenny, 2013; Snijders & Kenny, 1999). Recent overviews of the religion and spirituality subfield have noted the need for multilevel research (see the call for a "multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm" by Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003, or the review of research in "relational spirituality" by Mahoney & Cano, 2014). SRM helps fill this need by providing a novel approach to a new unit of multilevel analysis in the field of religion and spirituality.

Christian and Hindu Contexts

Although Christianity and Hinduism share common elements (e.g., deity figures and belief in a higher power), important theological and practical differences remain (Leach, Piedmont, & Monteiro, 2001). The most striking differences occur in foundational religious doctrine and theistic structure (e.g., sin before salvation, monotheistic vs. reincarnation until enlightenment, pantheistic). Furthermore, these religious differences are embedded in familial and cultural contexts (Vergote & Tamayo, 1981). For example, the predominately patriarchal nature of most Indian

Hindu families is to utilize marriage as a primary means to fulfill religious obligations. Also, Indian Hindu families worship both individualized family ancestors and communal Gods that may not even exist or be known to other Hindus (Mullatti, 1995). These practices are absent from Christianity. We therefore examine deity representation in these two religious contexts. In doing so, we investigate how God(s) is mentally represented across differing generations of family members (parents and children). Findings will demonstrate how each family member's God representation relates to other family member's beliefs, and will identify sources of variability in family members' beliefs. Finally, the current research explores these patterns in a western sample of Christian families (United States) and an eastern sample of Hindu families (India).

The Current Study

The purpose of the present research is to evaluate the sources of variation across family members' cognitive representation of deity figure(s) and utilizes SRM to better understand similarities and differences across family members' cognitive representation of deity figure(s). It explores how actor, partner, and relationship effects account for variability in reports of different family member's beliefs across dyads. Given the historically patriarchal nature of religion one might assume mothers' and children's views will correspond with fathers' views; further, one might expect reports of father's views to vary little, because father's views are well known. However, in the context of growing egalitarian family roles, we might also expect to find that deity representation varies similarly across mother and father roles, such that partner and relationship effects are similar for mothers/wives and fathers/husbands. Moreover, children's views will similarly correspond with the beliefs about God(s) for both mother and father. Finally, we utilize two samples to explore how family patterns of belief vary across family members in different cultures and religions.

Method

Participants

Two-parent families with an eighth-grade child were recruited during visits to schools, churches, and local community centers, following procedures that were approved by institutional review boards at both institutions (United States and India). Interested families were contacted by e-mail or telephone and invited to schedule a laboratory visit at a time that was convenient to them. Both parents had to volunteer to participate and participating children were required to give assent for their participation. Endorsement of marriage between mothers and fathers, legal guardianship of the child indicated by both parents, the same faith among family members (Hindu or Christian) as well as the ability to read and comprehend questionnaires by each family member was required to participate in the study. Prior research suggests that eighth-grade children in both the United States and in India are able to meet eligibility criteria in regard to reading comprehension (Hoyt, Fincham, McCullough, Maio, & Davila, 2005; May, Kamble, & Fincham, 2015). Given that the primary measure focuses on characteristics attributed to God, families in which one or more members did not believe in God(s) were excluded from

analysis. Samples were recruited from both the United States (families living in and around Tallahassee, Florida) and India (families living in the surrounding area of Hubli-Dharwad city, the second largest city in the state of Karnataka). Family members visited the lab together, but completed questionnaires in separate rooms. All materials were collected via a paper and pencil questionnaire. Christian ($N = 90$) and Hindu ($N = 90$) families were sampled; however, missing data pertaining to five Hindu families was identified in regard to demographics and measurement scales, and thus data of only 85 Hindu families are reported. Table 1 presents further details regarding participant demographic characteristics.

Measuring Deity Features

Mothers, fathers, and children were asked individually to report on their perceptions of their own and their family member's perceptions of God. The deity in the United States sample was referred to as "God." "Gods" was used to describe deities in the Hindu sample. The characteristics investigated were chosen because they were found to represent both central and peripheral features identified in previous prototype analyses on deity beliefs across American Christian and Indian Hindu families (Fincham et al., 2018; May & Fincham, 2018). Prototype analyses of Christian and Hindu deity attributes identified significant deity feature overlap and thus the same deity attributes were used in both samples. Each family member was prompted with 10 statements about God(s); e.g., "God is love," "God is judge," "God is truth,"

"God is guardian," "God is peace," "God is everywhere," "God is unknown," "God is forgiving," "God is misunderstood," "God is sunshine") and asked how characteristic it was of their own understanding of God(s), rated on a scale of 1 (*Not at all characteristic*) to 6 (*Completely characteristic*). Participants were asked the same questions regarding the beliefs of the two other family members. Questions were structured to be grammatically correct across respondents (i.e., do you, does your mother, does your father, does your child, does your spouse).

Statistical Analyses

Factor analysis of the deity ratings was conducted prior to the SRM analyses, indicating no evidence of multifactorial structure. Results showed that a single factor emerged, accounting for more than 95% of common factor variance. As reliable estimation of the variance in SRM relationship effects requires two indicators (i.e., parallel measures of the same construct), we followed Hoyt et al. (2005) and May et al. (2015) and used the factor loadings to split items into two indicators (e.g., FM1 and FM2) with comparable loadings that reflected a single common factor. Coefficient alpha for the two indicators in the six possible dyads ranged from 0.83 to 0.92.

The SRM analysis conducted was the distinguishable roles design (Kenny et al., 2006) involving a three-person family (mother, father, child) using EQS (Version 6.1; Bentler, 2001) with maximum likelihood estimation. To provide appropriate model specification, a distinguishable role SRM analysis requires,

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of American Christian and Indian Hindu Families

Characteristic	Christian ($N = 90$)			Hindu ($N = 85$)		
	Mothers	Fathers	Children	Mothers	Fathers	Children
Mean age (SD)	44.67 (6.56)	46.09 (5.80)	13.30 (.77)	39.43 (5.24)	46.69 (4.95)	13.78 (.63)
Gender						
Female (%)			45			69
Ethnicity						
Caucasian (%)	92	90	83			
Asian (%)				100	100	100
Education						
Less than high school (%)	0	1		5	4	
High school equivalency (GED; %)	1	2		18	5	
High school diploma (%)	3	9		6	10	
Some college (%)	20	5		7	6	
Associate's degree (%)	12	9		7	1	
Bachelor's degree (%)	43	42		29	33	
Graduate or professional degree not completed (%)	1	3		7	8	
Graduate or professional degree (%)	20	29		22	33	
Income						
>\$100,000 (%)	18	34		5	12	
\$75,000-\$99,999 (%)	16	25		4	12	
\$50,000-\$74,999 (%)	15	26		4	9	
\$40,000-\$49,999 (%)	4	8		0	9	
\$30,000-\$39,999 (%)	4	1		5	7	
\$25,000-\$29,999 (%)	8	1		1	5	
\$15,000-\$24,999 (%)	5	3		3	8	
\$5,000-\$14,999 (%)	14	1		6	15	
<\$5,000 (%)	5	1		6	15	
None (%)	11	0		67	8	
"Religion is very important"	91	83		64.4	54.7	
"Pray very frequently"	58	47		51	34.1	

at a minimum, three distinguishable roles (Kenny, 1994; Kenny et al., 2006). Model fit was assessed using standard fit indices: chi-square, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), and comparative fit index (CFI; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Specifications for the SRM included setting factor loadings to 1 to allow variance estimation of model components and to allow errors for a given indicator to correlate across all six dyads due to shared-item content. Figure 1 depicts the SRM analysis; omitted for clarity are individual indicator measurements, error terms (for each measured variable), and paths from the indicators to the corresponding actor and partner effects. The figure shows: variance partitioning of overall amount of variation (actor, partner, relationship) in individual and dyadic scores explainable by characteristics of each family role (mother, father, child), individual-level reciprocity correlations (generalized reciprocity: correlation between each role's actor and partner effects), and dyadic reciprocity (correlation between two roles' relationship effects). SRM analyses were conducted independently for each sample (American Christian and Indian Hindu).

Results

Fit indices indicated that the model for the American Christian sample fit the obtained data: $\chi^2(18) = 13.85, p > .05, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA < 0.01$. Similarly, the Indian Hindu model fit the data well: $\chi^2(18) = 15.01, p > .05, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA < 0.01$.

Individual-Level Effects

Actor and partner effects. Individual-level effects consist of actor and partner effects. As a reminder, the actor effect represents the respondent's report of each family member whereas partner effects represent the degree to which one elicits similar responses from other family members. Findings demonstrate that variability in mothers' and children's reports of fathers' beliefs reflect little to no partner effects, or differences in fathers' ability to elicit certain responses about their beliefs (Table 2). This is consistent for both American and Indian samples. However, it appears that the variability in reports of mothers' and children's beliefs (by all members) was explained by both individual (actor) differences of the

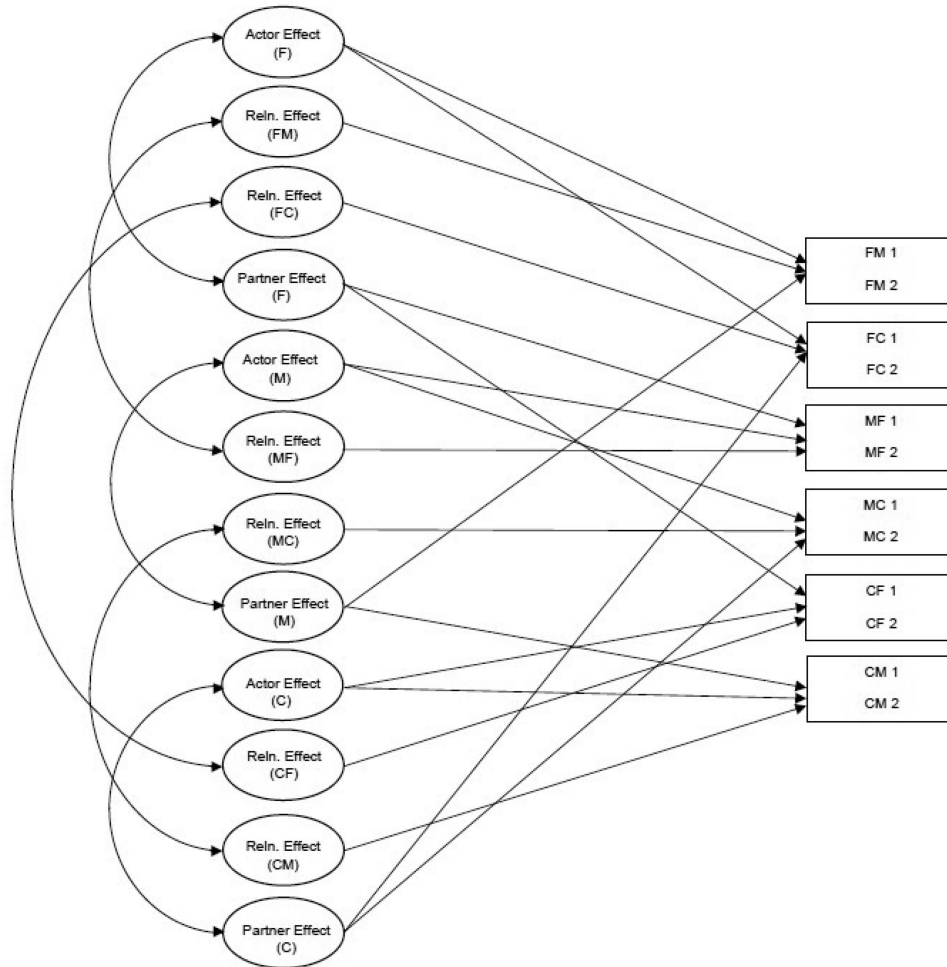


Figure 1. Social relations model. Individual indicator measurements and error terms (for each measured variable) and paths from the indicators to the corresponding actor and partner effects are omitted. F = father; M = mother; C = child, MF = mother's ratings of father; MC = mother's ratings of child; FM = father's rating of mother; FC = father's ratings of child; CM = child's ratings of mother; CF = child's ratings of father.

Table 2
Individual-Level Variance Estimates and Reciprocity Covariances

Component	Actor variance	Partner variance	Reciprocity correlation
Christian			
Mother	3.75*	.59*	.52*
Father	1.32*	.01	.03
Child	.89*	3.01*	.69*
Hindu			
Mother	13.77*	4.05*	.58*
Father	7.27*	1.45	.09
Child	6.42*	8.49*	.62*

* $p < .05$.

member reporting and differences in the person being reported on (partner effects). However, variability in the reports of father's beliefs was only predicted by actor effects, and not partner effects, although fathers' reports of mothers' and children's beliefs reflect variability due to both actor and partner effects. While partner effects appear to be greater in reports of fathers' beliefs in Hindu families, they were still small and not significant.

Individual-level reciprocity. Reciprocity at the individual level represents the relation between actor and partner effects. Table 2 shows the generalized reciprocity correlations, and it can be seen that there is significant positive generalized reciprocity among mothers and children in both samples. This finding provides an estimate of how much generally perceiving others in a certain way correlates with being perceived in the same way. Mothers and children were able to elicit similar beliefs about deity characterization from other family members. However, fathers failed to elicit similar responses in mothers and children regarding his beliefs.

Relationship-Level Effects

The relationship effect describes the unique relationship of an actor to a partner after both individual-level actor and partner effects have been removed. In other words, relationship effects represent uniqueness or the degree to which deity centrality ratings vary depending upon the specific individuals in the dyad, after partialing out variance due to those individuals' actor and partner effect. Findings for relationship effects (Table 3) displayed similar patterns for both Christian and Hindu families: (a) a mother's ratings of her child's and her husband's deity ratings showed significant evidence of relationship effects, (b) a father's reports of his wife's deity ratings showed no evidence for relationship effects but his reports of his child's deity ratings did show evidence for strong relationship effects, and (c) a child's reports of his or her mother's deity ratings showed evidence for relationship effects but his or her reports of the father's ratings showed no evidence for relationship effects.

Dyadic reciprocity is the correlation between two relationship effects. For example, reciprocity in the mother-child relationship measures the association between the mother-child relationship effect and the child-mother relationship effect. As seen in Table 3, there was evidence of dyadic reciprocity between mothers' ratings of children and children's rating of mothers in both samples. Further, the reciprocity appears to be direct, in that mothers and

Table 3
Relationship-Level Variance Estimates and Reciprocity Covariances

Dyad	Relationship variance	Dyadic reciprocity
Christian		
MF	4.03*	.00
MC	3.34*	.23*
FM	.00	.00
FC	6.72*	-.11
CM	.59*	.23*
CF	.10	-.11
Hindu		
MF	8.02*	.03
MC	3.99*	.32*
FM	1.01	.03
FC	9.98*	-.02
CM	2.06*	.32*
CF	.09	-.02

Note. MF = mother's ratings of father; MC = mother's ratings of child; FM = father's rating of mother; FC = father's ratings of child; CM = child's ratings of mother; CF = child's ratings of father.

* $p < .05$.

children's beliefs tend to elicit similar beliefs in one another (i.e., a positive correlation). However, there was no evidence of dyadic reciprocity for father's beliefs.

Percentage of Variance

When using family data for SRM analyses, actor and partner variance estimates vary for different family roles and relationship variances differ across dyads. However, this reveals little about the relative importance of each SRM component in each of the six dyads so the percentage of variance accounted for by each component of the SRM (i.e., actor, partner, relationship) was calculated to more clearly illustrate the relative importance of each component. Table 4 shows the amount of variance associated with actor,

Table 4
Percent of Variance in Scores Explained by the Components of the Social Relations Model

Dyad	Actor	Partner	Relationship
Christian			
MF	48	0	52
MC	37	30	33
FM	69	31	0
FC	12	27	61
CM	43	29	29
CF	89	1	10
Across dyads	49.58	19.63	30.78
Hindu			
MF	59	6	34
MC	52	32	15
FM	59	33	8
FC	28	33	39
CM	51	32	16
CF	72	16	11
Across dyads	53.86	25.50	20.64

Note. MF = mother's ratings of father; MC = mother's ratings of child; FM = father's rating of mother; FC = father's ratings of child; CM = child's ratings of mother; CF = child's ratings of father.

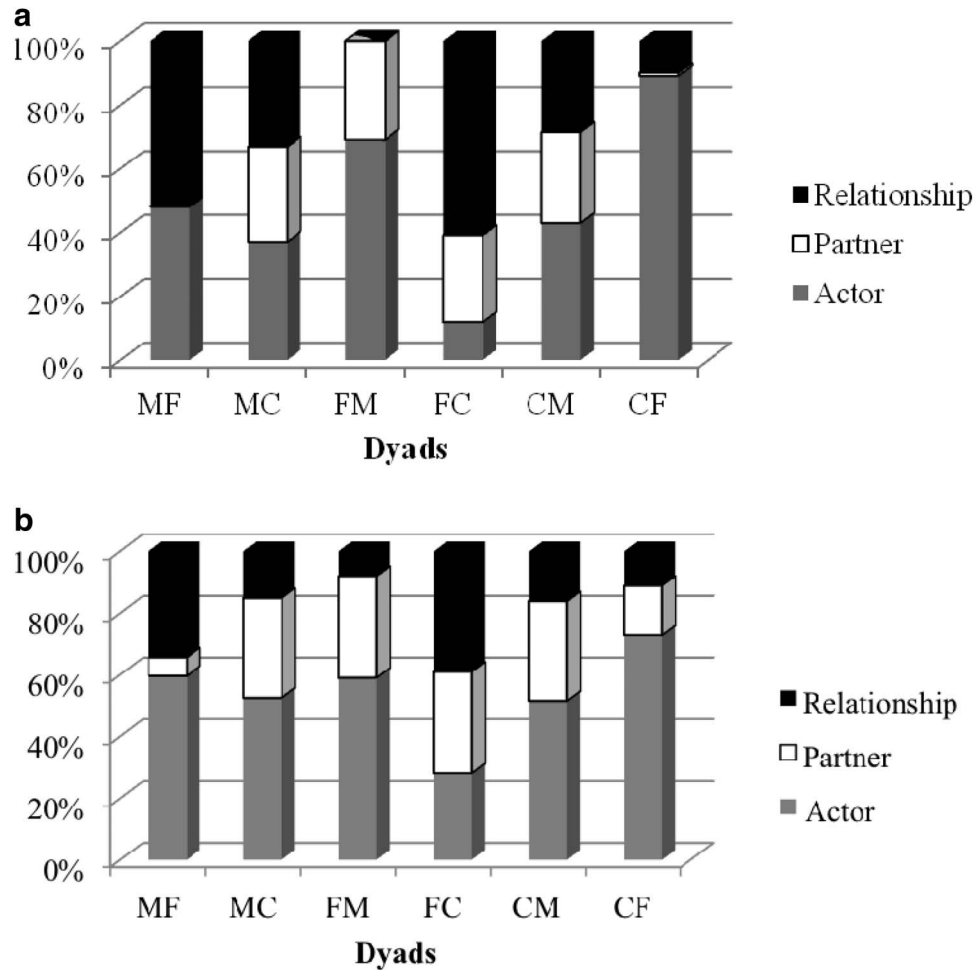


Figure 2. (a) Deity variance partitioning by dyad for Christian families. (b) Deity variance partitioning by dyad for Hindu families. Percentage of variance in deity centrality attributable to actor, partner, and relationship effect by dyad. MF = mother's ratings of father; MC = mother's ratings of child; FM = father's rating of mother; FC = father's ratings of child; CM = child's ratings of mother; CF = child's ratings of father.

partner, and relationship effects and Figure 2a and 2b illustrate these effects graphically.

The majority of variance in members' reports of one another's beliefs is accounted for by actor effects (Christian = 49.58%, Hindu = 53.86%), or individual differences of the member reporting. Such high actor effects are typical in the SRM context (Hoyt et al., 2005; May et al., 2015). However, what is notable is appreciable variance in both samples for partner effects as well as relationship effects. Thus, it appears that a significant proportion of variance in reports of family members' views of God is explained by differences in members' ability to elicit certain responses (partner effects), and the uniqueness of the dyad (relationship effects).

Some interesting similarities and differences were found for different dyads in both Christian and Hindu families. Husband's/father's beliefs demonstrate very little partner variance. For example, in the United States sample only 1% of the deity rating variance (0% from the mother's ratings plus 1% from the child's ratings) was attributed to the partner effects of the

husband/father, suggesting that very little variability in reports of fathers' beliefs is influenced by differences in fathers' ability to elicit a certain response. Overall, partner variance appears slightly higher in Hindu families (19.63% vs. 25.5%), especially in comparison with the father's partner effects (22% vs. 1%). Additionally, children's reports of fathers' deity beliefs were largely predicted by individual differences of children (actor effects; 89% for Christian families and 72% for Hindu families). In contrast, children's reports of mothers' deity beliefs were relatively equally predicted by actor (43% for Christian families and 51% for Hindu families), partner (29% for Christian families and 32% for Hindu families), and relationship effects (29% for Christian families and 16% for Hindu families), particularly for Christian families. Finally, in both samples, fathers' reports of mothers' deity beliefs contained very little relationship variability (Christian = 0%, Hindu = 8%). Thus, the uniqueness of the marital dyad did not account for any appreciable variance above and beyond that of the respective actor and partner effects. However, a fair amount of

variability in fathers' reports of children was explained by the uniqueness of the father-child dyad (61% for Christian families and 39% for Hindu families).

Discussion

The current findings advance empirical understanding of how beliefs about God(s) differ across family members. Further, these social relation analyses documented how variability in family member's reports of one another's beliefs were attributable to the uniqueness of the family member reporting and the member being reported on, as well as the uniqueness of each relationship in the family. Such insight provides a better understanding of how religious beliefs are shared within the family context and how variability in the awareness of members' beliefs is explained by differences in family roles and relationships. Further, these patterns were similar in two different cultures and theistic structures, suggesting that mental representations within the family structure across religions may be relatively universal.

Religion and Gender in the Family

Differences and similarities of beliefs between family members are intriguing, as findings revealed that while mothers and children share much of their beliefs about the characterization of God(s), this is not the case for fathers. There are several possible explanations regarding the socialization of religious beliefs about the deity/deities that might account for the results obtained for fathers versus mothers. Historically, popular beliefs about the father's role in leading religious education implies that the mother and child would follow the same belief as the father. While it would appear contradictory that a child and mother are more aligned with each other in their beliefs than they are with the fathers, high correlations between the religious beliefs of mothers and children have been found before (Dudley & Dudley, 1986). In fact, researchers have found that mothers were actually more involved than fathers in religious conversations about God with their children (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003). Perhaps the endorsement of female gender expectations encourages female participation in religious activities as an expectation of childcare and home management (Becker & Hofmeister, 2001). Moreover, a mother's perceptions of the risk of not engaging in religious activities (Miller & Stark, 2002) may encourage her to be more intentional in engaging her child in religious activities and discussion. Still, these explanations for the current findings are speculative and require continued research.

Such conclusions suggest a mother's tendencies toward nurturance make her more likely to engage in religious conversation and activities (Walter & Davie, 1998), particularly in American Christians (Sullins, 2006). As such, a mother may tend to encourage this behavior in the child, making it more likely that the child is aware of and share the mother's beliefs about God. However, our findings also suggest that variability in mother and child reports of one another's beliefs are fairly equally explained by differences in mothers, children themselves, and the unique relationship of the mother-child relationship. This would suggest that mothers and children share more beliefs with each other than with fathers but

perceptions vary according to individual characteristics of mothers, children, and their unique relationship. For example, in Family A the child might report more accurately what the mother believes as opposed to Family B where the child's report of the mother's beliefs is very different from what the mother herself believes. The differences in these two families are equally attributed to the unique characteristics of the child and mother reporting (i.e., personality, temperament, or awareness of people around them) and the unique nature of the mother-child relationship.

In the context of religious research, it may be that children are modeling the beliefs and views of a figure prominent in their exposure to religious practice (Oman & Thoresen, 2003), which, like previous findings, turns out to be rather reciprocal and dependent on the relationship (Meagher & Kenny, 2013). Further, the mother-child relationship acts as a primary attachment relationship from a young age, so the God image(s) may be influenced by the nature of this relationship and the primary attachment figure (i.e., mothers; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2013; Moriarty & Davis, 2012). Although previous lay assumptions and research have focused on the role of the father in children's religious socialization, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of the mother. The mother's beliefs and relationship with their child may help shape the prototypical characteristics of a God(s) endorsed by the child (i.e., the foundation of religious attributions and meaning making) and set the stage for how their children use religion as a coping method. Therefore, it may behoove both clergy and laypersons to be more attentive to maternal behavior in families' religious involvement.

In contrast, variability in mothers' and children's reports of fathers' beliefs were largely explained by differences in mothers and children or the uniqueness of the member of the family reporting on fathers' beliefs (i.e., actor effects). Variability in children's reports of fathers was largely due to differences in children (actor effects), as opposed to differences in fathers' eliciting certain responses about their beliefs (partner effects). For example, in Family A the child might report more accurately what the father believes, as opposed to Family B where the child's report of the father's beliefs is very different than what the father reports of his beliefs. The differences in these two families is because of the uniqueness of the children, whether in personality, temperament, or awareness of people around them (as possible examples). However, the majority of the variability in mothers' reports of fathers' beliefs about God was predicted by the uniqueness of the relationship between the mother and father (relationship effects). But again, differences in fathers did not predict differences between families in mothers' reports of fathers' beliefs (partner effects).

These findings could suggest that mothers and children are very aware of fathers' beliefs, so differences in their reports of fathers' beliefs are due to their own unique characteristics (actor effects) and the unique relationship with the father. Individual differences within the child could impact perception, such as the influences of socialization within the church, the family, or society. However, it may equally mean that there is a common elicited response (partner effect) across families for fathers because variability in reports of fathers' beliefs is primarily due to differences in mothers and children. In other words, men's behaviors failed to influence women and children's perceptions of men's beliefs. The virtual absence of

partner effects for fathers in Christian families is noteworthy. This could reflect strong stereotypical views of fathers' beliefs so that all fathers within the same faith tend to elicit similar responses (i.e., lack of variability due to partner effects).

Variability in fathers' reports of children, however, was largely attributable to unique characteristics of the father (actor effect) and the uniqueness of each father-child relationship (relationship effect) as opposed to differences in the child's tendency to elicit a certain response (partner effect), particularly in Christian families. It may be that there is commonality across families in the response elicited by the child for fathers. Perhaps there are assumptions that the child largely follows the father's beliefs, with adjustments in this assumption being largely due to unique differences in the relationships between fathers and children. Moreover, the differences in the unique relationship between father and child, above and beyond actor and partner effects, explains almost all of the variability in fathers' reports of children's beliefs. In other words, differences in Family A (where father's reports of the child's beliefs are fairly accurate) and Family B (where father's reports of the child's beliefs are different than what the child reports) is the unique relationship between the father and child, potentially making the father more or less aware of the child's beliefs. This bolsters the argument that there may be assumptions about fathers' and children's beliefs that are relatively universal, so variability between families/dyads is largely due to the unique father-child relationship. However, stereotypes about what fathers and children believe about God(s) would only seem to be at play regarding perceptions of the other's beliefs, because the beliefs of fathers and children are not significantly similar. In fact, while not significantly different, negative reciprocity correlations suggest disagreement between fathers' and children's beliefs. Given the relevance of cultural and familial context (Oman, 2013), the location of the families (i.e., southeastern United States Christian families) may have influenced the degree to which fathers were implicitly deemed religious leaders so their beliefs are known and not challenged, although not followed.

Regarding wives' and husbands' reports of one another's beliefs, interesting differences in what accounted for variability were found. For example, variability in fathers' reports of mothers' beliefs was predicted by differences among husbands and wives, but not the unique spousal relationship. In other words, differences between reports in Families A and B are due to the unique characteristics of the individuals reporting (mothers and fathers) as opposed to the uniqueness of the spousal relationships from family to family. This suggests that the role or importance of the spousal relationship in knowing one another's beliefs is similar across families. In contrast, wives' reports of husbands' beliefs is largely explained by individual characteristics of the wife reporting and differences in the unique relationship of husbands and wives, but not the unique characteristics of the husband. Given that fathers' ability to elicit certain responses regarding their beliefs about God(s) is similar across families, researchers would benefit from continuing to investigate why this is the case and whether there are some universal characteristics of fathers that are the same across families.

Christian and Hindu Contexts

Surprisingly, the pattern of findings obtained was relatively consistent across American Christian and Indian Hindu families, suggesting that despite differences in nationality, theistic structure of religion, and culture, families share what may be some relatively universal similarities. Specifically, mothers and children seem to share more beliefs about the attributes of God(s). Further, variability in the reports of fathers' beliefs about God is largely explained by differences in children and mothers (actor effects) and the uniqueness of the father-child and husband-wife relationships (relationship effects). Despite these similarities, there are minor differences largely due to differences in magnitude. For example, relationship effects in Christian samples accounted for greater variability in mothers' reports of fathers' and children's beliefs, fathers' reports of mothers', and children's reports of fathers' beliefs about God. Further, reports on Hindu fathers' beliefs about God(s) demonstrated stronger partner effects for both mothers and children reporting than in Christian families. Such differences are minor but may be attributed to cultural differences or reflect differences in religion, as Hinduism embraces patriarchal, matriarchal, and androgynous theologies around a multitude of different deities (Kumar, 2000).

Clinical Implications

The inclusion of religion and family discussion around God(s) can be beneficial to clinical work (Burton & Clements, 2013), and the findings of the current study have multiple implications for clinical work with families. Clinicians may be particularly mindful of fathers' beliefs and encourage open conversations among family members to help illuminate the uniqueness of the family belief system beyond the rhetoric of the church or temple in which the family and/or fathers may be involved. Further, in light of shared beliefs between mothers and children, a thorough assessment of mothers' belief systems may provide valuable information for clinicians aiming to better understand how family members contribute to the family's religious meaning-making process. Specifically, it may be useful for clinicians to assess for religious involvement and the role mothers play in encouraging faith-based activities and beliefs about God. Moreover, clinicians might explore the rationale behind mothers' role in family behaviors around religion, because maternal motivations may be linked to family dynamics around other topics in the family. Finally, given the similarities in findings across different cultures and religions, clinicians should be mindful of these patterns with all families, even amid diverse clientele.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the novel extension to the literature provided by this study and the intriguing questions raised by the current findings, the results need to be interpreted in light of several limitations. The study uses a cross-sectional design making it difficult to infer direction of effects; thus longitudinal designs are called for in future research regarding the influence of family members on each other's representation of God(s). Further, findings were limited to only two religions and cultures, hampering universal generalization. Those continuing research on this topic should strive to

compare family patterns across more cultural and religious contexts.

Additionally, the nature of the sample limits greater generalizability. First, the samples consist of intact heterosexual parent-led families with eighth-grade children so continued research should examine family agreement around deity beliefs in a variety of family forms and at differing development periods of childhood. Second, the exclusion of participants that did not believe in God limits SRM to beliefs around a deity in a sample with a greater propensity for religiousness than the average American due to location of data collection (Southeast American Christians). For example, 91% of Christian mothers and 83% of Christian fathers report religion to be very important in their life, but in national samples 43% of women and 34% of men report religion as very important to their daily life (National Center for Health Statistics, 2015). It may be beneficial to continue to examine family agreement and coherence around different aspects of belief systems to replicate patterns found relating to God in Christian families.

In regard to deity representation, many additional factors may be contributing to attributions to God(s), including cognitive style (Bouvet & Bonnefon, 2015). Also, the current analyses can only identify differences in family members (actor and partner effects) and dyads (relationship effects) that account for variability in family members' reports of their own and other family member's views. However, it does not identify the nature of any difference among family members. For example, some factors may impact family members' agreement and children's awareness or adherence to family members' values, such as the quality of relationships or the traditional structure and interactions of the family (Myers, 1996). Further, given the variability in culture between the samples used in the current study, generalizations about socialization experiences are limited. Therefore, researchers should continue to investigate individual and family characteristics that contribute to family members' beliefs about God(s).

Conclusions

The findings of the current study provide valuable insight into the interrelatedness of family members' beliefs about the characterization or representation of deity figure(s). Moreover, it identifies intriguing patterns in family members' understanding or perceptions of other family members' beliefs. Results highlight how unique differences in the person reporting, the person they are reporting on, and the dyad predict variability across families in two cultural and theistic contexts. Specifically, they underscore the importance of the interplay between mothers and children in their understanding of one another's beliefs about the attributes of God(s). Further, the partner effects for husbands/fathers suggest a consistency in the ability to elicit responses across families. Finally, findings were consistent across different cultures and theistic structures, suggesting that there may be some universality in these patterns in families across multiple cultures and religions. Patterns found may be of interest to those studying cross-cultural differences in the religion-family relationship and religious socialization. Implications extend to families and clinicians alike who are interested in increasing awareness of religious family processes

and bolstering family awareness of religious engagement and discussion.

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