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Parental attitudes concerning children's beliefs in secular and nonsecular entities

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Abstract

The present study examined the potential differences between how religious and nonreligious parents think about their child's acquisition and loss/retention of belief in Santa Claus, God, Easter Bunny, and Tooth Fairy. Parents of first-born children between the ages of 4 and 10 years of age were given a survey and asked to rate how they thought, worried, and talked about these four entities, both secular and nonsecular, to that child. Results suggest differing levels of concern between religious and non-religious parents. Nonreligious parents were more concerned with their child's belief in secular entities, while religious parents were more concerned with their child's belief in nonsecular entities. All parents indicated that they were not concerned that their child would lose their belief in entities. A possible explanation is that parents have either accepted that their child will no longer believe in the entity, or that they hope their child retains their belief. Future directions include looking at the time period that children begin believing in entities, and why parents have a low level of concern.

Parental attitudes concerning children's beliefs in secular and nonsecular entities

The way a child develops their beliefs in different entities is influenced by the environment in which they are raised. Beliefs in different entities can be disseminated by both the child's culture and by their family. This study was designed to gain more information about how parents felt about and thought about their child's belief in different entities, as well as how they explained these entities to their child and their comfort with doing so. Secular entities, such as Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy, and nonsecular entities, such as God/Allah/other deity were explored. Each of these entities is similar in that they require a child's belief in something that they cannot see, however parents may differ on how they explain the entities to their children. This topic is important because it explores the differences in how parents think about their child's beliefs, as well as their own beliefs, and what they deemed important for their child to know.

Children begin developing beliefs in many aspects of their world as they develop. They develop beliefs about friendships, religious and nonreligious figures, and sometimes imaginary friends. Children also develop Theory of Mind, which helps them to understand what other people are thinking at a particular time. This is important in social learning and the ability to interact with adults as they grow older.

Children are born with the potential to believe many different things, with parents often being the first source of important information (Gleason, 2002). Even though parents may not teach their children about imaginary friends, when asked about their imaginary friends, children are able to understand that there are differences in the types of relationships they have that are real and imaginary (Gleason, 2002). Children distinguished this by relying on parents and best friends for nurturance instead of relying on their imaginary friends (Gleason, 2002). One

possible explanation for the development of imaginary friends is that children are creating their own relationships and companions (Gleason, Sebanc, & Hartup, 2000) and that imaginary friends may be based off past interactions that children have had with peers or with adults (Gleason & Homann, 2006).

Taylor et al. (2004) suggested that having imaginary friends allows children to explore different concepts, such as Theory of Mind, and to help them understand different rules within society. Theory of Mind, or the ability to understand from another person's perspective, was first investigated by Wimmer and Perner (1983). They gave children a series of false belief tasks that revealed that children do have the ability to understand the perspective of another individual, although children younger than 4 years struggle with this concept and it is solidified between the ages of 4 and 6. Theory of Mind is important in understanding a child's belief because it helps them to evaluate the source of information and to understand why information is being presented.

Theory of Mind was seen in an earlier study by Taylor and Flavell (1984) when children were asked if two people can view one object from different viewpoints and have the object appear different. Wigger, Paxon, and Ryan (2013) looked at the different ages of children and reported that younger children often thought that imaginary friends knew everything that happened, but older children only attributed more knowledge to God as an all-knowing being, excluding imaginary friends and often times other humans in Theory of Mind tasks.

Understanding how children interact with imaginary friends and their ability to grasp Theory of Mind is important so that there is a basis for belief in other entities that they are exposed to.

There are times, however, when children confuse reality and fantastical or imaginary figures. Davoodi, Corriveau, and Harris (2016) conducted a study that examined the effects of

being raised in nonreligious and religious households. Younger children between the ages of 3 and 4 were more likely to incorrectly categorize novel figures as real than as older children.

Children who were raised in religious households and who were also exposed to scenarios with miracles in them were more likely to categorize novel fantastical figures as real when compared to children raised in nonreligious environments. A possible explanation for this is that children are exposed to more stories that include miracles, so hearing novel fantastical stories may seem normal to them. Deák (2006) also supports that children are able to determine if there are discrepancies between realistic and fantastical scenarios. Deák (2006) argued that children may fail appearance-reality tests, not because of the inability to differentiate between appearance and reality, but because of semantics and the way that tasks are presented. Woolley and McInnis (2015) looked at how children describe the properties of real but invisible entities and not real entities. Children who passed appearance-reality tests were significantly better at providing explanations about the invisibility and reality of the entities. They found that children described real but invisible entities by using physical characteristics, such as germs. When children described not real entities and their invisibility, children described their reality status and not physical properties. This study supports that children are able to distinguish that reality and visibility are separate from one another. The understanding that visibility and reality are separate plays a role in the development in the belief of different entities that children are exposed to.

Parents and guardians are an integral part of how a child learns about many things in life. They are a socializing agent, and as such, they teach values, culture, religion and many other aspects of life to their children. A study by Tudge et al. (2000) supported that parents, regardless of the different cultures they came from, taught their children important aspects about their culture. Another study by Juang et al. (2018) examined how second-generation parents practiced

sharing information with their children about their culture while they lived in the United States. Parents typically chose information from their culture that they deemed important to pass onto their children, and also found sharing information that was cross cultural as easier than sharing aspects of culture that went against the United States culture.

When raising children, it is common that parents hope to transmit their values to their children (Chan & Tam, 2016). In immigrant families, mothers expressed that they wanted their children to learn both their personal values and the norms of the culture. In that same study, children reported that their values were related to their parent's values (Chan & Tam, 2016). One way that parents successfully shared their values was by having open conversations with their children, whether they explained cultural values or religious values, and if the values were able to be adapted across culture easily. Hayes and Pittelkow (1993) evaluated how children obtain beliefs and how the family influences the transmission of beliefs. The study supported that a parent's belief and active commitment was predictive in the child having similar beliefs to their parents. This may be because parents were open to more discussions and talking about personal beliefs. Parents role in disseminating information and explaining it to their children, whether personal beliefs, religious beliefs, or cultural beliefs, is integral to understand because parents can influence what their children come to believe.

When learning to believe in fantastical figures, Woolley (1997) found that when children have more belief in other fantastical beings that children are more willing to learn about new or more fantastical beings. This is seen in the study by Woolley, Boerger, and Markman (2004), which introduced a new fantastical being, the Candy Witch. The study found that children who accepted the belief of the new entity used their belief in other fantastical beings to apply it to their belief in the Candy Witch. This was done by rating the children as either high or low in

fantasy beliefs, with the children with high fantasy beliefs being more likely to also have belief in the Candy Witch. This is significant because it shows that children are using previous knowledge as well as adult promotion to believe in a new entity. Adults play a particularly important part in a child's belief because adults have been recorded as willing to encourage fantastical thinking in children (Woolley, 1997). This influences a child's belief in fantastical entities because there is an authority figure that helped the child to learn about the entity. This has also been seen in Harris et al. (2006) when examining a child's belief in things that are unseen. Children were willing to believe in an entity that cannot be seen if they were told about the entity by an authority figure (Harris et al., 2006). However, it is important to note that the same study found that children were more confident in the existence of germs, a scientific entity, rather than of Santa Claus, a fantastical entity. Understanding the role of parents in the formation of beliefs is crucial to how children develop their own beliefs.

When discussing beliefs, Braswell, Rosengren, and Berenbaum (2011) asked parents when children should learn about religion, science, and fantasy (Santa Claus, Tooth Fairy) versus reality, with most parents reporting that children should learn about religion at a younger age and about fantasy at an older age, and that children should learn about religion with help. Results also revealed that the parents encouraged both religious beliefs and beliefs in fantastical figures. Braswell et al., (2011) also found that religious parents had a significant correlation between their beliefs and encouraged beliefs for religion and that most parents encouraged positive fantasy beliefs. This is important because it shows that religious parents encourage religious beliefs in their children, and parents in general encourage belief in positive fantasy figures. This is relevant to the current study because it demonstrates that religious parents encourage their

children to believe in nonsecular, religious entities and secular entities, as well as nonreligious parents encourage their children to believe in secular entities.

Goldstein and Woolley (2016) found that visited displays or events where an adult was dressed as or playing the part of Santa, their belief in Santa Claus became stronger. They also found that when parents encourage their children to visit a live Santa Claus, they are less likely to question the differences between the multiple Santa Claus actors they see. Goldstein and Woolley (2016) suggested that this might be because parents are encouraging their children more to believe in Santa Claus and to promote him carefully. Exposure to different entities that parents hope their children believe in increases the likelihood of children believing in that entity. This is important because exposure increases the likelihood of belief in an entity. This can also be applied to religious ideas or entities.

A study by Harris & Koenig (2006) looked at how children learn about religion. In their study, they found that children who knew about God's powers and the afterlife gathered information from listening to adults. This is in line with the study by Boyatzis (2013) which found that when parents socialize their child, they also impart their religious beliefs to the child. This helped children to internalize their parents' values because the values were explicitly taught, as well as modeled for the children (Boyatzis, 2013). Makris and Pnevmatikos (2007) also examined the relationship between children and their development of religious beliefs. Children who were older were better able to understand the supernatural power that was assigned to God, while younger children were unable to. This is most likely because of age differences and the more advanced abstract thinking of the older children. Again, it is seen that exposure to beliefs and religious ideas increases a child's ability to learn about religion and entities.

Weyand, Laughlin, and Bennett (2013) suggested that parental religiousness could either have a positive or negative impact on a parent's ability to provide guidance for their child. This result, applied to parents teaching their children about religious figures, implied that parental religiousness can either positively or negatively impact how parents influence their child's or children's beliefs in figures. When a parent reported having higher religious coping, the parent had significantly more stress than a parent who reported lower religious coping. This is important because parents who scored higher on religious measures in the present study were predicted to handle the fear of their child's loss of belief in religious figures similarly, and the parents who scored higher on religious measures would be more worried and concerned about the loss of belief than parents who scored lower on religious measures. This parental concern of loss of belief supports the hypothesis that religious parents worry about their child's loss of religious beliefs and entities.

The present study analyzed the difference between how religious parents think about their child's acquisition/loss of belief in Santa Claus, compared to their child retaining a belief in God, as well as how nonreligious parents handle their child's acquisition/loss of belief in Santa Claus, God, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy. This study explored the similarities and differences between parents, both religious and nonreligious, in how they thought about, worried about, and talked about different types of figures, both religious and secular, to their children.

The main hypothesis was that parents rated as more religious would generally be more concerned about God/Allah/other deity than nonreligious parents and nonreligious parents would worry more about Santa Claus than religious parents. A secondary hypothesis was that the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy would be rated as less important overall than Santa Claus and God/Allah/other deity, regardless of the parent's religious status.

Method

Participants

Parents whose eldest child was between 4 and 10 years of age were recruited to minimize the distance of time that parents had when explaining deities in a child's developing belief system. There were 44 participants (8 males, 36 females), ages 23-49 ($M = 34.8$, $SD = 5.41$). Additional demographic information can be found in Table 1 and Table 2.

Materials

The survey was conducted using Survey Monkey and distributed through college mailing lists, Facebook posts, and word of mouth.

Participants were asked to rate a series of questions concerning how important it is/was that their child knew about the entity, if they had specific concerns about the entity, and other questions (Appendix A). The questions were scored on a Likert Scale from 1 to 5, indicating disagree or agreement with the statement.

Participants also rated themselves on a pre-established religious scale (Appendix B) (Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012), as well as answered other demographic questions including age, their race, religious affiliation.

Procedure

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Albright College.

First, participants were asked to read an informed consent before continuing with the study. They agreed to the informed consent by clicking next. If parents did not consent, they were unable to continue the study. Participants were asked to rate a series of questions as described above (Appendix A) about the entities Santa Claus, God/Allah/other religious deity (GAO), the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy. Participants also had the option to name an entity

and answer the same questions about the entity using the same questions. Participants were also invited to share with researchers additional thoughts, comments, or concerns that they had regarding each entity.

Participants then rated themselves on a series of questions concerning their religiousness (Appendix B) (Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012) and other demographic information.

At the end of the study, parents were shown a debriefing form informing them of the nature of the study and the goals of the study.

Results

Data was analyzed by first separating respondents into categories of religious and nonreligious. Participants rated themselves on 4 questions concerning their religious beliefs and practices (Appendix B) (Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012). Scores were totaled, (possible range 4 to 28) and a median split at 17 was used to assign them to category of religious or not. Our categorization based on the scale answers did not always correspond to participants' reported religious background or affiliation. Parents then answered 6 different questions rating how they thought about, felt about, and were concerned about their child's faith in the entity (Appendix A).

After parents were split into the religious and nonreligious categories, a 4 (Entity) x 2(Religious Category of Parent) mixed measures design ANOVA was performed for each statement parents evaluated. The entities evaluated were Santa Claus (SC), God/Allah/Other entity (GAO), the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy. A One-Way ANOVA was then completed for each parent type, religious and nonreligious, to isolate the differences in responses regarding each entity. Further analysis was completed by using an independent samples *t-test* when

evaluating the differences between non-religious and religious parents to confirm that there was a difference in the ways that entities were rated.

To address the question of whether a parent finds it important a child knows about an entity, we compared responses to *"It is/was important that my child knows about the entity."* There was a main effect of entity, $F(3,40) = 20.9, p < .01$, there was no main effect of religious category, $F(1,40) = .021, p = .887$, however there was a significant interaction, $F(3,40) = 9.18, p < .01$. Nonreligious and religious parents had similar scores for Santa Claus, but as nonreligious parents rated GAO, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy, importance decreased. Religious parent scores increased significantly for GAO, and then decreased below nonreligious parents for the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy (Figure 1).

A One-Way ANOVA showed a significant difference for nonreligious parents when evaluated entities, $F(3,20) = 4.16, p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses revealed a significant difference between Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny, $p < .05$, and a significant difference between Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy, $p < .01$. Nonreligious parents rated the importance of their child knowing about Santa Claus as higher than the importance of knowing about GAO and both the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy. There was not a significant difference between Santa Claus and GAO.

A One-Way ANOVA showed a significant difference for religious parents when evaluated entities, $F(3,20) = 23.5, p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses revealed there was a significant difference between GAO and Santa Claus, $p < .01$, GAO and the Easter Bunny, $p < .01$, and GAO and the Tooth Fairy, $p < .01$. Religious parents rated the importance of their child knowing about GAO as higher than Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy.

To confirm that there was a difference between nonreligious and religious parents when evaluating GAO, independent samples t-tests were conducted, $t(41) = 3.37, p < .01$, showing a significant difference between religious and nonreligious parents such that religious parents rated the importance of their child knowing about GAO as higher than nonreligious parents.

To address the question of whether a parent finds it important a child believed in an entity, we compared responses to "*It is/was important that my child believes/believed in the entity.*" There was a main effect of entity, $F(3,40) = 14.6, p = .01$, there was no main effect of religious category, $F(1,40) = .39, p = .54$, and there was a significant interaction, $F(3,40) = 16.4, p < .01$. Nonreligious parents rated the importance of Santa Claus as higher than religious parents, with a decrease of importance across GAO, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy, while religious parents rated importance of belief about GAO as higher than nonreligious parents, and then rated the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy lower than nonreligious parents.

A One-Way ANOVA showed a significant difference for nonreligious parents when evaluated entities, $F(3,20) = 3.64, p < .05$. Post-hoc analyses revealed a significant difference for nonreligious parents between Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny, $p < .05$, and Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy, $p < .05$. Nonreligious parents rated Santa Claus as higher in importance of their child's belief than GAO, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy.

A One-Way ANOVA showed a significant difference for religious parents when evaluated entities, $F(3,20) = 23.3, p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses revealed there was a significant difference between GAO and Santa Claus, $p < .01$, GAO and the Easter Bunny, $p < .01$, and GAO and the Tooth Fairy, $p < .01$. Religious parents rated GAO higher than Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy.

To confirm that nonreligious and religious parents thought differently about the importance of their child believing in GAO, independent samples t-tests were conducted, $t(40) = 3.22, p < .01$. Religious parents rated GAO higher in importance for belief than nonreligious parents. There were no other significant differences for other entities as a function of religious category of parent.

To address the question of whether a parent was concerned their child would lose their belief in an entity, we compared responses to *"I am concerned that my child will lose/has lost their belief in the entity."* There was no main effect of entity, $F(3,40) = 1.3, p = .28$, religious category was approaching significance, $F(1,40) = 3.71, p = .06$, and there was not a significant interaction, $F(3,40) = 1.20, p = .31$. There was a trend that nonreligious parents consistently rated their concern higher than religious parents for lost belief (Figure 3).

A One-Way ANOVA revealed nonreligious parents did not rate entities differently, $F(3,20) = .54, p = .66$. A One-Way ANOVA revealed religious parents did not rate entities differently, $F(3,20) = 1.72, p = .17$.

To address the question of whether a parent was concerned about outside influences on their child's belief in an entity, we compared responses to *"I am/was concerned that someone would influence/had influenced my child's belief in the entity."* There was a main effect of entity, $F(3,40) = 3.59, p < .05$, there was a main effect of religious category, $F(1,41) = 6.09, p < .05$, and there was a significant interaction, $F(3,40) = 3.27, p < .05$ (Figure 4). Nonreligious parents for all four entities were rated similarly, while religious parents rated concern about Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy lower than nonreligious parents, they rated concern about GAO similarly to nonreligious parents.

A One-Way ANOVA revealed nonreligious parents did not rate entities differently, $F(3,20) = 1.7, p = .18$. Post-hoc analyses revealed the relationship between God and the Tooth Fairy was approaching significance, $p = .07$. Nonreligious parents tended to rate Santa Claus higher than GAO, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy.

A One-Way ANOVA revealed religious parents rated entities differently, $F(3,20) = 4.97, p < .05$. Post-hoc analyses revealed the difference in ratings for GAO and the Easter Bunny approached significance, $p = .07$. Religious parents rated GAO higher than Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and then the Easter Bunny.

To confirm that there was a difference between nonreligious and religious parents, independent t-tests were conducted. When evaluating Santa Claus, there was a significant difference, $t(40) = 2.74, p < .01$, and when evaluating the Easter Bunny, $t(40) = 2.99, p < .01$.

To address the question of whether a parent helped their child learn about an entity, we compared responses to, "*I helped my child to believe in the entity.*" There was no main effect of entity, $F(3,40) = 2.13, p = .1$, there was a no main effect of religious category, $F(1,40) = 1.86, p = .18$, however, there was a significant interaction, $F(3,40) = 15.7, p < .01$. When nonreligious parents rated entities as higher, religious parents rated their helping lower. Religious parents only rated helping their child believe in GAO high, while nonreligious parents only rated GAO lower. No other significant differences were found for other entities as a function of religious category of parent. (Figure 5).

A One-Way ANOVA revealed nonreligious parents rated entities differently, $F(3,20) = 5.65, p < .05$. Post-hoc analyses revealed there was a significant difference between Santa Claus and GAO, $p < .05$. Nonreligious parents rated Santa Claus higher in helping their child believe in the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, and GAO.

A One-Way ANOVA revealed religious parents rated entities differently, $F(3,20) = 11.51, p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses revealed there was a significant difference between GAO and Santa Claus, $p < .01$, there was a significant difference between GAO and the Easter Bunny, $p < .01$, and there was a significant difference between GAO and the Tooth Fairy, $p < .01$. Religious parents rated GAO as higher than Santa Claus, then the Tooth Fairy, and then the Easter Bunny.

To confirm there was a difference between nonreligious and religious parents, independent t-tests were conducted. There was a difference between Santa Claus $t(40) = 2.99, p < .01$, and GAO $t(40) = 3.94, p < .01$. Nonreligious parents rated Santa Claus higher while religious parents rated GAO higher. There were no other significant differences for other entities as a function of religious category of parent.

To address the question of whether a parent was comfortable explaining an entity to their child, we compared responses to, "*I am/was comfortable explaining the entity to my child.*" Type of entity approached significance, $F(3,40) = 2.31, p = .08$, there was no main effect of religious category, $F(1,40) = .55, p = .46$, and there was a significant interaction, $F(3,40) = 7.03, p < .01$. Nonreligious parents rated Santa Claus higher than the other three entities, however religious parents rated all except GAO lower than nonreligious in comfort explaining entities to their child (Figure 6).

A One-Way ANOVA revealed nonreligious parents rated entities differently, $F(3,20) = 2.4, p = .08$. There was a significant difference between Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy, $p < .05$. Nonreligious parents rated Santa Claus higher with regard to comfort explaining the entity than the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, and GAO.

A One-Way ANOVA revealed religious parents rated entities differently, $F(3,20) = 6.63, p < .01$. There was a significant difference between GAO and Santa Claus, $p < .05$, GAO and the

Easter Bunny, $p < .01$, and GAO and the Tooth Fairy, $p < .01$. Religious parents rated GAO higher than the Tooth Fairy, Santa Claus, and then the Easter Bunny.

To confirm that there was a difference between nonreligious and religious parents when explaining GAO, independent samples t-tests were conducted, $t(41) = 3.13$, $p < .01$. Religious parents rated GAO higher than nonreligious parents. There were no other significant differences for other entities as a function of parent religious category.

Discussion

The present study analyzed the difference between how religious parents thought about their child's acquisition/loss of belief in Santa Claus, compared to their child retaining a belief in God, as well as how nonreligious parents handle their child's acquisition/loss of belief in Santa Claus, God/Allah/other deity, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy. This study explored the similarities and differences between parents, both religious and nonreligious, in how they thought about, worried about, and talked about different types of figures, both religious and secular, to their children.

The main hypothesis was that parents categorized as religious would worry more about God/Allah/other deity than nonreligious parents and nonreligious parents would worry more about Santa Claus than religious parents. A secondary hypothesis was that the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy would be rated differently than Santa Claus and God/Allah/other deity, regardless of the parent's religious status.

When the importance of the child knowing about the entity was examined, simple main effects analyses showed that the interaction was explained by religious parents rating the importance of their child knowing about God/Allah/other deity higher than knowing about Santa Claus. Both groups of parents rated knowing about Santa Claus similarly. This is supported by

Braswell et al., (2011), whose research suggested that parents thought that their children should learn about religion at a younger age, and other entities and fantastical figures as they grow.

When parents evaluated the importance of their child's belief in the entity, simple main effects analyses showed the interaction was explained by religious parents' higher rating of the importance of their child's believing in God/Allah/other deity than Santa Claus, and the reverse for nonreligious parents. Previous studies support this because parents pass on their beliefs to their children and are seen as authority figures that are good sources of information (Chan & Tam, 2016; Hayes & Pittelkow, 1993; Tudge et al., 2000; Juang et al., 2018).

Parents were not concerned about their children losing their belief in any entity and this does not support the hypothesis. There are a few reasons for why parents may not be concerned about the idea of their child losing their belief. When discussing Santa Claus, most parents may already have accepted that their child's belief in Santa Claus will cease as the child grows older. The same may be true for the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy. Religious parents, on the other hand, may hope that their child will grow up and continue in the same faith tradition that they were born in. This result, particularly for religious parents, is contrary to what Weyand, Laughlin, and Bennett (2013) suggested, which is that more religious parents were more concerned about their children's beliefs in religion. Another factor that could contribute to this finding is that parents, depending on the age of the child, may realize that their child is unable to understand the abstract required to think about God/Allah/other deity or Santa Claus critically.

One factor that may contribute to what appears to be a lack of concern from parents about their child's beliefs is that there was a significant age difference between the children of religious and nonreligious parents, $t(41) = -2.25, p < .03$. The age range of children of nonreligious parents was 3-10 years ($M = 5.67, SD = 1.85$) while the age range of children of religious parents

was 3-10 years ($M = 6.98$, $SD = 1.97$). The age of the children from the different groups of parents may be influential because encouraging beliefs in younger children, especially Santa Claus, may be more important to parents at that time compared to raising older children. Additionally, children of religious parents who are significantly older may be able to start grasping concepts of religious figures, so there is a heightened sense of importance from the parents, as well as the tendency for children to start losing their beliefs in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy.

When analyzing the parent's concern that their child's belief will be influenced by others, it suggests that parents are differentially concerned about the impact of others on their child's belief. Nonreligious parents are more concerned than religious parents about the influence of others on their child's belief in Santa Claus. However, parents did not differ in their concern about other influences on their child for belief in God/Allah/other deity. This is contrary to the work done by Weyand, Laughlin, and Bennett (2013).

When examining whether parents were comfortable explaining the entity to their child, simple main effects analyses showed that the interaction was explained by religious parents' higher comfort with explaining God/Allah/other deity than Santa Claus, and the reverse for nonreligious parents. This suggests that parents are comfortable talking about their beliefs with their children, depending on whether the entity aligned with their own personal beliefs (Chan & Tam, 2016; Hayes & Pittelkow, 1993; Tudge et al., 2000; Juang et al., 2018).

Simple main effects analysis of scores for parent ratings of helping show that the interaction was explained by religious parents reporting greater agreement with helping their child believe in God/Allah/other deity than Santa Claus, and the reverse for non-religious parents. Again, this suggests that parents are comfortable helping and encouraging beliefs if they

align with their own values (Chan & Tam, 2016; Hayes & Pittelkow, 1993; Tudge et al., 2000; Juang et al., 2018).

Parent scores for the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy show a trend in the data suggested that both nonreligious and religious parents were not as concerned with their child's belief in either deity when compared to Santa Claus or God/Allah/other deity. This could be because they were seen as lesser deities or minor deities when compared to Santa Claus or God/Allah/other deity. This is supported by comments that parents made in the open-ended portion of the survey, which included comments about children not believing in the Tooth Fairy because they were older and no longer believed or because they were too young and were not yet losing teeth. Parents also commented about the Easter Bunny, noting that their child never believed in the Easter Bunny or that their child was never introduced to the Easter Bunny.

Overall, religious and nonreligious parents treated Santa Claus and God/Allah/other deity differentially. Religious parents rated God/Allah/other deity consistently higher on each statement than Santa Claus, as well as the other minor deities, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy. Nonreligious parents treated Santa Claus different from God/Allah/other deity most likely because they did not hold religious beliefs, and because Santa Claus is the major non-secular entity that is pervasive in the American culture. Nonreligious parents also rated the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy similarly to religious parents.

Some of the limitations facing this study include that the study required parents to recall their thoughts and feelings about their child's belief systems, that we used mainly rating scales to gather information, that only one parent or guardian was able to respond to the survey, and that we were unable to sort parents based on the age of their child. Asking parents to recall how they thought about and felt about explaining different deities to their children causes limitations

because parents needed to recall information, instead of reporting how they felt about something in the moment. Using rating scales allowed for the operationalization of parent's responses, however it limited parents to choices instead of having the chance to elaborate and add different information, express other concerns they may have had, or share different experiences they had with their child. Due to the limited sample size, we were unable to conduct analyses including the age of the children. This was a limitation because parents may not have been concerned about beliefs of their child about certain entities depending upon their age. For example, parents may not worry about a loss of belief in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny when their child is young because the child will most likely believe what the parent says to them, and they may not worry about an older child losing their belief in the Tooth Fairy because they have not yet begun to lose their teeth. Parents may also not worry about their child's loss of belief in God/Allah/another deity at an older age because they hope the child will maintain the beliefs they learned.

Future directions for this study include exploring the time frame of when children start to believe in entities studied, Santa Claus, GAO, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy. This is important because it may have an influence over why parents are not concerned about their child being influenced by others or why the parents are not concerned that their child may lose their belief. Another topic to explore further would be to better understand why parents rated their concern of their child's loss of belief as low. This is important because there could be a few different factors behind that, including that the parent has an unquestioned expectation that their child will grow up in their faith tradition, or that the parent does not mind if the child chooses not to follow their faith.

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Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Parents

Characteristics		
		%
Gender		
Male		18.2
Female		81.8
Ethnicity		
White		90.9
Hispanic/Latino		2.3
Black/African American		2.3
Native American Indian		2.3
Biracial/Multiracial		2.3
Education		
High School Graduate/GED		4.5
Technical Certificate		2.3
Some College – No Degree		9.1
Associate Degree		6.8
Bachelor's Degree		34.1
Master's Degree		27.3
Other Advanced Degree		15.9
Religious Affiliation		
Protestant		48.8
Catholic		31.8
Hindu		2.3
Jewish		4.5
None		9.1

Table 2.

Demographic Characteristics of Parents and Children

Characteristics	<i>M(SD)</i>
Age	34.8 (5.4)
Number of Children	2.05 (.75)
Age of Child	6.3 (2.0)

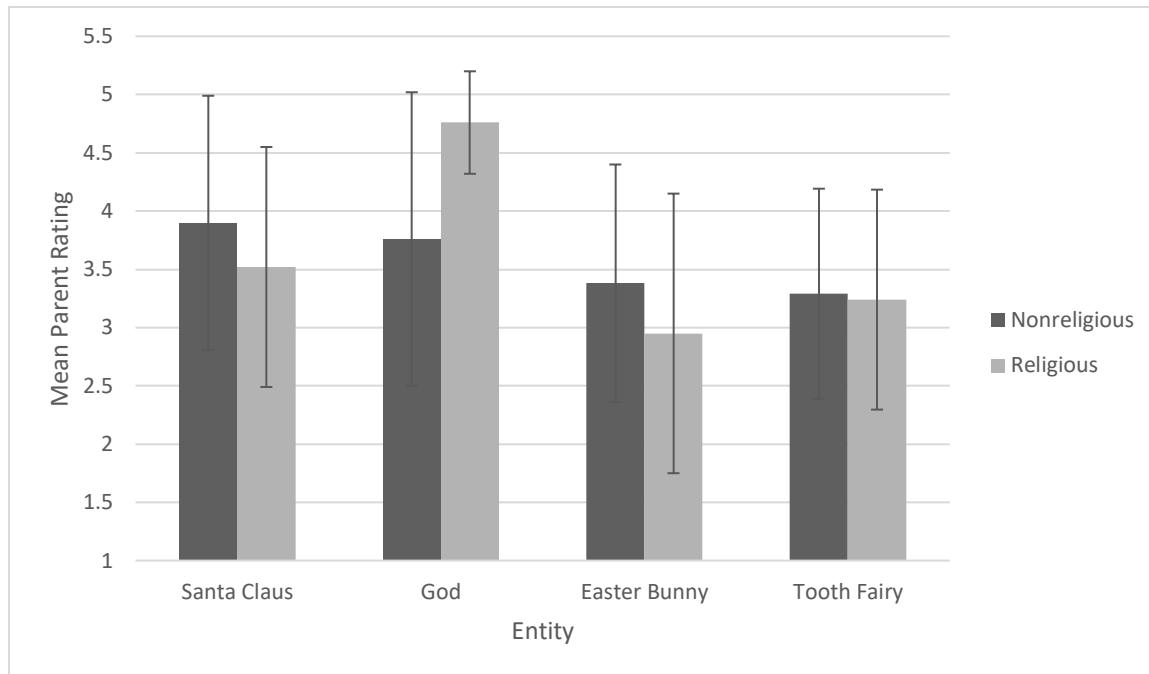


Figure 1: Mean ratings and standard deviations as a function of parental status and entity for *It is/was important that my child knows about the entity*

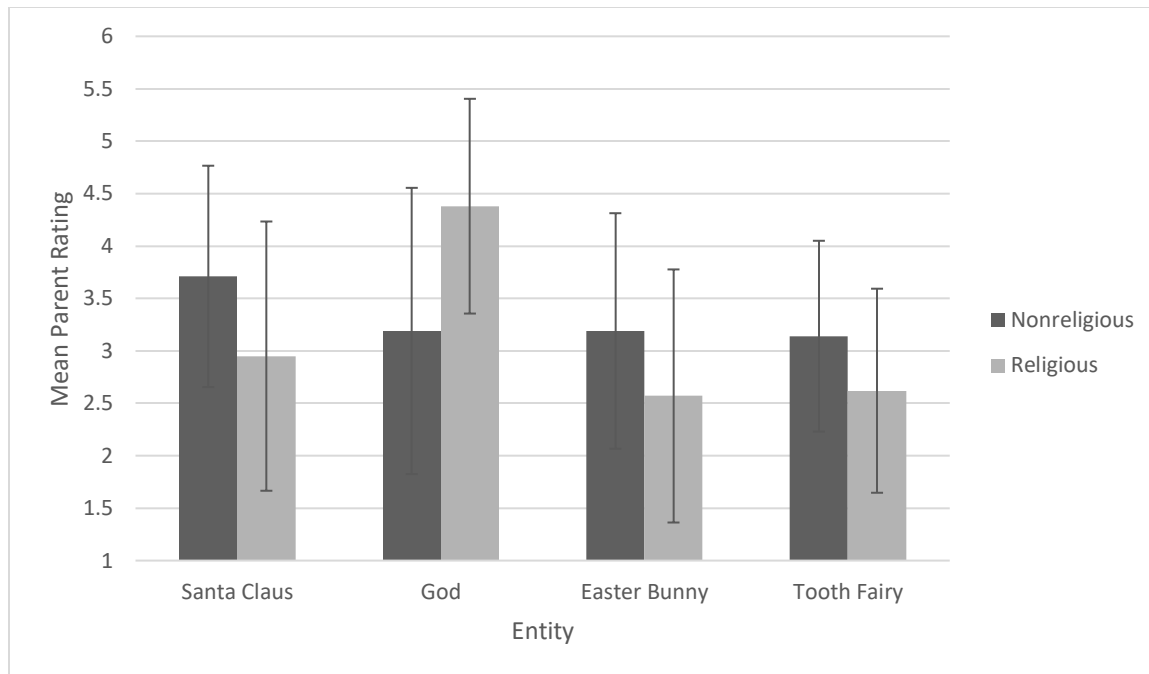


Figure 2: Mean ratings and standard deviations as a function of parental status and entity for *It is/was important that my child believes/believed in the entity*

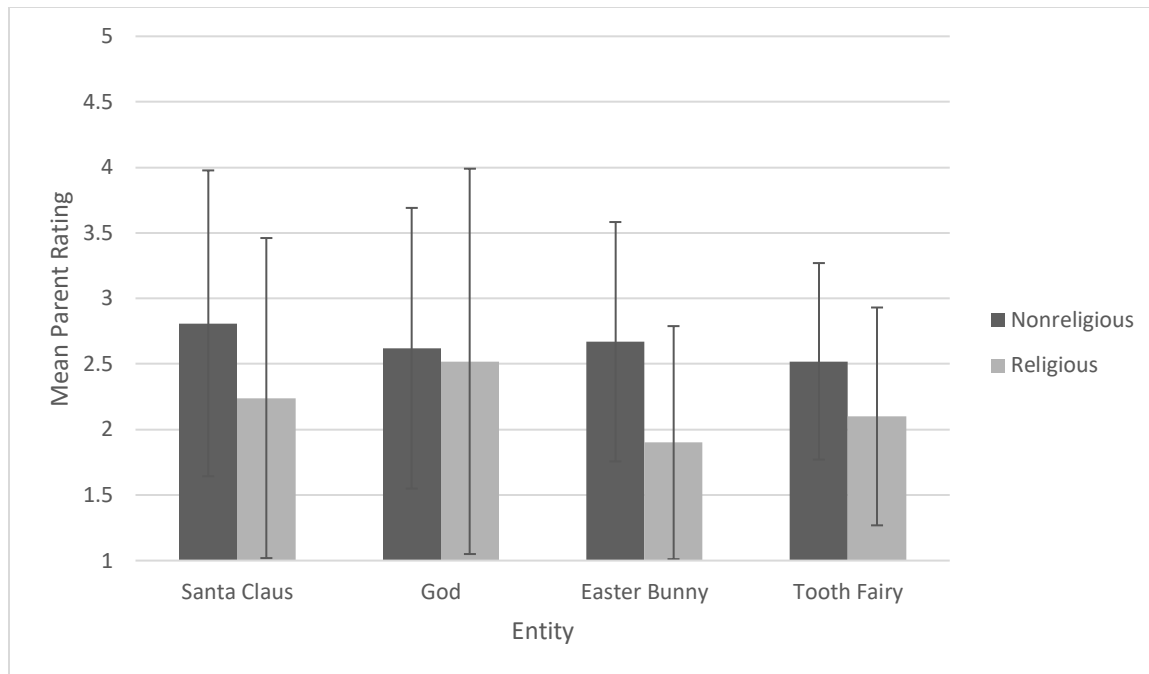


Figure 3: Mean ratings and standard deviations as a function of parental status and entity for *I am concerned that my child will lose/has lost their belief in the entity*

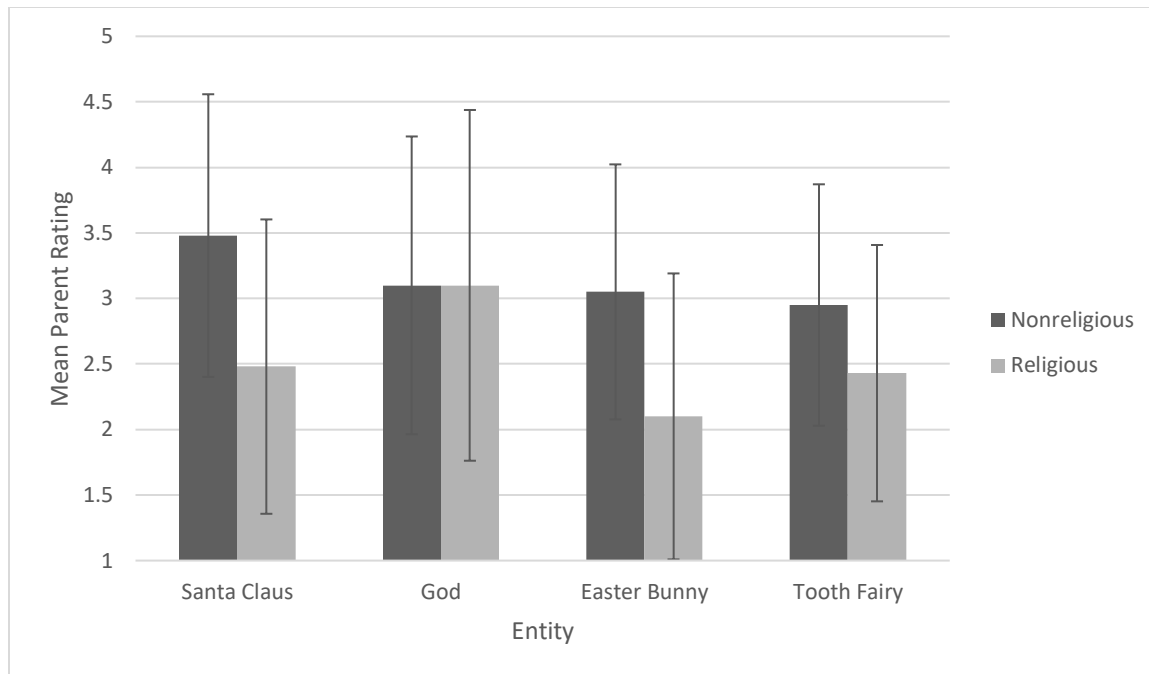


Figure 4: Mean ratings and standard deviations as a function of parental status and entity for *I am/was concerned that someone would influence/had influenced my child's belief in the entity*

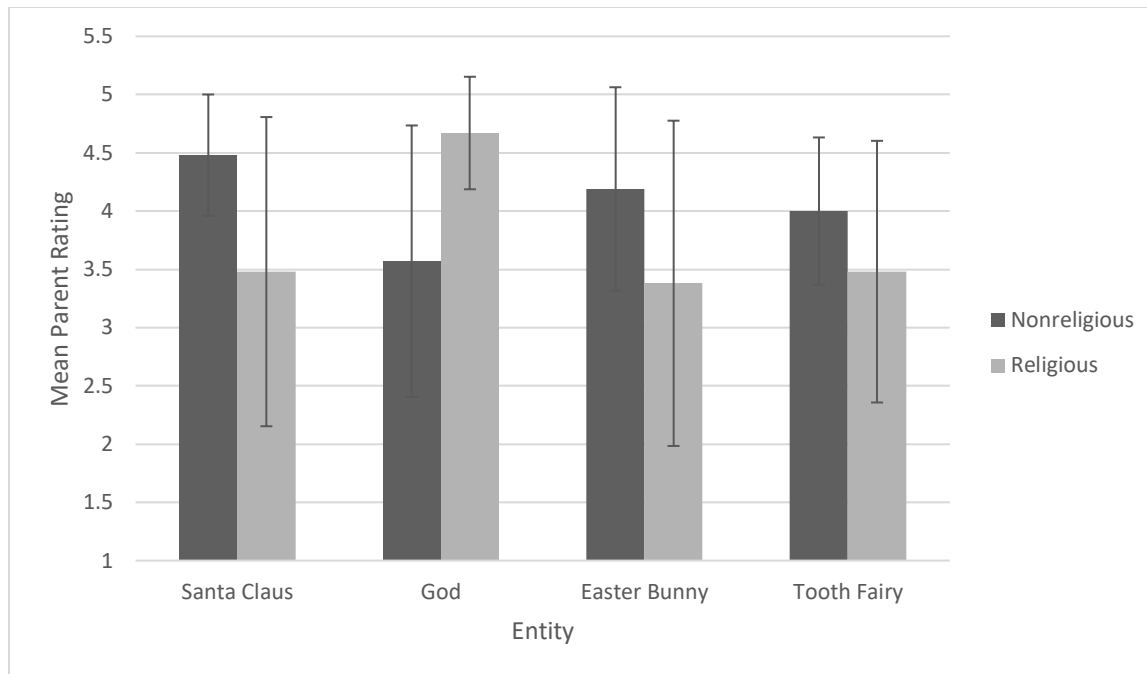


Figure 5: Mean ratings and standard deviations as a function of parental status and entity for *I helped my child to believe in the entity*

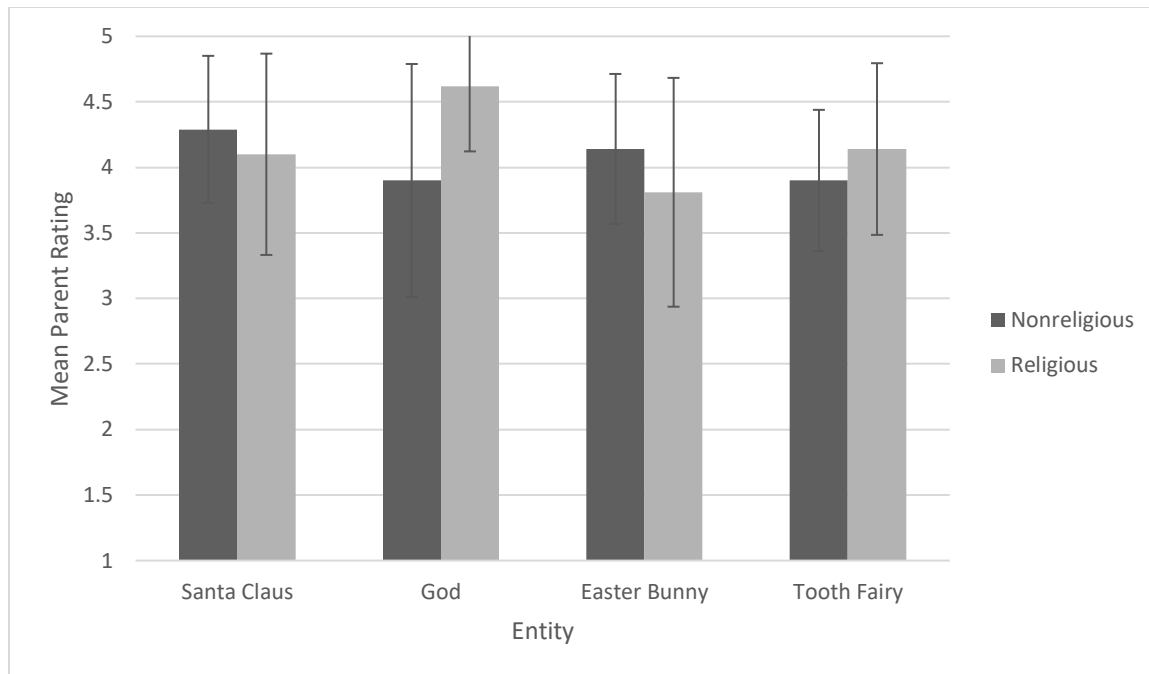


Figure 6: Mean ratings and standard deviations as a function of parental status and entity for *I am/was comfortable explaining the entity to my child*

Appendix A

Dependent Variables

Participants responded on a scale from 1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree

- It is/was important that my child knows about the entity
- It is/was important that my child believes/believed in the entity
- I am concerned that my child will lose/has lost their belief in the entity
- I am/was concerned that someone would influence/had influenced my child's belief in the entity
- I helped my child to believe in the entity
- I am/was comfortable explaining the entity to my child.

Appendix B

Religious Scale

Participants responded on a scale from 1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree

- I consider myself to be a religious person
- I am not religious
- I am a member of an organized religion
- I regularly attend religious services