

ABSTRACT

The Characteristics of Parent-Child Relationships and their Effects on God Images

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It has been proposed that an individual's attitudes and beliefs strongly reflect their concepts of what God is and what God represents. However, where do these attitudes and beliefs originate? I theorize that they come from child-rearing practices, as children are likely to view God as an authority figure with the same characteristics their parents have. To test this, I compared God's perceived love and anger to positive memories of a respondent's parents during childhood, and receiving corporal punishment as a child. The results showed that having positive memories of one's parents is positively correlated with viewing God as loving. However, receiving corporal punishment as a child proved to be positively associated with both viewing God as angry and loving. These effects were present despite multiple religious controls, suggesting that one's parents may have a great influence on the way God is conceptualized into adulthood.

The Characteristics of Parent-Child Relationships and their Effects on God Images

by

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A Thesis

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts

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May 2011

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	List of Tables	v
II.	Acknowledgments	vi
III.	Chapter One: Introduction	1
IV.	Chapter Two: Data and Methods	11
	Measuring the Quality of Parental Relationships	11
	Dependent Variables	12
	Demographic Controls	18
	Religion Controls	18
	Analytic Strategy	20
V.	Chapter Three: Results	22
	The Effects of Positive Memories and Corporal Punishment on God's Love	22
	The Effects of Positive Memories and Corporal Punishment on God's Anger	25
VI.	Chapter Four: Conclusion	29
VII.	Bibliography	33

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following: "From childhood, I have mostly positive memories of my parents."	12
Table 2: Please indicate how well the following describes your parents: "My parents often used corporal punishment as a form of discipline."	13
Table 3: Additive scale of God's perceived love	15
Table 4: Additive scale of God's perceived anger	17
Table 5: Effects of Corporal Punishment and Positive Memories on God's Love	24
Table 6: Effects of Corporal Punishment and Positive Memories on God's Anger	26

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis chairperson, Dr. Charles Tolbert, as well as my committee members, Dr. Christopher Bader and Dr. Margaret Baier. I would have not been able to complete this process without their expertise and willingness to help.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

It is well understood that parents are a primary source of an individual's beliefs and attitudes. These can include social norms, racial/ethnic identities, and even religious attitudes (Hyde 1990). The fact that individuals model these aspects of their lives based on their parents has long been accepted as part of the Social Learning theory, which proposes that individuals model their behavior after other individuals they spend time with and consider to be important. The more time an individual spends with a specific person or group of people, the more likely that individual is to adopt their attitudes and behaviors (Bandura 1971).

However, an individual's learned attitudes and behaviors are not limited to a general similarity with their parents. Social learning theory also suggests that specific characteristics of parents' value systems can be transmitted to children. This especially applies to religious beliefs. When children and adolescents' religious beliefs were compared to that of their parents, it was found that they were similar to each other. This applied to characteristics such as religious experiences, religious practices, and church attendance. However, it was also found that God images are somehow linked between parent and child. (Acock and Bengston 1978; Clark, Worthington, and Danser 1988; De Roos, Simone, Jurjen Iedema and Siebren Miedema 2004; Gibson, Francis, and Pearson 1990)

Understanding what leads to an individual's conception of God is of great importance, as God images themselves are responsible for a great deal of behavior. Greeley (1995) argues that an individual's views on God reflect who that person is. If

this is true, then it is understandable that a wide variety of human attributes can be found in God images. Kunkel and his colleagues (1999) discovered several attributes commonly ascribed to God: Creator, Healer, Friend, Father, Redeemer/Messiah, King/ruler, Judge, and Mother. Additionally, their research supported an earlier study done by Benson and Spilka (1973), which suggested that individuals also described God as vindictive, a stern father, all-encompassing, distant, supreme ruler, and a kindly father.

Perhaps the most common image of God is that of a father figure. Interestingly, individuals are likely to see God as a fatherly figure as opposed to a motherly figure. This is regardless of the individual's gender (Vergote et al, 1969; Nelsen, Cheek and Au, 1985). Vergote and Tamayo (1981) suggest that this is to be expected, as Christianity often teaches that the identity of God is "God the Father." This connection leads individuals to recall their own parents, and project their experiences unto God. Of course, how individuals define "fatherly" can vary from forgiving to strict. It seems that God concepts in general are dualistic in nature (Kunkel et al. 1999). God is described as kind and angry, judgmental and forgiving, and having both human and supernatural qualities.

As stated earlier, God images seem to act as a reflection of our own personal characteristics and experiences. According to Greeley (1995), if an individual is caring and affectionate, they are more likely to ascribe those characteristics to God as well. Therefore, an individual's religion can be thought of as a picture that describes the whole person. An individual's worldview then is used as a manner of seeing God. Greeley tested this theory, and found that individuals with more gracious concepts of God were more likely to be more tolerant of other opinions themselves (Greeley 1995).

However, because some God images are negative, it is possible that human behavior can be negatively affected as well. On the subject of political tolerance, Froese, Bader and Smith (2008) argue that “the key to understanding when religion negatively affects political tolerance is the individual’s conception of God.” Individuals who deny civil liberties to unpopular groups are more likely to have more vengeful and authoritarian images of God. This lends support to the idea that, in addition to Greeley’s finding that positive characteristics in individuals are correlated with a positive view of God, individuals with negative characteristics in individuals will also be correlated with negative images of God.

Individual beliefs on social and political issues seem to be impacted by God images as well. Froese and Bader (2007) found that “engaged and judgmental images of God are significantly related to conservative religious beliefs, increased religious involvement, and attitudes supporting a closer connection between religion and the state.” From an academic standpoint, this does seem to be the case. God images have been discovered to be correlated with a wide variety of individual characteristics, ranging from trust to the death penalty. (Mencken, Bader and Embry 2009; Unnever, Cullen and Bartkowski 2006)

It is common knowledge that child-rearing practices have a great influence on an individual’s personality as an adult, especially on religious characteristics. However, it also seems that God images have a very similar effect. Because of this similarity, it is not out of the question that parental practices might shape God images themselves. Social Learning theory argues that “most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are

performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.”(Bandura 1977) Therefore, an individual’s current beliefs on a subject may be due to what was learned as a child. This argues for a relationship between an individual’s view of God and the properties of their social environment (Winter 1973).

In order to understand how child-rearing practices affect God concepts into adulthood, it is important to understand God concepts during childhood. As common in adults, children often will assign God human characteristics, such as fatherly/motherly, kind, and strict (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006). However, they have also shown capability of believing that God is not bound by the same physical limitations that humans are (Barrett and Keil, 1996; Barrett and Richert, 2003). Interestingly, these supernatural characteristics attributed to God seem to exist in children even without religious instruction (Giminez and Harris, 2001; Roehlkepartain et al., 2006). It seems that children, as adults, are capable of ascribing both human and supernatural characteristics to God.

As mentioned previously, it has been noted that God images are similar between parent and child. However, what has not been as clearly established is how these God concepts become transmitted to parent and child. The first explanation that readily comes to mind is that parents transmit their God concepts to their children through religious socialization. However, this may not have as large of a role as is commonly thought. Evans (2000, 2001) and Kelemen (2004) discovered that children typically attribute the existence of life to a creator God. This holds true even in children from non-religious families (Roehlkepartain et al, 2006). As stated above, children have been found to ascribe characteristics to God outside of religious instruction (Giminez and Harris, 2001).

In general, it seems that children are able to conceptualize God outside of religious socialization.

However, if religious socialization does not account for the creation of children's God images in their entirety, then from where else could they originate? I believe that specific aspects of the relationship between the child and his/her parent(s) could play a large role in establishing God images. The quality of the parent-child relationship in childhood has a multitude of effects on the child; many of these effects last through adulthood. Many of these effects have been noted to be adverse to the child. For example, adults who experience high levels of social strain are more likely to have bad relationships with their fathers (Komarovsky, 1976). Success in adulthood can be limited by parental absence during childhood as well. High school dropout rates are higher among adolescents living in single-parent households, and these adolescents are more likely to attend a tertiary school if they partake in post-high school education (Astone and McLanahan, 1991; Keith & Findlay, 1988; McLanahan, 1985). Divorce is also noted for having potentially strong effects on children, including diminished psychological well-being and decreased academic performance. (Potter, 2010)

The effect that corporal punishment has on children is particularly interesting. The presence of corporal punishment in children seems to lead to a variety of consequences throughout life. These consequences include increased deviance in adolescence, and increased probabilities of violent behavior in adulthood (Straus, 1991; Straus and Yodanis, 1996). The effect was not limited to behavior either; children who were subject to corporal punishment showed hindered neurological development compared to children who were not. This includes both slower cognitive development in

childhood, and reduction in size of the prefrontal cortex in adulthood. (Straus and Paschall, 2009; Tomoda et al, 2009)

While certain child-rearing practices have negative effects that last into adulthood, the same is true for positive effects. Research has shown that being close to one's parents during childhood can have positive effects that last into adulthood. Amato (1994) found that adults who were close to their parents during childhood reported less stress, more happiness, and more satisfaction with their lives than those who were not close with their parents. Additionally, it has been found that adolescents who have high levels of parental monitoring are less likely to engage in drug use and risky sexual behavior. (DeVore and Ginsburg, 2005)

It has been determined from previous studies that the religious values (including God images) of parents are likely to be transferred to their children due to social learning. However, children have also been proven to develop God concepts outside of the religious socialization that they are exposed to through their parents. So then where else could these God images originate? The studies previously mentioned also show the profound effects that the parent-child relationship can have on a person when they enter adulthood. I believe that this relationship can also create a foundation for God images in childhood; these God images then persist into adulthood.

Of course, the specific forms that God images can take would depend heavily on the characteristics of the parent-child relationship. For example, adults who had a negative relationship with their parents as children could be more likely to view God in a negative manner. Social learning and projection theories would explain that having distant parental figures could result in an individual who believes parental figures are

expected to behave this way towards their children. Similarly, an individual who was brought up by controlling parents may expect figures of authority to act in a controlling manner. These points of view could transfer over to an individual's religious life as well, resulting in an individual conceptualizing God in a similar manner to how they perceive their parents. Therefore, an individual who had controlling and vindictive parents could be more likely view God as a controlling and vindictive figure.

However, this applies to positive characteristics as well. If an individual has parents who are close with their children, this instills the idea that authority figures are supposed to be close to those over whom they have authority over. As with negative effects, these parental attributes could be attributed to God. In other words, if an individual is part of a loving and nurturing environment, that person is more likely to view God as a loving and nurturing God. (Greeley 1995).

The idea that God images can originate from the parent-child relationship is not a new one. For example, Hertel and Donahue (1995) found that children who viewed their parents as loving were more likely to view God as a more loving deity. Also of importance is that the authors found that "parents' images of God were reflected in youths' impressions of parenting styles, which in turn predicted youths' God images, as did parents' God images." This lends support for the idea that child-rearing practices are similar across family generations, and this paves the way for God images to be similar as well.

These findings have been supported by other authors as well. De Roos et. al (2004) tested a model of individual differences in God concepts among kindergarten students. Children mostly viewed God as a "potent God." Occurrences of children that

viewed God as a “punishing God” were found in concurrence with the presence of corporal punishment. Additionally, the children of mothers that viewed God as a loving figure were more likely to view God as loving themselves.

Likewise, Justice and Lambert (1986) discovered that children with the most negative images of their parents also had the most negative images of God. Nelsen and Kroliczak (1984) improved upon an earlier study by Nunn (1964) by examining if God images in children were impacted by parents teaching them that God punishes misbehaved children. The study found that this resulted in an image of an angry and vengeful God, although the children did not as strongly believe that God punishes individuals.

However, the influence that parents have dwindles as the child becomes an adolescent. Previous studies have noted a significant decline in agreement between parents and adolescents in terms of general social and political values. However, when the religious views of adolescents have been compared with those of their parents, it has been found that there is still a moderate level of agreement (Hoge, Petrillo and Smith 1982; Jennings and Niemi 1974). This is particularly true in the case of adolescent God images, which have been found to be greatly affected by parental attributes. As also seen in children, adolescents are more likely to view God as affectionate when they view their parents as affectionate. Likewise, adolescents that saw their parents as controlling authority figures viewed God as punishing. Interestingly, it has also been reported that high levels of parental education tend to have a negative effect on God being perceived as a punishing figure among adolescents; similarly, low parental education was correlated with God being perceived as punishing.

Dickie et al (1997) discovered that when parents were perceived as nurturing and powerful, God was perceived as nurturing and powerful. The authors also discovered that God seems to become a replacement attachment figure as the child gradually separates from their parents. This could offer a potential reason as to why God images in children could persist into adulthood; they serve as a way for individuals to continue to idolize their parents while maintaining their own personal lives.

While Dickie et al suggested that adult's self-concept may be a better predictor of God images in adulthood, I believe that perception of parents during childhood is not something that should be ignored. If it is true that God becomes a replacement attachment figure for an individual's parents as they enter adulthood, it is possible that they will ascribe characteristics of their parents unto God based on their childhood. If this is true, it is also possible that an adult could view God in a positive or negative manner depending on the memories they have regarding their parents (e.g., an angry parent in childhood would transfer to an angry God in adulthood).

While numerous studies suggest that an individual's views of God are correlated with the quality of relationship with their parents, one key issue is absent. Existing studies have focused upon images of God amongst children or adolescents, and how they may reflect the parent-child relationship. However, none of these studies have determined if this effect lasts into adulthood. This is incredibly important, as if the effect is still present in adulthood there is a much greater chance of it being passed on to the next generation.

Based on the current literature, it can be inferred that an individual's views on God can reflect their life experiences and personality. However, while there is a wealth

of literature regarding the effects of God images, there is very little theorizing as to what the source of these images could be. Using Wave 2 of the Baylor Religion Survey, I will attempt to determine if childhood experiences with parents influence God images into adulthood.

CHAPTER TWO

Data and Methods

For this analysis, I will be using a binary logistic regression to determine the effects that having positive memories of one's parents from childhood can have on the individual's concept of a loving God. I will also be testing for the effects that corporal punishment has on the concept of a loving God. Additionally, I will use an OLS regression to determine if subjection to corporal punishment and the presence of positive memories from childhood result in an individual viewing God as angry. The data used in this study are from the second (2007) wave of the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS). Consisting of a random, national sample of 1,648 U.S. citizens, Wave 2 of the Baylor Religion Survey was administered and collected by the Gallup Organization. Wave 2 of the Baylor Religion Survey was an excellent choice for studying how the relationships between individuals and their parents during childhood affect God images. This is because the Baylor Religion Survey asks respondents several questions about God images and their childhoods. From these questions, I was able to create several variables that measure a variety of characteristics in regards to God images and childhood.

Measuring the Quality of Parental Relationships

As mentioned earlier, a study done by Dickie et al (1997) found that God becomes a substitute attachment figure for an individual's parents. If God does become a substitute attachment figure, then it is possible that God will be ascribed characteristics based on the individual's memory of their parents. I have decided to measure this by utilizing an item on the BRS that pertains to memories of parents during childhood. This

question measures the extent to which the respondent has “mostly positive memories of [their] parents.” For this question, four answer choices were presented in a typical Likert scale form, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” with an “undecided” option presented as a fifth choice. For this item the undecided option was moved to the middle of the scale. The lower end of the scale represents the lack of positive childhood memories (1), while the higher end represents very positive memories (5). The distribution of responses is not normal, as the majority of respondents (77.2%) indicated that they had positive memories of their parents. Table 1 demonstrates the responses:

Table 1

“Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following: From my childhood, I have mostly positive memories of my parents”

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	77	4.80%	4.80%
Disagree	229	14.00%	18.80%
Undecided	64	4.00%	22.80%
Agree	736	45.50%	68.30%
Strongly Agree	512	31.70%	100.00%

Note. N=1618

Because the distribution heavily favors the “agree” and “strongly agree” answer choices, the best way to approach this was by creating a binary variable. This was accomplished by making the “0” category include “Strongly Disagree,” “Disagree” and “Undecided,” and the “1” category include the “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” responses.

One consistent effect across the various God images studies is the strong effect that corporal punishment has on God images in children. Corporal punishment resulted in significantly higher rates of children viewing God as punishing and angry. If a child

grows up in a household where corporal punishment is the norm, it is possible that the effect on God images will continue into adulthood due to the tendency to ascribe parental characteristics to God. The BRS provides a question that can be used to measure the presence of corporal punishment during childhood. This question, “My parents often used corporal punishment (such as spanking) as a form of punishment,” was asked in a manner that included four answer choices in the form of a Likert scale (ranging from “very well” to “not at all”), with a fifth answer choice being an “undecided” option. Most individuals (70.8%) report that they were subject to some degree of corporal punishment.

Table 2

“Please indicate how well the following describes your parents: My parents often used corporal punishment as a form of discipline”

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all	186	11.70%	11.70%
Not very well	262	16.50%	28.20%
Undecided	16	1.00%	29.20%
Somewhat well	503	31.70%	60.90%
Very well	620	39.10%	100.00%

Note. N=1587

As with the variable that measures positive memories, the use of corporal punishment is not a normally distributed variable. Most respondents reported that their parents utilized corporal punishment. This was converted into a binary variable, where “0” represented “Not at all,” “Not very well” and “Undecided,” and “1” represented “Somewhat well” and “Very well.”

Dependent Variables

The two variables just mentioned will be used to predict beliefs about God's perceived love and God's perceived anger. For measuring God's perceived love, I selected five items within the Baylor Religion Survey that I believed would indicate this attribute. These five items measured the extent to which the respondent believed God was "kind," "loving," "just," "friendly" and "forgiving." Each of these items have four response categories constructed into a Likert scale, ranging from "very well" to "not well at all." A fifth option of "undecided" was also present, which I recoded to be in the middle of the resulting scale. Because I wanted to create a single variable that would represent God's love, I conducted a factor analysis using the varimax rotation method. All five of the items were placed within a single factor, which had a Cronbach's Alpha of .959. This enabled me to create a variable in which all five items were combined into a single additive scale. Table 3 displays this additive scale:

Table 3

Additive Scale of God's Love

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
5	43	2.90%	2.90%
6	5	0.40%	3.20%
7	0	0.00%	3.20%
8	0	0.00%	3.20%
9	7	0.40%	3.70%
10	26	1.70%	5.40%
11	4	0.30%	5.70%
12	8	0.50%	6.20%
13	8	0.50%	6.80%
14	10	0.70%	7.50%
15	122	8.20%	15.70%
16	21	1.40%	17.10%
17	13	0.90%	18.00%
18	22	1.50%	19.50%
19	23	1.60%	21.00%
20	88	5.90%	26.90%
21	37	2.50%	29.40%
22	50	3.30%	32.70%
23	74	4.90%	37.60%
24	92	6.10%	43.80%
25	837	56.30%	100.00%

Note. N=1490

Although the large Cronbach's alpha enabled me to create a combined scale, the skewed nature of the distribution would not allow me to utilize it unaltered. I attempted to center the data using a variety of methods, such as using the factor score, applying a logarithm, and squaring the data. However, no matter what technique was used, about half of the respondents viewed God as loving as the scale would allow. I decided the best approach was to create a binary variable that compares individuals who viewed God as extremely loving (i.e., the respondents that scored a 25 on the above scale) to all other respondents. This concerned me initially, as this method placed individuals who did not

find God loving at all with individuals who did find God somewhat loving. However, after reviewing the literature and asking the advice of others who have conducted God image studies, I learned that the individuals who view God as extremely loving are typically the individuals that have the greatest impacts. This is because the vast majority of individuals believe that God is loving to some degree, so it is the individuals that find God extremely loving that are set apart (Froese and Bader, 2010).

My second dependent variable is the extent to which the respondent believes that God is angry ($\alpha=.764$). This variable was created by combining seven variables measuring God's anger with humanity into a single additive scale item. Two of these items ask the extent to which the respondent agrees or disagrees with the following items: "God is angered by human sin", and "God is angered by my sins." Answer choices to both of these questions include a four-item Likert scale (ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"), and a fifth option of "undecided."

The other five items measure the extent to which the following characteristics describe God: "critical," "forgiving," "punishing," "severe" and "wrathful." For these questions, the answer choices are also arranged in a four-item Likert scale (ranging from "very well" to "not at all"), as well as a fifth answer choice of "undecided." For all seven of these items, responses were recoded to include "undecided" in the middle of a new five-item Likert scale. Additionally, all items were recoded so that a low value represented God not being angry, and a high value represents God being very angry. This additive scale is much more normally distributed than the scale measuring God's love, so it was not necessary to center the data any further. Table 4 displays this additive scale:

Table 4

Additive scale of God's perceived anger

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
5	31	2.20%	2.20%
6	14	1.00%	3.20%
7	58	4.10%	7.30%
8	44	3.10%	10.40%
9	79	5.60%	16.00%
10	31	2.20%	18.20%
11	74	5.20%	23.40%
12	50	3.50%	26.90%
13	89	6.30%	33.20%
14	79	5.60%	38.80%
15	111	7.90%	46.70%
16	60	4.20%	50.90%
17	82	5.80%	56.70%
18	59	4.10%	60.80%
19	129	9.10%	69.90%
20	61	4.30%	74.20%
21	68	4.80%	79.00%
22	35	2.50%	81.50%
23	41	2.90%	84.40%
24	30	2.10%	86.50%
25	53	3.70%	90.20%
26	26	1.80%	92.00%
27	41	2.90%	94.90%
28	19	1.40%	96.30%
29	49	3.60%	99.90%
30	0	0.00%	99.90%
31	1	<0.1%	100.00%
32	0	0.00%	100.00%
33	0	0.00%	100.00%
34	0	0.00%	100.00%
35	0	0.00%	100.00%

Note. N=1415

Demographic Controls

These analyses make use of multiple demographic controls. Education was measured as the highest grade completed by the respondent, broken down into the following categories: 8th or less, 9-12th no diploma, high school graduate, some college, trade/technical/vocational training, college graduate and postgraduate work/degree. For income, the responses are broken down into the categories of \$10,000 or less, \$10,001-\$20,000, \$20,001-\$35,000, \$35,001-\$50,000, \$50,001-\$100,000, \$100,001-\$150,000 and \$150,000 or more. Other demographic variables are also used in these analyses, such as marital status (married=1), age (in years), gender (male=1), and race (white=1).

Religion Controls

Because attributes of God's character could be easily affected by other factors, I have controlled for church attendance, Biblical Literalism and religious tradition in all models. Church attendance is broken down into categories of never, less than once a year, once or twice a year, several times a year, once a month, 2-3 times a month, about weekly, weekly and several times a week. Biblical Literalism is measured in the BRS by asking respondents their views on the Bible, given the choices of "The Bible is an ancient book of history and legends," "the Bible contains some human error," "The Bible is perfectly true, but it should not be taken literally, word-for-word. We must interpret its meaning," and "The Bible means exactly what it says. It should be taken literally, word-for-word, on all subjects." Because this question is structured so that higher scores reflect increasingly literal views of the Bible, I utilized this item unaltered as a continuous measure of Biblical Literalism.

As denomination of the respondent could heavily influence my dependent variables, I included a modified version of the RELTRAD typology developed by Steensland et al. (2000). Utilizing this method, I placed respondents into the categories of Black Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Other Religion and None based upon what denomination the respondents identified themselves as part of. Evangelical Protestants will be left out of these analyses, as I intend to use them as a contrast category.

Because I am attempting to determine how parental actions during a person's childhood impact their religious preferences into adulthood, it is necessary to control for childhood religious practices. The Baylor Religion Survey asks two questions of respondents that pertain to childhood religious behavior, and I have utilized both of these measures as controls. The first measure asks respondents how personally religious they were at age 12. For this item, the potential responses were "Not at all religious," "Not too religious" "Somewhat religious" "Very religious," and "I don't recall." These response choices were coded so that a "1" represents "Not at all religious" and a "4" represents "Very religious." Because these answers are in ascending order of the presence of religious belief, I felt it was unnecessary to alter them. However, I did remove the "I don't recall" option, as there is no logical place for that answer choice in an ordinal scale.

The second item I used asks respondents how often they attended church at age 12. As in the normal church attendance item, the possible responses are "Never," "Less than once a year," "Once or twice a year," "Several times a year," "Once a month," "2-3 times a month," "About weekly," "Weekly" and "Several times a week." I saw no need

to alter this question, as the answers are coded in ascending order of attendance frequency.

Analytic Strategy

The first step in the analysis is to run a binary logistic regression examining the effects of corporal punishment and positive memories of one's parents on one's perception of God's love. I am including both variables because I believe they could each impact God's perceived love in a different way. This will allow me to examine the extent to which a good relationship with parents affects the opinion of how involved God is with the world. I predict that if a respondent has positive memories of their parents, it is likely that these experiences will be ascribed unto God as the individual enters adulthood. In other words, positive memories of the childhood experience will result in a higher likelihood of an individual having an extremely loving God concept.

It is slightly more difficult to determine what effects corporal punishment will have on God's perceived love. It is possible that the presence of corporal punishment in childhood could create feelings of resentment towards parents, which would then transfer into perceiving God as resentful towards humanity. As corporal punishment has been shown to cause violent and deviant behavior later in life, this seems like a plausible scenario. However, I believe this is not the case. While the presence of corporal punishment can have negative effects, I believe it is also possible that children who receive corporal punishment understand that their parents discipline them out of love. This would then transfer to a loving God concept. I believe this is more likely to be the case.

For my second analysis, I regress the extent to which the respondent feels God is angry towards humanity on the extent to which the respondent was subjected to corporal punishment as a child and has positive memories of their child. This will enable me to determine if an image of an angry God is correlated with the type of punishment received as a child, and the lack of positive memories regarding one's parents. I hypothesize that the presence of corporal punishment in childhood will lead individuals to conceptualize God as a punishing individual. The reasoning behind this prediction is based on previous research; children see that their parents are punishing figures, and attribute this aspect of authority to God as children; I predict this will last into adulthood (De Roos et al, 2004; Justice and Lambert, 1989). I also predict that positive memories from childhood will be associated with a decrease in conceptualizing God as angry. If an individual has positive memories of their parents, I believe they are less likely to harbor any negative feelings that might influence how they conceptualize God. This would make it less likely for an individual to view God as angry.

CHAPTER THREE

Results

The Effects of Positive Memories of Parents and Corporal Punishment on God's Love

In concurrence with other studies, it is apparent that most Americans believe that God is a loving God (Froese and Bader, 2010). In fact, more than half of the respondents scored at the highest number in the scale I created to measure how loving God is. Interestingly, both the presence of corporal punishment and having positive memories of one's parents were positively associated with viewing God as extremely loving. Individuals subjected to corporal punishment as children were 11.70% more likely to view God as loving as the scale would allow, and having positive memories of one's parents made individuals 40.20% more likely. Complete information can be seen below in Table 5.

At first glance, this may seem counter-intuitive. After all, many would believe that positive memories and corporal punishment evoke very different responses. However, it is possible that most respondents subjected to corporal punishment realize that the punishment was done out of love and not hate. This understanding could eventually lead the respondent to view God as more loving than individuals who may not have been disciplined so harshly.

The way in which positive memories of parents create a loving God image is much easier to understand. Although what constitutes a positive memory is somewhat of a vague concept, good memories are part of what creates a loving memory of someone. As children mature, it is possible that they project this quality unto God.

Due to the nature of the main independent variables, it was necessary to include appropriate religious controls. When Evangelical Protestants were excluded from the model, being part of any other religious denomination had a slightly negative effect on God's perceived love. Out of all these groups, the Jewish individuals saw the largest difference with an 82.30% less chance of viewing God as loving as the scale would allow. Interestingly, this is an even greater difference from Evangelical Protestants than the "nones" had.

Of the other religious measures, church attendance and Biblical literalism were significant. This is to be expected, as these two variables are significant in the vast majority of literature on the subject of God images. What is interesting though, is that these two variables had opposite effects on viewing God as extremely loving. Church attendance had a positive effect of 13.20% per increase in response category, and Biblical literalism had a negative effect of 45.80% per increase in response category. Perhaps churches tend to preach more uplifting sermons, which is why high levels of church attendance would be associated with high levels of viewing God as loving. Biblical literalism, on the other hand, has drastic negative effects on viewing God as extremely loving. From this analysis, it is clear that going to church often and taking the Bible literally result in two different God images.

Table 5

The Effects of Corporal Punishment and Positive Memories on God's Love

Variable Name	Coefficient	Standard Error	Odds Ratio Estimate
Corporal Punishment	0.110**	0.047	11.70%
Positive Memories	0.338**	0.158	40.20%
<u>Religious Measures</u>			
Church Attendance	0.124***	0.026	13.20%
Biblical Literalism	-0.612***	0.066	-45.80%
Church Attendance (age 12)	0.061*	0.03	6.30%
Personal Religiosity (age 12)	0.019	0.049	
Black Protestant	0.608	0.437	
Mainline Protestant	-0.409*	0.174	-43.60%
Catholic	-0.113	0.171	
Jewish	-1.73*	0.778	-82.30%
Other	0.287	0.27	
None	-1.182***	0.313	-69.30%
<u>Control Variables</u>			
Male	-0.357**	0.129	-30.00%
White	-0.238	0.254	
Age	-0.004	0.004	
Education	-0.133**	0.047	-12.50%
Income	0.012	0.048	
Married	0.201	0.147	

Note. *p <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001, Max-rescaled r²=0.393

Out of the childhood religious controls, church attendance at age 12 proved to be significant, increasing the likelihood of viewing God as extremely loving by 6.3%.

However, church attendance in adulthood has slightly over twice the effect. This makes sense, as children routinely create God images outside of religious socialization (Gimenez and Harris, 2001). Based on this data, it seems that once an individual reaches adulthood, church attendance becomes a stronger predictor of God images. As previously mentioned, when children grow older, they could tend to ascribe the qualities of their

parents to God. Perhaps in childhood, religious socialization is not entirely necessary to create God images. After all, parents are readily available to serve as a model for God images. However, as individuals enter adulthood and God takes the place of parents, the human basis of God images is not as strong. This could explain why church attendance has a stronger impact in adulthood; individuals could be searching for a replacement human component for their parents.

Of the other control variables, only gender and education were statistically significant. Being male led to a decrease in viewing God as extremely loving by 30%, demonstrating that females are more likely to view God in this manner. Education also had a negative effect, with the chances of viewing God as loving as the scale would allow decreasing by 12.50% for each categorical increase.

*The Effects of Positive Memories of Parents
and Corporal Punishment on God's Anger*

Although much more normally distributed than God's perceived love, God's perceived anger slightly favors not viewing God as angry with humanity. Being subjected to corporal punishment as a child is significantly related to belief regarding God's anger. Specifically, those subjected to corporal punishment as a child are more likely to believe that God is an angry God. Unlike the previous analysis, positive memories don't have a significant effect on the God image being tested. I predicted that positive memories would decrease the likelihood that an individual would view God as angry, however I did not find that effect in this model. Table 6 below gives a detailed look at this analysis.

Although it may seem odd that corporal punishment can lead to God being conceptualized as both loving and angry, the two effects do not contradict one another. After all, numerous individuals have the idea of a strict God, who loves humanity but is angered by human sin (Bader and Froese, 2010). If this is the case, then it is not inconceivable that individuals who were corporally punished as children would end up conceptualizing God as loving but stern. I will elaborate on this concept in the discussion.

Table 6

Effects of Corporal Punishment and Positive Memories on God's Perceived Anger			
Variable Name	Coefficient	Standard Error	Beta
Corporal Punishment	0.392***	0.115	0.09
Positive Memories	0.016	0.385	0.001
<u>Religious Measures</u>			
Church Attendance	0.181**	0.067	0.085
Biblical Literalism	-0.739***	0.164	-0.146
Church Attendance (age 12)	0.062	0.076	0.023
Personal Religiosity (age 12)	-0.135	0.124	-0.029
Black Protestant	-0.889	0.98	-0.029
Mainline Protestant	-1.328**	0.449	-0.087
Catholic	-2.096***	0.44	-0.14
Jewish	-1.298	1.311	-0.0009
Other	-3.685***	0.681	-0.148
None	-2.713***	0.667	-0.125
<u>Control Variables</u>			
Male	1.895***	0.316	0.154
White	-0.178	0.637	-0.008
Age	-0.002	0.01	-0.005
Education	-0.366**	0.116	-0.089
Income	-0.511***	0.0119	-0.13
Married	-0.304	0.363	-0.023

Note. *p <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001, r²=0.207

The control variables offer some different effects. Being male significantly increases the chances of viewing God as angry, while education has a negative effect on God's perceived anger. Interestingly, while income had insignificant effects on God's perceived love, it has significant negative effects on God's anger. I suppose it makes sense that a highly educated individual with money would have a difficult time conceptualizing God as an angry one. Other control variables (Race, age and marital status) remain insignificant, as they did in the previous model.

When comparing all other religious denominations to Evangelical Protestantism, there is a negative effect on perceiving God as angry (when statistically significant). Among these, the "other" category has the largest difference from Evangelical Protestants. Church attendance is positively related with God's anger; the more a person goes to church, the more likely they are to view God as angry. Interestingly, going to church seems to result in God being conceptualized as both angry and loving. This falls in line with the authoritative God concept discussed earlier. Biblical literalism is the exact opposite, negatively affecting both God being conceptualized as angry and loving. This is definitely a more curious effect than church attendance, however I believe there is an explanation. Perhaps individuals who take the Bible extremely literally view God neither as loving or angry, but rather a deity whose job it is to deal out judgment.

The effects that childhood religiosity has in this model were surprising. As in the previous model, personal religiosity at age 12 was insignificant. However, despite being significant in the previous model, church attendance in childhood is not significantly related with God's anger. How could church attendance as a child effect love but not anger? Perhaps the answer is that individuals who are raised in the church are simply

more likely to conceptualize God as loving rather than angry. Perhaps individuals who are raised in the church typically focus on the more loving aspects of God, and downplay the potential negative aspects.

Something similar has been noted in children before. Dickie et al (1997) observed that if children preferred one parent over the other, they would ascribe more of the preferred parent's characteristics to God. It is possible that a similar mechanism is being observed in this model. Although church attendance is significant for both conceptualizing God as angry and loving in adulthood, perhaps children block this perceived negative attribute out. This results in focusing on God in a loving manner.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

From the first analysis, the results show that individuals with positive memories of their parents have an increased likelihood that they will view God as extremely loving. Additionally, individuals who were subjected to corporal punishment will also view God as extremely loving. The second analysis found that corporal punishment was positively correlated with viewing God as angry, however the presence of positive memories did not have the negative effect I believed it might.

So then, what caused corporal punishment to be significant in both models? At first it seems contradictory, but there are many possible explanations. It is possible that the physical element of corporal punishment somehow has a more lasting effect than the purely mental effect of having positive memories, however I doubt that the physical nature of corporal punishment alone is what causes this effect. While it is doubtful that corporal punishment in and of itself could cause someone to view God a certain way, it makes sense when we view it as a part of something else. Specifically, I believe that corporal punishment here is a representation of parental strictness.

One commonly noted God concept is that of an “authoritative God.” Individuals who hold this concept tend to view God as a figure that is strict towards his subjects, but is also loving and highly engaged with worldly affairs. Research by Bader and Froese (2010) suggests that slightly more than a quarter of Americans view God in this manner. When parents are strict towards their children, it can create an atmosphere of “tough love,” where parents are not cruel, but harsh in order to properly raise their children. If

this is projected on to an individual's God concepts, then these results make more sense. A child of a strict parent may view their parent as loving, yet capable of becoming angry. This is then projected onto God in adulthood. This could be why individuals who reported the presence of corporal punishment are likely to view God as both loving and angry.

Although corporal punishment was significant in both analyses, the positive memories variable was only significant in predicting the individual's chance of viewing God as extremely loving (which was a large effect). The question is then why having positive memories was not significantly correlated with conceptualizing God as angry. I initially predicted that having positive memories would have a negative impact on viewing God as angry, however I now see an alternate possibility. Perhaps a "positive memory" can be conceptualized as either a very general or specific experience. For example, an individual might recall their parents disciplining them often, resulting in an overall positive memory because their parents loved them enough to discipline them. However, another person might have positive memories of their parents because they were never disciplined in such a manner.

Therein lies a possible reason why positive memories may not have produced significant effects in both analyses. I believe that the "positive memories" concept might be too nebulous to make very specific predictions regarding the relationship between childhood and adulthood. After all, what constitutes a positive memory can vary greatly between individuals. For some, positive memories of one's parents come from spending a great deal of time with them. Others may acquire positive memories from the quality of life they had while under their parents' care. Because there are many different ways that

a person can conceptualize a “positive memory,” which could explain the absence of a statistical relationship between positive memories of one’s parents and images of God.

These findings could be important considering that many beliefs and attitudes are transmitted from parent to child. As mentioned earlier, God images are often similar between parent and child as well. From these findings, it can be inferred that both corporal punishment and positive memories from childhood have significant impacts on the way an adult conceptualizes God. Because we also know that child-rearing practices are often repeated when children become parents themselves, it seems that parents replicate their God images unto their children through child-rearing practices. Once these children become parents themselves, they transfer their ideas on God to their children through religious socialization and child-rearing practices again. Therefore, these God concepts are passed on through generations.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings in this study mirror the ideas of social learning and metaphoric parallelism. As social learning theory states, individuals adopt attitudes and behaviors based upon the individuals they most often associate with (Bandura, 1977). Metaphoric Parallelism is the idea that an individual conceptualizes God based on how he conceptualizes his social world, an idea which Greeley (1995) also used as the backbone of his research. What this analysis has suggested is that the two theories can be combined into a single concept, one in which children adopt the attitudes and behaviors of their parents based on childhood experiences, and then eventually use them as a model to create their own God images in adulthood.

Although there has been limited research into the origins of God images, the data suggests that they could originate at least in part from certain aspects of childhood.

Future research should focus on the different methods parents use to raise their children. I suspect this could be a very significant factor in God images as children mature into adults. Additionally, future analyses could be benefitted by adding more religious variables from childhood into the equation; more specific God images could be utilized as well.

This is especially the case with the “positive memories” variable. Although it was shown to significantly increase the chance an individual would view God as extremely loving, it could be too broad in its current form to predict more specific God images. I believe that if this variable was somehow made into a more concrete measure, there could be further significant effects on God images.

I also believe that more research should be conducted in regards to the potential relationship between childhood and the concept of a strict God. As described above, strictness is a plausible explanation for the combined effects corporal punishment had on love and anger. Future research should attempt to isolate the image of a strict God in order to more thoroughly examine the concept.

While the exact processes that create God images remains for now a mystery, these analyses suggest that the parent-child relationship may be a contributing factor. Perhaps it is the style of parenting itself that forms images of God in adulthood, rather than the parents themselves. From this analysis, the idea that parents can shape God concepts is strongly supported.

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