Conceptions of God and the Devil Across the Lifespan: A Cultural-Developmental Study of Religious Liberals and Conservatives

LENE ARNETT JENSEN
Department of Psychology
Clark University

Utilizing a cultural-developmental approach, this interview study examined how children, adolescents, and adults from religiously liberal and conservative groups conceptualize God and the Devil. Participants (N = 120) conceptualized God and the Devil along similar dimensions, including number (e.g., one, many), gender, central attributes (e.g., physical, supernatural), and evaluation (e.g., positive, neutral). Within-subject differentiations of God and the Devil occurred on all dimensions. Religiously liberal and conservative groups differed on attributes, evaluations, and degree of control ascribed to God and the Devil. With respect to age, results suggest a rethinking of the Piagetian interpretation that children's conceptions of supernatural entities are more concrete, more anthropomorphic, and less abstract than those of adolescents and adults. The results instead point to the usefulness of a cultural-developmental approach.

God is just God. He's not male or female. God is amazing. He helps you through your troubles. He's powerful. I think more powerful than we know. He's beyond what we know.

—13-year-old religiously liberal interviewee

There is a fallen spiritual being who rebelled against God and [who] is influential. He's nothing like what Hollywood portrays him to be or the painters of the Renaissance. Yet he's there. He exists. He is a deceiver, a liar, an accuser. And he has influence in people's thinking.

—48-year-old religiously conservative interviewee

Among American adults, approximately 62 percent believe in the Devil and 82 percent believe in God (Taylor 2007).[1] Psychological research on people's belief in the Devil is virtually nonexistent. A PsycINFO search for literature from the past 25 years that included the term devil and other synonyms yielded only one reference (i.e., Reimers 1994; the term "evil spirit" yielded eight motley references). Research addressing people's conceptualization of God is somewhat more common. Here, a common approach has been Piagetian. This work has focused on children and adolescents, and has examined the extent to which the development of God concepts fits within a cognitive progression from concrete to abstract thought (e.g., Gorsuch 1968; Harms 1944; Ladd, McIntosh, and Spilka 1998).

This study takes a cultural-developmental approach to conceptions of supernatural entities (Arnett and Jensen 2002; Jensen 2008a, in press, forthcoming; Jensen and Larson 2005). The

[1] Other polls find similar numbers, and sometimes higher ones for belief in God. The Harris Poll (Taylor 2007) uses a survey technique aimed at reducing social desirability bias. For detail, see http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=838.

developmental element entails a focus on developmental change (as in Piaget). However, because developmental change occurs after adolescence, the study included adults as well as children and adolescents. Also, adult conceptions to a considerable extent constitute the socialization aims that prevail within a culture. The cultural element does *not* assume that all conceptual categories and developmental patterns generalize across different cultures. Culture is defined in accordance with cultural psychology, where communities whose members share basic beliefs and practices constitute cultures whether they are located in the same or different countries (Shweder et al. 2005). This research distinguished religiously conservative and liberal believers (within the United States). A number of social observers have noted that these two groups constitute different cultures.

Unlike a Piagetian approach, the present cultural-developmental approach does not assume that persons apply the same cognitive scheme across cognitive content. For example, a person might apply different conceptual categories to different supernatural entities. This study addresses conceptions across two supernatural entities, God and the Devil.

This study responds to recent psychological research calling for increased attention to religion and spirituality (e.g., Boyatsis 2003; Kerestes and Youniss 2003; Lerner et al. 2003; Roehlkepartain et al. 2005). Furthermore, people's beliefs about God and the Devil may be related to a variety of other aspects of their lives. For example, research suggests that how people conceptualize God relates to their attachment to primary caregivers (Dickie et al. 1997, 2006; Eshleman et al. 1999; Granqvist 2006; Granqvist and Dickie 2006; Granqvist et al. 2007; Kirkpatrick 1997, 2005; Kirkpatrick and Shaver 1990), and may also relate to coping style (Maynard, Gorsuch, and Bjorck 2001), willingness to seek mental health services (Matlock-Hetzel 2005), self-esteem (Benson and Spilka 1973), political outlook (Lakoff 1996), and moral reasoning (Jensen 1997, 2008a).

The Role of Development

A rather long and sizeable psychological research tradition on the development of conceptualizations of God has employed a Piagetian framework. In a study from 1944, Harms obtained drawings of God from more than 4,800 children and adolescents (ages 3–16 years). He concluded that the drawings indicated a three-stage progression (running parallel to Piaget's stages of cognitive development), from a "fairytale" stage (ages 3–7 years) through a "realism" stage (ages 7–11 years) to an "individualism" stage (ages 11–16 years). In 1965, Deconchy arrived at a similar set of stages based on a study where over 4,700 7–16 year olds wrote down five associations they had with the word "God." Goldman (1965), on the basis of 200 children's and adolescent's (ages 6–15 years) responses to questions about Bible stories, also concluded that the development of God concepts parallels Piaget's description of cognitive development. The key feature of development in these studies is the movement from concrete to abstract; for example, from a fairytale image of God as a man sitting on a cloud or an anthropomorphic image of a man with a white beard to an abstract conception of God as omnipresent.

More recently, Nye also found that as children grew into adolescence their descriptions of God focused less on the tangible, visible, or measurable and more on the general and symbolic (Nye and Carlson 1984). Children and adolescents (ages 5–16 years) responded to questions such as "Where does God come from?" and "How old is God?" Nye and Carlson (1984:142) concluded that "understanding of the concept of God is limited by the child's level of cognitive growth." Bassett et al. (1990), using a nonverbal measure where 91 participants (ages 4 years to "college students and adults") selected among pictures that reminded them of God, found that 4–6 year olds selected concrete images (e.g., a bearded man), 8–10 year olds chose both concrete and abstract pictures, and adults preferred abstract images (e.g., three connected circles). Finally, using a method akin to the one employed by Harms (1944), Ladd, McIntosh, and Spilka (1998) asked 968 children (ages 3–18 years) to draw God and to briefly explain their drawings. They found that older children used more symbolism, such as crosses and fire in their drawings, than

did younger ones. Ladd et al. also argued that the less abstract thinking of children in middle childhood (ages 7–11 years) was supported by the finding that they drew more gendered pictures of God, compared to older children who drew more gender-neutral images (ages 12–18 years).

The Role of Culture

While development is a notable factor in the study of God concepts, few studies have examined the role of culture. Yet, research on sociocognitive development has suggested that Piagetian and other structural accounts of development are in need of revision in light of cultural findings (e.g., Rogoff 1990; Tomasello 2000; Vygotsky 1987). Only a few studies have examined the extent to which God concepts differ among religious groups. Nye and Carlson (1984) found no differences in children's and adolescents' images of God among Catholics, Jews, and Protestants. Ladd, McIntosh, and Spilka (1998) found no differences among eight Christian denominations (e.g., Lutheran, United Methodist, and Catholic) in drawings of God by children and adolescents.

Other researchers, however, have observed differences between religious groups. Noffke and McFadden (2001) compared ratings on six descriptions of God among 250 evangelicals, Catholics, and Methodists, age 16–55 years. The most consistent finding was that evangelicals differed from both Catholics and Methodists. The evangelicals agreed more strongly with five of the six descriptions: "stern father," "vindictive," "supreme ruler," "kindly father," and "allness." Lakoff (1996) has also called attention to differences between religious groups. On the basis of a linguistic analysis of texts by religious and other public leaders, he argued that conservatives (both religious and political in his analysis) conceive of God as a "strict father" requiring obedience and self-discipline. In contrast, liberals (again both religious and political) hold a "nurturant parent" image, seeing God as caring and helpful. Lakoff's terminology also suggests that the groups differ on conceptions of God's gender.

As early as 1967, Gorsuch hypothesized that "liberal" and "fundamentalist" groups might differ in their conceptualizations of God. In recent decades, a number of social observers have called attention to differences between religiously liberal and conservative groups (e.g., Bellah 1987; Davis and Robinson 1996; Fleishman 1988; Hunter 1991; Jensen 1998a, 2000, 2006; Marty and Appleby 1995; Merelman 1984; Olson and Carroll 1992; Wuthnow 1989). Religiously conservative believers share the view that a transcendent authority originated a moral code and revealed it to human beings. In this view, contemporary society is drifting away from God's truth, as individuals are allowed excessive freedoms to follow their own desires and navigate according to their own interests. This waywardness is manifest, for example, in decreased emphasis on parental authority, and blurring of roles and statuses for women and men. In contrast to religiously conservative beliefs, religiously liberal believers are more likely to regard moral truth as subject to change and progress. In their view, moral precepts are not revealed once and for all by a transcendent authority, but may be altered as individual understandings unfold and societal circumstances change. Thus, religiously liberal believers are more accepting of some measure of relativism, compared to conservative believers. They are also more accepting of allowing individuals to make choices free from the intervention of church or other individuals. In sum, the differences between the two viewpoints touch on a number of spheres, including divinity, morality, history, family, gender roles, and freedom.

The Role of Cognitive Content

Research suggests that conceptions of God develop differently from conceptions of human beings. Barrett, Richert, and Driesenga (2001) presented 121 children (ages 3–8 years) with false-belief tasks. They were asked to state what their mom and God would think was inside a closed cracker box containing rocks. Most children over age 5 years stated that mom would think it contained crackers whereas God would think it contained rocks. Children at this age attributed

false beliefs to their mothers but not to God. A study with 48 Yukatek Maya children (ages 4–7 years) from Southeastern Mexico obtained similar findings (Knight et al. 2004). Thus, Barrett and his colleagues have argued that conceptions of human beings do not serve as a structural basis for conceptions of nonhuman entities, such as God (see also Barrett 2001; Barrett and Richert 2003). We know very little about whether people's conceptions of one supernatural entity, such as God, generalizes to other supernatural entities. This study addresses conceptions of both God and the Devil.

The Present Methodological and Analytical Approach

Data were collected by interview with open-ended questions. This methodological approach grew out of conceptual considerations. First, researchers examining God concepts employ a variety of methods, but no standard method has crystallized in the field. Methods include drawings, selections, or ratings of predetermined descriptions, and verbal responses to Bible stories. Second, some have critiqued research methods that limit participants' responses by employing preselected descriptions. Kunkel et al. (1999:194) noted that "it is unclear . . . to what extent these items capture meaningfully and completely the extent of participants' construals of God." In a study comparing responses to closed and open-ended question about God, Hutsebaut and Verhoeven (1995:59) recommended the use of open-ended questions. They argued that to ensure validity, participants should be allowed to generate concepts in their own words. This seems apt for research on God concepts where such research has been quite rare, and it is no less apt for Devil concepts where psychological research is essentially absent. Third, some developmental researchers have argued that open-ended and broadly phrased questions are superior to highly structured questions for uncovering developmental differences (Elkind 1971). For example, asking a specific question about God's physical characteristics may encourage similar answers from children and adults. A specific question assumes a physical conception of God whereas a more general question is able to tap people's commonly used and preferred conceptions. Finally, cultural psychologists have put forth a similar argument regarding cultural differences. They note that researchers must aim to capture the concepts of all groups included in a project and take care not to assimilate the concepts of one group into the framework developed for another (Jensen 2008b; Jensen and Larson 2005; Shweder et al. 2005). These aims are furthered by using methods where less is brought to the participant (e.g., broader questions rather than specific stories or preselected descriptions) and more is collected from the participant (e.g., in-depth answers in participants' own words).

While open-ended verbal questions often enhance validity, using this method with children (perhaps especially younger ones) is not without its challenges as they may have a smaller vocabulary or be less verbally facile.[2] As explained below, statistical controls for number of utterances (which varies by age) were included in the analyses.

The first step in the analytic approach employed in this study was to analyze interviews using a qualitative approach (Gilgun 1992; Glaser and Strauss 1967). Conceptual categories pertaining to God and the Devil were identified. With the newly generated categories and literature review in hand, the next step was to formulate specific hypotheses regarding the relation between the categories and age, religious group, and content. The subsequent analytic step was to conduct quantitative analyses. The use of a mixed-methods approach has the potential to provide a more valid and complete research picture. The collection of time-consuming interviews limits the statistical power of the analyses because of the resulting small cell size. However, significant results are likely to be more robust. In the end, the mixed-method approach facilitated a

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[2] This methodological issue for lifespan research is not resolved by using drawings where younger children also are likely to have less experience with pictorial representation. For research involving preselected descriptions, there is the issue of whether younger children understand the descriptions in the same way as older participants.

cultural-developmental examination of how children, adolescents, and adults from religiously liberal and conservative groups conceptualize God and the Devil.

METHOD

Participants

The study included 120 participants. There were 60 evangelical Presbyterians representing religiously conservative believers, and 60 mainline Presbyterians representing religiously liberal believers. In each religious group, participants were selected to fit evenly into three age groups ($n = 20$): children (ages 7–12, $M = 10.0$, $SD = 1.38$), adolescents (ages 13–18, $M = 15.0$, $SD = 1.60$), and adults (ages 36–57, $M = 45.9$, $SD = 4.65$). There were no significant age differences between religious groups within any of the three age groups. The age of differentiation between the groups of children and adolescents corresponded to the age when Piagetian theory and research notes a key shift in cognition and God concepts.

Participants resided in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The conservatives attended a church that self-identifies as "evangelical" and is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America, a religiously conservative organization. The liberal participants attended a church that has an affiliation with the Presbyterian Church—USA, an organization that falls at the liberal end of the religious spectrum.

Validating the classification of participants, the two groups differed significantly on religious affiliation and attendance of religious services. Among various options, 100 percent of the liberals described themselves as "Mainline Protestant" and 98 percent of the conservatives described themselves as "Evangelical Protestants," X^2 (1, 84) = 80.09, $p < .001$. Also, conservative participants rated themselves as significantly more conservative than liberal participants: F (1, 118) = 77.64, $p < .001$, (conservatives: $M = 2.22$ [$SD = .74$] and liberals: $M = 3.55$ [$SD = .90$] where 1 = Very Conservative and 5 = Very Liberal). Finally, as would be expected, conservatives also reported more frequent attendance of religious services, F (1, 120) = 13.29, $p < .001$, (conservatives: $M = 6.05$ [$SD = 1.27$] and liberals: $M = 5.35$ [$SD = .78$] where 1 = Never or Almost Never and 7 = More Than Once a Week).[3]

Table 1 shows demographic characteristics of the sample. Female and male participants were evenly distributed within the religiously conservative and liberal groups. Compared to the liberal participants, the conservatives were more racially diverse. Adult conservative family members (i.e., adult participants along with the parents of the child and adolescent participants) were also more often married and had more children. Both groups of adults were highly educated, and had similar work statuses with the majority of adult family members holding part-time or full-time occupations. Nevertheless, the yearly family income of the liberal participants was on average higher than that of conservatives.[3] The differences on race, marital status, and number of children would be expected for samples differing on degree of religious conservatism and liberalism (Ammerman 1987). Regarding education, sociologists have noted that liberal and conservative groups are unlikely to differ within local regions of the United States (Ammerman 1987; Hunter 1987). Regarding income level, other studies have observed this difference between liberal and conservative groups (Jensen 1998b, 2006).

To recruit participants, the principal investigator first conferred in person with ministers and staff of the participating churches about the project. The ministers then provided the research

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[3] The information on religious affiliation and attendance was collected as part of a demographic questionnaire that included other questions about matters such as household income. The youngest children completed the questions with assistance from a parent or guardian.

Table 1: Participant demographics

	Liberal	Conservative	Culture Difference
Sex (%)			
Female	50	50	0 ns
Male	50	50	
Race (%)			
African American	0	17	
Asian American	0	3	13.57***
European American	100	80	
Marital status of adult(s) in family (%)			
Single	2	2	
Married	78	88	
Divorced	8	3	12.66*
Widowed	0	7	
Remarried	10	0	
No. of children in family (*M* and *SD*)	2.25	3.17	20.16***
	(.99)	(1.24)	
Education of adult woman in family (%)			
High school diploma or GED	0	2	
Some college	10	4	.02 ns
College degree	42	46	
Postgraduate education	48	48	
Education of adult man in family (%)			
High school diploma or GED	4	0	
Some college	6	2	.28 ns
College degree	26	39	
Postgraduate education	64	59	
Work status of adult woman in family (%)			
Full time	35	41	
Part time	29	27	3.80 ns
Full-time homemaker	35	27	
Work status of adult man in family (%)			
Full time	94	89	
Part time	2	7	2.64 ns
Full-time homemaker	0	0	
Yearly family income (%)			
$20,000–$39,999	4	2	
$40,000–$59,999	2	16	
$60,000–$79,999	0	36	39.59***
$80,000–$100,000	9	19	
>$100,000	86	28	

$^*p < .05$; $^{***}p < .001$; ns = not significant.
Notes: The table excludes a few never or rarely used categories (e.g., "Some high school education). Chi-square values are indicated for sex, race, marital, and work status, and *F* values for number of children, education, and income.

team with lists of all active church congregants, and letters to congregants both indicating support for the study and stating that participation was voluntary. The ministers' letters and a letter from the research team that further explained the nature of the study were mailed to congregants. Subsequently, congregants received phone calls where they were asked to participate. The participation rate was 78 percent.

Procedure

Participants took part in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. The interviews ranged in total length from 30 to 180 minutes, and the average length in minutes for each age group was 63 ($SD = 22$) for children, 68 ($SD = 20$) for adolescents, and 89 ($SD = 29$) for adults. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim for coding and analysis. Almost all interviews (95 percent) took place in the homes of participants. This increased the likelihood that participants would feel at ease during interviews. This may be particularly important for the children. Our impression was that the children also provided longer and more detailed interviews because they were free to take small breaks. Interviews were conducted without the oversight or overhearing of other persons in their home. However, a parent or guardian was always present in the household during interviews with children and adolescents. Adult participants and parents or guardians of the children and adolescents provided written informed consent. The children and adolescents provided oral assent. At the conclusion of an interview session, participants received compensation in the form of $10 for children, $15 for adolescents, and $20 for adults. They were also asked if they had questions or thoughts about the interview.

Materials

The interview contained six open-ended questions regarding God.[4] The first assessed belief in God's existence: "Do you believe in God?" The next three pertained to God's characteristics: "What is God like?" "Is there one God or are there many gods?" and "Is God male or female or something else?" The final two questions addressed the extent of God's influence on the participant's life: "What kinds of things does God control about your life?" and "To what extent do you determine your own life independent of God?" Piloting indicated that in order for children to comprehend the last question, it had to be phrased somewhat differently. They were asked: "Can you do anything without God?" (In statistical analyses, the responses to the last two questions were collapsed, rendering age group differences less likely to result from confounding with the altered phrasing for the one question).

With respect to the Devil, four questions on belief and characteristics were asked. The first question pertaining to belief was phrased in the following way: "Do you believe in the Devil or Satan or an evil force?" (Previous research has shown that religiously liberal and conservative Protestants typically use the same term to refer to God, but vary in their terminology for the Devil. For the sake of validity, the Devil question thus included more terms, making it grammatically but probably not substantively different from the comparable God question.) The questions on characteristics were identical to those for God but with the term used by an interviewee to designate the Devil now being used by the researcher (e.g., "What is 'Satan' like?"). The questions pertaining to influence that were asked for God were not asked for the Devil. This was for two reasons. In this round of research, where it was unclear how many participants would believe in the Devil, there were fewer questions on the Devil out of concern that the interview would become

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[4] The research team conferred extensively with pastors (not from the churches included here) and scholars specializing in theology, psychology, and the sociology of religion during the formulation of interview questions. Pilot interviews were conducted with persons representing each age and religious group.

too long, especially for children. Also, the research team was reluctant to ask participants about the Devil's control over their lives out of concern with jeopardizing its working relationship with participants.

The interview protocol provided for follow-up to all questions, encouraging the participant to clarify or elaborate. Participants' who answered that they did not believe in God or the Devil were posed no further questions on the topic.

<center>QUALITATIVE RESULTS</center>

Coding Dimensions and Categories

The first analytic step was to generate coding dimensions and categories. Following a grounded theory approach, the following questions were considered: What kinds of answers occur with some regularity? Are there answers—even uncommon ones—that stand out on their own or in light of the literature? What kinds of distinctions can be drawn among answers?[5]

Two researchers reviewed all interviews, and another reviewed 50 percent. This was done blind to demographic information. As the interviews were reviewed, a coding manual and a qualitative database were gradually constructed. The manual was continuously refined in the process of reading more interviews in order to account for all interview materials and clearly define coding categories. The qualitative database recorded both the coding category and the verbatim response for each participant answer. By sorting all verbatim answers in the database according to coding categories, the coherency of categories was continuously assessed and the coding manual further refined. Once the coding manual had been completed, interrater reliabilities were assessed on 20 percent of all interviews. They are reported below for each coding category.

The same coding categories were used for responses pertaining to God and the Devil. Qualitative analysis determined that participant descriptions for both supernatural entities could be coded with many of the same categories, and this also allowed for subsequent within-subject comparisons. A few coding dimensions, however, were not applied to responses for the Devil, either because an interview question had not been asked when discussing the Devil (i.e., degree of control on participant's life) or because the dimension was not applicable to responses (i.e., the Love-Power Dimension [detailed below] where no one spoke in loving terms of the Devil).

Belief in God or the Devil was coded into three categories: *Yes*, *No*, and *Don't Know*. All other dimensions and categories, along with examples of verbatim participant responses, are reported in Table 2. Number of gods was coded as *One, Many,* and *Don't Know*. Participants did not give a specific number such as two or five. Instead, they said "lots," or "many," or "one in every person." Some participants referenced one God and some spoke of God's trinity but always emphasized that God was still one entity. With respect to *gender*, five categories emerged: *Male, Female, Both Female and Male, Something Else,* and *Don't Know*. Interrater reliability for each of the above three dimensions was 100 percent.

Answers to the question of what God and the Devil are like were coded along three and two dimensions, respectively (see Table 2). The first of the common dimensions was termed *Attributes*, and distinguished four categories (Cohen's kappa = .86): *Physical* (bodily or material descriptions), *Human Roles/Abilities* and *Human Traits* (roles and abilities or traits that human

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[5] In grounded theory analysis, this process is what is referred to as "open coding" and the integration of categories (based on their properties). The entire process is also referred to as the "constant comparative method" (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Grounded theory analysis can be used with data collected at one or more times (Glaser 1992).

Table 2: Coding dimensions and categories, and qualitative interview examples

Dimensions and Categories	Qualitative Examples (Some Quotes Here Include More Than One Coding Unit)
Number	
One	P 138–16: I think there's one God. P 134–04: I think there's one that has many aspects, like the trinity or such. But there's one.
Many	P 139–21: I think that God is something that is somehow spiritual that gets into people to help them make moral decisions and know what's right or wrong. In [that] sense, I think that there's probably more than one. P 139–21: I think there is a Satan in each person.
Gender	
Male	P 183–19: In conversation with the kids we always say He. I guess I have always thought of God as a He.
Female	P 134–04: Like God our Father—it just doesn't make any sense. I just think that a mother makes a lot more sense. And so I think [that] a deity I would worship or believe in would be like a mother figure, I guess.
Both male and female	P 043–17: I think that Satan, like God, [is] a little bit of both because He seems to know how to push the buttons of men and women.
Something else	P 131–05: God's genderless. He's just a spirit.
Attributes dimension	
Physical	P 114–20: [God has a] big thundering voice. White beard. Blue cloak, excuse me, sky-blue cloak.
Human roles/abilities	P 037–12: God's just a friend. P 065–04: He chastises when he needs to. P 061–002: A counselor. P 069–16: Defender.
Human traits	P 070–19: God's wise. P 037–12: I think He's a jealous God because He wants us to only love him. P 012–08: The Devil is mean.
Supernatural	P 062–02: [God is] a noncreated being above the natural world, above it in all ways, beyond time, beyond energy depletion, beyond our imaginations, and fully enveloping eternity.
Evaluative dimension	
Positive	P 008–01: [God] loves us. P 024–18: God's Perfect. P 050–21: The Devil looks good on the outside.
Neutral	P 170–14: God's a spirit. P 006–06: No one can see God, He's invisible. P 071–10: God is immeasurable.
Negative	P 036–14: He's a vengeful God. P 051–19: God is terrifying. P 033–04: The Devil is unspeakably bad. P 007–07: Dishonest.

(*Continued*)

Table 2: (continued)

Dimensions and Categories	Qualitative Examples (Some Quotes Here Include More Than One Coding Unit)
Love-power dimension	
Power/judgment	P 012–08: If you disobey, He has to punish you. P 041–16: He can do anything. P 032–03: All powerful.
Love/nurture	P 010–06: If you need some help, He'll be there to help you. P 037–12: Merciful. P 039–07: The epitome of all love.
God's control	
No current control (1)	P 132–02: My personal position is that [God] just sits back and watches the show. He's not really involved in everyday life.
Lays out options (2)	P179–15: I think God lets us choose paths in life. God creates opportunities in my life and asks me to make the best of [those].
Guidance (3)	P 180–26: I don't think He controls anything. I think I control it all but I can go to God to seek help with things. People have free will to determine what their lives are going to be like but they can seek God in prayer for help.
Substantial control (4)	P 063–03: Although in Jesus Christ I'm redeemed I still have that fallen nature. I control that in the sense that I can [will] things that are contrary to God's revealed will. I can think things, I can do things, I'm not an automaton. Yet at the same time, God [is at] work in my life, working on my step-by-step becoming more like Him, like His son Jesus Christ. So those two things are at work at one time.
Complete control (5)	P 062–02: He controls all things about my life. What I think I'm allowing him to control is another question. But there's nothing out of his control in my life. All of my life is under his authority. There are no random events.

beings also typically possess), and *Supernatural* (immaterial and theological descriptions that capture characteristics that humans are unlikely to exhibit). The attributes dimension overlapped to some extent with Piaget's distinction between concrete and abstract, and his concern with anthropomorphism. Specifically, the physical and supernatural categories differed by whether they included material or immaterial descriptions and the human roles/abilities and human traits categories invoked qualities that humans typically might possess whereas the supernatural category did not.

Participants also often assigned a value to the attributes they described. The evaluative dimension consisted of three categories: *Positive*, *Neutral*, and *Negative* (Cohen's kappa = .95). Finally, a *Love-Power Dimension* applied to God concepts only consisted of two distinct categories, *Love/Nurture* and *Power/Judgment* (Cohen's kappa = .87). This tapped Lakoff's distinction (1996) between a nurturing parent and a strict father, as well as work on attachment in relation to God concepts.

In response to the question of what God and the Devil are like, many participants gave more than one description (e.g., P 006–06: "He's there to protect you, but no one can see God"). When responses were coded in terms of the three dimensions, there were a total of 446 descriptors for God and 213 for the Devil. To maintain statistically required independence, every single description was coded into only one category within each of the three dimensions (to control for group differences, as described below, total number of descriptors was entered in statistical analyses).

Finally, participants' answers to the two questions about *God's control* and influence on their lives were collapsed and coded along a five-point continuum. The five categories were the following: (1) *No Current Control* (God created things and now leaves people to act on their own); (2) *Lays Out Options* (God lays out options and choices but does not provide guidance or control behaviors in regard to those options); (3) *Guidance* (God can provide guidance, such as when people ask for help, but God does not control behaviors); (4) *Substantial Control* (God controls most behaviors and actions, but people independently make some choices, such as to engage in immoral behaviors); and (5) *Complete Control* (God has control of all behaviors).

Hypotheses

Based on the literature review and the categories generated through the grounded theory approach, the next step was to formulate hypotheses. In light of the consistent developmental findings, one expectation was that children would provide more concrete and fewer abstract descriptions of God and the Devil, as compared to adolescents and adults. Specifically, this was expected in regard to physical versus supernatural attributes (e.g., Bassett et al. 1990; Goldman 1965; Ladd, McIntosh, and Spilka 1998), and in regard to gender descriptions emphasizing a specific gender versus blended or no gender (Ladd, McIntosh, and Spilka 1998).

With respect to religious group comparisons, the hypotheses were that conservatives would be more likely to regard God as male than liberal participants (Lakoff 1996), and as exerting a higher degree of control on their lives (Noffke and McFadden 2001). The available empirical evidence (limited as it is) does not suggest that the two groups would differ in the extent to which they attribute physical, human, or supernatural attributes to God, and there was no expectation here that they would differ in these respects.

The lack of research pertaining to Devil concepts made it difficult to formulate hypotheses. Nevertheless, the present expectation was that within-subject conceptions of God and the Devil might differ in a number of respects (e.g., the evaluative dimension) given the different statuses of the two entities within religious traditions that include these entities. Furthermore, it was anticipated that within-subjects conceptions of God and the Devil would interact with religious groups, since conservatives would seem more likely to believe in and hold detailed conceptions of

the Devil than liberals whereas such cultural group differences would be less likely for conceptions of God.

Analysis Guidelines

Chi-square tests were used to test for between-groups differences (i.e., age and religious groups) for the categorical variables (i.e., belief, number, and gender). Stuart-Maxwell tests of homogeneity were used for within-subject differences (i.e., God vs. the Devil). The Stuart-Maxwell test is an extension of the chi-square test comparing responses that fall into a category across two different questions (Everitt 1977; Maxwell 1970; Stuart 1955). Unlike the chi-square, the Stuart-Maxwell test conducts comparisons for every category on a dimension (e.g., male, female, etc. for the gender dimension); significance values for the Stuart-Maxwell tests entailed a Bonferroni adjustment.

For continuous variables, 2 (religious groups) $\times$ 3 (age) analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were used to assess between-groups differences for God and Devil concepts. *A priori* Helmert contrasts were used to compare children to adolescents and adults combined (following Piagetian research) and to compare adolescents to adults (aiming to determine if adults, who have been excluded from most research in the area, might be distinctive in some respects). Two covariates were included in the analyses. Income was entered to control for the significant difference between conservatives and liberals. Income was significant in only three of the total number of analyses. The number of descriptors provided by participants was also entered in analyses of the attributes, evaluative, and love-power dimensions. This ensured that group differences on these categories reflected genuine differences and not the tendency of some groups to provide more descriptors. Number of descriptors was a significant covariate in many analyses. Group differences in number of God and Devil descriptors are reported below.

Within-subjects differences on the continuous variables were assessed using 2 (cognitive content) $\times$ 2 (religious groups) $\times$ 3 (age) repeated measures ANCOVAs. Here, cognitive content (i.e., God and Devil) was the within-subject variable. Main effects of cognitive content and interactions with content are reported. (The repeated measures ANCOVAs also generated comparisons that were purely between groups. However, only between-group results from the 2 $\times$ 3 ANCOVAs described above are reported here. God and Devil responses are merged on the repeated measures ANCOVAs for between-groups tests; the goal was to examine God and Devil concepts separately.) Tests of significance are reported for $p < .10$ because of the small sample size.

Conceptions of God

Between-groups comparisons by age and religious groups are shown in Table 3 for categorical variables and in Table 4 for continuous variables. As seen in Table 3, almost all participants believed in God (97 percent). Turning first to development or age, as seen in Table 4, children provided fewer descriptions of God than adolescents and adults combined. Children were also less likely to describe God in terms of human traits, positive characteristics, and characteristics pertaining to power or judgment. Children more than adolescents and adults, however, saw God as having control over their own lives. A number of differences existed between adolescents and adults. Specifically, adults gave more descriptions of God than did adolescents. Adults also conceptualized God more in terms of human roles or abilities, supernatural attributes, neutral characteristics, and power or judgment.

Table 3: Chi-square age and religious groups comparisons for God concepts (%)

	Conservative			Liberal			Age			Religious
	Child	Adolescent	Adult	Child	Adolescent	Adult	Age Difference	Ch vs. A&A	A vs. A	Cons vs. Liberal
Belief in God										
Yes	100	95	100	95	90	100				
No	0	0	0	0	5	0	4.05 ns	.51 ns	3.04 ns	1.33 ns
Don't know	0	5	0	5	5	0				
God's number										
One	100	100	100	84	94	90				
Many	0	0	0	16	6	10	.96 ns	.73 ns	.30 ns	6.44**
Don't know	0	0	0	0	0	0				
God's gender										
Male	45	32	21	11	17	26				
Female	0	0	0	5	11	0				
Male and female	5	11	21	26	11	11	3.89 ns	.73 ns	3.39 ns	8.26*
Something else	45	58	53	58	61	63				
Don't know	5	0	5	0	0	0				

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ns = not significant.

Notes: Ch vs. A&A = children contrasted to adolescents and adults combined; A vs. A = adolescents contrasted to adults; Cons = conservative. N = 119 for belief, N = 115 for number, and N = 114 for gender.

Table 4: 2 × 2 ANCOVA age by religious groups comparisons for God concepts (M [SD])

| | Conservative | | | Liberal | | | | Age | | Religious |
	Child	Adolescent	Adult	Child	Adolescent	Adult	Age Diff	Ch vs. A&A	A vs. A	Cons vs. Liberal
No. of descriptors	3.75 (2.24)	4.83 (2.66)	6.67 (3.63)	2.44 (1.15)	2.81 (1.22)	3.85 (1.63)	8.88***	**	**	11.90***
Attributes										
Physical	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	.17 (.71)	.19 (.75)	0 (0)	.91 ns	ns	ns	1.81 ns
Human roles/abilities	.80 (1.11)	.77 (.94)	1.39 (1.61)	.50 (.86)	.13 (.34)	.35 (.62)	1.24 ns	ns	+	.96 ns
Human traits	1.35 (2.08)	2.50 (2.07)	2.55 (2.12)	.67 (.91)	1.25 (1.44)	1.25 (1.74)	3.03^{+}	*	ns	.09 ns
Supernatural	1.55 (1.43)	1.44 (1.25)	2.72 (1.60)	1.00 (.97)	1.19 (1.17)	2.20 (1.24)	4.06*	*	***	.0 ns
Evaluative										
Positive	2.05 (1.96)	2.61 (1.82)	3.56 (2.81)	.89 (.96)	1.50 (1.41)	1.55 (1.76)	.71 ns	*	ns	.12 ns
Neutral	1.65 (1.73)	1.78 (1.48)	3.11 (1.84)	1.56 (1.10)	1.31 (1.20)	2.30 (1.17)	2.43^{+}	+	***	.41 ns
Negative	.05 (.22)	.44 (.78)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	8.02***	ns	**	1.38 ns
Love-power										
Power/judgment	1.00 (1.17)	1.76 (1.75)	3.28 (2.05)	.44 (.63)	.40 (.63)	1.42 (1.07)	5.93**	+	**	5.78*
Love/nurture	1.15 (1.42)	2.00 (1.50)	1.67 (1.71)	.75 (.86)	.67 (.72)	1.37 (1.16)	.47 ns	ns	ns	.14 ns
God's control	4.53 (.90)	3.89 (.83)	4.12 (.78)	3.35 (1.58)	2.38 (1.26)	2.64 (.79)	5.31**	**	ns	29.63***

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; $^{+}p < .10$; ns = not significant.

Notes: C vs. A&A = children contrasted to adolescents and adults combined; A vs. A = adolescents contrasted to adults; Cons = Conservative. For number of descriptors, attributes, and evaluative, $N = 110$; for love-power, $N = 105$; and for God's control, $N = 104$. For age groups comparisons, $df = 2$; for age group contrasts and religious group comparisons, $df = 1$.

With respect to significant main effects for religious groups, as seen in Table 3, more conservative than liberal participants conceptualized God as one entity, and as male. With respect to God's gender, 33 percent of conservatives saw God as male and 52 percent as something else, whereas the comparable percentages for religious liberals were 18 percent and 61 percent, respectively. Turning to Table 4, conservatives also generated more descriptions of God than liberals. Conservatives were also more likely to describe God in terms of power or judgment and as having control over their own lives.

There were two interaction effects of age and religious groups. Essentially, only the conservative adolescents evaluated God in negative terms, $F (2, 110) = 6.15, p < .01$. Also, there was a trend for conservative adolescents being the highest on descriptions of God as loving and nurturing while liberal adolescents were the lowest, $F (2, 105) = 2.65, p < .08$.

Conceptions of the Devil

Between-group comparisons by age and religious groups are shown in Table 5 for categorical variables and in Table 6 for continuous variables. The statistical power for these analyses was low due to three-fifths of liberals not believing in the Devil and hence providing no conceptualizations (sample sizes are reported in table notes). Conservatives almost unanimously believed in the Devil, whereas less than 40 percent of liberals did (as seen in Table 5).

With respect to development or age, significant differences were found between adolescents and adults. On gender concepts, as seen in Table 5, 48 percent of adults saw the Devil as male and 44 percent as something else whereas the comparable figures for adolescents were 11 percent and 62 percent, respectively. As seen in Table 6, adults also evaluated the Devil more negatively than adolescents. There were also differences when children were compared to adolescents and adults combined. Children ascribed significantly more physical attributes to the Devil (a trend). Adolescents and adults ascribed more supernatural attributes to the Devil.

In terms of religious groups, more conservatives (91 percent) viewed the Devil as one entity than liberals (65 percent) (Table 5). Conservatives also provided more supernatural descriptions (Table 6).

God Versus the Devil

Next, within-subjects comparisons of conceptions of God and the Devil were conducted along with within-subjects analyses by age and religious group. Results for categorical variables are shown in Table 7 and for continuous variables in Table 8.

As seen in Table 7, more participants believed in God than the Devil, and regarded God as one entity. Furthermore, as shown in Table 8, participants generated more descriptions of God than the Devil. In describing the two entities, participants assigned more human traits and supernatural attributes to God than the Devil. They also evaluated God more in positive and neutral terms, whereas the Devil (not surprisingly) was evaluated more negatively.

More adults regarded God as one (95 percent) than the Devil as one (70 percent). No such difference was found among children and adolescents (see Table 7). Also, about twice as many adolescents (25 percent vs. 11 percent) and adults (48 vs. 24 percent) assigned a male gender to the Devil, as compared to God. No such difference was present among children. As seen in Table 8, conceptions of God versus the Devil also interacted with age on physical attributions, supernatural attributions, and neutral evaluations. Figure 1 shows that children ascribed more physical attributes to the Devil than God, whereas adolescent and adults did not. Figure 2 indicates that adolescents ascribed the same number of supernatural attributes to God and the Devil, whereas children and adults attributed more to God. Figure 3 illustrates that adolescents gave only somewhat more neutral characteristics for God than the Devil, whereas children and adults gave considerably more neutral characteristics for God than the Devil.

Table 5: Chi-square age and religious groups comparisons for devil concepts (%)

| | Conservative | | | Liberal | | | Age Diff | Age | | Religious |
	Child	Adolescent	Adult	Child	Adolescent	Adult		Ch vs. A&A	A vs. A	Cons vs. Liberal
Belief in Devil										
Yes	89	90	95	50	30	35				
No	11	5	5	45	70	55	1.21 ns	.48 ns	.68 ns	35.84***
Don't know	0	5	0	5	0	10				
Devil's number										
One	100	89	83	70	67	57				
Many	0	6	11	20	33	29	1.48 ns	.94 ns	.48 ns	7.41*
Don't know	0	6	6	10	0	14				
Devil's gender										
Male	38	22	39	20	0	57				
Female	0	0	0	0	0	0				
Male and female	0	11	0	0	33	0	12.28*	2.29 ns	7.81*	1.11 ns
Something else	63	57	44	50	67	43				
Don't know	0	11	17	30	0	0				

*$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$; ns = not significant.

Notes: Ch vs. A&A = children contrasted to adolescents and adults combined; A vs. A = adolescents contrasted to adults; Cons = conservative. $N = 117$ for belief, and $N = 75$ for number and gender.

Table 6: 2 × 2 ANCOVA age by religious groups comparisons for devil concepts (M [SD])

	Conservative			Liberal			Age			Religious
	Child	Adolescent	Adult	Child	Adolescent	Adult	Age Diff	Ch vs. A&A	A vs. A	Cons vs. Liberal
No. of descriptors	2.81 (1.52)	3.17 (1.89)	3.88 (2.09)	1.88 (1.27)	2.17 (.98)	2.57 (1.27)	1.58 ns	ns	ns	1.00 ns
Attributes										
Physical	.19 (.54)	.11 (.32)	0 (0)	.67 (1.66)	.33 (.52)	0 (0)	3.51*	+	ns	2.52 ns
Human roles/abilities	.50 (1.10)	.56 (.78)	.35 (.79)	0 (0)	.17 (.41)	.57 (1.13)	.02 ns	ns	ns	.33 ns
Human traits	.50 (.73)	.83 (1.47)	1.18 (1.70)	.56 (.73)	.17 (.41)	.43 (.79)	.22 ns	ns	ns	.33 ns
Supernatural	1.38 (1.09)	1.44 (1.04)	2.18 (1.29)	.33 (.50)	1.00 (.63)	1.29 (1.11)	2.45+	*	ns	9.96**
Evaluative										
Positive	.06 (.25)	.22 (.55)	.06 (.24)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	.50 ns	ns	ns	.02 ns
Neutral	.50 (.82)	.94 (1.00)	.94 (.97)	.56 (1.33)	1.00 (.89)	.86 (.90)	1.09 ns	ns	ns	.13 ns
Negative	2.25 (1.61)	2.00 (1.81)	2.88 (1.73)	1.33 (.50)	1.17 (.75)	1.71 (.76)	1.26 ns	ns	+	.08 ns

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; +$p < .10$; ns = not significant.

Notes: C vs. A&A = children contrasted to adolescents and adults combined; A vs. A = adolescents contrasted to adults; Cons = Conservative. $N = 73$. For age group comparisons, $df = 2$; for age group contrasts and religious group comparisons, $df = 1$.

Table 7: Stuart-Maxwell within-subjects comparisons of God versus Devil concepts (%)

	All Participants		All Participants	Age			Religious	
	God	Devil		Children	Adolescents	Adults	Conservative	Liberal
Belief in God vs. Devil								
Yes	97	65	6.16***	3.32**	3.61**	3.74**	2.00 ns	5.83***
God's vs. Devil's number								
One	95	78	2.46*	.45 ns	1.73 ns	2.24+	2.24+	1.41 ns
God's vs. Devil's gender								
Male	25	29	3.87*	1.00 ns	2.24+	3.00*	.30 ns	.82 ns

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; +$p < .10$; ns = not significant.

Notes: Only results for the significant categories are indicated in the table. For belief, $N = 117$; for number and gender, $N = 75$ (52 conservatives and 23 liberals).

Table 8: Repeated measures ANCOVAs comparisons of God versus Devil concepts (*M* [*SD*])

	All Participants		Within All Participants	By Age	By Religious Group
	God	Devil			
No. of descriptors	4.07	2.96			
	(2.61)	(1.76)	18.38***	1.69 ns	2.42 ns
Attributes					
Physical	.08	.17			
	(.49)	(.67)	1.65 ns	2.45+	.13 ns
Human roles/abilities	.78	.41			
	(1.16)	(.83)	2.13 ns	.08 ns	2.84+
Human traits	1.89	.70			
	(2.00)	(1.21)	18.97***	.93 ns	1.87 ns
Supernatural	1.81	1.42			
	(1.45)	(1.15)	7.08**	2.61+	.81 ns
Evaluative					
Positive	2.42	.08			
	(2.16)	(.32)	65.99***	2.23 ns	5.77*
Neutral	2.08	.80			
	(1.64)	(.96)	28.42***	3.27*	1.90 ns
Negative	.12	2.08			
	(.44)	(1.54)	98.23***	2.01 ns	4.71*

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; +$p < .10$; ns = not significant.
Notes: $N = 74$ (52 conservatives and 22 liberals). For age group by within-subject, $df = 2$; for religious group by within-subject, $df = 1$.

Turning to religious groups, conservatives saw God as one more so than the Devil (100 percent vs. 91 percent; see Table 7). Conceptions of God and the Devil interacted with religious group on human roles attributions as well as positive and negative evaluations (Table 8). Liberal participants described God and the Devil with the same number of human roles or abilities, whereas conservatives attributed substantially more human roles to God than to the Devil (Figure 4). Both liberal and conservative participants evaluated God more positively than the Devil (not surprisingly), but the differential was stronger among conservatives (Figure 5). Both groups evaluated the Devil more negatively than God (Figure 6), but again the differential was stronger among conservatives.

DISCUSSION

Ninety-seven percent of participants believed in God and 65 percent in the Devil, fairly closely matching national trends (Taylor 2003). The present mixed-methods findings indicate that these supernatural entities constitute an important psychological reality (from a social science perspective) for many children, adolescents, and adults. It is, however, a reality that varies by age and religious culture. The findings here not only indicate the need to reconsider Piagetian interpretations, but also point to the usefulness of a cultural-developmental approach that takes into account the intersection of age, culture, and cognitive content.

The Psychological Reality of Supernatural Entities

These qualitative findings indicated that conceptions of God and the Devil are broad. In other words, participants had many, detailed, and diverse conceptions of these entities. The

Figure 4
Religious group by content interaction on roles/abilities attributes

Figure 5
Religious group by content interaction on positive characteristics

Figure 6
Religious group by content interaction on negative characteristics
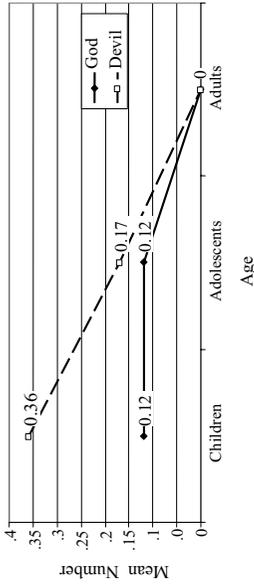

Figure 1
Age by content interaction on physical attributes

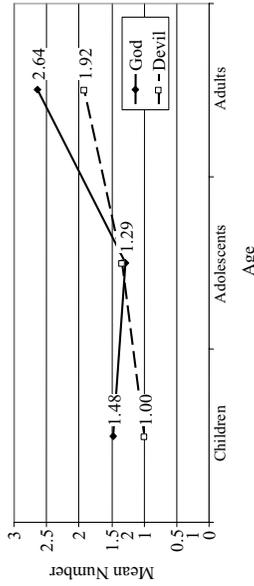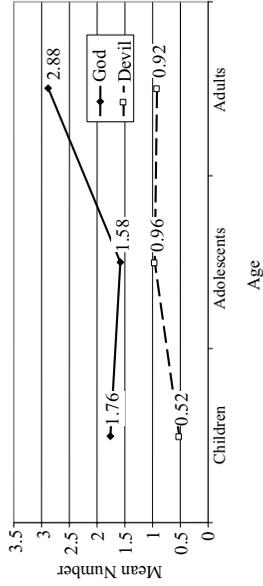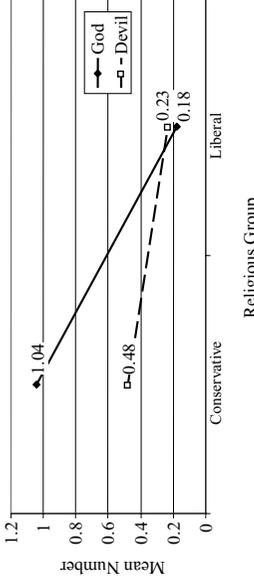Figure 2
Age by content interaction on supernatural attributes

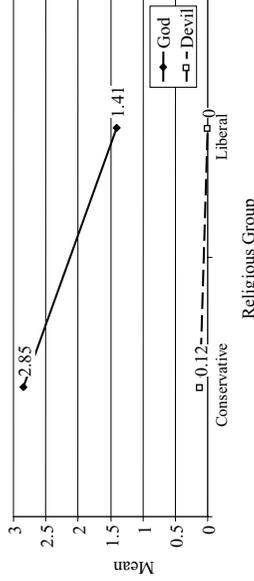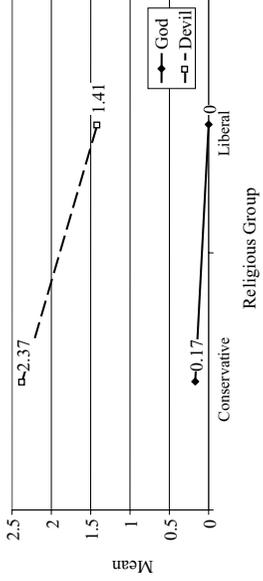Figure 3
Age by content interaction on God's neutral characteristics

question of what God is like alone generated a total of 446 descriptions from the 120 participants. Participants had more to say about God than the Devil, but the 78 participants who believed in the Devil still generated 213 descriptions in response to the comparable open-ended question. These descriptions of God and the Devil touched upon supernatural attributes, human-like roles and traits, and physical characteristics. The descriptions also touched upon positive, neutral, and negative characteristics. For God, they furthermore addressed characteristics pertaining to power and love. The fact that people have many and diverse conceptions of God and the Devil begins to suggest that these conceptions also play a role in many and diverse aspects of people's lives.

Interviews indicated that the reach of supernatural concepts not only is broad but also deep. To many participants, conceptions of God and the Devil addressed existential issues, for example, about the nature of good and evil; about the purpose of life; and about the extent of human free will, independence, and responsibility. As illustrated by the quotation from the 13-year-old in the epigraph, God and the Devil were everyday presences of profound importance to many participants. That fact merits far more psychological inquiry than it has received. Yet, participants' conceptions of God and the Devil were not universal. Age, religious culture, and cognitive content made a difference.

Development: Beyond Piaget

In contrast to Piagetian theory, while the children in this study thought of God in "concrete" ways, so did adolescents and adults. And while adolescent and adult descriptions were "abstract" in some respects, so were children's descriptions. Children spoke more in terms of physical attributes than adolescents and adults when describing the Devil. When it came to God, however, children were not different from adolescents and adults in discussing physical characteristics. Also, results showed that children provided fewer supernatural descriptions of both God and the Devil, compared to adolescents and adults combined. However, a closer examination of the numbers (see Table 4) shows that the higher use of supernatural concepts for God was most evident in adults (evidently children and adolescents were equally capable of talking in abstract terms). Furthermore, children did not use more specific or concrete gender descriptions. For God, there were no differences between age groups. For the Devil, the results went in the other direction. Adults were particularly more likely to describe the Devil as male and particularly less likely to describe the Devil as being without gender (i.e., something else).

A second Piagetian issue in the literature pertains to anthropomorphism. One question has been whether children are particularly anthropomorphic in their conceptions of God (presumably reflecting a kind of egocentrism), and another question has been whether concepts of human beings serve as a template for concepts of supernatural entities (Barrett and Richert 2003; Bloom 2005). These findings showed that adolescents and adults described God more in terms of human traits than did children. Also, there was a trend for adults attributing the most human roles or abilities to God. Describing God in terms of characteristics that human beings might also possess, then, seems to be a phenomenon present from childhood into adulthood, and it may be that for adolescents and adults God is more "human" than for children.

Barrett and his colleagues (Barrett, Richert, and Driesenga 2001; Knight et al. 2004) have demonstrated that young children attribute a different kind of knowledge to God than to human beings. In this study, too, persons of all ages described God in terms of many supernatural attributes that they would be unlikely to apply to humans. Thus, persons of all ages described God in terms such as all-knowing, present in all things, a spirit, without sin, invincible, all-powerful, and eternal. It would seem that a template strictly for the development of various human characteristics would not work well for such conceptions of God. In sum, God is human—especially to adolescents and adults—but God is also other or more than human.

Research on the development of God concepts has included only children and adolescents, but the findings here indicated the value of including adults. In many ways, the adults stood

out not only in comparison to the children, but also the adolescents. For example, adults had more to say about God, they spoke of God more in terms of power and judgment, and they were the most likely to envision the Devil as male. Again, there is a need for more research to better understand these age differences. What seems clear, however, is that we cannot simply extrapolate the development of conceptions of God and the Devil later in the lifecycle from what occurs earlier.

Different Religious Cultures, Different Psychological Realities

Religious culture is related to conceptions of supernatural entities in a number of ways. First, religious culture matters in terms of what supernatural entities populate one's psychological reality. To almost all conservatives, the Devil was real whereas this was not the case for the majority of liberal participants. To believe in the Devil would seem to provide ways of explaining many events in life—one's own and others'—that would require different concepts if one did not believe in the Devil. A belief in the Devil might, for example, account for lies, deceptions, doubt, and strife, to return to the understanding of the 48-year-old conservative participant quoted in the epigraph.

Second, religious culture makes a difference in terms of how one characterizes supernatural entities. In a finding similar to Lakoff's (1996), conservatives conceived of God more in terms of power and judgment than liberals, and they were more likely to see God as male. However, in a departure from Lakoff, conservatives and liberals did not differ on the number of loving or nurturing characteristics that they attributed to God, and the majority of conservatives (52 percent) saw God as genderless.

Third, religious culture makes a difference in how one evaluates supernatural entities. Thus, for conservatives there was a particularly large difference in their evaluations of God and the Devil, as compared to liberal participants. They evaluated God far more positively than the Devil, and the Devil far more negatively than God.

Fourth, religious culture makes a difference in the relationship that one has with God. Conservatives and liberals differed strongly on how much control they saw God as having over their lives. This came out vividly in the participants' language. Compare, for example, a conservative child who said "He controls my heart. He controls all of my body" to a liberal child who said "God controls nothing, 'cause my life is my life." Or a conservative adolescent who stated that "God controls everything, the kind of people I meet, how I react in situations" to a religiously liberal adolescent who said "I think God leaves ourselves to make our own decisions." Or a conservative adult who explained that "He really controls everything. I do have moral responsibility before God, but I am very dependent upon Him to really accomplish anything good" to a liberal adult who said "I'm not sure He, She, It controls anything. I mean, you have to live your life and you're making the decisions."

In sum, religious culture is important when it comes to conceptions of supernatural entities. When it comes to the implications of such conceptions on other spheres of life, religious culture is also likely to be important.

God Is and Is Not Like the Devil

On the one hand, cognitive categories carried across supernatural entities. Many dimensions, for example, of gender, number, attributes, and evaluation were applied to both God and the Devil. These categories may speak to basics of human cognitive categorization in regard to supernatural and natural phenomena (Bloom 2004, 2005).

On the other hand, a closer look at the way that participants used the categories also indicated that God and the Devil were conceptualized differently. In fact, participants differentiated the two entities on all dimensions. This suggests that not only are theories of God's mind and God

more generally not identical to theories of human beings (such as mothers, e.g., Barrett, Richert, and Driesenga 2001), but also that theories of God are not identical to those of other supernatural entities such as the Devil.

Limitations and Future Directions

Future work might address limitations of this research. There were numerous main and interaction effects for age, religious culture, and cognitive content in this study. Nevertheless, larger sample sizes might reveal additional significant findings. The present participants' rates of believing in God and the Devil matched national rates. Still, it would be helpful for future research to focus not only on other religious groups but also on nonreligious communities. Also, now that we know that children, adolescents, and adults who believe in the Devil have much to say about this entity, future research might include questions not asked here about the realm of the Devil's influence. Finally, the present in-depth and time-consuming interviews pointed to dimensions and categories of relevance and salience to both religious conservatives and liberals from childhood and into adulthood. Future work might utilize these dimensions and categories in the development of other methods, such as recognition tasks. This study involved a production task that may be somewhat demanding for children (although the present children produced many responses, in fact close to as many as the adolescents). The hazard of recognition tasks, however, is that they may unduly prompt children who are susceptible to suggestions. If present dimensions and categories were used, we would have some assurance that the recognition tasks had validity.

In conclusion, more in-depth psychological research is needed on supernatural concepts— God, the Devil, and other entities. For example, surveys indicate that 69 percent of Americans believe in the survival of a soul after death (Taylor 2007). Such research would contribute to the growing body of empirical work on religion and spirituality, addressing issues of importance to most people in most parts of the world. It is also compelling for future research to pair a developmental research perspective with a cultural perspective (Jensen forthcoming). A cultural-developmental approach has the prospect of charting new conceptual and empirical territory.

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