5-2024

# Nonreligious Parents' Perceptions of the Role Religious Differences and Religious Disaffiliation Play in Family Relationships

Heather H. Kelley
*Utah State University*, heather.kelley@usu.edu

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NONRELIGIOUS PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

AND RELIGIOUS DISAFFILIATION PLAY IN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

by

Heather H. Kelley

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Human Development and Family Studies

Approved:

_____     _____
Elizabeth B. Fauth, Ph.D.     Travis Dorsch, Ph.D.
Major Professor     Committee Member


_____     _____
Aryn Dotterer, Ph.D.     Spencer Bradshaw, Ph.D.
Committee Member     Committee Member


_____     _____
Loren Marks, Ph.D.     D. Richard Cutler, Ph.D.
Committee Member     Vice Provost for Graduate Studies


UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2024

ABSTRACT

Nonreligious Parents Perceptions of the Role Religious Differences and Religious Disaffiliation

Play in Family Relationships

by

Heather Kelley, Doctor of Philosophy

Utah State University, 2024


Major Professor: Dr. Elizabeth B. Fauth
Department: Human Development and Family Studies

The number of Americans who consider themselves to be "religious nones" (i.e., reporting no religious affiliation on surveys) has steadily increased in recent years. Recent Pew Research Center projections predict that even the more conservative estimates of religious switching (i.e., including both religious conversion and religious disaffiliation) will result in religious nones outnumbering Christians in the United States by 2070. Despite this, little empirical research has focused on specifically researching nonreligious parents; there is a particular dearth of research on the impact of religious differences in adult familial relationships. As such, through a qualitative analysis of 33 interviews with nonreligious couples (N=66 individuals) the current study seeks to address how nonreligious adults perceive the influence of religious differences on their relationships with their family of origin (i.e., parents, siblings, and extended family members) and how these religious differences impact the intergenerational relationships between nonreligious parent's family of origin and their children. Additionally, how nonreligious parents approach the (non)religious socialization of their children is addressed. In addressing these questions, grounded theory coding techniques and team-based approach to

qualitative data analyses were employed. Results highlight the complexity of religious differences in family relationships and include a strengths-based approach which highlights protective factors that can help maintain and strengthen relationships amidst religious differences.

(142 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Nonreligious Parents Perceptions of the Role Religious Differences and Religious Disaffiliation

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The number of nonreligious Americans has steadily increased in recent years, and researchers

predict that this growth will continue. Despite this growth, limited research has explored the

experiences of nonreligious parents and how religious differences impact their family

relationships. As such, through a qualitative analysis of 33 interviews with nonreligious couples

(N=66 individuals), the current study addresses how nonreligious adults perceive the influence of

religious differences on their relationships with their family of origin (i.e., parents, siblings, and

extended family members) and how these religious differences impact the intergenerational

relationships between nonreligious parent's family of origin and their children. Additionally,

how nonreligious parents approach the (non)religious socialization of their children is addressed.

Results highlight the complexity of religious differences in family relationships and include a

strengths-based approach which highlights protective factors that can help maintain and

strengthen relationships amidst religious differences.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the many individuals who have supported me through the process of completing this dissertation. First, I am deeply thankful to my mentors throughout my master's and doctoral degrees, Dr. Elizabeth Fauth, Dr. Loren Marks, and Dr. David Dollahite. I am grateful for their invaluable guidance, support, and encouragement throughout the research process. Their expertise and insightful feedback have been instrumental in shaping both the current study as well as me as a researcher.

I am grateful the other members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Aryn Dotterer, Dr. Travis Dorsch, and Dr. Spencer Bradshaw, for their time and valuable feedback and guidance. I deeply value their diverse perspectives and expertise.

I extend my appreciation to the participants of this study, whose willingness to share their experiences and insights produce rich insights. Without their contributions, this dissertation would not have been possible.

I am grateful to my colleagues and friends for their support, encouragement, and understanding during the challenging phases of this journey. Their words of encouragement and moments of camaraderie have provided much-needed motivation and inspiration.

Finally, special thanks are due to my husband and daughter for their unwavering love and support as I have pursued my doctoral degree. They have kept me sane and motivated throughout the ups and downs this journey.

Heather Kelley

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the number of Americans that consider themselves to be religious nones (i.e., reporting no religious affiliation on surveys) has steadily increased (Jones, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2022a). According to a Pew Research Center survey, 78% of religious nones report being raised as members of a specific religious organization (Lipka, 2016). This increase in religious disaffiliation has been observed across a wide variety of demographic groups in the United States. Many scholars predict that the number of religiously unaffiliated individuals will continue increasing as nonreligious parents raise nonreligious children and as children continue to reject their parents' religion (Cragun et al., 2018; Stinespring & Cragun, 2015). Recent Pew Research Center (2022b) projections predict that even the more conservative estimates of religious switching (i.e., including both religious conversion and religious disaffiliation) will result in religious nones outnumbering Christians in the United States by 2070.

Religious disaffiliation can be a difficult and even painful process, and individuals who become or remain nonreligious as parents may face additional challenges, including both familial and societal pressures (Manning, 2015; McClure, 2017). Despite this, little empirical research has focused on specifically researching nonreligious parents and families. The research that is available, though predominately focused on religious differences between parents and adolescent children, has shown that religious

disaffiliation and religious differences between family members can lead to a number of significant individual and relational challenges (Longo & Kim-Spoon, 2014; Stokes & Rengerus, 2009). However, research has also identified that while religious disaffiliation often adds strain to relationships, under some circumstances it can also lead to improved relational trajectories in families (Worwood et al., 2020). In light of these associations established by previous research, more research is needed that provides insights into the *processes* that contribute to relational challenges due to religious differences or religious disaffiliation, as well as factors or processes that might protect and strengthen family relationships when member(s) leave the familial religion.

There is similarly a lack of research on the impact of religious differences on intergenerational relationships. Specifically, little is known about how religious differences influence grandparent-grandchild relationships and how religious differences might impact parents' gatekeeping behaviors between their children and their children's grandparents. The most notable series of studies that has looked at religion and intergenerational relationships is Bengtson and colleagues' (2002, 2009, 2013, 2017) *Longitudinal Study of Generations*, which compiled data from over 3,000 individuals from four generations of 350 families. They found that grandparents played an important role in their grandchildren's religiosity and religious beliefs, both in conjunction with the grandchildren's parents and independent of the children's parents (Bengtson et al., 2009). However, Bengtson and colleagues' research was only able to offer limited insights into the role of religious differences and intergenerational relationships, and the data used is now two decades old, with the final wave being collected in 2000.

Multigenerational households are increasing in popularity in the United States (Marquez-Velarde, 2020; Pilkauskas et al., 2020). The degree of grandparent involvement in the lives of their grandchildren is often dependent on the quality of parent-grandparent relationships (Doyle et al., 2010; Uhlenberg & Hammil, 1998). Because parents often act as gatekeepers between the grandparents and grandchildren (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1992; Robertson, 1975), it is important to understand parents' perceptions of the roles that religion and religious differences play in how they perceive the relationships between their parents and their children, as well as relationships between their children and other members of the parents' family of origin (e.g., the parents' siblings, the parents' aunts and uncles, etc.).

While a growing body of literature has begun exploring how nonreligious parents socialize their children in regard to religion or nonreligion (e.g., Bengtson et al, 2018; McClure, 2019; Thiessen, 2016), there remains a need for additional research in this area that includes a focus on how parents' perceptions of the intergenerational family dynamics influence their decisions. In particular, research that delves into how a parent's own religious upbringing, current worldviews, and their religious differences with their family of origin influence how they choose to socialize their children in regard to religious and nonreligious worldviews is needed.

Given the dearth of research on the experiences of nonreligious adult parents and their relationships, this study was designed to address these gaps in the current literature through an analysis of 33 interviews with nonreligious couples ($N = 66$ individuals) who are raising or have raised one or more children together. Specifically, the current study has the potential to address both how nonreligious parents perceive the impact of

religious differences on their relationships with their family of origin and on the intergenerational relationships between their family of origin and their children, as well as how nonreligious parents approach the (non)religious socialization of their children. As much of the research available has focused on the negative outcomes of religious disaffiliation, this study includes an intentional focus on understanding nonreligious parents' perceptions of protective factors that help maintain or strengthen their family relationships amidst religious differences.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

**Trends in Religious Disaffiliation**

Over the past three decades, the number of religious 'nones' (as defined in Chapter 1) in the United States has increased from approximately 5% of the overall population to 29% of the overall population (Pew Research Center, 2022a). This increase has largely been driven by individuals leaving Christian denominations; approximately 90% of Americans identified as Christian three decades ago in contrast to the 63% of Americans identifying as Christian today. The percentage of individuals in religions outside of Christianity has remained fairly stable (Pew Research Center). A number of projections, which vary based on the degree of religious switching, suggest that the number of Christians in the United States will be somewhere between 35-54% of the population in 2070 (Pew Research Center, 2022b). Currently, religious disaffiliation has been the primary driver of the increasing number of religious nones. However, as this demographic continues to grow, it is predicted that the irreligious socialization of children will become the primary force driving this trend (Thiessen & Wilkins-Laflamme, 2017, 2020).

While religious disaffiliation can look very different across individuals, leaving religion is typically a gradual and complex process that is described as a painful but liberating experience (Smith, 2011; Streib, 2020; Zuckerman, 2015). Religious disaffiliation or decreased involvement in religion is most often observed in late

adolescence or young adulthood (Fowler, 1991; Zuckerman, 2015). Adolescents and young adults will question the religious beliefs and practices established in their upbringing by their parents or other parental figures as a normative part of their development as they are exposed to new ideas and belief systems through their peers or education (Fowler). Following this period of religious exploration, some individuals may choose to return to the religion they were raised in, often following marriage or childbearing and childrearing (Merino, 2012; Schleifer & Chaves, 2017; Uecker et al., 2016; Wuthrow, 2010).

Although the number of individuals who have left religion has increased substantially in recent years (Pew Research Center, 2022), it is interesting to note that many of the reasons *why* individuals leave their religion appear to be somewhat stable. This is illustrated by a 25-year-old study in which Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1997) conducted interviews with 46 college students who had been raised in highly religious homes yet had rejected their familial religion and nearly all its doctrines. While there are innumerable and complex reasons why people leave their religion, Altemeyer and Hunsberger's analysis identified many of the same reasons for leaving as presented by Zuckerman's (2015) more recent mixed-methods study. Zuckerman identified nine items that increase the likelihood that individuals reject religion. These reasons include (1) being raised by partially or nonreligious parent(s), (2) increasing education, (3) hardships (personal or observed) and subsequent questioning of God's goodness, involvement, and existence, (4) experiencing cultural pluralism, (5) the influence of friends and peers, (6) political views, (7) rejection of religious boundaries regarding sex, (8) rejection or resentment of ideas regarding judgement and hell, and (9) observing and experiencing

hypocrisy among religious people. Although these general reasons for leaving have persisted over several decades, trends within these categories may have shifted. For example, increased attention on LGBTQIA+ rights, which conflict with some traditional religious teachings, doctrines, and policies, has become an increasingly salient factor in decisions to leave religion, though concerns over LGBTQIA+ rights are typically only one reason cited among many other drivers of religious disaffiliation (Brenner, 2019; Djupe & Neiheisel, 2023).

### *Theories of Secularization*

Secularization, or generational succession, appears to play the largest role in the increasing number of nonreligious Americans (Hout & Fisher, 2014). This includes not only the increasing number of religious nones raising nonreligious children, but it also includes the idea that as each generation becomes more secular than the previous generation, many parents who identify as religious are not socializing their children in the beliefs and practices of the religion (Thiessen & Wilkins-Laflamme, 2017)

As religion becomes more of a cultural identity rather than a religious one built on beliefs, practices, and communities, nominally religious parents are (whether intentionally or not) socializing nonreligious children. When this occurs, it is not a drastic lifestyle change when individuals disaffiliate from their family's religious identity. Indeed, much of the current increase in the number of religious nones results from a change in religious identity, rather than in religious participation, as many of the actively religious still appear to be staying religious (Hout & Fisher, 2014; Merino, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2015). This is further evidenced in Zuckerman's (2015) interviews with religious disaffiliates, in which about half of the sample had at least one of their parents

who was somewhat nonreligious. However, the changing religious landscape in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2022a) may also be increasing the social acceptability of individuals leaving actively religious homes, and thus decrease some of the challenges and negative outcomes associated with religious disaffiliation; continued research is needed to investigate this.

In contrast to the secularization theory is the individualization theory, which posits that religion is *changing* rather than declining (Ammerman, 2014). Specifically, individualization theory argues that religion is not being rejected due to modernization, but rather it is being replaced by focusing energy on more subjective, individual pursuits outside of organized religion (Pollack & Pickle, 2007). In other words, while there is a change in form, there are limited changes in significance. From an individualization lens, religious switching may be a more accurate term than religious disaffiliation. Such pursuits can include anything from social justice movements, to parenting practices, to exercise and healthy eating, and more (Zahl, 2019). While research on secularization versus individualization theories is limited (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2020), and debate remains around these two theories, research supports the argument that individualization only accounts for part of the current secularization trends (Pollack, 2015; Pollack & Pickle).

**Individual Costs and Benefits of Religious Disaffiliation**

In considering how religious disaffiliation can influence relationships, it is important to first acknowledge the substantial influences it can have on individual well-being. As noted earlier, religious disaffiliation can be a complex process that often includes both painful and joyful experiences (Streib, 2020). The costs of leaving religion

may be greater depending on whether the disaffiliation constituted a mild or transformative apostasy (Zuckerman, 2015). Transformative apostasy, or exit from a high-demand religion or rejection of a highly religious lifestyle (including strict adherence to various religious beliefs and practices), is typically more costly and can result in a loss of identity and the need for identity reconstruction that can last for many years (Gull, 2021; Hookway & Habibis, 2015; Zuckerman).

Another factor to consider is the depth of the rejection. Zuckerman (2015) distinguished "shallow" apostasy from "deep" apostasy, with the shallow group being comprised of those who reject religion but still consider themselves to be spiritual or not fully secular, while the deep group includes those who consider themselves fully secular, not at all spiritual, and reject religion completely. Typically, deep apostasy includes more challenges for individuals as they deconstruct their belief system and reconstruct their worldview. When compared to those who remained either consistently religiously affiliated or religiously unaffiliated, one large, nationally representative sample showed that those who disaffiliated from religion reported poorer health and overall well-being (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016). This decrease in health and well-being was completely mediated by religious service attendance, and the authors emphasized the importance of understanding the social costs and processes of religious disaffiliation (Fenelon & Danielsen). Qualitative interviews with 24 individuals who left Christian fundamentalist groups supported this finding, while also highlighting some of the struggles individuals face when leaving their religious community (Nica, 2019). Specifically, depending on the quality of the relationship prior to disaffiliation, many participants reported struggling with the loss of both formal (e.g., pastors) and informal (e.g., religious community

members) relationships, as well as some of the initial struggles to find and construct a new support system after disaffiliation. For many participants, time was an important factor in decreasing the perceived community losses and increasing the benefits of creating new support systems (Nica).

Through a family stress theory lens (Hill, 1949), community involvement and support can be viewed as a salient resource that should be considered in understanding the impact of religious disaffiliation on the family system. For example, while the individual finding community outside the religious group is important, whether they retain support from members of the religious community, and how the religious community supports the family system as a whole, can all play an important role in how the family functions.

The costs of disaffiliation can also be exacerbated by the societal and physical circumstances of the individual or family. In areas with more difficult living conditions, religiosity is generally more prevalent and associated with higher levels of subjective well-being than in areas with a higher standard of living (Diener et al., 2011). Thus, consistent with higher levels of secularity found in wealthier countries (Zuckerman, 2007), the costs of leaving religion are often less in more affluent areas and communities than they appear to be in less socioeconomically favorable circumstances (Diener et al.). However, even in countries that are highly industrialized and that are more secular as a whole, disaffiliation from high-cost religions can still be a very difficult and painful process.

Björkmark and colleagues' (2021) recent interviews with disaffiliates from high-cost religions in Finland found that participants perceived their disaffiliation as leaving

them "broken as a human being," and left them living with fear and guilt, pain for what they had lost, and a long process of reconstructing their identity (p. 7). However, although these costs remained poignant, they were often mentioned alongside a theme of freedom and joy. Some of the specific benefits mentioned included feeling empowered, a sense of relief, and feeling as though a new world had opened up to them.

**Religious Disaffiliation and Family Relationships**

Although more research has focused on the many ways religious disaffiliation can influence individual well-being, the research available also suggests that there are salient ties between religious disaffiliation and relational well-being. Religious disaffiliation has been associated with decreased family functioning across a number of measures (Knight et al., 2019; Newfield, 2020; Zimmerman et al. 2015). Research has found that religious disaffiliation can lead to relational rifts in parent-child relationships that may span decades (Hwang et al., 2018). This may be especially true if other family members are extremely religious or if the familial faith is a high-cost religion (Stokes & Rengerus, 2009; Zimmerman et al., 2015). However, even in such circumstances, most families appear to maintain at least some contact with members who have disaffiliated (Newfield, 2020).

Knight and colleagues (2019) conducted interviews with five family systems from five different religious traditions, including at least one member who had disaffiliated and one who had remained in the familial religion. They found that both religious "leavers" and "stayers" reported a decrease in frequency or quality of communication, a lack of feeling understood, decreased participation in family events, awkward interactions, and painful emotional responses. Based on their findings and theory, they provided several

suggestions for families and clinicians working with families who are navigating religious differences. Some of these suggestions included practicing empathy, engaging in open and respectful conversations around religious journeys and experiences, and reframing former beliefs. Through a family stress theory lens, these suggestions map onto the importance of perceptions. Religious beliefs that relate religious belonging and salvation or an afterlife may be particularly important to understand and reframe in light of religious disaffiliation.

Interviews with emerging adults who had left the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a high-cost religion (Scharp & Beck, 2017), identified a number of relational turning-points between the children and their parents which either brought them closer together or increased relational rifts between them (Worwood et al., 2020). These turning points included interactions such as having open conversations about religious (non)beliefs, confrontation, withdrawal, third-party events, and setting boundaries. They further identified four relational trajectories, in which the relational turning points either led to a disrupting, turbulent, declining, or accelerating relational trajectory. While this research provides valuable insights into the complexity of the intersection of religious disaffiliation and family relationships, continued research on turning points and relational trajectories is needed among religious disaffiliates from diverse religious denominations.

### *Religious Disaffiliation, Religious Differences, and Intergenerational Relationships*

Longitudinal research has found that grandparents play an important role in the religious socialization of their grandchildren, both in conjunction with and independent from the role that parents play (Bengtson et al., 2017, 2020). McClure's (2019)

qualitative research with 20 nonbeliever parents residing in the Bible Belt provided some insights into the challenges nonreligious parents face when religious family members attempt to push religious beliefs or practices onto their children. In particular, many of the parents interviewed reported proselytizing attempts by Christian family members; 90% of the parents who had experienced such proselytizing viewed it as being potentially harmful to their children, especially as children aged and were more easily influenced by the beliefs and practices of these Christian family members. Accounts of proselytizing efforts varied greatly, from some participants reporting that it did not occur and religion was a topic that was completely avoided, to others reporting family members violating salient boundaries. An extreme example of this was one grandparent who baptized the grandchild without the parents' knowledge.

While this literature provides some insights, there remains very little research on the relational impacts of religious disaffiliation among adult parents. How grandparents' desire to transmit their religion to their grandchildren is navigated by nonreligious parents requires research. In particular, research is needed on both how religious differences influence nonreligious parents' gatekeeping behaviors between their children and the children's grandparents, as well as how having children interacts with religious differences to influence the parent-grandparent relationship.

### *Religious Differences and Family Stress Theory*

Hill (1949) proposed the ABC-X family crisis model, in which A represents a stressor event, B represents the family's resources, and C represents the family's perceptions. There are bidirectional associations between each of these factors, where the stressor will influence the resources and perception, and the resources and the perceptions

will influence each other and the stressor. These factors interact with each other to create the stress that is experienced by the family as a whole. If this stress becomes distress, or reaches a level that cannot be met without adaptions to the family's current processes and functioning, it becomes a crisis, which is represented by X.

Applying the ABC-X model to the focus of this study, religious differences between family members can be viewed as a stressor event (A), that when considered in conjunction with the family's resources (B) and the family's perceptions (C), will determine the level of stress that is experienced by the family in response to the religious differences and whether the experienced stress leads to a crisis (X). Among the various adaptations of family stress theory is the family adjustment and adaptation response (FAAR) model. The FAAR model (Patterson, 1988) emphasizes that when a family enters crisis, they must adapt to regain equilibrium. These adaptations may lead to bonadaptation (i.e., when family functioning improves from the level of functioning observed before the crisis) or maladaptation (i.e., when family functioning decreases from the level of functioning observed before the crisis).

Religious disaffiliation is one of the most stressful manifestations of religious differences. Most of the small body of literature focused on the effects of religious disaffiliation on family relationships has found that religious disaffiliation often leads to maladaptive relational processes, such as poorer communication, less emotional intimacy, and fewer positive interactions between family members (Knight et al., 2019; Newfield, 2020; Zimmerman et al. 2015). While very little research has focused on how relationships can be maintained or strengthened following a religious transition, the FAAR model sensitizes researchers to investigate how a stressor event can lead to both

diminished and improved relational functioning depending on a family's resources and perceptions.

**Nonreligious Parents Approaches to the (Non)Religious Socialization of Their Children**

Until recent years, much of the research on nonreligious individuals and families has conceptualized nonreligion as simply an absence of religious beliefs. Research is now beginning to show that this is an inaccurate, oversimplified view of nonreligious belief and practice for many individuals and families. Similarly, nonreligious transmission has been previously viewed as primarily the failure to successfully transmit religious beliefs, but it is increasingly clear that nonreligious transmission can also be an intentional, explicit socialization effort among parents as well as grandparents (Bengtson et al., 2018). Through qualitative analyses of intergenerational relationships, Bengtson et al. found that while nonreligious socialization occurred unintentionally by creating "religious rebels" (p. 269), typically stemming from raising children in an overly religious or strict household, many parents were also engaging in intentional nonreligious socialization. Specifically, two themes of intentional nonreligious socialization were identified by Bengtson et al.'s research: the intentional socialization of Humanism and Humanistic values along with the intentional socialization of atheistic ideals.

This finding is supported and nuanced by research from the longitudinal General Social Survey which found that recent generations of individuals raised by nonreligious parents are more likely to remain nonreligious than those raised by nonreligious parents in previous generations (Merino, 2012). Reasons for this shift include that these later cohorts have had an  explicitly secular and liberal upbringing, including a wariness towards organized religion. Further, recent cohorts are more likely to marry nonreligious

individuals, reducing the rates of returning to or joining a religion that can often accompany family formation (Schleifer & Chaves, 2017; Uecker et al., 2016), and thus increasing the rates of nonreligious socialization when these individuals choose to have children.

In addition to research on the intentional socialization of nonreligious beliefs, some qualitative research has also provided insights into *how* nonreligious parents socialize their children with regard to other religious worldviews. Thiessen's (2016) interviews with 60 marginally religious and nonreligious parents in Canada found that while marginally religious parents were inclined to introduce their children to religious beliefs, nonreligious parents expressed a preference to let their children explore religious ideas on their own. However, both groups of parents expressed a strong desire to not impose either religious or secular beliefs on their children.

A qualitative case study with a family who had been nonreligious for three generations (the grandparents had grown up nonreligious) in Germany, where secularism has been normative and accepted for these three generations, examined how nonreligious family members interacted with religion (Gärtner, 2020). The case study showed that for this family, religion played a situational role, in that it only mattered on the rare occasions when members interacted with religious individuals or institutions outside of the family. The family expressed respect for religion as a personal, private experience, but saw or experienced difficulties with religion when it interfered with secular beliefs. In this way, the family experienced and socialized their children to view religion and secularism in a hierarchical manner, where secular and scientific knowledge were viewed as superior to religious beliefs and practices.

While Gärtner (2020) emphasized the role of the environment in providing opportunities to nonreligious individuals to interact with religious worldviews, Strhan and Shilitoe's (2019) ethnographic study emphasized the importance of the cultural context and the socialization that takes place outside of home in cementing individuals nonreligious beliefs. This study took place in Great Britain, currently a far more secular context than the United States, where being nonreligious is modal (see Woodhead et al., 2016). While these studies from European contexts provide valuable insights into how nonreligious parents socialize their children with regard to secular and religious worldviews, more research on this topic is needed among Americans, where the more religious context can play an important role in influencing parents' approaches to the (non)religious socialization of their children.

Manning's (2015) mixed-methods study investigating how religious nones raise their children is perhaps the most insightful study on the topic among individuals residing in the United States. The book-length analysis highlights both the diversity of religious nones and of the challenges nonreligious parents face, particularly when living in highly religious communities. Manning created four classifications of religious nones: Unchurched Believers, Spirituality Seekers, Philosophical Secularists, and Indifferent Individuals. In addition to these four classifications, Manning's analysis discussed the fluidity of nonreligious identities, including how time, place, and relationships influenced one's (non)religious identity. Focusing specifically on parenting, Manning's interviews provided insights into how becoming a parent could prompt a return to religion for some and solidify a nonreligious identity for others.

Regarding diversity among religious nones, Manning (2015) identified five distinct paths parents took with the (non)religious socialization of their children. First, providing a traditional religious education, through returning to church or teaching and integrating religious practices into the home (most common among unchurched believers). The second path relied on joining groups that provided community structures and were open to (e.g., Unitarian Universalists) or taught (e.g., Humanist groups) nonreligious worldviews. The third path focused on teaching children of diverse worldviews in the home, without any institutional support. The fourth path was outsourcing their children's religious education to extended family members or enrolling them in formal religious education programs. The final path Manning identified was taking no actions at all to transmit a religious or secular worldview to children.

An important conclusion of Manning's (2015) research was that there is a great deal of diversity within and across religious nones' approaches to the religious socialization of their children that more research is needed to elucidate. As the religious landscape continues to rapidly evolve in the United States, continued research on nonreligious parents' efforts and challenges in the (non)religious socialization of their children is needed. Further, understanding how parents' own religious experiences and religious differences between parents and their family of origin influence nonreligious parents' approach to their children's (non)religious education is also needed.

## Current Study

In light of the findings reported by previous research, more research is needed that provides insight into the processes that contribute to relational outcomes following

religious disaffiliation. Specifically, through a qualitative investigation of the connections between religious disaffiliation and relational well-being, this study was designed to help increase understanding of the risk factors and processes related to religious differences and disaffiliation that may lead to maladaptation in family relationships. A strengths-based approach (Dollahite & Marks, 2020) is applied to identify resources or perceptions that may act as protective factors for family relationships, as well as processes (i.e., interactions between the stressor, resources, and perceptions) that may help foster bonadaptation in families facing religious differences.

While the FAAR model (Patterson, 1988) is used as a sensitizing lens that encourages the investigation of pathways to both bonadaptation and maladaptation, a cohesive theory on the relational outcomes of intergenerational religious differences and religious disaffiliation among parents is lacking. Thus, in addition to investigating the processes and perceptions that contribute to relational bonadaptation and maladaptation, this study aims to integrate novel findings and patterns that are grounded in data from in-depth interviews with 33 religiously unaffiliated, heterosexual couples ($N = 66$ individuals) into focused models of the factors and processes that influence adults' relational well-being amidst religious differences. The following research questions will guide my inquiry:

> **RQ1**: What are nonreligious adults' perceptions of the influence of their exit from their familial religion or general religious differences on their relationships with their family of origin, including their parents, siblings, and extended family members? What protective factors (e.g., perceptions, resources, processes, etc.)

promote bonadaptation (i.e., improved family functioning) amidst religious transitions and religious differences?

**RQ2**: What are nonreligious adults' perceptions of how religious differences influence the relationships between their children and their family of origin (i.e., the children's grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.)?

**RQ3**: How do nonreligious parents socialize their children in regard to (non)religion and spirituality?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

**Sample Selection Procedures**

The sample was identified primarily through contacting various Humanist and atheist groups from across the United States. Specifically, the American Humanist Association (americanhumanist.org) provided a list of over 200 relevant organizations. After obtaining Institutional Review Board Approval from Brigham Young University (protocol #17179), our research team contacted these groups via email whenever an email address was provided to make them aware of this research opportunity. We also identified a number of Humanist and atheist groups on Facebook and used Facebook messenger to contact those groups as well. Specifically, emails or messages were addressed to the leader of the group and invited them to share this opportunity with couples in their group who would potentially be interested in participating. The email included information about the project and an email address where individuals could contact a member of the research team directly if they were interested in participating or if they had any questions related to the research project. Once an individual or couple contacted our team, we set up a brief screening call to identify whether they met the inclusion criteria, to answer any questions they had, and to set up a time for the interview.

Inclusion criteria included that the couple be married, had raised (or were raising) at least one child together, that neither partner reported belonging to a specific religious denomination, and that both members of the marital dyad were willing to be interviewed

together. In line with our strengths-based approach (Dollahite & Marks, 2020), we also invited couples to be interviewed who reported that they considered their marriage to be a happy marriage. These criteria were created with the intent of consistency with overarching goals and structure of the larger American Families of Faith project (americanfamiliesoffaith.byu.edu) that has explored couples from a variety of religious denominations. This project was intended to similarly understand marital and familial processes that promote relational success among nonreligious families, as well as to understand how religion has impacted and continues to impact their overall well-being and relationships with others.

Although we intended to recruit a sample that was more representative of the religiously unaffiliated population in the United States, we struggled to find participants who fell under this larger umbrella term who did not identify as atheist or Humanist (e.g., spiritual but not religious, agnostic, etc.) as we were unable to identify many nonreligious groups outside of atheist or Humanist groups. We intentionally strove for geographic diversity by contacting groups from different states in order to obtain a sample that came from each of the eight different socio-religious regions of the United States, as described by Silk and Walsh (2011).

**Sample Description**

In depth interviews were conducted in 2018 with 33 heterosexual married couples ($N = 66$ individuals). Participants ranged in age from 23 to 75 years with a mean of 44.0 years. The majority of the sample (86%) was White. Most of the sample was highly educated, with approximately 70% of the sample having completed a four-year college degree or more, though the sample ranged from completing some high school to

completing a doctoral degree. The number of children ranged from one to four, with two children being both the average and modal number per couple. Participants reported that their children ranged in age from newborn to adult, with the average child age being 15.4 years.

Consistent with recent survey data that shows that the majority of individuals who currently identify as religious nones were raised as part of a specific religious denomination (Lipka, 2016), the large majority of the sample (83%) reported that they had been raised in a specific religious tradition. With the exception of one participant who was raised in a Jewish household, all participants that reported having been raised in a religious tradition reported that it had been a Christian denomination (e.g. presbyterian, Catholic, LDS), though there was significant diversity in the Christian denominations that participants hailed from. Additionally, many participants, including those who had not been raised in a specific religious tradition, described personally exploring a variety of religious traditions, including faiths outside of Christianity. As a result, many participants drew insights from experiences with these non-Christian religious groups into their responses as well. For those who were raised in a specific religious denomination, the reported age of disaffiliation from their religion of origin (the faith they were raised in as children, also referred to as the familial faith) ranged from 9 to 38 years of age, with the average age at disaffiliation being 20 years old. Initial reviews and analyses of the data suggest that even participants who were not raised in a specific religious affiliation provide valuable insights in the perceived effects of religious disaffiliation and religious differences on family relationships, and thus were retained for analysis in the current

sample. Participants' information, grouped by couples, age, religious background, age of disaffiliation, and current worldview is reported in Appendix A.

Interviews were conducted using video-conferencing technology. Couples were interviewed together in a manner that allowed them to build from, correct, and add to each other's responses (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Interviews lasted between just under an hour to over three hours, lasting approximately one hour and 45 minutes on average. Interviews were semi-structured and consisted of approximately 25 open-ended questions (see Appendix B). To encourage both members of the dyad to speak equally, couples were instructed to alternate who responded to each question first. These questions focused on participants' experiences with religion, current worldviews, and relationships with both their family of origin and their family of creation (i.e., their marital relationship and their parent-child relationships). Consistent with a semi-structured interview design, follow-up questions were used to clarify responses and to elicit additional information, examples, or experiences. Interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were completed and checked by undergraduate research assistants.

**Analysis**

After obtaining Institutional Review Board Approval from Utah State University (protocol #13206) to conduct a secondary analysis of the data that had been previously collected, I combined interpretative grounded theory coding techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) with a systematic, team-based approach to the analysis of these data (Levitt et al., 2018; Marks, 2015). Specifically, I trained and directed a team of two undergraduate coders enrolled in a semester length research course in how to code the

data using NVivo software. Coders first engaged in reflexivity exercises before coding the data, which included reading several academic articles about the experiences of nonreligious parents and writing a brief reflection about their own experiences with religion, religious transitions, and family relationships. Coding included open, axial, and selective coding levels, consistent with an interpretative grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin). More specifically, for each of the three research questions, I worked with another individual[1] with prior experience with qualitative research to analyze and *open* code approximately 30% (n =10 interviews) of the data. In this stage, we reviewed and coded the data individually, noting and labeling all potential themes without assessing recurrence or salience. After open coding the data individually, we discussed our findings together. Through these discussions, we engaged in *axial* coding to combine and remove various themes based on both salience and prevalence (or lack of recurrence; see Marks, 2015), from which we created a codebook for each of the research questions (Bernard et al., 2016); all codebooks can be found in Appendix C.

The codebooks were given to undergraduate coders who I trained and worked with to systematically code each of the interviews. Interviews were coded twice in order to reduce biases and to assess interrater reliability (Levitt et al., 2018; Marks, 2015) using NVivo qualitative coding software. While the primary focus of this stage of coding was to systematically apply the codebook, consistent with an interpretative grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), the undergraduate coders were encouraged to still

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[1] The codebook for each research question was created with a different individual; RQ1 was created with my committee chair, a PhD researcher with prior experience in qualitative research in other content areas; RQ2 was created with one of the undergraduate coders after she had completed the coding for RQ1 and RQ3; RQ3 was created with a master's student with prior experience in qualitative research on religious families.

engage in axial coding. Specifically, I met with the coders approximately twice a weekly during this period to discuss their experience applying the codebook and provided them with opportunities to assess whether additions or modifications need to be made to the codebook in order to best capture the data. At the conclusion of this level of coding, I engaged in selective coding in order to create a model that best represented the processes underlying the identified themes and to identify accounts that best encapsulated the themes or that added nuance or contrasting perspectives to the identified themes. This process consisted of me individually and reflexively reading through the accounts coded in each theme multiple times as a I sought to select the accounts to include in the findings section and to create a model that would most accurately represent participants' experiences.

While such qualitative inquiry necessitates limited *a priori* expectations, I acknowledge one *a priori* expectation of this analysis and conceptual model. Specifically, in line with a family stress theory framework (Patterson, 1988), I anticipated that this conceptual model would illuminate processes, factors, and pathways to both improved family functioning (bonadaptation) and decreased family functioning (maladaptation). However, I also approached this analysis with an open mind, recognizing that the data may illuminate a different model that is not in-line with family stress theory and intentionally strove to also consider the data outside of this *a priori* assumption. Finally, to limit the influence of my internal biases, findings are presented in a way that emphasizes participants' own voices, with a number of direct quotes illustrating each of the identified themes (Marks, 2015).

**Reflexivity**

I still identify with the religious tradition (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) I was raised in, though I have gone through faith crises and am continually going through deconstruction and reconstruction efforts as I work to live in line with my personal beliefs and values. My ideas about religion and my religious beliefs are in many ways different than what they were when I was raised, even though my affiliation has remained the same. I have had family members who have left the familial religion and I have observed some of the struggles this process has created for them personally as well as the struggles that other family members have experienced in relation to their decisions. Both of the undergraduate coders also identified as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and also reported having family members who had disaffiliate from the religion.

Through several years of research (e.g., Kelley et al., 2020, 2022a, 2022b) and through personal experience, I feel acutely aware of how religion can be both a helpful and a harmful force in family relationships. However, given my current involvement in religion, I acknowledge that I may be predisposed towards focusing on the benefits of religion. This is a bias I have intentionally and actively striven to be aware of and keep in check in working with this sample in particular (Kelley et al., 2022b). One example of how I intend to intentionally be aware of and limit the influence of personal biases in the research processes is through a heavy reliance on participants' own voices in reporting on the results of this study (Marks, 2015; Marks & Dollahite, 2018).

## CHAPTER IV

## RESULTS

**RQ1: Religious Differences and Adult Family Relationships**

Across participants, religious disaffiliation and religious differences had salient impacts on the adult relationships between participants and their family of origin. In coding for the impact of religion on these relationships, nearly twice as many accounts (84 accounts across 28 interviews) of a negative relational trajectory were coded compared to accounts identified of a positive relational trajectory (45 accounts across 19 interviews). Though these numbers paint an initial picture, there were an additional 54 accounts (across 25 interviews) of a mixed trajectory, suggesting that costs in one area often came with improvements in others. However, despite the salient impact of religious differences on many relationships, there were a number of specific relationships or specific differences that had little effect on relational well-being, with 67 accounts coded across 28 interviews in which these differences appeared to have negligible impacts. For example, Luke, after reporting religious friction with his parents, said in regard to the impact of religion on his sibling relationships, "My siblings, not at all."

The majority of the accounts identified were focused on the relationship with participants' parents (172 accounts across 33 interviews). This was followed by other extended family members (99 accounts across 26 interviews), siblings (98 accounts across 30 interviews), and grandparents (42 accounts across 15 interviews). Additionally, in discussing religious differences, participants often commented on their family

members' religious journeys. Across 34 interviews, there were 130 accounts of family

members remaining or increasing in their religiosity and 87 accounts across 26 interviews

of family members questioning or decreasing in religiosity, while there were 24 accounts

coded across 17 interviews of participants reporting a lack of knowledge of a family

member's current religiosity. Interrater reliability for this coding project was $\kappa = .57$,

suggesting moderate agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

While these numbers are included as a contextualizing lens, the focus of this

section is on the sources of conflict identified and the strategies participants reported they

and their religious family members employ to cope with these differences. Three broad

sources of conflict were identified, as well as three unique approaches to coping with

these conflicts. In exploring these themes, a heavy emphasis is placed on participants

own words in a way that illustrates the relational impact of these sources of conflict and

approaches to coping.

### *Sources of Conflict or Relational Distance*

In looking at how religious differences impact adult familial relationships, three

primary sources of conflict or relational distance were identified: religious concern from

the family of origin, participants perceiving religious pressure from religious family

members, and participants' concerns of offending or hurting their relatives. Table 1

displays the frequency of these themes across the interviews.

**Table 1.**

*Numeric Content Analysis of Sources of Conflict or Relational Distance*

| Theme | # of Interviews | # of References | % Interviews | Avg. references per interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| FOO's concern for participants | 21 | 56 | 64% | 2.7 |
| Participants perceiving religious pressure | 28 | 75 | 85% | 2.7 |
| Participant fear of offending FOO | 18 | 44 | 55% | 2.4 |

*Note.* FOO = Family of Origin. The percent of interviews column is calculated as the number of sources the theme appeared in divided by the total number of interviews (33). The average references per source is calculated as the number of references divided by the number of sources the theme was identified in (i.e., # References/# Interviews). When a spouse simply agreed or echoed what their partner said about the same theme, this was only counted as one reference. When a participant stated something additional or separate from what their spouse said, but still related to the theme, this was counted as a unique reference.

**FOO's Concern for Participants and Participants' Children.** Nearly two-thirds of the couples interviewed reported perceiving that members of their family of origin were concerned for their current or future (including after death) well-being due to their lack of religion. Distinct from the other sources of conflict identified, the accounts coded in this theme were less focused on relational conflict stemming from religious differences and were more focused on internal conflicts and pain participants observed their lack of religious adherence cause their family members. Lynette[2] described this in her in-laws, saying, "They're extremely accepting of people with different beliefs, it's just this core ingrained, this existential fear they have that if anyone believe[s] differently, these people they love, they're going to suffer."

The accounts in this theme often included a sentiment of understanding and even

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[2] All names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

empathy from participants towards their family members, as illustrated in the following discussion from Noah and Angela:

> **Noah**: When [we] got together and I [told my wife], "You know it's not like my people are going to shun you because you're an atheist. They're going to be worried about you. They're going to be worried about your soul. They're going to be worried for you. . . . They're going to see how happy I am, they're going to be impressed with you as a person, with your brain and your humor and they're going to see how fundamentally whole I am. But they are going to worry. . . . They really aren't going to shun you, they're just going to be worried that you're going to go to hell.
>
> **Angela**: And if they didn't like me, they wouldn't care. The fact that they're worried is a sign of them liking me.

Another Husband, Frank, gave his sister permission to perform "temple work," or religious ordinances performed on another's behalf after death among Latter-day Saints, to help reduce her worries. He said,

> My sister says she is going to do the temple work for me when I die, she's gonna get me baptized and I can reaccept it. And so, I say, "Okay, that's fine if that'll make you feel better. It's not going to bother me any because I'm going to be dead." So just don't flaunt it too much to my kids, they might get a little irritated if you make a big fuss about it, but I've told them that she's planning to do that and it's okay with me, there's no harm done. If it makes her feel better that's fine.

A husband named Daniel similarly recounted allowing his family members to bless him:

> They know what my views of the world are and what my views of God are. And

they put their hands on me and raised their faces to God and asked God to bless

me and keep me well and guide me and help [me], and have everything get better

and would Jesus shine his light on me. And I was just like okay, . . . "Thank you

very much." They mean it out of the goodness of their heart, and they mean it

lovingly, and though it might not be my [thing], they're not forcing anything on

me.

The distinction Daniel made at the end of this account is important; while sincere

worries from family members were met with understanding and compassion from many

participants, attempts to change or influence religious beliefs or practices were often met

with frustration and resulted in relational conflict, as explored in the following theme.

**Participants Perceiving Religious Pressure from FOO.** A number of the

references identified in this theme focused on pressure from family members to raise

children in the familial religion or to participate in certain religious traditions (e.g.,

baptism, blessings, attending religious schools, etc.); these accounts focused specifically

on the children are explored in depth in RQ2 and thus not discussed further here.

Accounts identified in this section described general pressure to change or to engage in

religious beliefs or activities, as seen in the following account from Isabella:

I feel like some of my aunts and uncles as well as my cousins have branched out

more Evangelical and Protestant. And maybe it's because they're just coming to

the religion, but I feel like they are more devout and outspoken with it. And so,

they have definitely tried to push me back to the church and back to Jesus. And

then when they realized that didn't work, they are just flat out, I hate to say this, it

sounds juvenile, but they are just flat out mean about it—about me being an

atheist.

Isabella described very direct pressure that appeared to contain elements of bullying; this sort of direct pressure or attempts to change participants' religious beliefs appeared to have the most damaging influence on relationships. Many other participants reported experiencing religious pressure from family members in less direct ways, and the relational impact of these pressures varied but seemed to be milder overall. Tierra recounted,

> If I talk to my mom, she's like, "Oh, you should go to church. I haven't had depression since I've been to Bible study." I'm like, that's the one thing I don't want to hear. It's not going to help me.

Other participants experienced this pressure in the form of guilt. Colin said,

> I didn't really enjoy [church growing up]. So I kind of got pushed into it a little too hard and was turned off to the whole experience from that. . . . I still enjoy the holidays, of course, 'cause that was the fun part of the church growing up, and when my mother guilts me into going on holidays with her to church, then that happens occasionally.

Finally, several participants described experiencing religious pressure through jabs or passive-aggressive comments, as seen in the following quote from Sarah. She said, "[My sisters] sneak little, you can call it passive-aggressive comments in here and there, but it's not really a big deal." These comments could often be brushed off or ignored, as seen in this account. Participants' desires to avoid conflict or to not offend family members appeared to contribute to participants moving past these pressures rather than reacting to them, as explored more in the following theme.

**Participants Fear of Offending or Hurting FOO.** The accounts in this theme focused on participants feeling that they cannot express or discuss their religious identity or beliefs because they believed it would offend or harm their family members. Indeed, several participants spoke of not being able to "come out" as atheists. Miriel and Garrett said,

> **Miriel**: I'm an atheist and a Humanist . . . [but] I haven't come out to my communities yet. . . . Or my family. My family doesn't know.
>
> **Garrett**: As far [as] she's still in the closet with her atheism or agnosticism, there's really nothing there to ruin [her] relationships.
>
> While Miriel avoided coming out to her entire family and community, most

participants focused on specific family members who they feared being open about their beliefs with. Lynette recounted,

> I never outright told [my grandmother] this is what I believe because it would have been a nightmare scenario, but over time, many times I got into arguments with her and my grandfather about religion. . . . [For example,] me learning that a specific book in the bible wasn't written by the same person that it's dogmatically believed to have been written by. Saying that would cause a huge argument. Something that simple. So I could never approach them and say, "I don't believe this anymore."

Similarly, but with differing motivations, Noah said,

> I've never [told my mom] that I was atheist, [that] I don't believe. I would never straight up tell her that in a million years. . . . Why bother this wonderful woman? She raised us the best she could. . . . I guess the part I don't get about atheists is

why do they feel so fundamentally that everything has to be about them and antireligion and stuff? That stuff is important to her. That comfort is important to her. That's more important to me. I would never challenge her or make some mockery of her faith.

While a number of participants chose to not come out to their religious families for fear of offending or damaging relationships, there were a couple of participants who reported remaining actively involved in religion for fear of hurting family members. Nick said,

My grandfather was everything to me up until the day he died. So, there was a big part of my religious connection . . . was basically an attempt to stay connected to him. All of the warm feelings I have about my grandfather sort of were connected with the church. . . . It was not until my mom got sick, she had a type of dementia, and it was not until she was at the point that I knew she wouldn't understand what I was doing, that I actually left the church. I know now that that was because it was more important for her happiness than it was my unhappiness with the church.

Across this theme, religious differences prevented participants from being able to be themselves and be open about what they believed. However, as highlighted by these accounts, there was a wide variety in how this impacted participants, with some reporting that they were happy to pretend they still belong to the familial religion in order to protect their family members, and others experiencing feelings from hurt to resentment that they could not be open about their religious beliefs. These differing perspectives and how they impact the ways participants coped with the impact of religious differences on their

relationships are explored in more depth in the following section.

### *Coping and Response Strategies*

In discussing how they dealt with religious differences in their family relationships, participants provided insights into both their coping strategies as well as how they perceived their family members approached dealing with the religious differences. These coping strategies could be employed in both positive and negative ways, either protecting or damaging the family relationships.

Across the three subthemes identified in this section, the number of accounts coded under the participant employing the technique and accounts of participants perceiving their family member employed the technique were quite similar, with the exception of avoiding the topic of religion, in which 30 more accounts were identified under participants wanting to avoid the topic compared to their perception of family members wanting to avoid it. Table 2 presents the frequency of these themes across the interviews.

**Table 2.**

*Numeric Content Analysis of Coping and Response Strategies*

| Theme | # of Interviews | # of References | % Interviews | Avg. references per interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Avoidance (FOO) | 20 | 45 | 61% | 2.3 |
| Conversation (FOO) | 22 | 76 | 67% | 3.5 |
| Respect and Acceptance (FOO) | 25 | 81 | 76% | 3.2 |
| Avoidance (Participant) | 25 | 75 | 76% | 3.0 |
| Conversation (Participant) | 24 | 58 | 72% | 2.4 |
| Respect and Acceptance (Participant) | 20 | 52 | 61% | 2.6 |

*Note.* FOO = Family of Origin. The percent of interviews column is calculated as the number of sources the theme appeared in divided by the total number of interviews (33). The average references per source is calculated as the number of references divided by the number of sources the theme was identified in (i.e., # References/# Interviews). When a spouse simply agreed or echoed what their partner said about the same theme, this was

only counted as one reference. When a participant stated something additional or separate from what their spouse said, but still related to the theme, this was counted as a unique reference.

**Avoidance**. For many participants and their family members, avoiding the topic of religion was not an initial strategy chosen to cope with the religious differences, but rather a lesson-learned after conflicts or unproductive conversations centered around religion. Lynette said, "My grandmother was extremely upset for a very long time. Over time I think she just kind of bit her tongue about me not going to church." Other participants, however, reported avoiding the topic of religion completely. Elizabeth referred to her religious disaffiliation as "the elephant in the room."

A number of participants suggested that this desire to avoid the topic of religion was mutual, as seen in the following account from Stewart:

> [Religion] doesn't really come up, luckily. [My parents] really shut their mouth about my beliefs and our beliefs and I think that's honestly what I want and that's great… I know that they don't share it and they just leave it alone.

While many families were reportedly able to successfully avoid religious discussions while still engaging in meaningful interactions with each other, a few participants reported that their religious differences resulted in their family members avoiding most or all interactions with them. Garrett and Miriel recounted,

> **Garrett**: A lot of the family that we don't go see because either they whole-heartedly don't want us to come, or I know that it's not going to be a good thing to be around… After I resigned from the church, officially resigned, they don't really want a whole lot to do with us.

**Miriel**: Ever since you sent in your letter of resignation from the church, I haven't heard from your grandparents, I haven't heard from your uncle, your aunt.

**Garrett**: I've heard from them. [laughter]

**Miriel**: He hears negative things, I just don't hear from them…

**Garrett**: And that's the case certainly with some of my—pretty much all of my extended family—[they're] more or less on rare speaking terms with me.

While many of the accounts focused on avoiding religious discussions to protect relationships, as seen in this previous account, several participants reported that family members avoided religious discussions or other interactions to protect their religious identity, even at the cost of the relationship. Amanda said, "I try to have engaged epistemology kind of conversations with my mom and the wall goes up. She really wants to protect her ideas and her religion and her position."

Teresa described how her mom stayed in "denial" to protect both her religious ideas and her relationships:

 I think she is very comfortable inhabiting denial and so I think rather than bump up against the truth which would be one of the four of us saying, "No, actually none of the four of us believe in God," she's chosen to back off from the edges where she might bump into the truth, and just go back into this center of pretending that deep down we're all believing the same thing.

While many participants had family members who wished to avoid religious topics, and there was often a reported mutual agreement on this, a fair number of other participants spoke of the different tactics they employed to avoid religious discussions or conflicts when family members consistently brought the topic up. Luke relied on a

number of techniques, saying, "[My father] enjoys talking about it a lot. And I try to deflect, or respond with humor and sarcasm, and that usually doesn't work well." Other participants reported lying to family members to avoid religious discussions or revealing their lack of religious beliefs. Tierra described the following interaction,

> My mother is still very religious. I don't really talk to her about religion. She brings things up and I just kind of smile and nod and just let her go. I might say something here and there, but . . . I don't want to challenge her . . . 'cause she believes in it so deeply. It's very hard to dissuade her from her view. If I tell her I feel this way or that way, it would cause huge conflict. I had, at one point I said I was agnostic and actually had it on my Facebook page. When I friended my momma on Facebook a few years back, she looked at my profile and she said "Why do you have agnostic on your thing next to religion?" I said "Oh, I was going through this phase. I was trying to figure out really who I was and everything." And, she goes, "Okay, I see you figured out yourself." I said, "I'm still learning." She goes, "Okay, well, can you take that down? It's kind of bothersome." Yeah, and so I changed it to Christian and I just didn't feel like having an argument with her about it.

Finally, just as participants reported family members avoided them completely in order to avoid religious differences, a few participants also reported that their desire to avoid religious conversations resulted in them avoiding other interactions with their family members. Nick said, "We have absolutely nothing to talk about because she wants to bring everything back around to religion and I want nothing to do with it."

While avoiding the topic of religion was essential to the health of family relationships for many, intentionally engaging in conversation around religion was important for others' individual or relational well-being, as explored in the following section.

**Engaging in Conversations Related to Religion.** A number of participants' accounts of their family members initiating conversations about religion focused on parents trying to still parent their adult children by changing their religious beliefs or practices. Tierra said,

> [My parents] may make a suggestion, but it's a suggestion. If we take it, if we don't, they're fine with it. They know that we're going to figure out our own thing that's going to work with [our daughter] and we're going to run with that. My mom is slowly starting to understand that. But, she still every so often, gets into a mood and she'll say we should do this, this, this, this, this, and this.

While this previous account speaks of gradual understanding mixed in with being told how to live, many of the conversations about religion were one-sided, in line with the previous theme. Benjamin said,

> [My parents] still bring [religion] up now and then when we do get together, about how I should find a church. But then also to my sister, they're disappointed in my sister for not getting married. So, I'm assuming I'm just getting my little talk to about how I should be living my life at this point.

Religious differences impact both relational and individual well-being, and for many of these one-sided conversations, the focus appeared to be on protecting individual

well-being. Frank discussed the reason why he believed his sister-in-law would continually bring up religious ideals, saying,

> She just does gentle little things that don't really require a reaction and you understand that she is doing it out of positive belief in herself and so it doesn't require pushback. It's in a sense, no harm done.

Participants similarly reported that they too instigated conversations related to their worldviews that their family members didn't wish to engage in. Ephraim said, "There is an awkward silence when we start talking about certain things [and] try to enlighten them with what we believe in."

While for some, religious conversations filled an individual need, for others, they addressed relational needs. Erik described how conversations helped address his in-laws' fears for their well-being in the afterlife, saying,

> With her parents actually, her parents and grandparents, they fully accepted me even after finding out that I was atheist but there were definitely some conversations. I think they just kind of eventually accepted my answer like, "What if you go to Hell?" I guess then that's where I belong and I'd be comfortable enough with just, I am where I am because that's where I am.

Hannah described how, despite differing beliefs, engaging in conversations related to religion helped both her and her mom work through difficult times:

> I've had conversations with my mom. We've had some really interesting discussions. Her sister passed away at a young age, well, she was 45, but it was sudden. So we had to deal with that loss and grieving and asking big questions. So we've had discussions before about faith and we're all pretty much on the same

page which is kind of a relief because just someone I can say something openly to and I'm not worried they're going to judge or disown me.

Having left the familial religion, a number of participants reported that they were a safe person to come to for other family members exploring their religious identity. Lisa said, "Last time we were there all together the words were said that if you have some doubts about Mormonism and you want to find out about other points of view, talk to [my husband]. He's the go-to person." Angela described the many, deep conversations she had with her religious in-laws, saying:

> Your mom has asked me and I never know what to make of it because they're asking me to witness what the experience of nonbelief is like. And these are genuine conversations that are not them trying to convert me. It's almost like they're struggling with doubts that they have and they just kind of want to bounce those ideas off in a safe place… I'm always shocked when people have these conversations with me, cause it's not something I bring up. It's not a topic I would choose to discuss. And I don't even feel comfortable doing it because I never want to challenge faith and I'm always afraid that by witnessing what my experience is as a nonbeliever that I will end up converting you, which is not my intention at all. But I also don't feel good about not answering questions truthful[ly] about matters such as this. Because they are very deep questions, and people do really want to have these conversations when they want to have them, and they don't really have a lot of safe places to have them.

In addition to conversations fostering religious exploration, they also helped foster understanding and respect for a number of participants and their family members. Nathan recounted,

> I don't want to say I wasn't understanding or whatever of the Christian religion but with [my wife] having a set of grandparents that is very religious, . . . I had never really thought about being open to listening somebody talk about religion on a regular basis or something like that or having the understanding of where they were coming from in a religious way or something like that, so I guess it didn't really influence my beliefs but it probably forced me into being more accepting of somebody who was going to be around me all the time because up until . . . her dad was only in her life more and I didn't really have family members who were overly religious and I didn't have friends that were religious at all or anything like that so I never really heard anybody talk about religion anymore, to a degree, so I guess that change of . . . being more open to it or something.

This quote connects to the final theme of acceptance and respect as a way to navigate religious differences, as explored next.

**Acceptance and Respect Amidst Religious Differences.** Coming to accept or respect the religious differences was often a gradual process for both family members (as reported by participants) and participants themselves. Erik said, "I think that both of [my parents] over time… They've accepted that this is now the current state of being in general . . . and only I will change my own beliefs." Colin similarly described how his

parents hadn't yet accepted his lack of belief but had accepted him and his wife as individuals, saying,

> My parents haven't openly accepted it, but they've accepted the fact that they aren't gonna change us. They still try a little bit. . . . [My mom is] not happy about it [laughter] and she hasn't fully accepted it, but she doesn't push [it on me] anymore.

While acceptance was a gradual and incomplete process for many, for others, it came naturally. For example, for Leah and Roger, the religious differences were simply not an issue. They said,

> **Leah**: My parents, again I have no idea what they actually believe, but they're cool with us being atheist and raising [our son as a] atheist.
>
> **Roger**: Both our parents were totally fine with that.
>
> **Leah**: They were cool with it. There's never been any pressure from my family.

Daniel described that while some things were difficult for his parents to understand, he always felt accepted as an individual:

> My parents are very accepting. My mother always went out of her way to make people that we chose, my sister and I chose, to make them feel accepted. In my case, I don't think it was that hard, but in my sister's case it has been very difficult in all of her choices, . . . but my mother and my father have been very accepting [and] the religious difference [h]as never really came up as an issue. . . And they are very accepting of what we believe just as we are really accepting of what they believe even if it is very different than what we believe. I guess our

attitude is you can believe what you want, just don't impose what you believe on me.

While the respect for differing beliefs was often mutual as reported in this previous account, in some cases, being respectful of differing beliefs was an intentional but unreciprocated choice. Isabella said,

> When [my family members] realize that I don't push my beliefs on them, I think they feel like they can push their beliefs on me. So, I try to still be open and I want my daughter and my son to be around family. But when it comes to religion it makes it really difficult for them to have a nice conversation with me, just because they let religion get in the way. So, I'm trying my best not to put my foot in my mouth or not to overstep about being atheist, and I don't think I do. But it also comes to a point where if they attack me because I'm an atheist and I do have to say something, [I] just try to respond with compassion and understanding, just to make my life and my children's life a little easier with the family.

As seen in this previous account, respect for the differing beliefs stemmed from a desire to protect family relationships; this was common throughout this theme. Focusing on the relationship helped a number of participants work through issues or unkind behavior related to religious differences. Anne said,

> It has caused some issues. But I would say that, to be fair to his parents, I finally understand that the love that they have for their son and their family, it physically hurts them to think that we're not going to heaven. I feel like it causes them physical pain to think that we would not join them in heaven.

Bethany summed up the desire to accept and love her family members, regardless of religious differences, saying,

> I think our goal is to always remember that regardless of what you believe, you're my family member and I care about you, and you're important to me. What you believe is what you believe and that's fine. At the end of the day, that doesn't change the fact that you're my relative and I care about you, and I'll do whatever you need. I think that's sort of the underlying feeling amongst all of those family members even as the religious part of our belief systems are not on par.

While respect and acceptance as a way to cope with religious differences looked quite different across participants, of the three approaches identified, it most consistently appeared as a protective factor for relationships, both in immediate families and in intergenerational relationships as explored next in addressing RQ2.

## RQ2: Parents as Gatekeepers and Religious Differences in Intergenerational Relationships

Four themes were identified related to the nexus of religious difference and parents' role as gatekeepers between their children and their family of origin that demonstrated varying degrees of openness toward religion and the family of origin across participants. The frequency of the themes are reported in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

*Numeric Content Analysis of RQ2*

| Theme | # of Interviews | # of References | % Interviews | Avg. references per interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Engaging in Familial Religious Traditions | 16 | 29 | 48% | 1.8 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Setting Boundaries Around Religion with Family of Origin | 15 | 24 | 45% | 1.6 |
| Child's upbringing as a point of conflict | 20 | 29 | 61% | 1.5 |
| Child as a relational bridge | 11 | 16 | 33% | 1.5 |

*Note.* The percent of interviews column is calculated as the number of sources the theme appeared in divided by the total number of interviews (33). The average references per source is calculated as the number of references divided by the number of sources the theme was identified in (i.e., # References/# Interviews). When a spouse simply agreed or echoed what their partner said about the same theme, this was only counted as one reference. When a participant stated something additional or separate from what their spouse said, but still related to the theme, this was counted as a unique reference. Interrater reliability for this coding project was κ = .79, indicating substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

### *Theme 1: Engaging in Familial Religious Traditions*

About half of the couples in our sample discussed intentionally involving their children in familial religious practices which often served to reduce the impact of the religious differences on intergenerational relationships. For some, the reason behind this involvement was simply tradition, as seen in the following account from Emily:

We got both of our kids baptized and that was mainly on me because of the tradition of it more than the actual act of it, because everyone in my family was baptized in the same church, and so it's more of a traditional thing.

Other parents described involving their children in various religious traditions and practices when they were young and eventually growing out of engaging in these practices. Anne said, "So, my son was born and we, I took him to church, and I took him to church because I thought well, good families, good people go to church, they bring their kids to church." Anne proceeded to describe how several things she observed in church changed her opinion and led her to stop taking her son to church.

For a few participants, this was a longer journey of wanting to disengage from religious practices but continuing due to perceived pressures from family members as illustrated in the following quote from Agatha:

Obviously, I married a non-member knowing full well the ostracism, how I would be ostracized in the church, and I went to church anyway. I think I was skeptical for years. I started to have some problems with the church when my daughter started reporting that she was hearing some of the same kinds of things that I heard as a child–how sad it was that she wouldn't be with her family in heaven, and we had decide[d] together prior to her turning 8 that we were not going to allow her to be baptized at 8 years old. Even though I was active in the Church, and I still believed in the Church, I did not believe that 8 years old was old enough to make a decision of that magnitude. That's something that we agreed upon and that we communicated about and so when she turned 8 years old, we did not allow her to be baptized. So, classes after that, teachers would make little comments to her about how she really needed to get baptized and that started to upset me about the church, but I kind of kept going because I didn't want to upset my mom. I still had a feeling that it was true and that I could make it work. But I had heavy doses of skepticism.

While many accounts focused on similar struggles to continue religious traditions or practices that no longer fit their current belief system, other couples discussed how they adapted religious traditions to fit within their secular worldview. Isabella said,

We grew up Catholic, so baptism was a big deal for us. So, when we had our daughter . . . we had a humanist . . . officiate our daughter's naming ceremony.

And I think maybe my husband did it more just to please me, but I really wanted to do it. And [our daughter] used my communion gown that my grandmother made for me. And for me that was really important to pass that down. And I guess as far as traditions go, I think it's just like a family legacy. Like anything that I can pass down from my mother or my grandmother. So, we did the naming ceremony, and I was so much more over the hill happy and emotional than I thought I would be, which makes me happy to do it for my son. And I think those are the kinds of things that like not everybody, not every atheist needs that, but for me, that's what I guess I miss about religion. It's not worth it to go back for that, but I realized I can have my own traditions being secular.

For some parents, they passed the responsibility of sharing their familial religious traditions onto their children's grandparents or other extended family members. Anne said, "[We] felt like it was important that the kids knew his religion that he was raised in, so we let his parents take them to their church." For others, while it was less important to them personally to have their children exposed to the religious traditions they grew up with, they were open to allowing their parents to teach various religious traditions to their children. Nathan recounted,

> When she goes to her [grandparents'] house, . . . she does the prayer before meals and all that stuff, and we have no problem with that and when she comes home she knows at our house we don't do those things. So, she has learned just like we do to respect your family members, friends, and just anyone in general that you have your beliefs and I'm fine with that. I don't have a problem with that, just as long as you're not going to preach to me.

While Nathan was open to their child participating in religious activities with other family members, and indeed, emphasized the importance of respecting other religious practices, they set limits around family members preaching or trying to influence her beliefs. Setting boundaries around religion was an important way parents dealt with religious differences, as explored in the following theme.

### Theme 2: Religious Boundaries with Family of Origin

About half of the parents discussed boundaries around religious discussions or religious activities with their children as a way to address religious differences. Most of the boundaries discussed were unspoken or implicit, however, some parents recounted setting explicit boundaries with their families around religion. Teresa and Stewart described the firm stance they took to deal with Teresa's mother reading a book that addressed crucifixion to their child:

> **Teresa**: There's the new Bernstein Bear books that all have a very religious flavor that we never had when we were kids. So, I would catch her reading them those.
>
> **Stewart**: And then the Bernstein bible where there's Bernstein Bears killing other Bernstein bears.
>
> **Teresa**: Crucifying other [bears]. . . .
>
> **Stewart**: Oh yeah, I took that one and threw it [away]. . . . It was [my mother-in-law's], but I threw it in the garbage.

> Other parents talked about hypothetical boundaries they would set if the need arose. Tierra said,

> If my mother were to come in and start pushing her religious beliefs on my child, I would have to sit and say, "You can't do [that]. We're letting her make her own

decision. We can't force that or influence her in any way, shape, or form. It's just not right. It took me a long time to get to where I am on my own. Let her make it on her own, in her own time."

While some parents openly discussed boundaries with their family of origin, many participants alluded to boundaries that should be understood and respected without needing explicit conversations. Gabriel said,

I don't like the fact that they told my kids that their mom is going to hell. And the way they teased . . . my wife about not knowing [certain things, saying things like], "Well, I bet your mom doesn't even know the words to 'Jesus loves me.' Who doesn't know the words to that song? Everyone does. It's been on TV."

As seen in this previous quote, many of these implicit boundaries seemed to elucidate themselves when they were crossed and were often harmful to family relationships. Chloe described this, saying,

[My mom] doesn't believe in science. I was like, "Wait. What!?" It just kept making a wedge. It's one I don't think we'll ever get over because she really force feeds her religion to my children and that's not a good thing in my mind. I think it's overstepping a whole lot on her part.

Parents often similarly highlighted the ways that religious differences created intergenerational wedges, as explored more in the following theme.

### *Theme 3: Children's Upbringing as a Point of Conflict*

Participants reported that many members of their family of origin struggled with how they were raising their children outside of the familial religion. A common point of conflict focused on not completing religious rites such as baptism. Luke said, "There's

been some minimal friction [with my mom], like when [our daughter] was born, [she said], 'Oh, here's your old baptismal gown.' Don't think I'll need that, mom."

Zoe similarly recounted,

A Unitarian Universalist minister did our wedding vows and they were non-religious, and I don't think that upset [my mom] but when she knew we weren't gonna have our daughter baptized, that upset her. . . . So there was tension around that. After that, after my daughter was here, after my mom spent time with her, then even that tension went away and there was never a question of, are you going to consider going to church or whatever.

While this family was able to get past this conflict, for others, these religious differences had long lasting negative impacts on the relationships. Miriel and Garrett said,

**Miriel**: I used to hang out with [my sister-in-law]. She'd call me for everything. And then [we] had a blow-up and it hasn't ever been the same since. Basically, [in her mind], we're not raising our daughter right. We're not doing a good enough job raising our daughter.

**Garrett**: [Because] we wouldn't take her to church.

For others, the differences over how to raise children were less dramatic but still harmful for the relationships. William described how the religious differences led to some distance between his children and his mother-in-law.

[My mother-in-law] pictured certain things, especially about her grandkids [like] having grandkids who would go to church and would be involved and connected to her in that way. Then there's this disconnect from that and that has to have been really difficult for her.

While differences over how children should be religiously socialized created various religious struggles, children also provided opportunities to participants to confront and overcome differences with their family of origin.

### *Theme 4: Children as a Relational Bridge*

For some participants who faced significant relational struggles with their family of origin, their children provided common ground between them and their family members, which provided opportunities to heal and strengthen intergenerational relationships. For Tierra, having a child shaped the way she viewed family relationships, motivating her to intentionally invest in those relationships. She said,

> It's been because of [our child] and everything, but that's always been huge [to] keeping family together. My mom's side of the family is kind of splintered right now, but on that side of my family, I'm still very close, still in good contact with [them]. That's always been a thing, especially with [our child], is to have family, [to] show her that family's an important thing. No matter what happens in life, your family will always be there.

Other participants described how their children motivated their family members to be more involved in their lives, even if there were still significant tensions related to religion. After describing how a conversation about religion with his brother had resulted in his brother ignoring him, Gabriel discussed how he believed his children would protect his relationship, to some degree, with his parents:

> My parents, I don't know if they would still disown me fully because they would want to have access to my kids to try to convert them. And they would get much

stronger on that as well. They'd probably send a lot more bible-related gifts and

Facetime with them and more with the undertone of pushing religion.

While relational struggles and religious pressures remained poignant for this

family, others reported that having children had a very healing impact on their

relationships. Nick recounted,

[Leaving religion] impacted my relationship with my mother for a long time. She

wanted me to believe what she believed. She had expectations. She had an idea of

what she wanted my life to be, and it hurt her. She felt like a failure as a mother

because I wasn't with God and living the life that she wanted me to live. That's

changed. She's over that now. She has seen the children that this home has

produced and even though she doesn't agree with my religious beliefs, she has

seen what my beliefs have created.

Children provided both opportunities for strengthening and weakening

relationships, depending on both how parents and the family of origin approached

religion and the religious differences. An important underlying factor to whether children

facilitate strengthening or further stressing relationships was parents' approach to the

(non)religious socialization.

## RQ3: How Nonreligious Parents Approach the (Non)Religious Socialization of Their Children

Six themes were identified in coding data related to how nonreligious parents

socialize their children in regard to religion. However, only five of these themes will be

explored in this section. Specifically, one of these themes contained considerable overlap

with RQ2 regarding the role religion plays in the intergenerational relationships between

grandparents, parents, and children and thus is not discussed here. Table 4 provides a

numeric content analysis demonstrating the prevalence of each of these themes.

**Table 4.**

*Numeric Content Analysis of RQ3*

| Theme | # of Interviews | # of References | % Interviews | Avg. references per interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Openly sharing beliefs | 32 | 139 | 97% | 4.3 |
| Encouraging religious exploration | 32 | 127 | 97% | 4.0 |
| Behaviors over beliefs | 23 | 43 | 70% | 1.9 |
| Concerns about religion | 30 | 84 | 91% | 2.8 |
| Cultural Influences | 17 | 33 | 52% | 1.9 |

*Note.* The percent of interviews column is calculated as the number of sources the theme appeared in divided by the total number of interviews (33). The average references per source is calculated as the number of references divided by the number of sources the theme was identified in (i.e., # References/# Interviews). When a spouse simply agreed or echoed what their partner said about the same theme, this was only counted as one reference. When a participant stated something additional or separate from what their spouse said, but still related to the theme, this was counted as a unique reference. Interrater reliability for this coding project was $\kappa = .60$, indicating substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

### *Theme 1: Parents Openly Sharing Their Beliefs*

The most frequent (145 references) and pervasive theme, identified in 32 of the 33 interviews, was parents focus on being open and intentional in sharing their beliefs with their children. Leonie and Ephraim described the strong responsibility they felt to share their knowledge and beliefs with their son:

**Leonie**: To teach is our core responsibility. To teach [our son] about life. To show him the way and try and help him make the right decisions and we are real honest with him, anything he asks us . . . we tell him the truth about it. . . .

**Ephraim**: And support and filling in for the teachings that he doesn't learn at school or from anywhere else. I want to teach him things that no one has ever

thought to teach him. . . . I feel like it's necessary. I feel like it's a sin, I feel like I

am doing them a disservice if I learn something, and I keep it to myself.

While teaching their children and being open about their beliefs was very important to

most of the participants in our sample, some participants expressed difficulties in being

open while others highlighted the challenges of balancing their beliefs with the cultural

context their child lives in, as seen in the following quote from Peggy:

I feel like I have to be really careful about not mentioning religion at all 'cause I

feel like we might be ostracized. I feel like I have to really go out of my way to

teach the kids about some things about religion so that they don't [say] "Who's

Jesus?" and then all of the sudden it would be like "Oh, okay, obviously we're not

[religious]." . . . We're in a very religious area, and if [our children] feel like they

need to believe in something, or at least pretend they believe in something to fit

in, that's fine. We do tell them that we don't think that it's true. That other people

believe in it.

Along with the difficulties some parents reported in sharing their beliefs with their

children was also personal growth. Sarah described how wanting to be open and honest

with her children helped her better recognize what she actually believed in:

I realized . . . I was essentially telling myself I was going to raise my son to

believe something that I did not believe. And I felt like a liar… I found myself

believing that I needed to go to church because that's what good people do. And

then also recognizing that I didn't believe that myself anymore [and] I was

disturbed with the realization that I was willing to lie to my child. And I decided

not to do that. So rather than pretend and lie, I just decided to be honest with myself and with my kid and acknowledge that I was not religious anymore.

While some parents were intentional about making time to have discussions surrounding religion and personal beliefs with their children, most emphasized natural and organic conversations, often in response to children's questions, as seen in the following quote from James:

It's not like we sit down and say, "This is how thou shalt behave." . . . It's more like as they have questions or as they have experiences come up. But I think also that it's almost like a Socratic method of them looking at a situation and analyzing and seeing how they feel and developing their own conclusions off of that as far as what's right and what's wrong.

As alluded to in this previous quote, in discussing the importance of sharing their personal beliefs with their children, many parents made the distinction between sharing *what* they believed from *how* they came to their beliefs, placing an emphasis on helping their children understand the latter. Leah and Roger said,

**Leah**: We should discuss what to do about other people talking to them about religion more. Because, with us, we just wanted to teach them to learn as much as they can and be as knowledgeable as they can because if they are a believer in learning then they are more likely to make educated decisions better and be more logical . . .

**Roger**: I think our responsibility is just to make sure that they have the mindset where they can learn things in logical routes and realize when they are being illogical.

For Chloe, she expressed the desire to not impart any specific religious beliefs to their child, but rather, to instill three rules to believing:

> My three rules are: Believe whatever you want, as long as it's what *you* believe in, and no one is forcing you to. Don't ever force your beliefs on someone else. And, respect everyone's beliefs, whether they're the same or they're different. I tell them that all the time, 'cause my daughter did go through a phase where she believed in God and Jesus. Right now, she's not. I've always told them, they can believe whatever they want and I really push that because I don't want me not having a belief to affect their ability to have a belief.

As highlighted in this excerpt, parents' desire to balance sharing their own beliefs with ensuring that their children find what they believe on their own often resulted in parents encouraging their children to explore various religions and belief systems.

### Theme 2: Encouraging Religious Exploration

Nearly as pervasive and frequent as the previous theme, participants also emphasized the importance of their children exploring various religious teachings, practices, and traditions (132 accounts identified across 32 interviews). A number of parents reported intentionally engaging their children in various forms of religious education. Jeff said,

> Abundant literature that we'd share with them, books to read, stories. [Others would] have parables or prophets, we'd have something comparable that might extend to a much broader philosophy because all of those traditional religions would be part of what they're exposed to. We think a part of religious education as comparative religion is the most valuable thing.

Some parents sought help in giving their children a well-rounded religious education, as seen in the following account from Andrew:

> We became part of the Unitarian congregation in part, large part, because of our daughter.  One time, we caught somebody trying to proselytize to her when she was, what, four years old and we realized that she didn't really have a concept of religion at all and so we thought, if we bring her to a community where religion is discussed openly [then] she'll have a kind of a language to be able to kind of formulate her own beliefs eventually.

While some parents took the lead in exposing their children to various religious beliefs and practices, others opted to follow their children's lead and be supportive in helping their child explore religious interests. Chloe described how she would face her own discomfort around religion to support her children, saying,

> The only reason I would go [to a religious gathering] is because my children wanted to, because I give them free reign over their religious beliefs. So, if either of them came to me and said, "Mom, I'd really like to go to church or to a temple," or whatever was interesting to them, I would sort of suck it up and do it for them so that they could have that experience.

Miriel and Garrett, like other participants, chose to not engage in explicit religious education, but instead provided encouragement to explore and access to a wide variety of religious texts for their children:

> **Miriel**: We have a lot of religious texts so we don't discourage anything. They're welcome to use anything like that. We've got Wiccan books, we've got the Koran, we've got the Bible, the—

> **Garrett**: We've got the Book of Mormon, we've got Confucianism, the teachings of Buddha.
>
> **Miriel**: Everything that they could possibly want to research, we've tried to encourage them to look it up.

While participants took a variety of approaches regarding how they encouraged their children to explore religions, across participants, the goal of encouraging exploration was almost always to help their child come into their (non)religious beliefs on their own, as summed up by Gary who said, "A religion, a belief should be personal. Something you should be able to choose for yourself. Not have chosen for you and pushed on you by your parents."

### Theme 3: Placing an Emphasis on Behaviors Over Beliefs

As seen in the previous two themes, many parents in our sample reportedly cared far more about *how* their children grew into their beliefs than about *what* their children believed. Parents also reportedly cared far more about how their children behaved and treated others, and thus, when socializing their children in regard to (non)religious worldviews, intentionally emphasized that behaviors matter more than beliefs.

Adam and Cynthia captured the essence of this theme by saying,

> **Adam**: Actions speak much louder than words. . . .
>
> **Cynthia**: I just want them to be moral and ethical and they can develop their own belief system.

Alexis similarly said,

> If she decides she wants to be a Catholic or a Buddhist, or a whatever, I just want her to be the best one that she can be. She may find different answers than I did,

and as long as she's not using those answers to harm or oppress other people, I'm fine with wherever it takes her.

A number of parents also highlighted the differing responsibilities they held in shaping their children's *beliefs* and in shaping their children's *behaviors*. This is illustrated in the following conversation from Peggy and Benjamin:

**Peggy**: Our values, yeah, we do kind of press on [our children], that they do need to be kind to other people. So, the morals we do press on them, but as far as religious beliefs. . .

**Benjamin**: I mean I really don't like to force it on [our son].  I mean if it comes up in topic I'll talk about it, but we never said the word "atheist" in front of him until this year. We've kind of wanted him to decide for himself. . . . No, we really don't push his hand, "You must not believe . . ."

**Peggy**: I think part of the problem we had with organized religion is how they tell you "This is how you have to think." And we don't want to tell our son how to think.  Or what to think.

While many participants expressed that they did not care if their child became religious, some also expressed concerns that becoming religious may negatively impact how their child behaves towards others, as seen in some of the previous quotes included in this section and in the following account from Sarah:

I would not care if any of my kids become religious. I would care if they become a bigot. Or a hurtful, mean person. If they choose a religion, that's fine, but if they choose a religion so they can use it as a weapon against other people then I would very much have a problem with it.

Parents expressed a number of concerns related to their children being exposed

religion, as explored in more depth in the following theme.

### *Theme 4: Concerns Regarding Child Being Exposed to Religion*

Despite the value parents placed on encouraging their children to explore various

religious beliefs, as well as the near unanimous sentiment that (non)religious beliefs do

not matter as long as the child behaves morally, almost all parents expressed concerns

related to their children being exposed to religion or becoming religious. Indeed, a

number of parents mentioned the need to have constraints in how or which religions their

children explored. Carl expressed this, saying,

> We will give them all the information to anything that they want, allow them to
>
> check out anything that is safe for them to check out. Certain places and certain
>
> churches, I probably wouldn't allow them to check out. But I feel like, if I can
>
> give them the knowledge and information beforehand, then sure.

Other concerns related to how becoming religious would impact their children's

behaviors, as seen in Theme 3. The most common concern seemed to focus on if their

children became religious that it would come at the cost of their logic or rational thought.

Garrett said,

> I don't think that I would be discouraged if they wound up religious. I would be
>
> discouraged if they get the same church as I did and wound up religious. Because
>
> I think that my discouragement would come from surprise. I would find it highly
>
> unlikely that anyone that honestly and open mindedly did proper research on all
>
> [that] could be relevant to religion. Or any mythology or theology. I would be
>
> surprised if they could still stay by any religion at all. Spirituality, sometimes,

maybe. But I would be really surprised if they did that and went about the route of religion.

Other concerns were rooted in fears of how religious differences would impact their relationships with their children. Roger and Leah discussed these worries, saying,

**Roger**: It certainly would be easier if he came to the same conclusions we do about a lot of stuff, so I feel like I kind of have a bias towards him just agreeing with me with everything.

**Leah**: That would be convenient, just on everything.

**Roger**: At some point I have to . . . it is his choice. The best thing I can do is teach him well to make those choices.

**Leah**: I think if he has honestly held beliefs that are religious, then that will be fine. There may be some friction there, but I don't feel I would ever try to . . .

**Roger**: Yeah, if there is a struggle there it would be with us being cool with that rather than trying to fix him.

Other concerns stemmed from negative experiences participants had observed their children having related to religion. Anne and Gabriel recounted the following experience:

**Anne**: We let his parents take [our children] to their church.

**Gabriel**: Just a few times.

**Anne**: But enough times that my daughter came home one day crying because they had told her—she was three or four—in an Easter Sunday type, [in] preparation for Easter Sunday, that they nailed Jesus to the cross. And then they

had her draw a picture of where the nail went in his [wrist] and she was traumatized. . . .

**Gabriel**: At four years old she could tell us why physiologically they would have to put it through a wrist and not his hand.

**Anne**: So, it broke me at that point in time, I was like, . . . "Some religions are just evil. And I don't think that's appropriate for my kid that's four…"

**Gabriel**: *Misguided.*

**Anne**: Misguided. . . . It was just traumatic for her. It was really traumatic 'cause she had never been exposed to that level of . . .

**Gabriel**: Gruesome violence.

As highlighted by this story, what is deemed acceptable for children varies greatly, with the cultural context playing a significant role, as discussed next.

*Theme 5: Cultural Influences*

Cultural influences, such as religious holidays and living in areas with a prominent religious tradition also played an important role in how parents socialized their children in regard to religion. Hayley illustrated the importance of culture with the following example:

I vividly remember our oldest son, when he was five, saying to me, and this would be early December, "So are we trees or stars?" I had no idea what he was talking about. . . . Well, he had heard some kids talking about Christmas and he had heard other kids talking about Hanukkah, and he wondered just where we were on the tree/star paradigm. It was a golden opportunity to talk about rituals that different religions have and the commonalities of light.

While religious holidays provided an opportunity for Hayley to talk with her children about various religious traditions, for other participants, these holidays provided an opportunity to celebrate and connect with family. Sofia and Clinton said,

> **Sofia**: It's funny, as much as we don't practice a religion, we celebrate rituals. We have a Christmas tree. We decorate our house for Christmas. We have whatever kids can be in town wake up on Christmas morning and make French toast and open presents under the tree. . . .
>
> **Clinton**: And Passover, . . . we have Passover meals
>
> **Sofia**: Seders. We celebrate, I light Hanukah candles. So, it's rituals that [we celebrate], even now that the kids are in their 30's and they don't live at home anymore.

While parents varied in their approaches to the (non)religious socialization of their children, all were impacted by the cultural context in which they lived. For nonreligious parents, the (non)religious socialization of their children typically required a delicate balance between these outside (i.e., cultural and familial) influences, the parents' own beliefs, and the parents' deep desire to not impose a belief system on their children, but to rather facilitate critical thinking among their children.

# CHAPTER V

# DISCUSSION

Through an analysis of 33 in-depth interviews with nonreligious couples (66 parents), I sought to address three broad research questions related to the impact of religious differences on adult familial relationships, the impact of religious differences on intergenerational relationships, and how nonreligious parents approach the religious socialization of their children. In line with a grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), through iteratively engaging with the themes identified, I created three models grounded in the data to represent the processes underlying each of these three research questions.

## RQ1: Religious Differences in Adult Familial Relationships

While the research question was focused on the impact of religious differences on relationships, participants' reports showed that these differences also created salient intrapersonal struggles for both them and their religious family members. In analyzing the sources of conflict participants reported, three broad categories were identified: the religious family members' concerns for general, spiritual, or eternal well-being of participants due to their lack of religious belief, participants fear of worrying or offending their religious family members, and participants perceiving religious-based pressure from their family members. While the first two sources of conflict appeared to be more likely to lead to intrapersonal conflicts and relational distance, perceiving religious pressure was most likely to lead to frustration and relational conflict. However, it is important to note

that many participants perceived that it was their family members' concern for their well-being that often led these family members to place religious pressure on them.
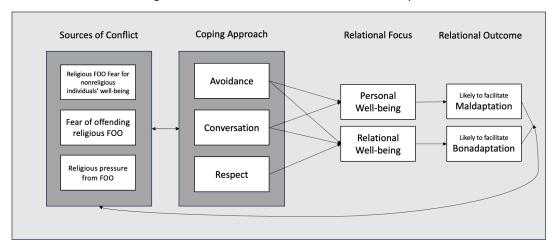
Participants reported that both they and their religious family members coped with these sources of conflict in a variety of ways, which were coded into three general categories: respect and acceptance, avoidance, and engaging in conversations. Often, two or all three of these response strategies were used, usually over time (e.g., avoidance at the beginning could evolve into conversations which could facilitate acceptance). Each of these three strategies were employed in varying ways. Respect and acceptance included both respecting the individual generally, which facilitated being able to ignore or overlook religious differences, as well as accepting the religious differences specifically. This approach to addressing religious differences appeared to be consistently associated with positive relational outcomes. Avoidance spanned from deflecting specific topics with humor, to staying quiet at family gatherings, to severing relationships completely. Conversations included deeply intimate explorations of faith and spirituality, passive-aggressive comments, and hurtful arguments. Given this wide variety of approaches, both conversation and avoidance could facilitate relational bonadaptation and maladaptation.

Additionally, coping response strategies could exacerbate or alleviate the conflicts stemming from religious differences. Specifically, when these approaches were employed to address the intrapersonal conflict created by the religious difference, both avoidance and engaging in conversations appeared to be more likely to facilitate relational maladaptation. In particular, a source of conflict was religious family members fear for the immediate and eternal well-being of their nonreligious family members. To alleviate this fear, in some cases, family members tried to change the beliefs and practices of the

nonreligious individuals. Such religious pressure instead typically further alienated participants from both the religion and the family. On the other hand, when these strategies were employed with the goal of increasing understanding or improving relationships, they appeared to be more likely to facilitate relational bonadaptation (see Figure 1). This is consistent with Dollahite's et al. (2018) theory of generative devotion, which describes how religious beliefs and practices can be employed in both generative ways which benefit family relationships as well as destructive ways, which are typically individually focused, and can harm family relationships. The relational outcome could exacerbate or alleviate the conflicts stemming from religious differences.

**Figure 1.**

*Conceptual Model of the Influence of Religious Differences on Adult Familial Relationships*



Religious Differences in Adult Familial Relationships

*Note*: FOO = Family of Origin

*Implications*

Religious differences in families not only impact the well-being of the familial relationships, but also present salient challenges for individuals, as highlighted by previous literature (Gull, 2021; Hookway & Habibis, 2015; Streib, 2020; Zuckerman, 2015) and the present study. However, the current study suggests that coping that was focused on protecting one's individual well-being amidst religious differences between family members often appeared to lead to more relational conflict and deterioration, particularly when coupled with a lack of openness to differing worldviews or attempts to change other's beliefs. While a focus on protecting one's own emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being is important, findings showed that this can be employed in ways that damage relationships and thus exacerbate the overall religious-relational struggles. Mental health professionals and family therapists working with individuals and families experiencing distress due to religious differences should be mindful of this and help clients find coping approaches which protect their personal well-being without causing further harm to the family relationships. Indeed, in line with family stress theory (Patterson, 1988), these approaches are skills that can be viewed as resources. Honing and refining these skills can increase family's resources and better prepare them to cope with the demands that the religious differences place on the family system.

Data suggested that respect and acceptance consistently fostered improved relationships; focusing on respect and acceptance, whether related to the religious differences specifically or for the individual generally, may be a useful place to begin when working to reduce the impact of religious differences on relationships. Additionally, it is important to note that none of the coping strategies identified were

inherently negative; both avoidance and conversations could be employed in helpful and harmful ways. As such, it may be that small shifts in how or why individuals avoid topics of religion or how they engage in these conversations may lead to improved relational functioning. This is supported by Worwood et al. (2020), who found conversations could act as relational turning points for both strengthened and weakened family relationships.

**RQ2: Religious Differences in Intergenerational Relationships**
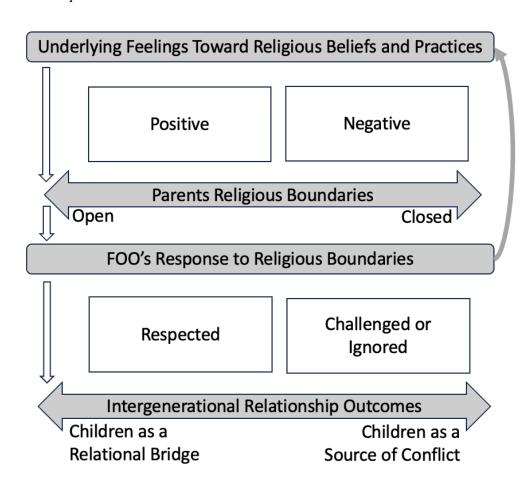
Religion and religious differences played salient roles in the relationships between participants' family of origin and their children. Figure 2 presents a flowchart of the various factors that reportedly influenced whether religion and religious differences facilitated stronger or weaker intergenerational relationships. As seen in Figure 2, the first factor that played into the impact of religion on participant's intergenerational relationships was participants' feelings toward religion. This includes feelings toward religion in general, toward the familial religion they left specifically, as well as attitudes towards specific religious beliefs or traditions. For example, a number of participants reported disliking many elements of the religion they were raised in while still harboring fond feelings towards certain rituals or traditions, such as baptisms and naming ceremonies or various holiday celebrations.

Fond feelings and memories of the familial religion led parents to want to engage their children in these traditions, while negative attitudes led parents to want to avoid or protect their children from the religious beliefs or practices. These feelings appeared closely related to the experiences participants had when leaving the familial religion. In particular, connecting to the work of Zuckerman (2015) on the differing types of religious disaffiliation, it often appeared that participants who experienced a "mild apostasy" (i.e.,

disaffiliation after being marginally religious and a shallow rejection of religion) remained more open to many aspects of the familial religion, whereas those who experienced a "transformative apostasy" (i.e., disaffiliation and a deep rejection of religion after being actively involved in a high-demand religion) appeared to harbor more negative feelings towards religion and appeared more likely to feel the need to project their children from these negative experiences.

**Figure 2.**

*Conceptual Model of the Influence of Religious Differences on Intergenerational Relationships*

In Figure 2, an arrow shows that parent's boundaries exist on a continuum from open to closed, and that positive feelings are correlated with openness while negative feelings are associated with closed boundaries. The boundaries parents set in regard to religion then elicit a response from the family of origin. Religious family members choose whether to respect the boundaries or to challenge and disregard them. Their response in turn influences the health of the intergenerational relationships; it can also reinforce or shift parents' feelings toward the familial religion. Specifically, when boundaries were respected, participants typically reported positive interactions between their children and their religious family members; in some instances, they reported that these interactions strengthened relationships between themselves and their family of origin. On the other hand, when boundaries were disrespected, this resulted in poorer family relationships, increased distance and decreased trust, and increased levels of conflict often centered around how parents were choosing to raise their children.

### *Implications*

McClure's (2019) interviews with 20 nonbeliever parents from the Bible Belt found that most of these parents experienced proselytizing attempts by Christian family members and that 90% of the participants who had experienced proselytizing attempts reported that they found these attempts to be potentially harmful to their children. The current study showed that religious family members crossing religious boundaries was also harmful to intergenerational relationships and was rarely received well by participants. However, drawing from the themes identified in RQ1, participants perceptions of the motivations behind religious pressures shaped how they responded to these pressures, and participants were more understanding of religious pressures and

crossed boundaries when they perceived that these words or actions came from a place of genuine concern.

While again emphasizing that the current study did not interview religious family members, from participants' reports of their family members it appeared that religious family members with strongly held beliefs regarding the lasting implications of not adhering to religious doctrines (e.g., not going to heaven) may experience a lack of control when family members reject those religious doctrines for both them and their children. In light of this, some religious family members chose to exert control in ways that violated the boundaries parents had set for their children. When this occurred, it appeared to reinforce negative feelings toward religion and distance from the religious family members. On the other hand, when boundaries were respected, this appeared to increase trust between family members and reduce negative feelings towards religion. Thus, as clinicians work with religious individuals struggling with the disaffiliation of family members, it may be useful to explore these feelings of both sincere concern for the well-being of the nonreligious individuals and how this concern may lead to the desire to exert control. Contextualizing these feelings in the findings that crossing boundaries will reinforce negative feelings towards religion and relational distance, whereas respecting these boundaries may facilitate openness to the familial religion and reduce relational distance, may help religious family members maintain a sense of control as they respect nonreligious family members' childrearing decisions.

## RQ3: Nonreligious Parents' Approach to (Non)Religious Socialization

When approaching the (non)religious socialization of their children, participants took different approaches to balancing passing on their own beliefs, introducing children

to a variety of religious traditions, and encouraging children to explore belief systems on their own. This led to four distinct approaches, as pictured in Figure 3. All these approaches are situated within and influenced by the cultural context in which the family lives. For example, some parents who lived in a community with a strong religious presence reported avoiding using the word "atheist" with their children or choosing to teach their children about the predominate religion so that their children could fit in with their peers, and many parents chose to celebrate the religious holidays that their community valued. The importance of cultural context in shaping nonreligious parents (non)religious socialization efforts has similarly been documented in previous literature (Gärtner, 2020; Strhan & Shilitoe, 2019).

As seen in Figure 3, parents' approach could be mapped onto two continuums: the degree to which they engaged in intentional (non)religious socialization and the degree to which they encouraged their children to engage in (non)religious exploration. Parents who were low on intentional socialization and high on encouraging exploration would often provide resources, such as religious texts or rides to religious services, but provided little guidance or direction on what or how children explore various religious approaches. These parents were often open about their beliefs with children, but primarily only in response to their children's questions.
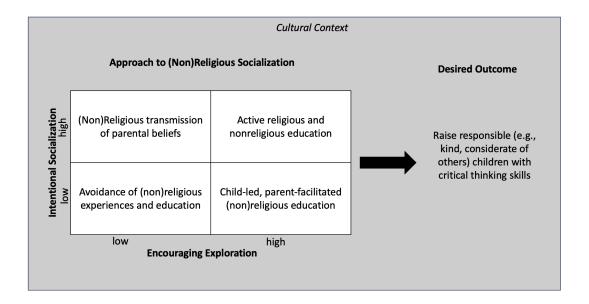
Those who were high on both intentional socialization and encouraging exploration actively guided their children's exploration of both religious and nonreligious texts, groups, and practices. These parents were open to sharing what they personally believed and typically had strong feelings that sharing their own beliefs needed to be counterbalanced by the child learning from other people about their beliefs; this often led

to these parents being open to their family members bringing their child with them to religious services or engaging in other religious practices with their children or to parents joining (non)religious groups that could support the (non)religious education of their children.

Among parents who were high on intentional socialization and low on encouraging exploration, these parents found value in openly imparting their beliefs to their children. However, in line with the shared goal of raising children who are critical thinkers, these parents often also emphasized sharing *how* they came to believe what they believe. While these parents were cautious of allowing their children to independently explore various religions as they found the doctrines or practices to be harmful, confusing, or immoral, they remained open to discussing religion with their children. Parents who were low on both intentional socialization and encouraging religious exploration did little to facilitate religious exploration or religious discussions with their children, but rarely discouraged either if the children expressed an interest in the topic.

**Figure 3.**

*Conceptual Model of Nonreligious Parents' Approaches to (Non)Religious Socialization*

Of the four approaches pictured in Figure 3, it is important to note that participants moved from one approach to another. This appeared to be most commonly aligned with their children's development. For example, parents were more likely to be low on exploration and high on intentional socialization when children were young, and high on exploration and low on intentional socialization when children were older. Specifically, and consistent with previous research which found that atheist parents reported preferring that their children be autonomous over being obedient (Berkers & Sieben, 2020), parents often mentioned their responsibility to raise children who could critically evaluate these belief systems, while also expressing concerns about how some religious traditions can stifle critical thought or may teach certain doctrines or beliefs that parents found to be developmentally inappropriate, and thus felt the need to shelter their children from these teachings.

In comparing these findings to those of previous literature, there are some notable differences and similarities. Thiessen (2016) conducted interviews with 30 marginally

religious and 30 nonreligious parents in Canada and found that while the marginally

religious parents engaged in intentional socialization, the nonreligious parents tended to

refrain from intentional socialization and preferred to have their children explore religion

on their own. The current analysis of 66 nonreligious parents in the United States found a

great deal of diversity in nonreligious parents' approach to the (non)religious

socialization of their children, with many parents being high on intentional socialization.

This diversity in approaches more closely aligns with the findings of Manning (2015),

which identified five paths of (non)religious socialization among nonreligious parents.

However, while Manning's pathways included more of an emphasis on engaging in

formal or informal religious education, the current study did not identify parents seeking

out formal religious education as a pervasive theme. This may be in part due to the larger

number of unchurched believers in Manning's sample, whereas the present sample was

predominately atheists and Humanists. Continued research, including quantitative

surveys with larger sample sizes, is needed to better understand the approaches

nonreligious parents employ in the (non)religious socialization of their children.

### *Implications*

Despite the varying approaches parents took to the (non)religious socialization of

their children, there was a remarkable lack of variety in what parents hoped to achieve by

their chosen approach: nearly all parents emphasized their desire to instill critical

thinking skills in their children and that they cared far more about how their children

behaved than about what their children believe. Parents' self-evaluations suggested that

one approach was not any more effective than the other approaches at achieving this goal.

However, quantitative research which relies on more than parents' subjective evaluations of their success is needed to assess the costs and benefits of these different approaches.

A previous analysis that used this dataset (Kelley et al., 2022b) to analyze what nonreligious parents wanted religious individuals to understand about them identified "We are good people, good parents, and not that different from you" as the most pervasive theme. Research has documented that negative attitudes towards nonreligious individuals and groups (atheists in particular) are pervasive in the United States (Cheng et al., 2018; Edgell et al., 2016; Gervais, 2014). These attitudes may stem in part from assumptions that religion is good for families and society, and therefore, the lack of religion is bad (Mahoney et al., 2010; 2020). Understanding that nonreligious parents share many of the same hopes and dreams for their children as religious parents do, and understanding the thought and work many nonreligious parents put into the (non)religious socialization of their children, may help to reduce some of these stereotypes.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Despite the strengths of this study, including the large sample size (for an in-depth qualitative study) and the team-based approach to analysis, there were a number of salient limitations. First, the sample is not representative of nonreligious parents in the United States. Specifically, the majority of nonreligious adults (63%) in the United States identify as "nothing in particular" and report believing in God or a higher power while only 17% identify as atheist and 20% identify as agnostic (Smith et al., 2024). The majority of our participants identified as atheist or Humanist, with only a few identifying as spiritual but not religious. Additionally, the sample does not reflect the racial and

ethnic diversity of the United States with 86% of the sample identifying as White. There

was also a lack of diversity in the research team. Specifically, I as well as the two

undergraduate coders all share the same religious background and identity (members of

the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) and are all White women. While I had

hoped to recruit coders from more diverse backgrounds, I was unable to, and it is

important to note that this is reflective of the demographics of the U.S. region where the

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the predominant religion. We worked to

mitigate the influence of this by all engaging in reflexivity exercises throughout the

research process and by including a heavy emphasis on participants' own words.

However, in research, there is great value in having both insider and outsider perspectives

integrated into the research process and the lack of insiders (i.e., nonreligious parents) is

a salient limitation of the study. I highlight here the value of my dissertation committee in

which there is greater diversity in terms of religious background.

An additional limitation is the complexity of the RQ1 codebook which required

coders to code most accounts several times (e.g., they typically coded the relationship

discussed, the relational trajectory, and the source of conflict or coping solution). While

coding these different levels provided some interesting insights, the number of codes in

the codebook may have reduced the quality of the coding. In particular, a goal of coding

each of these levels was to run queries in NVivo to assess the amount of overlap across

these levels (e.g., how often was avoidance as a coping mechanism associated with

positive relational trajectories in sibling relationships). This attempt at quantizing

(Sandelowski et al., 2009) the qualitative data did not produce results that were

particularly insightful or useful, and it is possible that the complexity of the codebook may have slightly reduced the quality of the coding.

Finally, many of the quotes that provided insights into the challenges religious family members experience in relation to the religious differences and how they respond to these challenges. However, all these insights, which played an important role in the model development, were filtered through the lens of the nonreligious participants. As such, the models produced are only reflective of the experiences of nonreligious parents and not of religious family members. Future research is needed with family level interviews including both those who have remained in the familial religion and those who have left. In particular, given the sensitive nature of the topic, an ideal model would be to conduct individual interviews with a family member who has left and family member who has remained religious, and then to conduct a group interview in which participants are able to correct, build upon, and challenge each other (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Such interviews would likely produce even richer, more nuanced results which would be useful in further refining the models produced from the current analysis.

**Conclusion**

Both relationships and religion are inherently complex as illustrated by the nuanced nature of the themes identified from interviews with 33 nonreligious couples (*N* = 66 parents). Across the three research questions, one idea remained prevalent. The following quote, introduced in response to RQ1, warrants revisited attention: "I guess our attitude is you can believe what you want, just don't impose what you believe on me." Across couples, there was generally room for religious differences, but not for religious pressures. There was an openness, and even a longing, for conversations focused on

understanding, but a fear and repulsion of conversations in which the intent was to change one's beliefs. This played out not only in participants' personal relationships with their family members, but also played an important role in parents' choices around gatekeeping their children from religious family members or religious groups more broadly and was lived out in parents approaches to the (non)religious socialization of their children. While relationships and religious differences are complex, there may be a simple solution to ameliorating some of the relational challenges associated with religious differences: focus on engaging with those who have differing beliefs with an intent to understand rather than with an intent to change or influence.

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**APPENDICES**

## Appendix A.

*Participant Demographics.*

| Pseudonyms | Age | Religious Background | Age of Disaffiliation | Current Worldview |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Luke | 44 | Catholic | 18 | Atheist Humanist |
| Alexis | 43 | Nonreligious | NA | Atheist Humanist |
| Clark | 33 | Nonreligious | NA | Atheist Humanist |
| Emily | DNR | Lutheran | 25 | Agnostic Humanist |
| Mitch | 33 | Catholic | 20 | Atheist |
| Jane | 33 | Methodist | 17 | Atheist and Secular Humanist |
| Gary | 37 | Christian | 11 | Atheist Humanist |
| Tierra | 38 | Christian | Early 30's | Atheist |
| Adam | 71 | Presbyterian | Mid 30's | Atheist |
| Cynthia | 73 | Methodist | Late 20's | Agnostic |
| Aaron | 39 | Nonreligious | NA | Agnostic Humanist |
| Sarah | 33 | Evangelical | 30 | Atheist Humanist |
| Nathan | 35 | Methodist | 14 | Atheist |
| Gwen | 32 | Southern Baptist | 17 | Atheist Humanist |
| Colin | 38 | Roman Catholic | 16 | Agnostic |
| Abbey | 36 | Nonreligious | NA | Agnostic |
| Frank | 74 | Latter-day Saint | 21 | Humanist |
| Lisa | 74 | Episcopalian | 13 | Humanist |
| Jiahao | 46 | Christian | 20 | Agnostic |
| Isabella | 28 | Catholic | 22 | Atheist |
| Erik | 27 | Christian/Buddhist | 20 | Atheist |
| Lynette | 29 | Protestant | 15 | Agnostic |

| James | 75 | Nonreligious | NA | Humanist |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ruth | 72 | Episcopalian/Methodist | 11 | Secular |
| David | 64 | Nonreligious | NA | Atheist |
| Mary | 51 | Christian | 23 | Atheist Humanist |
| Cole | 33 | Christian | 17 | Humanist |
| Hannah | 33 | Christian | 22 | Humanist |
| Roger | 31 | Catholic | 18 | Atheist |
| Leah | 30 | Catholic | 18 | Atheist |
| Hayden | 24 | Latter-day Saint | 17 | Agnostic Humanist |
| Michelle | 23 | Latter-day Saint | 13 | Agnostic Humanist |
| Noah | 62 | Nonreligious | NA | Atheist |
| Angela | 51 | Christian | 25 | Atheist Humanist |
| Garrett | 27 | Latter-day Saint | 23 | Atheist Humanist |
| Miriel | 29 | Christian | 17 | Agnostic Humanist |
| Stewart | 36 | Catholic | 18 | Atheist |
| Teresa | 35 | Evangelical | 27 | Atheist Humanist |
| Benjamin | 35 | Methodist/Presbyterian | 19 | Secular |
| Peggy | 32 | Lutheran | 25 | Secular |
| Gabriel | 34 | Baptist | 26 | Agnostic |
| Anne | 34 | Catholic | 32 | Atheist |
| Daniel | DNR | Presbyterian | 18 | Atheist/Nontheistic |
| Josanna | 65 | Nonreligious | NA | Atheist/Nontheistic |
| Clinton | | Catholic | DNR | Secular |
| Sofia | 64 | Jewish | DNR | Secular |
| Samuel | 48 | Nonreligious | NA | Agnostic Humanist |
| Amanda | 48 | Anglican | 12 | Atheist Humanist |
| Ephraim | 39 | Christian | 12 | Spiritual but not religious |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Leonie | 39 | Christian | 9 | Spiritual but not religious |
| Andrew | 52 | Episcopalian | 22 | Atheist Humanist |
| Zoe | 51 | Nonreligious | NA | Atheist Humanist |
| Carl | 37 | Baptist/Pentecostal | 13 | Spiritual but not religious |
| Jocelyn | 43 | Catholic | 14 | Agnostic |
| William | 54 | Christian | 13 | Agnostic Humanist |
| Elizabeth | | Baptist/Episcopalian | 38 | Atheist Humanist |
| Tran | 34 | Catholic | 24 | Spiritual but not religious |
| Chloe | 34 | Catholic | 24 | Agnostic |
| Aidan | 57 | Nonreligious | NA | Atheist Humanist |
| Aimee | 58 | Episcopalian | 12 | Atheist Humanist |
| Jeff | 73 | Catholic | 23 | Humanist |
| Hayley | 74 | Protestant | 16 | Humanist |
| Nick | 41 | Presbyterian | 15 | Scientific Humanist |
| Agatha | 37 | Latter-day Saint | 34 | Humanist |
| Derek | 49 | Methodist | 16 | Atheist Humanist |
| Bethany | 47 | Presbyterian | 17 | Atheist Humanist |

*Note.* Couples are listed together and distinguished by the shading of the rows. Husbands are consistently listed first. DNR = Did not respond.

**Appendix B.**

*Interview Schedule*

**Semi-Structured Interview on Beliefs, Practices, Community, and Experiences**

**(for Religiously Unaffiliated Married Couples)**

*I'd like to ask some questions about your beliefs, practices, and community related your marriage/family. By beliefs I mean your ideas, attitudes, and opinions. I am also interested in hearing about personal experiences and stories that illustrate your ideas.*

**Religious History:**
1.     Was religion a part of your home life as a child, and if so, how?
2.     What aspects of your childhood faith do you remember fondly? Which do you remember not fondly?
3.     Tell me about your parents' relationship with religion. How important was it to them? How authentic was their faith in your opinion? (meaning, did they really believe the precepts of their religion, and did they really live it?)
4.     Describe your home life growing up. Was your family close? (How was your relationship with your parents growing up? How was their relationship with each other?)
5.     How did your religious views change over time? Who or what influenced that change? Was it a sudden or gradual process?
6.     Recent surveys show that most people reporting "no religious affiliation" were raised in highly religious homes. Does that surprise you and do you have any ideas about why this trend exists?
7.     You reported that you are not currently attending a faith community. What keeps you from attending?
8.     Can you even see yourself returning to a faith community? (Why or why not?) (What would it take for that to happen?)

**Current Belief System:**
9.     How would you describe your belief system/worldview? (Would you consider yourself an atheist, humanist, agnostic)?
10.    What beliefs and values do you share with each other? Do you feel that you are on the same page as far as level of commitment to those beliefs/practices?
11.    What are the key principles you try to live by and why?
12.    In your view, what are your core responsibilities as a parent, spouse, neighbor?
13.    What thoughts and strategies help you get through difficult times?
14.    Where do you turn for moral guidance? How do you decide difficult moral questions?

**Marriage Practices and Beliefs:**
15.    Are there practices or traditions that hold special meaning for you as a couple/family?
16.    What are the greatest challenges to your marriage and family being all you want it

to be, both internally and externally?

17.     All couples have some conflict. How do you try to resolve marital conflict?

18.     In trying to be a good marital partner and a good parent, from whom or where do you seek guidance? Who are your marriage role models?

19.     What values or beliefs are most important to the success of your marriage/parenting?

20.     As an individual and couple who have built a successful marriage:  If you could share any marriage-related advice or insight with others, what would it be?

**Parenting Practices and Beliefs:**

21.     How did having children impact your beliefs, if at all?

22.     As parents, do you strive to share your deepest beliefs and values/morals with your children? If so, what and how? How have they responded? If we asked them right now, what would your children say they believe?

23.     How important to you is it that your child(ren) follow in your beliefs? As you think about the question of religion, spirituality, or some other worldview in your child's life, what is it you want to give him or her?

24.     How has your belief system impacted your relationship with your parents, siblings, and other extended family?

25.     What is the most stressful challenge you and your family have faced in the past few years? How did you handle it? How did it change you and/or your marriage?

**Opinions and Beliefs about Religion in General:**

26.     Research has indicated that churches and other faith-based groups can be helpful and that they can cause harm. What is your opinion, based on your experience?

27.     Some unaffiliated parents have reported that they feel very much like "outsiders" while others reportedly feel at least some cultural support and have more of an "insider" experience.  Where would you locate yourself?  Will you share a related experience or two?

28.     If you could have religiously involved people understand just one or two things about you and your family, what would you want them to know?

**WRAP-UP QUESTIONS?**

-Is there anything else you'd like to talk about that I haven't asked?

-Were there any awkward or potentially offensive questions that we should delete **or revise**?

Appendix C.


*Codebooks*


**RQ1:**

| Name | **Relational Trajectory** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | The impact of the religious difference or religious change on the participant's relationships with their Family of Origin and In-Laws. In coding, INCLUDE the reasons or context provided for relational trajectory. |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Any comment on the quality, dynamics, or specific characteristics of a relationship related to (a) religion or religious differences and (b) occurring during the participants' adulthood |
| Exclusion Criteria | - Comments on the quality of a relationship that is wholly unrelated to religion<br>- Relationship quality as a child (unless included as context to their adult relationships) |
| **Subthemes** ||
| **1a. Positive (Improvements)** | Improved relational functioning. For example, decreased conflict, increased closeness, getting back to 'normal' following a period of conflict. Relational processes that the participant values.<br>*"So it's actually forced me out of my comfort zone into continuing that personal development but also that personal relationship with family because I've actually had to be on the phone and have an actual conversation with my stepmom about my daughter going to Sunday school and what she's learning there and the concerns I had. And I think if you had told me ten years ago that I would be doing that, I would of just probably melted into the pavement and there's no way I'm having that conversation with anyone in my family."* |
| **1b. Negative (Deterioration)** | Decreased relational functioning. For example, increased conflict, lack of disclosure, feeling distant, anxious about spending time together, etc.<br>*"He was, he still is very strict about his faith or about his belief, to the point where it has just completely made our relationship divided and it's like really really severed our relationship."* |

| | |
|---|---|
| **1c**. **No impact** | Religion or religious differences does not play a role in the relationship.<br>*"I don't think it does for the most part. Even my religious family members. My sister has been attending mass. She also has a highly critical world view."* |
| **1d**. **Mixed** | Participants note some positives and some negative elements at the same time.<br>*"So, if it's a holiday, or if there's something like that going on, [my mom] always pushes for that. And like I said, at this point I'm not gonna fight her about it. It's like, "Okay, I'll go. This isn't for me, and I'm just doing this for you, but I'll go." So she's—I'm sure she hasn't, she's not happy about it [laughter] and she hasn't fully accepted it, but she doesn't push me on it anymore."* |

| Name | **Relationship** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | The specific relationship is the participant talking about |
| Inclusion Criteria | - In-laws should be coded under the general category (e.g., mother-in-law would be coded under parents) |
| Exclusion Criteria | - Discussion of relationships as a child (unless included as context to their adult relationships) |
| **Subthemes** ||
| **2a. Grandparents** | Grandma, Grandpa, Great-Grandparents, spouse's grandparents |
| **2b. Parents** | Mom, Dad, Mother-in-law, Father-in-law, Stepparents |
| **2c. Siblings** | Brothers and Sisters, Brothers and Sisters in-law |
| **2d. Other extended family members** | Aunts, Uncles, Cousins, etc. |
| **2e. Children** | The parents own children |

**Coping or Response Strategies**
**Family of Origin**
*While the categories are mirrored for participants and family members, the subthemes in this theme have been separated by WHO is employing the coping or response strategies.*

| Name | **FOO Avoiding the Topic of Religion** |
| --- | --- |
| Short Description | Avoiding discussion of religious topics. Choosing not to disclose their religious identity or ideas on certain topics. |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Any attempts made to avoiding discussing religion |
| Typical examples | - Deflection when topic comes up<br>- Remaining quiet when other family members are discussing religious topics |
| Examples | *"My mom will make subtle hints about wanting her to go to church, doing certain things, and she's just recently finally stopped bringing that up"* |

| Name | **Respect or Acceptance of the Religious Difference** |
| --- | --- |
| Short Description | FOO Respecting or accepting the religious differences |
| Inclusion Criteria | When FOO accept that participant is no longer religious;<br>Include 'baby steps' to acceptance (e.g., "My parents haven't openly accepted it, but they've accepted the fact that they aren't gonna change us.") |
| Typical examples | - Differences no longer bother them<br>- No longer trying to change Participant's religious views |
| Examples | *"It's everybody's perfectly respectful, and when we, if we're at my mom's at Christmas time, they go to church at Christmas Eve, I've sent [daughter] with them before, I don't go, they're fine with that, I'm fine with them taking [daughter] if she wants to, it's not been a big deal."* |

| Name | **Engaging in Conversations (regardless of respect or conflict) Regarding Religion** |
| --- | --- |
| Short Description | FOO bringing up religion, engaging in conversations about religion and religious differences. FOO telling participants how they should live in accordance with religious beliefs. Engaging conflict over religious differences. |
| Inclusion Criteria | FOO starting religious discussions, whether the intent is to understand the Participant or to influence/change the participants' religious identity |
| Typical examples | - FOO trying to influence participant's beliefs |

| | |
|---|---|
| | - FOO asking questions related to religious beliefs or religious practices<br>- FOO having open and respectful conversations |
| Examples | "*And he enjoys talking about it a lot*"<br>"*My mom is slowly starting to understand that. But, she still every so often, gets into a mood and she'll say we should do this, this, this, this, this, and this. I just kind of go, "Oh, that's great, that's great, that's great," but then it'll nag on me*" |

| Name | **Other Strategies** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Code strategies used to address or deal with religious differences that were not capture in the first three themes here. |

**Participant**

| Name | **Avoiding the Topic of Religion** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Avoiding discussion of religious topics. Choosing not to disclose their (non)religious identity, lack of belief, or ideas on certain topics. |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Any attempts made to avoiding discussing religion |
| Typical examples | - Deflection when topic comes up<br>- Remaining quiet when other family members are discussing religious topics<br>- Lying or deceiving to appease |
| Examples | "*And he enjoys talking about it a lot. And I try to deflect, or respond with humor and sarcasm, and that usually doesn't work well.*"<br>"*She makes comments about [daughter] starting Bible school and going to Sunday school, but . . . we also like haven't told her that [husband is an atheist]*"<br>"*When I friended my momma on Facebook a few years back, she looked at my profile and she said "Why do you have agnostic on your thing next to religion?" I said "oh, I was going through this phase. I was trying to figure out really who I was and everything." And, she goes, "Okay I see you figured out yourself." I said, "I'm still learning." She goes, "Okay, well, can you take that down? It's kind of bothersome." Yeah, and so I changed it to Christian and I just didn't feel like having an argument with her about it.*" |

| Name | **Respect or Acceptance of the Religious Difference** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Respecting or accepting the religious differences, whether this respect/acceptance is one-sided or mutual. |
| Inclusion Criteria | When participants are not bothered by their FOO's religious beliefs, practices, or comments related to religion<br>Include 'baby steps' to acceptance |
| Typical examples | - Differences no longer bother them<br>- Recognizing why family members might say certain things related to religion and no longer allowing it to bother them |
| Examples | *"We are very close to them and we're… both sides are very respectful of each other's beliefs. I think that's the way it should work is that you can have your separate beliefs or your separate identities, but you can also be respectful of each other and I think that's that in practice so world view is that everyone just needs to chill the F (letter, not full word) out [laughs] and find some common ground."* |

| Name | **Engaging in Conversations (regardless of respect or conflict) Regarding Religion** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Open conversations about religion and religious differences. Engaging conflict over religious differences. |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Participants being open about their nonbelief with family members, discussing it, standing up when family members pressure them with religious expectations |
| Typical examples | - Not shying away from beliefs |
| Examples | *"Well it's pretty literal I would say, last time we were there all together the words were said that if you have some doubts about Mormonism and you want to find out about other points of view talk to Uncle [Name]. He's the go-to person. And so this daughter of hers and her husband came to us at this big family picnic and we were sitting there talking about this the 4 of us with her mother circling the table where we were, trying to hear what was going on, trying to hear is this up to you what was being discussed and this was threatening to her."*<br>*"So I'm: "great," but we don't really talk about it much. If he brings it up, I tell him I don't think any of it is real, I'm pretty blunt about that. I don't think my parents really talk about it either. Everybody knows that I am an atheist, it's out there."* |

| | |
|---|---|
| | |

| Name | **Other Strategies** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Code strategies used to address or deal with religious differences that were not capture in the first three themes here. |

**Sources of Conflict or Concerns (themes are specific to either FOO or Participant)**

| Name | **FOO's Concern for Participants and Participants' Children** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | FOO's worries about the current or future (including after death) well-being of the participants due to their rejection of the family religion. |
| Inclusion Criteria | Any mention of the FOO being concerned about the participants, including participants hypothesizing that family members act in certain ways because they are concerned for their current or future well-being |
| Typical examples | - FOO concern that participant will not be in heaven<br>- FOO concern over participant's children not being baptized<br>- FOO concern over participant not having religious morals |
| Examples | *"When we said no, she was very scandalized by that. She couldn't believe that we wouldn't baptize our child because with Catholics if you are not baptized then you go to hell. Very real. Innocent baby. Still going to hell if you weren't baptized. She thought we were risking our child."*<br>*"They are fundamentalist Christians and evangelicals and all of that and I'm sure my mother thinks I am going to Hell but we don't talk about it. You know she doesn't get mad, she just says, "It's not right, it's not right". But, it doesn't impact us. I am sure it worries her."* |

| Name | **Participants Perceiving Religious Pressure from FOO** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | When FOO says or acts with the (perceived) intention of influencing participants' religious belief or behaviors |
| Inclusion Criteria | Any comments or actions where participant perceive the intention as changing their religious beliefs, including a range from benign comments to harmful actions |
| Typical examples | - Passive-aggressive comments from FOO regarding religion<br>- Tell participants they need to engage in certain rituals or their |

| | children need to (e.g., baptism) |
|---|---|
| Examples | *"She would make jabs. There wouldn't be conversations, but there would be jabs"*<br>*"When our first son was born she was very very admit that he be baptized."* |

| Name | **Participants fear over offending or hurting FOO** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | When participants feel that they cannot express or discuss their identity or beliefs because they believe it will offend or harm their family members. |
| Inclusion Criteria | Any actions or words related to religious views that are motivated by participant not wanting to upset family members. |
| Typical examples | - Pretending to still be religious to avoid conflict<br>- Feeling guilt; engaging in religious practices because of guilt |
| Examples | *"It was before I started having a report with her mother. Her mother asked me to say grace. [Wife] looked at me with this horrified look on her face like she expected me to go completely fire brand atheism on her mom. It was actually kind of hilarious. But, I just kind of made up a bullshit grace and went with it."*<br>*"For me, my family doesn't know I'm Atheist. So, it's really, I can kind of fake, I can pretty much fake it. . . . My mother, on the other hand, no, it would just open a big can of worms. I'm just, I'm not going to do it. That's just me.*<br>*"We have to figure out what works for us. I think it's we're trying to find our own path without offending the grandparents"* |

| Name | **Other Sources of Conflict or Concern** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Sources of conflict or concern that were not capture in the first three themes here. |

| Name | **Family of Origin's Religious Journeys** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Participants reports of where their family members are at religiously. |
| Inclusion Criteria | Subthemes specify whether family members have decreased in |

| | |
|---|---|
| | religiosity or engaged in more questioning and critical thought about religion, whether they have remained stable, increased in religiosity, and whether multigenerational belonging has played a role, and whether participants are unaware of their family members current religious views. |
| Exclusion Criteria | - FOO's religiosity when PARTICIPANT was still a child living at home (unless included as context) |
| **Subthemes** | |
| **Decreased, Questioning, or Engaged in More Critical Thought** | Family members have become less engaged with religion or more critical of religion<br>*"But, maybe within the past 5 years or so she started to question it. Questioning why the church that she attends, does some of the things it does."* |
| **Remained Stable or Increased in Religiosity** | Family members have remained active in their religion, become more active, or cite multigenerational belonging as being salient.<br>*"My father later on in life, he became born again Christian and he was very into wanting to read the Bible at least once a week, that sort of thing. My mom is still very religious."* |
| **Lack of Knowledge Regarding FOO's Religious Views** | General lack of knowledge regarding a family member's religious views; include when a participant is making 'guesses' about a family members religiosity without supporting observations or conversations.<br>*"I don't really know what religion he believed in, but then he was on drugs, I don't know what that played into it (laughter). He's just all over, so I don't really know."* |

**RQ2**:

| Name | **Engaging in Familial Religious Traditions and Rituals** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Parents introducing or involving children in religious traditions or practices of their familial religion |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Participation in religious ceremonies or rituals for family tradition<br>- Parents exposing their children to their religious background |
| Exclusion Criteria | - FOO engaging children in traditions and religious practices (code under 2) |
| Typical examples | - Participating in baptisms or other religious ceremonies<br>- Parent taking children to a religious service |
| Examples | *"I took my daughter once to an Episcopal service when she was younger so she could see the church that I grew up in as a favor to my dad and when they got to the Nicene Creed, I realized this is the mission statement of my former religion, and I realized there wasn't a word in it I agreed with."*<br><br>*"H: Okay. Honestly, we, I was still willing to do the religious stuff just out of tradition, mostly. We had [oldest son] baptized and went through and went through the whole devotions with [oldest son], but honestly it didn't really reconnect me with any kind of religious aspect of it. It didn't really send me over the edge of not being religious either."* |

| Name | **Open to FOO sharing religious beliefs and practices with child** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Parents allowing family of origin to engage and include children in religious practices or to share religious beliefs with child |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Parents letting family members expose children to religion<br>- Parents allowing family members to include children in religious practices<br>- FOO having religious conversations with children |
| Typical examples | - Children attending religious services with FOO<br>- Praying at family members households |
| Examples | *"We've sent them to church with their grandmother. They have been exposed to the ministries with their Aunt. They have been exposed to* |

| | |
|---|---|
| | *our belief system."* |
| | *"H: ...and everything here she does the prayer before meals and all that stuff and we have no problem with that and when she comes home she knows at our house we don't do those things. So she has learned just like we do to respect your family members, friends, and just anyone in general that you have your beliefs and I'm fine with that I don't have a problem with that."* |

| Name | **Setting Boundaries with FOO** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Parents creating boundaries or implicit desired boundaries with family of origin on how they want their child to experience religion. |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Parents uncomfortable with family members having religious conversations with children<br>- Not wanting child involved with family religion<br>- Boundaries that have been set, regardless of whether FOO respects or violate these boundaries. |
| Exclusion Criteria | - Lack of boundaries from parents or openness to family members engaging child in religion (code under 2) |
| Typical examples | - Passive aggressive actions or comments<br>- Attempts from FOO to convert child |
| Examples | *"I think probably a little further would be, if my mother were to come in and start pushing her religious beliefs on my child, I would have to sit and say, you can't do it. We're letting her make her own decision. We can't force that or influence her in any way, shape or form. It's just not right. It took me a long time to get to where I am on my own. Let her make it on her own, in her own time."*<br><br>*"With my mom, I think just with my mom, has been how we do things with [Child]. My mom will make subtle hints about wanting her to go to church, doing certain things, and she's just recently finally stopped bringing that up. Yes, it's a thing of we have to find our own path of doing things. We have to figure out what works for us."* |

| Name | **Child's upbringing as a point of conflict or disagreement** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Negative comments or behaviors between parents and family of origin leading to decreased relational functioning |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Judgement from family members not raising children religious |

| | |
|---|---|
| | - Participants feeling pressure from family to raise children religious<br>- Negative comments from family of origin |
| Typical examples | - FOO making comment on raising children the "wrong" way<br>- Friction between family members<br>- Avoiding family members or topics of conversation |
| Examples | *"W: Like I used to hang out with his sister. She'd call me for everything. And then when they had a blowup and it hasn't ever been the same since. Basically we're not raising our daughter right. We're not doing a good enough job raising our daughter."* |

| | |
|---|---|
| Name | **Child as a bridge (of relationship and/or of religious acceptance)** |
| Short Description | Child creates a more positive/stronger relationship or greater acceptance of religious differences between family of origin and parents |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Increased involvement from FOO because of child<br>- Greater acceptance from FOO or parents<br>- Relationship is more positive because of child |
| Typical examples | - FOO wanting relationship with child<br>- Having to confront differences<br>- Reaching out to FOO for support or asking questions |
| Examples | *"My parents, I don't know if they would still disown me fully because they would want to have access to my kids to try to convert them."*<br><br>*"I don't want to say I wasn't understanding or whatever of the Christian religion but with her having a set of grandparents that is very religious, I guess it became more of like... I don't know. I don't know how to word it. I had never really thought about being open to listening somebody talk about religion on a regular basis or something like that or having the understanding of where they were coming from in a religious way or something like that, so I guess it didn't really influence my beliefs but it probably forced me into being more accepting of somebody who was going to be around me all the time"* |

*Note:* The first two themes, **Engaging in Familial Religious Traditions and Rituals** and **Open to FOO sharing religious beliefs and practices with child** were combined in the reporting of these findings due to overlap between the two and low prevalence of quotes in the second code.

**RQ3:**

| Name | **Encouraging Exploration or Engagement** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | When parents hope their children will come to their own belief system and provide opportunities for them to explore various worldviews |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Encouraging critical thinking and research<br>- Allowing children to find their own belief system<br>- Openness to children's religious exploration |
| Typical examples | - Engaging in religious activities or services with their children<br>- Buying children books world religions<br>- Engaging in open discussions with children about religion |
| Exclusion criteria | Put concerns about becoming religious in **THEME 4** |
| Examples | *"W: That's it because the thing is that even if they don't agree with us if they critically evaluated it to come to a decision that's good enough.*<br>*H: I think that's just the biggest thing for me you're not unduly influenced by…*<br>*W: or accepting anything wholesale.*<br>*H: You've thought…you have put enough thought into it that it's not just an acceptance of…"*<br><br>*"So we're both like when she gets older, we'll let her, we'll take her to different churches, mosques, synagogues. Get her a rounded view of all religions and even tell her about atheism and just other beliefs like Buddhism, Hinduism, everything like that, and let her come to her own conclusion. If she wants to be an atheist, or if she wants to go into religion, and then encourage it. If she wants to be a Christian, we're not going to say, "You need to get out of the house." No, we're not doing that. No. We want her or any children we have in the future to feel that they can either have religion or not have religion and it's not going to change how we feel about them."* |

| Name | **FOO in religious education or influence** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Family of origin (e.g., interviewee's parents and siblings, aunts and uncles, children's grandparents or great grandparents) religious influence or noninfluence on the interviewee's children. |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Family members bringing up religious beliefs |

|  | - Family members bringing a child to a religious service or event<br>- Boundaries set by the parents regarding religious discussions with their children<br>- Family members respecting or disrespecting boundaries set by the parents |
|---|---|
| Typical examples | - Both positive and negative experiences with family members |
| Examples | *"I think just with my mom, has been how we do things with [Child]. My mom will make subtle hints about wanting her to go to church, doing certain things, and she's just recently finally stopped bringing that up. Yes, it's a thing of we have to find our own path of doing things. We have to figure out what works for us. I think it's we're trying to find our own path without offending the grandparents, or just grandparent, because [Husband's] mom, [Husband's] dad, they are okay with what we're doing. They may make a suggestion, but it's a suggestion. If we take it, if we don't, they're fine with it."*<br><br>*"[My mom] doesn't really like hearing my son talk about atheism or skepticism or anything against the Bible. She doesn't like that, it's offensive to her, and I find it kind of amusing, but I do I wish she was more open to different ideas. But I mean it has it's, my mom and I have had a rocky relationship outside of religious beliefs anyways, so for us to get along we just take each other in small doses right now anyway. But I try to stay away from that as much as possible."*<br><br>*"W: Like I used to hang out with his sister. She'd call me for everything. And then when they had a blowup and it hasn't ever been the same since. Basically we're not raising our daughter right. We're not doing a good enough job raising our daughter.*<br>*H: We wouldn't take her to church."* |

| Name | **Religious Holidays and Ceremonies** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | How Parents navigate religious holidays with their children |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Religions holidays that are celebrated culturally (e.g., Christmas, Easter)<br>- Avoiding holidays because of religious connotations<br>- Participating in only certain parts of holiday celebrations<br>- Life events that typically include certain religious celebrations or rituals (e.g., weddings, birth of a child) |
| Typical examples | - Singing or not religious holiday songs<br>- Talking to children about the history of the holiday |

| | - Gift giving and Easter Egg hunts |
|---|---|
| Examples | *"I've never been a person that is really into traditional gift giving. I guess if anything a little bit later, now that our kids are six and eight and we can't quite shelter them from the existence of holidays like I used to be able to do, I've had to relax a little bit about it. But I was always…again, we're not religious. It always felt kind of hypocritical to me to celebrate holidays that were essentially religious in nature. To a certain extent you can say Easter is about spring and the solstice and the equinox and all that, but it always feels just sort of contrived to me. I mean we could but…or we could just say "Yay it's spring."*<br><br>*"Holidays are always a bit of a big thing for us. When we first started dating, we still do, we alternate holidays. So Thanksgiving, we'll go to his parent's, and then Christmas, we go to my family, and next year, we will switch. It's been because of [Child] and everything, but that's always been huge is keeping family together. My mom's side of the family is kind of splintered right now, but on that side of my family, I'm still very close, still in good contact with."* |

| Name | **Concerns Regarding Children Being Exposed to Religion or Becoming Religious** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Any negative thoughts or behaviors associated with their children choosing a certain religious path or religious beliefs or deviating from the parents' own worldviews |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Specific religious denominations they don't want their children to join<br>- Specific religious beliefs they don't want their children to believe in<br>- Specific religious practices they don't want their children to adhere to<br>- General concerns about their child becoming religious<br>- Concerns about *pathway* to becoming religious |
| Typical examples | - Concerns about religious beliefs translating into political beliefs and opinions<br>- Concerned that they might become religious due to a lack of critical thought<br>- Hesitation or uncertainty about certain religious paths |
| Examples | **"*To be totally honest, it's not as important to me that she follow in my footsteps as far as her religious beliefs. If she were to become pretty* |

*much any mainstream religion, I don't think that would freak me out as much as if she became a conservative Republican.  That would freak me out if she suddenly was against gay marriage or not pro-choice or…There are stances she could take that would upset me, and there are times even now where we'll disagree on a point that's more (1:45:30) political than anything else, or more social and it'll surprise me.  So it wouldn't be so much religion as it would be specific beliefs that it would disappoint me. Like for example, I'm against the death penalty.  If I found out that she became radically pro-death penalty, that would disappoint me more than if she said I'm a Quaker.  Maybe that's the U.U. (Unitarian Universalist) in me because U.U.s tend to be very tolerant in terms of spiritual beliefs but it's a liberal religion that's pretty progressive in its social values and that's pretty much where I fall."*

*"H: I don't think that I would be discouraged if they wound up religious. I would be discouraged if they get the same church as I did and wound up religious. Because I think that my discouragement would come from surprise. I would find it highly unlikely that anyone that honestly and open mindedly did proper research on all of our [inaudible] that could be relevant to religion. Or any mythology or theology [inaudible]. I would be surprised if they could still stay by any religion at all. Spirituality, sometimes maybe. But I would be really surprised if they did that and went about the route of religion . . .  so that's why I would be discouraged if they did the same research [W: Exactly the same way] yeah the same type of research in the same way and wound up that way. I don't care what they choose to believe or what they choose to follow as long as they honestly research those things."*

| Name | **Parents Sharing their Own Belief with Children** |
|---|---|
| Short Description | Intentionally sharing their own beliefs with children. |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Transparency and honesty when talking about parent's views on religion or the world more generally<br>- Specific beliefs or behaviors Parents strove to impart to their children<br>- Parents journey to being open about their beliefs with their children<br>- Parents hesitations to being open about their beliefs |
| Typical examples | - Being a model for their children<br>- Starting intentional conversations<br>- Helping children become critical thinkers |

| Examples | *"H: I mean the short answer is yes.  We want her to know and hopefully understand what we think, believe.  But I think part of that it trying to make sure that she knows to be open minded about other viewpoints and other belief systems.*<br>*W: I would agree with that. The biggest thing I've tried to share with is curiosity, and knowing that no one person can have all the answers. And just a wonder for the world around us."* |

| Name | **Emphasis on Behaviors not Beliefs** |
| --- | --- |
| Short Description | Caring about how their children acts rather than what their child believes |
| Inclusion Criteria | - Emphasis put on specific characteristics or behaviors they hope to impart to their children OVER specific beliefs |
| Typical examples | - Hoping their child is a good person, regardless of their belief system<br>- Hoping their child is a critical thinker regardless of their belief system |
| Examples | *"H: The stuff I want him to advance on in the coming years is the same introspective stuff, the honesty of himself and his own motives and his own interpersonal relationships. That kind of stuff, teaching him how to not be completely self-centered and be capable of having mutual relationships with other people instead of the one-sided ones that he's, at this time, pretty much only capable of. That's where, and it's kind of the same problem that I would also like to see. He's good in critical thinking skills and skepticism, but he's, I want him to put a human face on things more. I want him to grow in terms of respecting people even if you don't respect their beliefs"* |

| Name | **Community Influence on Child's Religious Socialization** |
| --- | --- |
| Short Description | How the community (e.g., neighbors, friends, etc.) directly influence children or indirectly influence children's religious socialization (i.e., how the impact the parents' behaviors or perceptions) |
| Inclusion Criteria | Any way that individuals outside of the FOO influence children's religious socialization or influence how parents think about/approach their children's religious socialization. |
| Typical examples | - Parents telling children not to discuss their beliefs with certain peers |

|  | - Parents feeling judged by neighbors for not raising their children in a certain religion<br>- Feeling left out/not included because they are not religious/because they don't participate in certain religious activities |
|---|---|
| Examples | *"Already, even in our playgroup the neighborhood kids, they go to vacation bible school in the summer, so she's already heard of that and she's four, so I imagine---they sing songs when watching our kids----so I imagine they already have had the exposure there and there are different beliefs out there, that some people think this, and some people think that, and what do you think?"*<br><br>*"Yeah, when we don't participate in the prayer or something we get really weird looks. Or sometimes when I show up to do something nice it gets confusing for people. Like, especially older people for some reason. If I try to help them it's like, "Why is it you helping me and not the return missionary kid?" (laughs). So yeah, I think that will be a challenge for sure. Just the community around here I'm sure will be asking, "When are you going to baptize your kids?" or things like that."* |

*Note:* The themes of **Community Influence on Child's Religious Socialization** and **Religious Holidays and Ceremonies** were combined in the reporting of these findings due to overlap between the two.

*Curriculum Vitae.*

# Heather Howell Kelley

## Curriculum Vitae
Cell: (801) 473-9347
Email: heather.kelley@usu.edu

## Education

**Doctor of Philosophy.** Major: Human Development and Family Studies. Advisor: Elizabeth B. Fauth. Utah State University, September 2020 – present. Anticipated Graduation in May 2024.

**Master of Science.** Major: Marriage, Family, and Human Development. Advisor: Loren D. Marks. Brigham Young University, August 2018.

**Bachelor of Science.** Major: Family Life. Emphasis: Family Studies. Minor: Business Management. Brigham Young University, August 2016. Magna cum laude.

## Statistical Skills

Highly proficient in: STATA and NVivo; Experience with: SPSS, R, and SAS

## Academic and Professional Positions

**USU Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice**
Researcher III……………………………………………………………June 2023 – present
- Grant writing
- Program evaluation
- Conduct and disseminate original research

Research Assistant for Elizabeth B. Fauth and Ty B. Aller………………Aug 2020 – present
- Analyze data and write research papers related to mental health literacy
- Assist in the development and adaptation of mental health literacy programs
- Assist in grant writing

**Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services**

Instructor of Record……………………………………………………Jan 2022 – present
- EDUC 6800: Mixed Methods Research
- HDFS 2660: Parenting and Child Guidance

Teaching Assistant for HDFS 1500: Lifespan Development……………….Jan 2023 – present

Teaching Assistant for HDFS 4900: Practicum……………………………Aug 2020 – May 2021
- Mentor students on grant writing processes

# I. Scholarship

## A. GRANTS

### 1. Funded Grants ($N = 4$)

Juhasz, A. (PI), Aller, T. B. (Co-I), **Kelley, H. H.** (Co-I). Patterns and prevalence of chronic health conditions among adults with disabilities. Disability and Health Secondary or Existing Data Analysis, Association for University Centers on Disabilities. ($81,984.69 for 6 months).

**Kelley, H. H.** (PI) and Levin, M. (Co-I). Determining the feasibility and acceptability of an online, ACT-based, single session intervention for adults with dementia. Alzheimer's and Dementia Research Center. ($24,628.38 for 1 year).

Aller, T. B. (PI), **Kelley, H. H.** (Co-I), Levin, M. (Co-I). Determining the feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary efficacy of an online, self-guided, single-session ACT program to improve quality of life for autistic adults experiencing mental health concerns. National Research Consortium on the Mental Health Aspects of Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. ($35,000 for one year).

Aller, T. B. (PI), **Kelley, H. H.,** (CoI), Franco, J. (CoI) (2023) Western Regional Agricultural Stress Assistance Program (WRASAP). Subcontract with Washington State University. ($50,000 for one year).

### 2. Under Review Grants (N = 1)

Fauth, E.B. (PI)., Aller, T.B., (Co-I) Juhasz, A., (Co-I), **Kelley, H.H.** (Co-I), Novak, J.R. (Co- I), Levin, M.E. (Co-I). *A mixed-method randomized control trial of an online Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Program for Caregivers of*

*Individuals with Dementia.* National Institute on Aging. (Requested $3,161,967 for 5 years).

## B.  RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

### 1.  Scholarly Peer-Reviewed Publications (*N* = 50)

*\*Denotes mentored undergraduate student.*

Fauth, E. B., Novak, J. R., Gossner, J., Aller, T. B., **Kelley, H. H.**, & Levin, M. E. (In press). Family caregivers' progress toward values moderates the associations between behavioral symptoms of dementia, caregiver burden, and depressive symptoms. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development.*

Aller, T. B., **Kelley, H. H.,** Barrett, T. S., Covington, B., Levin, M. E., & McClain, M. B., (In press). An examination of psychological flexibility as a mediator between mental health concerns and satisfaction with life among autistic adults. *Autism in Adulthood.*

Aller, T. B., **Kelley, H. H.,** Barrett, T. S,, & Fauth, E .B. (In press). An exploratory
analysis of moderating effects in a non-randomized, quasi-experimental evaluation of a college-based mental health literacy curriculum. *Journal of American College Health.*

**Kelley, H. H.,** Byers, R., Aller, T. B., & Wappett, M. (In press). Mental health and intellectual and development disabilities: A participatory action landscape analysis of a western state. *Sage.*

Byers, R. & **Kelley, H. H.** (In press). Lessons learned: Photovoice as an inclusive research method for individuals with co-occurring mental health concerns and intellectual or developmental disability. *Sage.*

Lee, Y. G. & **Kelley, H. H**. (2023). Financial perceptions and financial behaviors across marital status and gender, *5*(2), 86-101. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journa*l.  https://doi.org/10.1111/fcsr.12493

LeBaron-Black, A. B., **Kelley, H. H.,** Van Alfen, M., Button, J., Coyne, S. M., Rogers, A. A., & Duerden, C. (In press). Predictors of differing experiences with scriptural women and Heavenly Mother among Latter-day Saints. *Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association.*

**Kelley, H. H.**, Hendricks, J. J., Chelladurai, J. M., Dollahite, D. C., & Marks, L. D. (In press). "We have hope": Exploring hope in highly religious families. *Family Relations.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12937

Li, X., Jin, B., **Kelley, H. H.,** Cao, H., Zhou, N., Holmes, E., & Yorgason, J. (In press). Work-family conflicts and perceived fairness of housework division in dual-earner couples during COVID-19. *Sex Roles.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-023-01422-5

Lee, Y. G., **Kelley, H. H.,** & Lee, J. (In press). Untying financial stress and financial anxiety: Implications for research, financial therapists, and practitioners. *Journal of Financial Therapy, 14*(1) 4. https://doi.org/10.4148/1944-9771.1293

Chelladurai, J. M., Marks, L. D., Dollahite, D. C., **Kelley, H. H.,** & Allsop, D. B. (2023). The hidden power of "thank you": Exploring aspects, expressions, and the influence of gratitude in religious families. *Psych*, *5*(3), 742-756. https://doi.org/10.3390/psych5030048

**Kelley, H. H.**, Aller, T. B., & Wappett, M. (2023). A systematic review of mental health focused training programs for direct support professionals working with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Journal of Mental Health Research in Intellectual Disabilities.* https://doi.org/10.1080/19315864.2023.2198491

Lee, Y. G., **Kelley, H. H.,** Wiatt, R., & Marshall, M. I. (2023). Work-family balance and perceived business outcomes among copreneurial and noncopreneurial small business owners. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-023-09897-w

**Kelley, H. H.** (2023). Introduction to the *Marriage and Family Review* special issue on home-centered practices, processes, and relational well-being during COVID-19. M*arriage and Family Review*, *59*(2), 37-40. https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2023.2178075

Lee, Y. G., Hales, E., & **Kelley, H. H.** (2023). Investigating the connections between financial behaviors, government assistance, and financial well-being. *Social Indicators Research, 166*(1), 85-103. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-022-03051-z

Aller, T. B., Russo, R. B., **Kelley, H. H.,** Bates, L., & Fauth, E. B. (2023). Mental health issues in individuals with developmental disabilities: Improving mental health literacy trainings for caregivers. *American Journal on Intellectual and Development Disabilities, 61*(1), 49-64. https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-61.1.49

Marks, L. D., Dollahite, D. C., **Kelley, H. H.,** Kimball, E. R., & James, S. (2023). Changes in family communication during COVID-19: Positive, negative, or both? *Marriage and Family Review, 59*(2), 121-142. https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2023.2170014

Marks, L. M. Dollahite, D. C., **Kelley, H. H.,** James, S., & Kimball, E. R. (2023). How changes in home-centered family meals influenced relational well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Marriage and Family Review, 59*(2), 121-142. https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2023.2170014

**Kelley, H. H.,** Dollahite, D. C., James, S., & Marks, L. M. (2023). Changes in home-centered spiritual practices and relational wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Marriage and Family Review, 59*(2), 41-64. https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2021.2022563

Dollahite, D. C., **Kelley, H. H.,** James, S., & Marks, L. D. (2023). Changes in home-centered religious practices and relational wellbeing following the initial onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Marriage and Family Review, 59*(2), 65-94. https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2022.2141942

Chelladurai, J., Hendricks, J., Dollahite, D. C., Marks, L. D., **Kelley, H. H.,** & Rose, A. H. (2023). Exploring personal and relational motivations and processes of forgiveness in religious families. *Family Relations, 72*(3), 1014-1031. https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12733

LeBaron-Black, A. B., **Kelley, H. H.**, Hill, E. J., Jorgensen, B. L., & Jensen, J. F. (2023). Financial socialization agents and spending behavior of emerging adults: Do parents, peers, employment, and media matter? *Journal of Financial Counseling and Planning, 34*(1), 1-13. http://dx.doi.org/10.1891/JFCP-2021-0036

Shoaf, H., Hendricks, J., Dollahite, D. C., Marks, L. D., **Kelley, H. H.,** & Ward, S. G. (2022). Individual, marital, parental, and familial strengths of interfaith couples. *Marriage and Family Review,* 58(8), 675-701. https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2022.2093311

**Kelley, H. H.,** Chandler, A. B., LeBaron-Black, A. B., Li, X., Curran, M., Yorgason, J., & James, S. (2022). Spenders and tightwads: Perceptions of spouse's money management and marital outcomes. *Journal of Financial Therapy 13*(1) 20-38. https://doi.org/10.4148/1944-9771.1288

Lee, Y. G., Lopez, P., & **Kelley, H. H.** (2022). Does race/ethnicity matter? Associations between financial stressors and poor and desirable financial behaviors. *Journal of Financial Counseling and Planning,* 33(3), 358-375. https://doi.org/10.1891/JFCP-2021-0040

Aller, T. B., Fauth, E. B., **Kelley, H. H.**, Hodgskiss, S., Brown, A. L., & Hellstern, R. (2022). College students with personal mental health experiences have greater mental health literacy: A strengths-based perspective using two unique samples. *Journal of Mental Health.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2022.2069692

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**Kelley, H. H.,** Lee, Y., LeBaron-Black, A. B., Dollahite, D. C., James, S., Marks, L. D., & *Hall, T. (2022). COVID-19 related changes in financial stress and family wellbeing. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-022-09822-7

**Kelley, H. H.,** Marks, L. D., & Dollahite, D. C. (2022). Uniting and dividing influences of religion on parent–child relationships in highly religious families. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 14*(1), 128–139. https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000321

Kimball, E. R., Marks, L. D., Dollahite, D. C., Leavitt, C. E., & **Kelley, H. H.** (2021). Why do the devout remain devoted? Exploring religious expectations and relational compensators. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000439

Marks, L. D., **Kelley, H. H.,** & Galbraith, Q. D. (2021). Explosion or much ado about little? A quantitative analysis of qualitative research from 1995-2017. *Qualitative Research in Psychology.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2021.1917740

Chelladurai, J. M., **Kelley, H. H.,** Marks, L. D., & Dollahite, D. C. (2021). Humility in family relationships: Exploring how humility influences relationships in religious families. *Journal of Family Psychology.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000860

**Kelley, H. H.,** LeBaron-Black, A. B., Hill, E. J., & Meter, D. (2021). Perceived familial support and the work family interface: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 37*(3), 143-155. https://doi.org/10.5093/jwop2021a15

**Kelley, H. H.,** LeBaron, A. B., & Hill, E. J. (2021). Family matters: Decade review from *Journal of Family and Economic Issues. Journal of Family and Economic Issues, 42*(1), 20-33. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-020-09706-8

LeBaron, A. B., & **Kelley, H. H.** (2021). Financial socialization: A decade in review. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues, 42*(1), 195-206. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-020-09736-2

**Kelley, H. H.,** Galbraith, Q. D., & Korth, B. (2021). The what and how of modern religious transmission and its implications for families. *Journal of Family Psychology, 35*(4), 423–432. https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000673

LeBaron, A. B., **Kelley, H. H.**, Hill, E. J., & Galbraith, Q. D. (2021). Religion, financial stress, and the FAAR model: How religion exacerbates and alleviates financial stress. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality. 13*(3), 370–380. https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000294

Riley, C., Carlile, A., Galbraith, Q., & **Kelley, H. H.** (2020) Surviving secular society: How religious families maintain faith through community and parenting practices." *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society 10*(3) 57-73. https://doi.org/10.18848/2154-8633/CGP/v10i03/57-73.

Spencer, A. T., Marks, L. D., Dollahite, D. C. & **Kelley, H. H.** (2020). Positive relational transformation in religious families: Supports and catalysts for meaningful change. *Family Relations.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12440

Marks, L. D., Dollahite, D. C., Hatch, T. G., Goodman, M. A., Phillips, T. M., & **Kelley, H. H.** (2020). The real Book of Mormon musical: Latter-day Saint family home evening as a weekly ritual. *Marriage & Family Review*, *56*(5), 425-448. https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2020.1726852

**Kelley, H. H.,** Galbraith, Q. D., Strong, J. Z. (2020). Working moms: Motherhood penalty or motherhood return? *Journal of Academic Librarianship, 46*(1), 102075. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2019.102075

**Kelley, H. H.,** Marks, L. D., & Dollahite, D. C. (2020). Uniting and dividing influences of religion in marriage among highly religious couples. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 12*(2), 167-177. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/rel0000262

Callister, A., Galbraith, Q., & **Kelley, H. H.** (2019). Constructing meaning through connection: Religious perspectives on the purpose of life. *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society 9*(3) 15-31. http://dx.doi.org/10.18848/2154-8633/CGP/v09i03/15-31

Galbraith, Q. D., Callister, A., **Kelley, H. H.** (2019) Have academic libraries overcome the gender wage gap? An analysis of gender pay inequality. *College & Research Libraries 80*(4) 470-484. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.4.470

**Kelley, H. H.,** LeBaron, A. B., & Hill, E. J. (2018). Financial stress and marital quality: The moderating role of couple communication. *Journal of Financial Therapy 9* (2) 3. https://doi.org/10.4148/1944-9771.1176

**Kelley, H. H.**, LeBaron, A. B., Sussman, L. J., Fagan, J., Dollahite, D. C., & Marks, L. D., et al. (2018). Shalom bayit—Peace of the home: Ritual and tradition in American Jewish families. *Marriage & Family Review,* 54(7), 706 -718. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2018.1478922

Galbraith, Q., **Kelley, H. H.**, & Groesbeck, M. (2018). Is there a racial wage gap in research libraries? An analysis of ARL libraries. *College & Research Libraries*, *9*(7), 863-875. http://dx.doi.org/10.5860/crl.79.7.863

LeBaron, A. B., **Kelley, H. H.**, & Carroll, J. S. (2018). Money over marriage: Marriage importance as a mediator between materialism and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, *39*(2), 337-347. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10834-017-9563-2

Dollahite, D. C., Marks, L. D., & **Kelley, H. H.** (2017) Mormon scholars and Mormon families in family studies: A brief retrospective. *Mormon Studies Review, 4,* 16-40. Retrieved from https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1074&context=msr2

2. <u>**Under Review Publications (Available upon request; *N* = 3)**</u>

Li, X., Kong, D., Khan, M. A., **Kelley, H. H.,** Xiaohui, S. L., Homes, E., Yorgason, J. (Under review). For Richer, For Poorer: The Associations among Financial Distress, Power (Im)Balance, and Depressive Symptoms among U.S. Different-gender Couples. *Family Process.*

**Kelley, H. H.,** Kimball, E. R., Hendricks, J., Marks, L. D., & Dollahite, D. C. (Submitted). Leaving the faith: Personal and perceived reasons from religious nones and dones. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality.*

**Kelley, H. H.,** & Aller, T. B. (Revise and resubmit). Transcendent spirituality and psychological flexibility among adults on the autism spectrum. *Journal of Religion and Health.*

3. <u>**In Preparation Publications (Available upon request; *N* = 3)**</u>

**Kelley, H. H.,** Dollahite, D. C., James, S., & Marks, L. M. (In preparation). Knowing someone who died from COVID-19 and the perceived lasting impact of the pandemic on religious involvement.

Aller, T. B., **Kelley, H. H.,** Juhasz, A. & Covington, B. (In preparation). Short report: COVID-19 health distress among autistic adults: Does psychological flexibility explain effects of health distress on mental health outcomes?

**Kelley, H. H.,** Aller, T. B., Julian, A., Strand, L., (In preparation). "It's a circus": Family caregivers' perspectives on accessing mental health care.

C.      **RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS (*N* = 25)**

**Kelley, H. H.,** & Aller, T. B. (2023, November 5-8). *Barriers to mental health care for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities: Perspectives and solutions from family members and caregivers.* [Conference presentation]. Application to present a poster presentation submitted to Association for University Centers on Disability, Washington, D.C., United States.

Aller, T. B., **Kelley, H. H.,** & Juhasz, A. (2023, November 5-8). *Challenges, and solutions, for people with disabilities in rural areas seeking mental health services.* [Conference presentation]. Application to lead an interactive discussion submitted to Association for University Centers on Disability, Washington, D.C., United States.

**Kelley, H. H.,** Dollahite, D. C., & Marks, L. D. (2023, November 8-11). *Knowing someone who died from COVID-19 and the perceived lasting impact of the pandemic on religious involvement.* [Conference presentation]. Application to present a poster presentation accepted by National Council on Family Relations, Orlando, FL, United States.

**Kelley, H. H.,** Dollahite, D. C., & Marks, L. D. (2022, November). *Changes in spiritual practices and relational well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic.* Paper presented at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Baltimore, MA.

Marks, L. D., **Kelley, H. H.,** & Dollahite, D. C., (2022, November). *Family dinner during the COVID-19 pandemic: Does the family that eats together stay together?* Paper presented at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Baltimore, MA.

Dollahite, D. C., **Kelley, H. H.,** James, S., & Marks, L. D. (2021, November). *Changes in Home-centered Practices and Relational Wellbeing during COVID-19. Paper presented* (live online) at the Annual Conference of the National Council on Family Relations.

Fauth, E.B., Novak, J., Aller, T. B., **Kelley, H. H.**, & Levin, M. (2021, November). *ACT-related processes: Value-based living attenuates meditating relationships in caregiver stress outcomes. Poster presented* (live online) at the Gerontological Society of America.

*Hendricks, J., Kimball, E. R., **Kelley, H. H.,** Marks, L. D., & Dollahite, D. C. (2021, April). *Leaving Religion Behind.* Poster presented (live online) at the annual Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference.

*Marks, L. J., **Kelley, H. H.,** Dollahite, D. C., James, S., & Marks, L. D. (2021, April). *Change in Financial Stress and Relational Wellbeing during COVID-19: Exacerbating and Alleviating Influences.* Poster presented (live online) at the annual Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference.
- Recipient of the 1st Place Award in the Family Life Category ($300 cash award)

*Hall, A., **Kelley, H. H.**, Aller, T. B., & Fauth, E. B. (2021, February). *Associations between childhood socio-economic status and mental health literacy in college students.* Poster session presented online at the Utah Conference on Undergraduate Research.

**Kelley, H. H.,** *Maxfield, S., Mann, T., Marks, L. D., Dollahite, D. C. (2020, April). *Surmounting the Empathy Wall: What Nonreligious Families Want Religious People to Know About Them.* Poster session presented online at the Mary Lou Fulton Conference, Provo, UT.

Dollahite, D. C., Marks, L. D., & **Kelley, H. H.** (2020, March 18). *Positive religious youth development (results from four studies)* [poster presentation]. Society for Research on Adolescence Biennial Meeting Pre-Conference on Adolescent Religious and Spiritual Development. San Diego, CA.

Marks, L. D., Dollahite, D. C., & **Kelley, H. H.** (2020, March 18). *Key concerns for parents of religious youth (results from three recent studies)* [poster presentation]. Society for Research on Adolescence Biennial Meeting Pre-Conference on Adolescent Religious and Spiritual Development. San Diego, CA

**Kelley, H. H.** (April, 2018). Friends Don't Let Friends Do Qualitative Research – Or Do They? Poster presented at the Mary Lou Fulton Conference, Provo, UT.

**Kelley, H. H.,** (March, 2018). The Influence of Healthy Couple Communication on Financial Stress and Martial Quality. Paper presented at the Conference of Family and Healthy U, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

**Kelley, H. H.,** Korth, B., Galbraith, Q. D. (November, 2017). Mechanisms, Barriers, and Motivations of Religious Transmission. Poster presented at the National Conference on Family Relations (NCFR), Orlando, FL.

**Kelley, H. H.** (October, 2017). The Divisive Side of Religion: An Analysis of Highly Religious Families' Relationships. Paper presented at the Civic Engagement Research Conference, Provo, UT.

**Kelley, H. H.** & Kelley, T. C. (July, 2017). Mechanisms and Motivations of Religious Transmission: A Qualitative Study. Paper presented at the biannual International Society for the Sociology of Religion (ISSR) conference in Lausanne, Switzerland.

**Kelley, H. H.** & Galbraith, Q. D. (June, 2017). Beliefs or behaviors?; A qualitative analysis of religious transmission. Paper presented at the annual International Journal of Arts and Sciences (IJAS), Vienna, Austria.

Kelley, T. C., **Kelley, H. H.**, Galbraith, Q. D. (2017, June). Challenges to raising children in religious families. Paper presented at the annual International Journal of Arts and Sciences (IJAS) in Vienna, Austria.

**Kelley, H. H.** (March, 2017). The divisive side of religion: An analysis of highly religious families' relationships. Poster presented at the Mary Lou Fulton Conference, Provo, UT.

**Kelley, H. H.** (March, 2017). The Divisive Side of Religion: An Analysis of Highly Religious Families' Relationships. Poster presented at the Utah Council on Family Relations, Provo, UT.

**Kelley, H. H.** & Galbraith, Q. (April, 2016). *Working Moms: Motherhood Return or Motherhood Penalty?* Paper presented at the Utah Council on Family Relations, Ogden, UT.

Galbraith, Q., & **Kelley, H. H.** (April, 2016). *Couples' salary satisfaction: Does it make a difference if both partners work?* Poster presented at the Utah Council on Family Relations (UTCFR), Ogden, UT.

## D.      SELECTED PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP AND OUTREACH (*N* = 7)

Byers, R., **Kelley, H. H.,** Aller, T. B., & Keady, T. (2024) *Skills to support mental health in uncertain times, part 1: Cultivating awareness.* USU Extension. https://extension.usu.edu/healthwellness/research/skills-to-support-mental-health-part-1

**Kelley, H. H.,** Byers, R., Aller, T. B., & Keady, T. (2024) *Skills to support mental health in uncertain times, part 2: Cultivating awareness.* USU Extension. https://extension.usu.edu/healthwellness/research/skills-to-support-mental-health-part-2

**Kelley, H. H.,** Byers, R., Aller, T. B., & Keady, T. (2024) *Skills to support mental health in uncertain times, part 3: Being engaged.* USU Extension. https://extension.usu.edu/healthwellness/research/skills-to-support-mental-health-part-3

Howard, L., **Kelley, H. H.,** Marks, L., & Dollahite, D. (2023, April 12). *How many religious families thrived during COVID.* Public Square Magazine. https://publicsquaremag.org/faith/american-families-of-faith/how-many-religious-families-thrived-during-covid/

Lee, Y. G., **Kelley, H. H.,** Wiatt, R., & Marshal, M. (2022, July). *Succession Planning Expectations among Women-Owned Small Businesses.* Purdue Institute for Family Business. https://ag.purdue.edu/department/agecon/fambiz/2022_pifb_summer_newsletter11.pdf

Lee, Y. G., **Kelley, H. H.,** Wiatt, R., & Marshal, M. (2022, July). *Social Media Use and Business Profitability among Small Businesses.* Purdue Institute for Family Business. https://ag.purdue.edu/department/agecon/fambiz/2022_pifb_summer_newsletter11.pdf

Aller, T. B., Russo, R., Byers, R., Howard, T., **Kelley, H.,** & Fauth, E. B. (2022, March). *Promoting mental health literacy in agricultural families: Leveraging the role of Extension in community programs.* NCFR Family Focus Articles.

**Kelley, H. H.,** LeBaron, A. B, Dollahite, D. C., & Marks, L. D. (2019, September). *What We Can Learn from Ritual and Tradition in American Jewish Families*. Meridian Magazine. https://latterdaysaintmag.com/what-we-can-learn-from-ritual-and-tradition-in-american-jewish-families/

# II. Teaching

**A.**    <u>**INSTRUCTOR OF RECORD**</u>

EDUC 6800: Mixed Methods Research – 9 Students, Spring 2024

HDFS 2660: Parenting and Child Guidance - 43 Students, Spring 2022

HDFS 2660: Parenting and Child Guidance - 60 Students, Fall 2022

**B.**    <u>**UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH COURSES**</u>

Supervised and taught SFL 403R: Research/Creative Works Practicum, an undergraduate family life research course under the supervision of Dr. Loren Marks for three semesters. Taught students how to conduct literature reviews, code interviews, use NVivo Software, and do scholarly presentations. The course emphasized the application of knowledge gained throughout earlier family life courses to conducting and completing a research project (2017-2019).

Supervised and taught PSYCH 430R: Senior Practicum: Research in Psychology, an undergraduate psychology research course, under the supervision of Family Life Subject Librarian, Quinn Galbraith for two semesters. Taught students how to apply knowledge related to families and relationships to completing a research project. Mentored students on conducting literature reviews, coding interviews, and using NVivo Software (2017-2018).

**C.**    <u>**COURSE DEVELOPMENT**</u>

**Mental Health Awareness and Advocacy for Employment Support Professionals (Online course) –** Lead a team of researchers and specialists to design an online course aimed to decrease stigma surrounding mental health concerns and to increase understanding, advocacy, and access to treatment for individuals with mental health concerns and disabilities among employment support professionals. (Aug 2023 – Feb 2024).

**Mental Health Awareness and Advocacy (Online course)** – Worked with a team of university professors, licensed therapist, and extension specialists to design an online course aimed to decrease stigma surrounding mental health issues and to increase understanding, advocacy, and access to treatment for individuals with mental health issues. My work focused on collecting and organizing materials to be used in the course (Jan 2021 – Aug 2021).

**Stress, Mental Health, and Acceptance and Commitment Training among Agriculture Workers (Online course)** – Worked with a team of university professors, licensed therapist, and extension specialists to design an online course aimed to decrease stress and to teach mechanisms for coping with stress in a health way. My work focused

on writing the outline for the course and collecting materials and designing interactive activities to be used in the course (March 2021 – Aug 2021).

D.      **TEACHING WORKSHOPS**

**Graduate Instructors Forum** – USU's Graduate Instructors Forum is a nationally acclaimed program created to train doctoral students in the intricacies of successfully teaching Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) courses in higher education settings. The course is bi-weekly and includes discussions on teaching while engaging in philosophical and pedagogical exchanges with experienced faculty. An emphasis is placed on creating course content and assignments to align with IDEA objectives (these objectives correspond closely with Bloom's Taxonomy of learning). Issues of content in HDFS courses is also discussed (Sept 2020 – Dec 2022).

**Beyond the diversity assignment: Applying critical approaches to pedagogy –** A day-long workshop for focused on integrating critical and inclusive pedagogy into classroom assignments (Apr 2023).

E.      **TEACHER AT NANYANG NORMAL UNIVERSITY**

Taught oral English to English major university students. Taught eight courses each week to classes of 10-20 students. Was fully responsible for creating the course content and curriculum. Tutored individual students when needed (2018-2019).

F.      **TEACHING ASSISTANT**

HDFS 1500: Lifespan Development – Fall 2021, Spring 2023

HDFS 4000: Pre-practicum – Fall 2020, Spring 2021

G.      **LIBRARY RESEARCH SKILLS**

Taught several courses each semester to classes of 30-60 undergraduate students regarding how to use the library databases and resources to conduct literature reviews and research (2017-2018).

**H.** **INVITED GUEST LECTURER**

October 2022 – Invited guest lecturer on religion across the lifespan in Daniel Fleming's HDFS 1500: Lifespan Development Course

September 2022 - Invited guest lecturer on conducting qualitative interviews to Dr. Scott Howell's graduate qualitative research methods course.

January 2020 – Invited guest lecturer on conducting qualitative interviews to Dr. Sarah Coyne's research team.

April 2018 - Invited guest lecturer on using NVivo Software in a qualitative methods graduate course.

March 2018 - Invited guest lecturer in an undergraduate theories course on research regarding family relationships.

Jan 2018 - Invited guest lecture in an undergraduate research methods course on conducting literature reviews.

# III. Service and Citizenship

## A. **LEADERSHIP**

Council member. Graduate Student Society; Brigham Young University. Provo, Utah. September, 2016 - 2018.

## B. **EDITORIAL AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

Editorial review board member for *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* (April 2021 - present)

Ad hoc reviewer for *Journal of Family Psychology*

Ad hoc reviewer for *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review*

Ad hoc reviewer for *Family Relations*

Ad hoc reviewer for *Journal of American College Health*

Ad hoc reviewer for *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*

Ad hoc reviewer for *Marriage and Family Review*

Ad hoc reviewer for *Journal of Financial Counseling and Planning*

Ad hoc reviewer for *Community, Work & Family*

Ad hoc reviewer for *Journal of Financial Therapy*

Ad hoc reviewer for *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*

Ad hoc reviewer for *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*

Summary of verified reviews available at
https://publons.com/researcher/3468945/heather-kelley/

## C. **OTHER SERVICE**

Reviewer for Utah State's Student Research Symposium (2021-2024)

Reviewer for Utah State's Undergraduate Research and Creative Opportunities (2021-2024)

Reviewer for California State University's Student Research Competition (April 2021)

# IV. Awards and Honors

**A.**     <u>**UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY**</u>

Presidential Doctoral Research Fellowship (2020 – 2024)
- Full tuition for four years
- $10,000 annually for four years

Graduate Creative Research Opportunity Grant (2023)
- $300 one-time payment

HDFS Graduate Scholarship (2023-2024)
- $2,000 one-time payment

HDFS Graduate Researcher of the Year (2023)

Phyllis R. Snow Graduate Scholarship (2022 – 2023)
- $2,500 one-time payment

Phyllis R. Snow Graduate Scholarship (2021 – 2022)
- $2,500 one-time payment

**B.**     <u>**BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERISITY**</u>

Recipient of the Hinckley Fulton FHSS research $1,000 travel grant (2017)

Magna Cum Laude, School of Family Life (2016).

Dean's List, College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences (2015 - 2016).

BYU Full Undergraduate Tuition Scholarship (4 years full tuition)