



All Theses and Dissertations

---

2018-07-01

# Uniting and Dividing Influences of Religion on Familial Relationships

Heather Howell Kelley  
*Brigham Young University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

## BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Kelley, Heather Howell, "Uniting and Dividing Influences of Religion on Familial Relationships" (2018). *All Theses and Dissertations*. 7437.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/7437>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

Uniting and Dividing Influences of Religion on Familial Relationships

Heather Howell Kelley

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science

Loren D. Marks, Chair  
David C. Dollahite  
E. Jeffrey Hill

School of Family Life  
Brigham Young University

Copyright © 2018 Heather Howell Kelley

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

### Uniting and Dividing Influences of Religion on Familial Relationships

Heather Howell Kelley  
School of Family Life, BYU  
Master of Science

Previous research suggests that religion can be both helpful and harmful. However, much of the research on religion and families has employed relatively simple, distal measures of religion and has predominantly focused on only one side of the dualistic nature of religion. Drawing upon interviews with 198 highly religious families ( $N = 476$  individuals), the purpose of this study is to better understand how religion can have both a unifying and a dividing influence on familial relationships. To address the complex nature of religion, the analysis investigated the influence of three dimensions of religious experience (religious practices, religious beliefs, and religious community). For the families in this study, religion was most commonly identified as a unifying influence. However, it was also identified as having a dividing influence, particularly when principles were misapplied, done in excess, or when ideas regarding religious beliefs, practices, and community, were not shared. Implications and considerations for future research are offered.

Keywords: religion, family relationships, qualitative, marriage, parenting

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
Uniting and Dividing Influences of Religion on Familial Relationships .....	1
Literature Review.....	2
Theoretical Foundations.....	2
Beliefs, practices, and community.....	3
The Role of Religion in Unifying and Dividing Family Relationships .....	5
Current Study .....	6
Reflexivity.....	6
Methods.....	7
Sample.....	7
Interview Procedure .....	8
Measures and Coding Process.....	8
Initial analyses. ....	8
Secondary analyses.....	10
Open coding.....	10
Conceptual coding. ....	10
Findings.....	11
Theme 1: Religious Beliefs.....	11
Theme 1, Concept A: Unifying beliefs in marital relationships.....	11
Theme 1, Concept B: Dividing beliefs in marital relationships. ....	12
Theme 1, Concept C: Unifying beliefs in parent-child relationships.....	13

Theme 1, Concept D: Dividing beliefs in parent-child relationships.....	15
Theme 2: Religious Practices.....	17
Theme 2, Concept A: Unifying practices in marital relationships. ....	17
Theme 2, Concept B: Dividing practices in marital relationships.....	20
Theme 2, Concept C: Unifying practices in parent-child relationships. ....	23
Theme 2, Concept D: Dividing practices in parent-child relationships. ....	24
Theme 3: Religious Community.....	26
Theme 3, Concept A: Unifying influences of community in marital relationships. ....	27
Theme 3, Concept B: Dividing influences of community in marital relationships.....	29
Theme 3, Concept C: Unifying influences of community in parent-child relationships.....	30
Theme 3, Concept D: Dividing influences of community in parent-child relationships.....	31
Discussion.....	32
A Model for Future Research on Religion and Families .....	35
Limitations .....	36
Conclusion .....	36
References.....	37
Table 1 .....	46
Table 2 .....	47
Appendix A.....	48
Appendix A, Table 1.....	48
Appendix A, Table 2.....	49
Appendix B.....	50
Extended Literature Review: Influence of Religion on Extrafamilial Relationships.....	50

<i>Uniting and Dividing within Congregations.</i> .....	50
<i>Uniting and Dividing Across Interfaith Communities.</i> .....	51
<i>Uniting and Dividing the Religious from the Secular Community.</i> .....	52

### Uniting and Dividing Influences of Religion on Familial Relationships

Religion can be both a uniting and a dividing force in relationships. In a seminal piece on religious violence, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (2015) stated,

Groups unite and divide. They divide as they unite. Every group involves the coming together of multiple individuals to form a collective Us. But every Us is defined against a Them, the ones not like us. . . . Inclusion and exclusion go hand in hand (p. 31).

Each one of us belongs to many different groups, and for many people, religion plays an important role in many of those relationships. Numerous studies show the positive influences of religion on various relationships, but a growing body of literature also shows the negative influences of religion on those same relationships (Burr, Marks, & Day, 2012; Marks & Dollahite, 2017; Marks, Dollahite, & Young, in press). Religion is complex and multidimensional, and it is increasingly clear that religion can be both beneficial and detrimental to relationships (e.g. Dollahite, Marks, & Dalton, 2018; Mahoney, 2005; Mahoney, 2010).

One weakness of the extant empirical literature is that despite the complex nature of religion, many studies focused on the nexus of religion and family life look at religion from a relatively simplistic viewpoint, using only one or two measures of religiosity, often attendance and salience (Mahoney, 2010). Qualitative work can be a valuable tool to capture depth, meaning and process (Daly, 2008; Marks & Dollahite, 2011). Through qualitative interviews with 198 highly religious families ( $N = 476$  individuals), I have further parsed out several of the nuanced roles religion plays in unifying and dividing religious families. Because unity in one relationship can often lead to division in other relationships, this analysis would ideally analyze religion's role as a unifier and divider in relationships both within the family and outside the family. However, due to space constraints, the present article will focus only on familial relationships,

looking at both (a) marital relationships and (b) parent-child relationships. A future study will investigate relationships outside of the family and will examine interpersonal relationships within (a) congregations, (b) interfaith communities, and (c) secular communities. A review of the literature on these relationships can be found in Appendix B.

### **Literature Review**

The theoretical foundations of this study will be presented first. Following the review of theory, previous literature regarding the influence of religion on familial relationships, specifically on marital and parent-child relationships, will be reviewed.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Dollahite et al. (2018) proposed a conceptual model of a system of dualities to explain why religion is both helpful and harmful in families. One of the eight proposed dualities is that “religion in families may be relationally divisive and unifying” (p. 1). As called for by Dollahite and colleagues, this paper will explore this dividing and uniting duality in depth. The authors define relationally divisive as “disharmony with family members and others resulting from religious belief, identity, obligations, and choices,” and relationally unifying as “harmony with family members and others resulting from religious belief, practice, identity, and traditions” (p. 30). I will utilize these definitions in this paper, however, it is important to first further explore the word *harmony*, as it is not a word generally used in this body of literature. When looking at the unifying side of religion, studies typically focus on the positive outcomes of religion on family life such as improved marital quality and stronger parent-child relationships (Ellison, Henderson, Glenn, & Harkrider, 2011; Wilcox, 2004). I will consider harmony to encompass any of these positive processes and outcomes that strengthen relationships and bring individuals together. The literature surrounding the disharmony that religion creates generally focuses on

struggles (Exline, Pargament, Grubbs, & Yali, 2014; Exline & Rose, 2005) and conflict (Curtis & Ellison, 2002). In analyzing the dividing influence of religion, I will consider these constructs as well as more subtle forms of division such as time spent apart and a sense of not belonging.

It is important to note that dividing influences are not inherently negative or harmful, nor is uniting influence inherently positive; both have the potential to be a helpful and a harmful influence. However, while this analysis did not identify instances when uniting was outwardly negative, there were instances identified where the participants presented the dividing account as harmful. Throughout this study, I will use the words *dividing* and *division* to refer to any instance, positive or negative, when religion is separating individuals and groups. When talking specifically about the negative types of division, such as conflict, I will use the word *divisive*, which carries a more negative connotation.

**Beliefs, practices, and community.** Further dissecting the definitions provided by Dollahite et al. (2018), they assert that religion unites and divides through belief, practice, identity, tradition, obligations, and choices. Previous research condenses this list to three dimensions of religion; *belief*, *practice*, and *community* (Dollahite, Marks, & Goodman, 2004; Marks & Dollahite, 2001). These three items provide a nuanced view of religion's complex role in relationships. For both conceptual and practical reasons, rather than coding for all six aspects mentioned in the definition by Dollahite et al. (2018), I chose to code only for beliefs, practices, and community, and the remaining aspects are couched within these three constructs. Beliefs are defined as the meanings, perspectives, identities, and internal beliefs that stem from religion, whereas practices encompass the more overt rituals, traditions, choices, and actions such as church attendance, prayer, as well as acts of abstinence (e.g. fasting, abstaining from sex before

marriage, etc.). Community refers to the support, involvement, obligations, and relationships that are grounded within a religious group (Dollahite et al., 2004).

Answering the call by Mahoney (2010) to look at religion through a more complex lens, these three constructs represent several distinct dimensions of religiosity, each addressing an aspect of the bio-psycho-social model (Engel, 1977; Marks, 2005). The connection between beliefs and psychological function is intuitive and well established. The literature shows that religious beliefs can have both positive and negative effects on psychological functioning (Ellison, Bradshaw, Flannelly, & Galek, 2014; Huuskes, Heaven, Ciarrochi, Parker, & Caltabiano, 2016). Specific religious practices can address the biological aspect of the model as practices have often been tied to various biological outcomes. For example, adherence to the Latter-day Saint health code, the *Word of Wisdom*, has been linked to significantly reduced death rates and cancer rates (Enstrom & Breslow, 2008). Additionally, more typical, outward religious practices such as prayer and church attendance have also been linked to physical outcomes such as increased longevity, and reduced rates of illness (Ellison et al., 2014; Ellison & Levin, 1998; Koenig, King, & Carson, 2012; Levin 1994). Church attendance, while a religious practice in itself, connects to the final construct, community. Community involves the social aspect of the biopsychosocial model. For a significant portion of Americans, congregations and religious groups provide valuable social support and form some of the most important relationships outside the family (Krause, 2008). While these relationships are significant by themselves, interactions with religious communities may also have important impacts on familial relationships (Dollahite et al., 2004) as well as secular relationships, including relationships with peers in school and work, (Fiala, Bjorck, & Gorsuch, 2002; Krause, 2011; Lazar & Bjorck, 2008), and provide a rich context for building social capital (Stark, 2012).

### **The Role of Religion in Unifying and Dividing Family Relationships**

Beliefs, such as the sanctity of marriage and parenting, and practices, such as prayer, have been linked to increased trust between spouses (Lambert, Fincham, LaVallee, & Brantley, 2012), higher levels of overall marital well-being (Ellison et al., 2011; Olson, Marshall, Goddard, & Schramm, 2015), and increased levels of parenting satisfaction (Henderson, Uecker, & Stroope, 2016). Religiosity also helps families reduce or overcome divisive behaviors such as marital conflict (Butler, Stout, & Gardner, 2002; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003), infidelity (Fincham, Lambert, & Beach, 2010), divorce (Brown, Orbuch, & Bauermeister, 2008), and parenting related stress (Ellison et al., 2014; Henderson et al., 2016). While religion can help to strengthen families and to reduce certain problematic issues in relationships, it can also be a major source of conflict. Religious conflict in families primarily stems from two sources: (a) differing religious beliefs and (b) differing practices, specifically, differing levels of religious observance and involvement.

While differing religious beliefs will clearly exist in interfaith relationships, they also exist in shared-faith relationships and can lead to major conflicts (Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Mahoney, 2005). A scholar of interfaith marriages, Susan Miller, stated that, “. . . no two individuals have identical beliefs and practices; thus, every marriage could be considered an interfaith marriage” (2013, p. xii). The effects of these differing beliefs belong on a wide spectrum. While some differences in beliefs can be benign, others can be detrimental to the relationship, largely depending on the salience of the belief (Mahoney, 2005; Stokes & Regnerus, 2009). Not only do these differences in beliefs affect marital relationships, they can also be detrimental to parent-child relationships (Petts & Knoester, 2007; Stokes & Regnerus, 2009).

The ways in which religious practices are expressed within families can equally lead to division among family members (Lu, Marks, & Apavaloiae, 2012). Perhaps the most common example of this is when one spouse attends worships services more frequently than the other does. Over-involvement in religious communities and practices can potentially be harmful to marriages; Doherty (2000) referred to over-involvement in religious activities as “time affairs” (p. 66). Differing levels of attendance may not only be detrimental to marital relationships but may also negatively impact parent-child relationships (Call & Heaton, 1997; Curtis & Ellison 2002; Stokes & Regnerus, 2009; Vaaler, Ellison, & Powers, 2009).

The dimension of religious communities can also have a major influence on family relationships. On the unifying side, religious communities provide important support for couples (Vaaler et al., 2009; Wilcox, Chaves, & Franz, 2004) as well as for parent-child relationships (Mahoney, 2010; Palkovitz, 2002). However, certain types of religious demands can be harmful and divisive for families (Ellison & Levin, 1998). Additionally, when family stressors occur that are not in line with the expectations of the religious community, such as divorce or childbearing outside of marriage, the religious community may exacerbate these challenges (Dollahite et al., 2004).

### **Current Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore how religion influences the familial relationships of religious families. In an attempt to address some of the complexity inherent in religion, I will look specifically at how religious beliefs, practices, and religious communities unify and divide relationships. Within the family, I will look at both (a) marital relationships and (b) parent child relationships.

### **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity refers to researchers exploring and openly reporting their own assumptions,

personal experiences, and other biases that may influence their research, and trying to minimize those biases (Daly, 2008). I am an active member of a faith community. Based on personal beliefs and experiences, as well as previous research, I am predisposed to focus on the positive outcomes of religion. In an effort to reduce biases stemming from my personal views, a diverse (e.g., race, gender, age, religious backgrounds) group of students aided in completing the secondary coding analyses.

## **Methods**

### **Sample**

This study employed data from the American Families of Faith project (Dollahite & Marks, 2017). The sample consists of with 198 families ( $N = 476$  individuals) from the three Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). Participants were selected from all eight religiously diverse regions of the United States (Silk & Walsh, 2011). Families were purposively sampled (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) with an intentional oversampling of racial and ethnic minorities (see Table 1). Families were selected by first contacting clergy to identify marriage-based families with children who were committed to and involved in their faith. The recommended families were then contacted to determine willingness to participate. Among more difficult-to-access faiths (e.g., Islam, Orthodox Judaism), participant referral sampling was also employed. The final sample included 22 denominations of Abrahamic religions. Thus, the sample is characterized by (a) a generally high level of religious commitment (as reported by referring clergy and the participants), (b) religious diversity, (c) a wide range of socioeconomic and educational levels, (d) racial/ethnic diversity, and (e) geographic diversity.

### **Interview Procedure**

Each interview question was pretested to identify potential problems. Questions were open-ended, and many had follow-up questions to clarify and add depth to the initial responses. Interviews typically lasted about two hours. Questions focused on connections between religion, marriage, and family life. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded, as described in the following section.

No questions asked specifically about the unifying nor the dividing influences of religion. However, questions were asked regarding how religion strengthened the participant's families, what role religion played in their relationships, and which religious teachings or practices were most meaningful to them. These questions elicited many of the unifying narratives. While these questions also revealed some dividing narratives, many of the dividing narratives came from questions regarding challenges the family was facing and whether there were any religious beliefs or practices that, when misunderstood or misapplied, were harmful.

### **Measures and Coding Process**

A team-based approach to systematically analyzing qualitative data was employed (Levitt et al., 2018; Marks, 2015). Data went through several phases of analysis. The first phase was done by one group of coders and secondary analyses were performed by a different group of coders. Coders consisted primarily of students enrolled in a semester-long research course. In this course, coders were taught the coding process, including how to use NVivo 10 and 11 and the overarching ideas they would be coding. Meetings were held at least twice a month in order to make sure that coders were making progress.

**Initial analyses.** Coders involved in the primary analyses read through the transcriptions of interviews in NVivo 10 and NVivo 11 and categorized what participants said into unifying

and dividing codes. Students were given a codebook (see Table 2) to help them determine when they could categorize what a participant said as an example of the dividing or unifying nature of religion. The codebook was created following procedure described by MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, and Milstein (1998) and Bernard and Ryan (2010).

The operational definition of *unites* focused on connections, bonds, and relationships between individuals and others, including God, family members, members of their congregations, as well as those outside their religious community. The operational definition of *divides* included any exclusion, separation, or criticism of others, as well as conflict with others. The initial analyses were performed by four undergraduate coders, who coded transcriptions of all 198 interviews. Reports and feedback about progress were exchanged through in-person meetings and email correspondence.

As the themes of religion unifying and dividing were included within a larger coding project, the length of this initial analysis took several semesters. Because of this longevity, each stage of coding was completed independently by each coder. Coders were first assigned transcripts to read through and identify possible examples of religion unifying and dividing, based on the codebook. Coders were then given copies of another coder's work to read through and make notes of any disagreements about *unites* and *divides* codes (for purposes of establishing inter-rater reliability). Coders were then given another file where they were to review why another coder had disagreed with a code and made a decision about whether or not the identified account should be kept as an example of either *unites* or *divides*. A graduate student went through these decisions and made appropriate changes in the coding files so that secondary analyses could be conducted. Interrater-reliability estimates were above .90.

**Secondary analyses.** Secondary analyses were completed in a two-step process. The first step utilized open coding to create a codebook, which was completed by the author and one undergraduate student. The second step utilized a conceptual codebook to code interviews according to the themes identified through a brief review of the literature. Both of these steps used coders enrolled in a semester-long research course. Two part-time paid research assistants also assisted in the open coding.

**Open coding.** The author and one paid undergraduate research assistant open coded the already selected accounts of unites and divides. We were each given a select number of interviews to read and identify sub-themes within the accounts previously identified as unites or divides that seemed to be found in multiple accounts. Bi-weekly meetings were held to discuss these ideas and come to an agreement on a codebook (see Table 3). Four additional coders then used this codebook to code the remaining interviews. This level of coding primarily identified which relationships were being divided (e.g. familial, congregational, etc.) as well as some of the causes of the unity or division (e.g. misunderstandings, stress created by religion, etc.). Not all of the themes identified at this stage appear in the paper. Some, such as unity and division in divine relationships, will be explored in future papers.

**Conceptual coding.** After open coding was completed, one additional round of coding was done. Through a brief review of literature, the author selected several additional themes (see Table 3) and created a codebook. Four groups of two students utilized this codebook to code all the interviews. Selected themes from the open coding from the 198 transcribed interviews were divided between the four groups of students, so that each group was responsible for analyzing a quarter of the data. Within each pair of students, each student individually coded their allotted data. Then, each partner reviewed their partner's coding and recorded any disagreements and

vice versa. Coders then met together to discuss these disagreements and decide which secondary analysis decisions should be kept or deleted (Levitt et al., 2018). The author reviewed these disagreements and made appropriate changes.

### Findings

Findings regarding the unifying and dividing influence of religion on marital and parent-child relationships are presented below. Table 1 presents a summary of these findings, and Table 2 presents a numeric content analysis of the themes (Levitt et al., 2018).

#### Theme 1: Religious Beliefs

**Theme 1, Concept A: Unifying beliefs in marital relationships.** Our team coded 551 accounts, nearly three accounts per interview, as unifying beliefs in marriage. The majority of these accounts centered around beliefs specifically focused on the importance of marriage and family. These accounts included beliefs such as marriage is sacred, God is involved in their marriage, spouses are required to love and respect each other, and divorce is not an option. For example, one Christian wife stated, “Marriage is important, marriage has got to be forever.” Another Christian wife described marriage as “the vehicle that God has for taking care of each other.” A Jewish husband expressed a similar idea as he described the Jewish belief in *bashert*, or soulmates, as creating wholeness in his life:

It’s a concept in Judaism that your *bashert* is like your other half, that together you create a kind of wholeness, [a] kind of completeness. When two flames join, [they] are greater . . . the [whole] is greater than the [sum of its parts].

The other accounts in this section focused on beliefs that were not specifically about marriage and family, yet still had a unifying influence on the relationship. Angela, a Catholic, described how a shared belief system unified her marriage. She said, “The Gospel we chose for

our wedding was ‘seek first the kingdom.’ I know for both [my husband] and I, that is what unites us.” Brent, a Jehovah Witness, expressed how it was his relationship with God that improved his family life, saying, “If I didn’t have a good relationship with God, if that wasn’t solid . . . it would have a negative impact on our family life.” Similarly, a Muslim husband stated, “Islam has definitely blessed my marriage . . . our marriage has been . . . peaceful . . . without Islam, we would not be in [this] situation . . . Islam keeps us away from the evils of this society.”

**Theme 1, Concept B: Dividing beliefs in marital relationships.** Our analysis identified fewer accounts regarding the dividing influence of religious beliefs within marriage. Most of the 79 accounts identified (approximately one account for every three interviews) focused on the divisive influence of spouses having different beliefs, rather than focusing on specific beliefs that were divisive. One Jewish couple discussed the harm that resulted from having differing beliefs:

**Eli:** I came from . . . well, let’s say that it was a hypocritical background, that the things which I [was taught] made it even harder for me to accept things later.

**Hannah:** You didn’t think they could really [be] valid.

**Eli:** Right, a certain validity. It took me many years, many years in fact. It’s only pretty recently that we find ourselves close to being in the same place, in terms of acceptance . . . and that caused marriage stress. There were disagreements, foot-dragging.

For Eli and Hannah, as with most of the accounts in the section, division in their marriage resulted from them not sharing the same beliefs or interpreting and emphasizing certain beliefs differently. However, some couples reported that certain specific beliefs did lead to disunity within their marriages. The only recurring specific beliefs that were identified as having a dividing influence were beliefs regarding sexuality and gender roles. George, a Lutheran,

expressed how the beliefs regarding sexuality he gained from his religious upbringing in a different Christian denomination were harmful to his marriage:

All the parochial education, unfortunately, I think, has had a negative effect on me . . . because I think that it totally ruins my whole idea of sexuality. Which I think is an important part of a marriage, and can be a spiritual thing, and I think that the education that I got in a Catholic tradition was to just ignore that and have a shame about it, and I think it has hurt our marriage.

While George shared a personal narrative of how his religious education regarding sexuality had a divisive impact on his marriage, most of the accounts regarding the divisive potential or influence of these beliefs were non-personal or hypothetical. Whether participants had simply not experienced the divisive influence of these beliefs, or whether they were not comfortable sharing personal experiences regarding how religion had been divisive in their relationships, this trend contrasted the many highly personal unifying accounts that were identified.

**Theme 1, Concept C: Unifying beliefs in parent-child relationships.** There were 232 accounts (more than one per interview) regarding unifying beliefs in parent-child relationships, many of which were focused on the responsibilities of parents towards their children. These responsibilities included being a good example for them, loving them, caring for them, and teaching them good principles. Aisha described her key responsibilities as a Muslim mother as follows:

I think it's real important to understand that there's no compulsion in Islam, and with that, as a mother in Islam, teaching your children, educating them, is the key for a mother in Islam. I . . . can only [teach] them, you know, [to enjoy] what is good, forbid what is

wrong, and hope and pray that they could go on the right path, because, we [are] taught that in Islam that there is no compulsion.

Aisha's beliefs led her to not only strive to teach her children to the best of her knowledge and ability, but to also respect them and their autonomy. Respecting children was important to many parents, as illustrated in the following example. Dewei, an Asian Christian father said, "In our family, I am the father of my son, but we are also brothers. This is very important, and we are equal. I regard him as a little brother and we grow up together in Christ." The end of this account, growing together in Christ, hints at another prevalent theme identified in this section; shared faith brought the family together. Devon, a Baptist son similarly referred to his family's faith as providing a "common ground between us."

In addition to providing common ground for parents and children, religious beliefs also influenced parents to make their children their primary focus, and to thus spend more time with their children than they did in other pursuits, including careers. Charlene, a Mormon mother, reflected on how she might have approached parenting differently, had she not been religious:

I would probably have [had] children, but maybe have [put] them in daycare . . . but my religion helps answer some questions for me that the world might answer in different ways. So instead of having to struggle . . . when my kids are teenagers, wish[ing] that I had been there with them, I already knew what was the right thing to do, so I did it. Even though there were some struggles with it . . . I [now] see the fruits of my labors and I'm so grateful that I had that guidance.

Although Charlene ultimately expressed her gratitude for the guidance she gained in parenting from her religious beliefs, she notes that it was not without struggles. While religious beliefs had

a unifying influence in many situations, they could also create struggles and have a dividing influence on parent-child relationships, as will be discussed next.

**Theme 1, Concept D: Dividing beliefs in parent-child relationships.** As with beliefs in marital relationships, there were again fewer accounts identified regarding the dividing influence of beliefs (41; nearly one for every four interviews) than the unifying influence beliefs. The beliefs that had a divisive influence on parent-child relationships often resulted from dissonance between religious beliefs and popular culture. Many of these accounts described how parents' efforts to encourage children to live according to various religious beliefs introduced tension and frustration to the relationship. For example, while discussing what they allowed and did not allow into their home, one Asian Christian father, Jianguo, recounted, "We didn't encourage them to read *Harry Potter*, but Jeffery wanted to read it and he began to feel frustrated." While the magic and witchcraft elements in the *Harry Potter* series were well accepted in society, they conflicted with some of the teachings and beliefs Jianguo desired to pass onto his children. This frustration that Jianguo mentioned his son experienced was not only felt by children, but by parents as well. Candance, an Episcopalian mother recounted,

[Our daughter] is constantly wanting stuff, constantly wanting to buy stuff and acquire stuff. It is always things . . . mostly materialistic, and it's very frustrating to us. It is a real concern and it seems like a real distraction but it's not easy to parent [it] out of her. It's in her and reflected in the culture.

These previous accounts presented some of the struggles that took place between parents and children within the home and were related to how beliefs were expressed in terms of rules and restrictions. The dividing accounts which generally took place outside of the home dealt with parents differing in beliefs and even belief-systems from their family of origin. There was a great

deal of variance in the resulting influence of these differing beliefs on the parent-child relationship. For some, differing beliefs resulted in concern for each other. Ziva, a no-longer-practicing Catholic who was raising her children Jewish, explained the concern her Catholic father felt for her:

[My father] thinks that I've given up something very big. Although I haven't changed religions, I think my non-practice is an issue. . . . My father doesn't ever say anything about it, so it's not like it's an argument between us, but I know that he is concerned, because he is a very, very deeply religious person.

As illustrated by the previous account, religion appeared to be a subject this father and daughter avoided due to the differences between them. Moriah, a Jewish mother, similarly explained how her husband's non-religious parents struggled to understand their religiosity. Moriah stated, "I think [my husband's] parents, being non-religious, think [he has] given up a lot, because they don't understand what [he gets] out of . . . all the traditional things that we do. They don't see how it could possibly enrich [our lives]." While these previous accounts demonstrate how differing beliefs can make it harder to connect, for others, such as Gary, a Black Methodist, this inability to understand others' beliefs was much more divisive. He said, "For the most part, 99% of the time, I can't talk to my mom, or [my siblings]. Because their walks are different than mine. I mean everyone's walk is different, but their relationship with God [is different]."

As seen in this previous narrative, for many, religious beliefs compose a fundamental part of their identity, and thus, can be unifying when shared, as they create a shared identity, but can also be divisive when family members don't share the same beliefs, much less, when family

member have very different and conflicting beliefs. The next section will explore how religious practices can similarly have both a unifying and dividing influence on familial relationships.

## **Theme 2: Religious Practices**

As many of the practices were done “as a family”, and thus were unifying to both the marital and parent-child relationships, there was a good deal of overlap between unifying practices in marital and parent-child relationships. However, as I present the findings, I will primarily present accounts which were specifically unifying to either the marital or the parent-child relationship. Additionally, it is important to note that prevalent throughout this entire section is the concept of time. For both marital and parent-child relationships, religious practices generally had a unifying influence when they were done together and thus resulted in time spent together, and had a dividing influence when they were done individually and thus resulted in time spent apart. Examples of this, along with other ways religious practices both unified and divided our sample’s familial relationships, are presented in this section.

**Theme 2, Concept A: Unifying practices in marital relationships.** Our analysis yielded 606 accounts (approximately 3 accounts per interview) of unifying practices within marriage. Many of these unifying accounts were about how religious practices created a reason for couples to spend time together. Ibrahim, a Muslim husband, described his experience doing *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, by saying “It was such a great spiritual experience, and in Hajj, the husband and wife do everything together. You hold hands and you do all of the things together.” For Vera, an Asian Christian, it was weekly church attendance that created time for her to spend with just her husband:

On Sundays, I feel that [familial] closeness more than I do on other days of the week [when] we’re just going through the motions and things are so busy. . . . Sunday is a

family day and a day to worship . . . and when we would go to [church, our children] would be in Sunday school and . . . nursery, so it's just [my husband] and I. So that's a very special time for me. We hold hands in church.

Similarly, Hannah described her experience observing the Jewish practice of *Shabbat* as follows:

Six days a week you have to work for a living, but you have this one day you don't have to, you can't. You have to spend all of your time praying, all of your time with your family, all of your time visiting with God, so to speak. That's very refreshing.

While these previous accounts reflect practices that brought couples together for longer periods of time occasionally, other accounts described practices that occurred more regularly (usually daily or twice daily) and brought the couples together for shorter periods of time. These practices included daily scripture study and prayer. Prayer appeared to be the most common practice couples did together on a regular basis. For example, Anne, an Orthodox Christian wife, stated, “[My husband] and I say prayers as a couple, and we try to do that every night.” Mason, a Mormon husband similarly said:

We have companionship prayer every night, and that's pretty good. [We] made a little promise to each other when we were first married that we would never go to bed angry with one another or unresolved, and we've knelt at the bedside till [we're no longer angry with each other].

This previous account shows how religious practices not only created unity among the couples in our sample by encouraging them to spend time together on a regular basis, but also helped unify couples by making the time spent together meaningful. By setting aside time to pray together every night, Mason and his wife were able to overcome their daily differences and

issues, and thus were also able to prevent problems and differences from festering. Ruby, a Methodist, similarly expressed how prayer helped her overcome conflict with her husband, however, prayer in this instance was an individual practice, rather than a practice that was done as a couple. Ruby said, “[My husband will] usually go to bed in the conflict and I’m up, all night, and then finally realize, I’ll go to God. He’ll help me through this.” For a Jewish Couple, Ariel and Dalia, it was reportedly studying the Torah that helped them to overcome some of their challenges:

My husband and I study together; and that’s been really important. Sometimes, especially [with a] complicated family life with step-kids and teenagers . . . things will get brought down . . . just one stress or whatever after another. To have [the Torah] as a constant presence in the house, and studying Torah, it really kind of changes the environment.

Religious practices were not only described as useful in overcoming challenges; many of the couples in our sample also described how these practices strengthened or enriched their relationships and their lives. A Mormon wife expressed this, saying, “We have our couple prayer together whenever we can. Besides the strength you draw from those experiences . . . hearing your spouse pray for you is really humbling.” Briana and Ted, a Christian couple, similarly discussed how religious practices strengthened them both individually and as a couple:

**Briana:** I think the personal, family, and marital benefits for us is that we grow together in God. We study together, we pray together, we fellowship together, and being under [the] pastor and first lady that we are under, they’re able to pour into us. So, that’s a good benefit for me, you know, serving God together as husband and wife, loving God together.

**Ted:** And it makes your marriage strong when you pray together and stay together, because when you have challenges and downfalls, you lift one another up. Where one is weak, the other is strong . . . you can lift each other up at the same time.

**Theme 2, Concept B: Dividing practices in marital relationships.** While our participants reported many such benefits and unifying influences on their marriages as resulting from religious practices, they also reported on the dividing influence of religious practices on their marriages, however, there were again far fewer dividing accounts than unifying accounts. As with unifying practices, many of the 92 accounts of dividing practices dealt with time. The dividing influence of religious practices on marital relationships in relation to time varied greatly. For some, some practices simply took time away from their marriage, but were not necessarily viewed as divisive. These accounts generally consisted of practices that were done individually, such as Muslim men going to the mosque or Jewish men going to the synagogue without their wives. For Jennifer and her husband, who were Jehovah's Witnesses, it was missionary work that interfered with their time as a couple. Jennifer stated:

When [our daughter] was out of school, I joined this missionary type program, and when [my husband] retired, instead of stopping that to spend more time with him, I have continued doing that, and [he's] in a position where it would be nicer if I could be home more. But [he has] chosen to kind of make that sacrifice because I'm still really enjoying this, and [he supports] it when [he] can, but it's . . . a little thing we've worked out.

Although it was a sacrifice for Jennifer's husband, they were able to come to a mutual agreement on how much time she spent involved in missionary work. Several other couples related similar experiences where they struggled to find a proper balance between religious practices and

commitments and family time. For some, including the following Lutheran couple, this was a recurring process, which the wife described as:

We struggle sometimes with being over-committed in the church, where we're spending more time there or devoting our time there rather than to each other and home life at times. Fortunately, we catch it and we usually correct it fairly quickly, but we find ourselves getting so wrapped up into that.

While these previous accounts described religious time commitments as challenging but solvable, for others, time commitments related to religious practices presented a major issue for the couple, and thus were perceived as quite divisive. As one Evangelical wife recounted, "When [my husband] was a deacon, he got enthusiastic about our church . . . and he went all the time . . . . Some of our biggest fights have been about our church."

Beyond the dividing influences of time apart for religious practices, the only specific and recurring practices that were identified as being divisive dealt with gender and sexuality. This reflects the pattern that emerged in divisive religious beliefs, and as with divisive beliefs, many of these accounts were non-personal or hypothetical. This can be seen in the following account from Stuart, a Mormon husband:

We have what we call the priesthood, [which] is the men hold a calling where they are serving in the Savior's place, as if the Savior were here. They're to serve other people. But I think sometimes men in the church will use that calling as a superiority issue and when it's done in a marriage relationship, it can be very harmful, and they can use that as an excuse to get what they want or to treat their wife poorly.

As reflected in this account and others in the data, the practice itself was not divisive, but how individuals interpreted and applied the practice could cause it to become divisive and

harmful in marriages. Indeed, some couples did report that gender roles had a unifying influence on their marriages. In response to the question: Do you feel like there are any religious beliefs or practices that if misunderstood or misapplied can be harmful to marriage?, Efrem, a Jewish husband described how it is not the practice itself that is divisive, but rather, how the couple chooses to implement and live certain practices that can be harmful:

I think the thing that would be the most dangerous to a relationship might be any sort of dogma that you would bring to it, not the thing itself. If you begin to practice something and . . . developed a negative view of me because I didn't . . . that's not about the practice itself. It's about us.

This idea was illustrated in several accounts, including a conversation between a Jewish couple, Simon and Talia. After discussing how they had seen gender-roles be divisive in Talia's Christian siblings' marriages, Simon recounted how similar gender-roles helped promote equality in their marriage:

In the Jewish religion, the woman is in charge of the house. That's basically a standard thing. The man makes money. It's more of an equal relationship, and the woman runs the house. [If] she says, "I want to paint this purple," [then] I say, "It's going to be painted purple." I have no say so in it, . . . [only] indirectly, maybe, . . . but she runs the house. I think from that standpoint, from the Jewish standpoint, I think [it] is more of an equal thing than the Christians that are the born-again types. . . . I think in the Jewish religion it's more equal.

As illustrated by these previous accounts, similar practices can be applied and perceived differently, and the application and perception of that practice appeared to be a better determiner of whether it would have a unifying or dividing influence than the practice itself.

**Theme 2, Concept C: Unifying practices in parent-child relationships.** There were 496 accounts (approximately 2.5 per interview) that were identified by our coding team as unifying practices in parent-child relationships. Again, time was identified as a prominent theme among these parent-child relationships. Whether it was reading scriptures together, praying, attending worship services, or “family night,” religious practices provided meaningful time for parents and children to spend together. Nadira, a Muslim daughter, described how many various practices in Islam brought her family together:

[We say] prayers together as an entire family, most evenings . . . we read from the religious books and talk about Islam and the values, which in your daily life, you can sometimes forget [and the] reminder to everyone again is done as a family. So many of those things, [it] is not . . . one act. The religious holidays . . . fasting together [and] breaking the fast together. Going on the pilgrimage together.

As illustrated by this previous account, many different religious practices created many opportunities for Nadira and her siblings to spend time with their parents. For many, this time spent together participating in religious practices was highly meaningful, and mutually beneficial and strengthening, as reflected in the following account from a Christian son who described how his religious home and rituals strengthened and unified his family:

There’s an equal goal. Everybody serves God. And as a family, [this] serves as a function to help each other. So, we all kind of help each other develop. You know, parents help us, we help the parents. . . . The parents do a lot of teaching and raising of us, me and [my brother]. We in return . . . serve God through serving them.

While this previous account did not elaborate on the specific practices that unify the family, it is evident that the common goal of serving God guided many of the family’s interactions and

practices, whether these practices were done together or individually. Many participants reported that practices that were done individually, particularly prayer, also had a positive, unifying influence on their parent-child relationships. Melinda, a Pentecostal mother, described how prayer guided her and her husband's parenting and strengthened their relationships with their children, saying, "We pray for our children, individually. . . . We ask God for guidance . . . [to] teach us how to deal with kids and the problems, and all that stuff. That creates a stronger bond . . . and it helps me with the parenting." Praying for their children and asking God for help and guidance in parenting was a frequent occurrence among our sample. Tara, another Mormon mother, even called it "a constant conversation with God."

It is also important to note here that some of the gender-based practices mentioned briefly as having a dividing influence in marital relationships, such as men leaving their wives to go pray at a synagogue or mosque, appeared to provide important bonding between fathers and sons, or mothers and daughters. Whether it was a Jewish mother and daughter making *challah* together, or sons accompanying their fathers to pray, these gender-based religious practices often provided one-on-one bonding time between fathers and sons and mothers and daughters.

**Theme 2, Concept D: Dividing practices in parent-child relationships.** There were 53 accounts (about one per four interviews) coded as dividing practices in parent-child relationships. The most common accounts identified in this section appeared when religious practices conflicted with what the children wanted to do with their friends, or how they wanted to be perceived by their peers. For example, a common conflict our sample dealt with were sports or other events that took place during their worship services or other family practices. Dmisha, a Jewish mother, described how the activities her oldest daughter wanted to do with friends on *Shabbat* created conflict:

We had a rule for the girls. The oldest one was old enough to date and go out and she wanted to go out on Fridays. I mean, she basically didn't want to come home on Friday. She wanted to go to the football games and date and do things and I said, "No. It's Shabbat. You come home. You have friends you want to be with? Invite them. We'll feed them too! And you will be with the family until 8 or 8:30 at night and then after that you can go out." And that was just looked upon as terribly restrictive.

Beyond feeling restricted by religious practices, children also expressed feelings of embarrassment and isolation from their peers, and these feelings often led to conflict with their parents. Jennifer, a Jehovah's Witness, expressed how their children struggled with the missionary work they did, saying, "The door-to-door in the ministry. When the kids get to a certain age, that can be embarrassing [to them]." Sara, a Jewish daughter, recalled why religious practices led her to struggle with her parents:

It was a struggle, like I don't want to go to services, like none of my friends have to go to services on Saturdays, or . . . to . . . a boring Bar Mitzvah, I don't want to go. Nobody else I know has to go. . . . I think, like the strongest sort of challenges . . . come from when you feel like being Jewish like isolates you from your friends, or isolates you from the surrounding area, or that having any sort of strong faith isolates you.

During adolescence, the children of these highly religious parents in our sample seemed to struggle finding balance between the demands of their religion and religious practices and the demands and desires of their social life. For some, this did create conflict in the parent-child relationship, while others were able work with their parents to figure out a balance that worked for both of them. Kira, a Lutheran Mother, described how [her] experience raising her children in a religious household varied greatly between the children:

Every child and parent have a different relationship, and each kid reacts to different things. Some you might be able to just throw the Bible at them and say, “Read this and get back to me” and they can learn it. Others . . . [might need to be] exposed to sermon and . . . [I] throw a question, a very non-threatening question, to them about the sermon and see if they bite and start . . . talking about it.

In this account, this mother expressed how each child learned and responded differently to religious practices and religious socialization efforts. Even within the same family, what may have been unifying for one parent-child relationship could be divisive for another. As seen in the section on dividing practices within marriage, it again seems that how the practice is enacted and perceived in the family is a better determiner of the unifying or dividing relational influence it may have, rather than *what* the practice is.

### **Theme 3: Religious Community**

Overall, there were far fewer accounts identified regarding the unifying or dividing influence of religious communities on family relationships. Despite the fact that these accounts were less prevalent than the accounts identified as unifying and dividing beliefs and practices, community still played a salient role in familial relationships for many of our participants. According to our analysis, community had a primarily unifying influence on familial relationships, and a rarely a divisive influence. This is in part due to the coding criteria that was used. As there can be a good deal of conceptual overlap between some religious practices and community, these two constructs were distinguished in the analysis as follows. Any practices related to the religious community, such as attending worship services and teaching Sunday School were coded under religious practices rather than community. Time spent beyond regular

practices, or any service given to or received from the members of the religious community was coded under community.

**Theme 3, Concept A: Unifying influences of community in marital relationships.**

Our team-based coding identified 74 accounts (nearly one per three interviews) regarding the unifying influence of religious communities on marital relationships. These accounts focused primarily on the support that the couples received from their religious communities, whether it was physical, emotional, or spiritual. Several couples mentioned how important this support was specifically in the formation of their marriage, as illustrated in the following account from a Christian wife:

[Marriage] allows there to be trust . . . it gives you the support of the community, and if you do it in the faith context, like we did it in a church, you know, before God and all the assembled family and friends, that supports that trusting, committed bond.

For Susan and Mitch, getting married in their church had a powerful and even transformative influence on their marriage. Susan recalled:

For a long time, [my husband] and I were of a mind, like [why] does [marriage] matter? . . . I know he loves me and he knows I love him, and we vowed to take care of each other and love each other. Why should we do this whole marriage thing? . . . [but] then we [got] to the church and that act . . . of getting married, of being in the church and having all of these people here to witness, and to be part of that union, and to have God part of that union. And the two of us were really of [the same] mind, when we left . . . We had *no idea* it was going to be like this. It was so different than what we had imagined. It was so incredibly powerful.

Susan expressed how those present became a part of their marriage, alluding to the continued influence of their religious community in their marriage. The support couples gained from their religious communities throughout their marriages was also common throughout this section.

Sophie, a Presbyterian wife, expressed how her religious community helped her and her husband through tough times in their marriage.

I don't feel alone. I have the faith community. We have practices that are kind of comforting I would say. There's something to hold onto in terms of practicing your faith together as a group. I value that experience and that's helpful when [we're] going through tough times, whatever they might be in [our] marriage.

Some couples expressed how service in their community was a reciprocal, how they both gave and received service. Just as the support of members of the religious community had a unifying influence on marriages and families, supporting others in the community was also typically identified as a unifying experience. A Catholic couple described this as follows:

**Kathy:** In marriage . . . we do all the faith stuff. But, the faith system of the community, our faith has been beneficial for us, as far as having other families. . . .

**Kurt:** It's a community of people who, you know, get together and all bake [pasta] for each other at different occasions or celebrations . . . You celebrate together, and when someone dies, you're there together. When you need a helping hand, [they're] there. And when someone else is sick, you're cooking them a meal, and that becomes the fabric of your existence in the town and the community, so that becomes really important.

As illustrated by this previous account, it was often the small acts of service, such as baking pasta or being there to both celebrate and mourn the achievements and losses of others, that had a

unifying influence. However, when time commitments and sacrifices for the religious communities interfered with family life, they could have a divisive influence.

**Theme 3, Concept B: Dividing influences of community in marital relationships.**

There were few accounts coded regarding the divisive influence of community within marriages. Of the 20 accounts (one account per 10 interviews) that were coded as such, most of them dealt with the time serving and interacting with community members took away from time as a couple and as a family. One Orthodox Christian wife described the struggles that resulted from the many hours her husband, who was serving as a deacon in the church, admitting that “there have been times that there’s been some resentment . . . on my part. [I’ll ask], ‘Are you going to church *again?*’” Thomas, an Evangelical Christian reflected on the challenges serving in the ministry created for his wife, saying, “I wound up . . . leaving the ministry because we just saw I was away from home 60-80 [hours] a week and she felt like a widow many times, especially with our only child.” Joelle, a Black Christian, reported a non-personal experience, recounting the challenges some of the women in her bible study group faced in their marriages:

There were other women in this group whose husbands were just fighting it. They were just fighting it, you know I’m going, “Why would you fight your wife becoming more Godly?” I’m confused. I couldn’t understand why a sensible man would fight this. You know, to become more good. . . . She’s hanging out with other women, not men, studying the bible.

It is important to note here that these dividing accounts occurred when husbands or wives served or met with members of their religious community *individually*. As previously mentioned, when husbands and wives spent time serving and interacting with those in their community together, it often appeared to have a unifying influence on their relationship. This idea is succinctly

expressed by Feng, an Asian Christian, who said, “Satan tempts us. . . . You can imagine if I want to go to church and she wants to go outside shopping, . . . but once we are both involved in church that actually makes us happy.”

**Theme 3, Concept C: Unifying influences of community in parent-child relationships.** There were 86 accounts (nearly one per two interviews) coded as unifying influences of community in parent-child relationships. These accounts mainly dealt with the support parents gained from their community and the examples of other parents in their community, as well as the common ground religious communities provided for parents and children. One Christian couple recalled the physical support they received as they faced challenges surrounding the birth of their first son:

**Michael:** Our first son was born two months premature and was in the hospital for three weeks. We didn’t have a car and it was halfway across town to the hospital, [but] people gave us rides.

**Linda:** Almost every day for three weeks, someone would come pick me up at our house at 8:00 [in the morning] and take me to the hospital so I could spend the day there nursing and caring for our baby, and then at 8:00 at night somebody would come and pick us up and give us [a] ride home, which was huge. . . . It was a bonding experience. We could never leave [our city] because we owe the [congregation] too much.

The support of the congregation allowed this family to bond with their newborn son. Arella, a Jewish mother, described how her religious community provided bonding time with her children by creating a shared social group:

[Judaism] also defines our social circle, . . . the majority of our friends are Jewish because we go there for Friday night dinners or they come here. We share holidays together, and so it defines again who we are, who our friends are, who our kids' friends are.

Efrem, a Jewish father, similarly described how his religious community helped him be more connected with his children and be more aware of their social life. In response to a question regarding how his involvement in religion had influenced his parenting, he said, "Being . . . an active part of a larger community just helps me see the connection between our kids and our family and the community and then thereby, our kids in the community."

Theme 3, Concept D: Dividing influences of community in parent-child relationships.

The divisive influence of community on parent-child relationships was nearly non-existent, with only seven accounts coded as such, most of which again dealt with the time commitment some religious communities demand of parents. As mentioned previously, practices related to religious community (such as attending worship services) were coded under religious practices, not religious community. Thus, the accounts in this section went beyond the regular religious practices, to the demands of interacting with and serving the members of the religious community. An LDS mother, Heidi, expressed this as follows:

We are so committed [to] serve in this church. You know, we dedicate our lives and a lot of time and effort into programs in the church, helping the youth with camp, helping [children in] Primary . . . and I think that can be taken to an extreme to where you can neglect your family, 'cause you are to serve the Lord with all your heart, might, mind and strength, but part of that is taking care of your family first.

This account again demonstrates that it was generally not the religion that was inherently divisive, but rather how the family applied principles of the religion. While this family's faith

emphasized the importance of serving, their faith also taught that family should come first. However, this family struggled at times to balance these teachings, and it was when they were out of balance that the religion reportedly had a divisive influence.

### **Discussion**

Through a qualitative analysis of 198 interviews with highly religious families, this study identified ways religion can have both a unifying and dividing influence on familial relationships. This study illustrates how religion is often a tool, rather than a force in and of itself. While some beliefs and practices may be prone to having a more unifying or divisive influence than others, these findings suggest that most important factor is how the beliefs and practices are applied, rather than what they are. In doing this, the study simultaneously provided examples of how religion has been applied both in a unifying manner as well as in a dividing manner. For example, the data showed that beliefs and practices regarding gender and sexuality were prone to having a more divisive influence than most other beliefs and practices. However, for some, gender roles and teachings about sexuality did have a unifying influence on their marriage. Additionally, accounts surrounding the unifying and dividing nature of gender-based beliefs and practices also demonstrated how religion can be a dividing force in some relationships, while being a unifying force in other relationships. In this example, some gender-based practices had a dividing influence between husbands and wives but also had a unifying influence in parent-child relationships as they often provided meaningful one-on-one time for mothers and daughters, and fathers and sons to spend together. This is an important concept and warrants future research that investigates the unifying and dividing influence of religion on familial relationships along with relationships outside the family.

It is important to again note that division is not inherently negative, and even when religion does have a divisive influence on relationships that appears negative for that relationship, this does not necessarily mean it is negative for the individuals. The model presented by Dollahite et al. (2018) lists unifying influences as “stabilizing” and dividing influences as “dynamic,” and calls for finding a proper balance and flux between the two. For example, this analysis identified that religion had a dividing influence on parents and children when there was dissonance between the religious beliefs and practices and popular culture or the child’s peer group. Division between parents and children in this instance may be accompanied by greater unity in the child’s peer relationship. The resulting tension between the child’s parents and their friends may help the child develop their own ideas and opinions. Future research could build from these studies and employ quantitative methods to assess the correlation between the unifying influence of religion in certain relationships and its dividing influence in other relationships.

Across beliefs, practices, and community, more unifying accounts were identified than dividing accounts. While this is likely due in part to the fact that the sample consisted of religious families who had strong marriages, it is also likely due in part to the nature and purposes of religion. Across Abrahamic faiths, family is important. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all have the sanctity of marriage and parenting among their fundamental doctrines (Agius & Chircop, 1998). As illustrated by the high number of unifying accounts, it appears that these doctrines about the family do have a tangible influence on families. However, even among the highly religious, these doctrines can still have a dividing influence, particularly when misunderstood and misapplied, or when they are not shared.

Another interesting finding is that the unifying and dividing influences of beliefs and practices on both marital and parent-child relationships were more prevalent than the unifying and dividing influence of community on these relationships. While community did still play an important role in relationships, it appears that what took place within the home was more influential for most families' relationships than the interactions that took place outside of the home.

Additionally, among the various religious practices that can help unify families, prayer appeared to be the most common practice. Unlike most practices, which were generally done either privately, as a couple, or as a family, prayer was regularly done privately, as a couple, and as a family. Although a growing number of studies have investigated individual and couple prayer (Marks & Dollahite, 2017), few have addressed family prayer. One recent study that did address family prayer found several positive and unifying influences of family prayer on familial relationships (Chelladurai, Dollahite, & Marks, 2018). Future research that examines, and compares and contrasts, the influence of all three types of prayer on family relationships is warranted. Additionally, while this study did not identify prayer as having a dividing influence on relationships, it is important to note that some studies have identified prayer as having a negative and harmful influence, particularly when it is used to criticize or manipulate family members (Lambert et al., 2012). The lack of accounts regarding the divisive influence of prayer in this study are likely due in part to the fact that these were exemplary families. Future research regarding prayer and family relationships should intentionally seek to understand both the benefits and costs of prayer, as should much of the future research on religion, as discussed next.

### **A Model for Future Research on Religion and Families**

In addition to findings and implications discussed above, this paper also presents a model by which religion and family life should be studied. For many years, religion has been viewed as either predominantly negative or predominately positive (Marks & Dollahite, 2017). Up until the 1970s, religion was often viewed as a mainly negative influence. Between prominent scholars like Freud referring to religion as a “poison” (Freud, 1927, p. 88) and the many negative references of religion in the DSM III, religion was largely viewed as pathology. However, in 1971, Rodney Stark published a study that showed an inverse relationship between religion and mental illness, showing that contrary to the general opinion on religion in psychology, religiosity was associated with a lower incidence of psychopathy. Stark and others continued to apply high quality methods to the study of religion and health that ultimately helped overturn the stigma of religion as psychopathy. As studies continued to demonstrate the many positive outcomes of religion on both individuals and relationships, some scholars in the fields of psychology and family studies began to view religion as a largely positive force (see Marks & Dollahite, 2017 for review).

In recent years, a more nuanced view of how religion is both helpful and harmful in relationships has emerged in the field (Burr et al., 2012; Dollahite et al., 2018; Mahoney, 2010). However, many of the studies that do address the dualistic nature of religion often focus primarily on one side (generally the positive side) and only briefly address the opposing side in the discussion or as a peripheral finding. Another weakness of the extant literature is that in large part, studies dealing with religion have used overly simplistic measures of religion, such as a single measure of attendance or salience (Mahoney, 2010). By applying a bio-psycho-social model and through looking at the three religious dimensions of practices, beliefs, and

community, this study provides a more holistic picture of some of the ways religion can be both a unifying and dividing influence in familial relationships. By looking at multiple dimensions of religion and by intentionally seeking to understand both the positive and negative influences of religion simultaneously, this study provides a model that future studies can employ in the study of religion and family.

### **Limitations**

Although the sample had many strengths, including its large size of 198 families ( $N = 475$  individuals) and its racial, religious, and geographic diversity, it was not without limitations. First, our sample included only religious, intrafaith couples from Abrahamic faiths. Future research should investigate the unifying and dividing influence of religion on interfaith families, and families who are both moderately and marginally religious, and include faiths outside of the Abrahamic tradition. Additionally, as mentioned briefly above, this study only investigated religion's unifying and dividing influence on familial relationships. To better understand the implications of the unifying and dividing nature of religion, extrafamilial relationships should be investigated as well.

### **Conclusion**

For the families in this study, religion reportedly had both a unifying and a dividing influence on marital and parent-child relationships. While religion was most commonly identified as a unifying influence, it was also identified as having a dividing influence at times, particularly when principles were misapplied, done in excess, or when ideas regarding religious beliefs, practices, and community, were not shared within a marriage or a family. Additionally, this study provided a model by which future studies can approach the complexity inherent in the nexus of religion and family.

## References

- Agius, E. & Chircop, L. (1998). *Caring for Future Generations: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic perspectives*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Becker, P. E. (1999). *Congregations in conflict*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bernard, H. R., & Ryan, G. W. (2010). *Analyzing qualitative data: Systematic approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Brown, E., Orbuch, T. L., & Bauermeister, J. A. (2008). Religiosity and marital stability among Black American and White American couples. *Family Relations*, 57(2), 186-197. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2008.00493.x
- Burr, W. R., Marks, L. D., & Day, R. (2012). *Sacred matters: Religion and spirituality in families*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, M. H., Stout, J. A., & Gardner, B. C. (2002). Prayer as a conflict resolution ritual: Clinical implications of religious couples' report of relationship softening, healing perspective, and change responsibility. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 30(1), 19-37. doi:10.1080/019261802753455624
- Call, V. R., & Heaton, T. B. (1997). Religious influence on marital stability. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36(3), 382-392. doi:10.2307/1387856
- Chelladurai, J. M., Dollahite, D. C., & Marks, L. D. (2018). "The family that prays together . . .": Relational processes associated with regular family prayer. *Journal of Family Psychology*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1037/fam0000432
- Curtis, K. T., & Ellison, C. G. (2002). Religious heterogamy and marital conflict: Findings from the National Survey of Families and Households. *Journal of Family Issues*, 23(4), 551-576. doi:10.1177/0192513X02023004005

- Daly, K. (2008). *Qualitative methods for family studies and human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Doherty, W. J. (2000). *Take back your marriage*. New York: Guilford.
- Dollahite, D. C., & Marks, L. D. (2017). American Families of Faith Project. Retrieved from <http://americanfamiliesoffaith.byu.edu/>
- Dollahite, D. C., Marks, L. D., & Dalton, H. (2018). Why Religion Helps and Harms Families: A Conceptual Model of a System of Dualities at the Nexus of Faith and Family Life. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, *10*(1), 219-241. doi:10.1111/jftr.12242
- Dollahite, D. C., Marks, L. D., & Goodman, M. A. (2004). Families and religious beliefs, practices, and communities. In M. Coleman & L. Ganong (Eds.), *Handbook of Contemporary Families* (pp. 411-431). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dollhopf, E. J., & Scheitle, C. P. (2013). Decline and conflict: Causes and consequences of leadership transitions in religious congregations. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *52*(4), 675-697. doi:10.1111/jssr.12075
- Ellison, C. G., Bradshaw, M., Flannelly, K. J., & Galek, K. C. (2014). Prayer, attachment to God, and symptoms of anxiety-related disorders among US adults. *Sociology of Religion*, *75*(2), 208-233. doi:10.1093/socrel/srv011
- Ellison, C. G., Henderson, A. K., Glenn, N. D., & Harkrider, K. E. (2011). Sanctification, stress, and marital quality. *Family Relations*, *60*(4), 404-420. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2011.00658.x

- Ellison, C. G., & Lee, J. (2010). Spiritual struggles and psychological distress: Is there a dark side of religion? *Social Indicators Research*, *98*(3), 501-517. doi:10.1007/s11205-009-9553-3
- Ellison, C. G., & Levin, J. S. (1998). The religion-health connection: Evidence, theory, and future directions. *Health Education & Behavior*, *25*(6), 700-720.  
doi:10.1177/109019819802500603
- Engel, G. L. (1977). The need for a new medical model: A challenge for biomedicine. *Science*, *4*(1), 129-136. doi:10.1126/science.847460
- Enstrom, J. E., & Breslow, L. (2008). Lifestyle and reduced mortality among active California Mormons, 1980–2004. *Preventive Medicine*, *46*(2), 133-136.  
doi:10.1016/j.ypmed.2007.07.030
- Exline, J. J., Pargament, K. I., Grubbs, J. B., & Yali, A. M. (2014). The religious and spiritual struggles scale: Development and initial validation. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, *6*(3), 208-222. doi:10.1037/a0036465
- Exline, J. J., & Rose, E. (2005). Religious and spiritual struggles. *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality*, 315-330.
- Fiala, W. E., Bjorck, J. P., & Gorsuch, R. (2002). The religious support scale: Construction, validation, and cross-validation. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *30*(6), 761-786. doi:10.1023/A:1020264718397
- Fincham, F. D., Lambert, N. M., & Beach, S. R. (2010). Faith and unfaithfulness: Can praying for your partner reduce infidelity? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *99*(4), 649-659. doi:10.1037/a0019628
- Freud, S. (1927). *The future of an illusion*. Garden City, NY: Double Day.

- Henderson, W. M., Uecker, J. E., & Stroope, S. (2016). The role of religion in parenting satisfaction and parenting stress among young parents. *Sociological Quarterly, 57*(4), 675-710. doi:10.1111/tsq.12147
- Hoffmann, J. P., & Miller, A. S. (1998). Denominational influences on socially divisive issues: Polarization or continuity? *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 37*(3), 528-546. doi:10.2307/1388059
- Hummer, R. A., Rogers, R. G., Nam, C. B., & Ellison, C. G. (1999). Religious involvement and US adult mortality. *Demography, 36*(2), 273-285. doi:10.2307/2648114
- Huuskes, L. M., Heaven, P. L., Ciarrochi, J., Parker, P., & Caltabiano, N. (2016). Is belief in God related to differences in adolescents' psychological functioning? *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 55*(1), 40-53. doi:10.1111/jssr.12249
- Koenig, H. G., King, D., & Carson, V. B. (2012). *Handbook of religion and health (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. New York: Oxford.
- Krause, N. (2002). Church-based social support and health in old age: Exploring variations by race. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, 57*(6), 332-347. doi:10.1093/geronb/57.6.S332
- Krause, N. (2008). *Aging in the church: How social relationships affect health*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Krause, N. (2011). Do church-based social relationships influence social relationships in the secular world? *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 14*(9), 877-897. doi:10.1080/13674676.2010.534775

Krause, N., Chatters, L. M., Meltzer, T., & Morgan, D. L. (2000). Negative interaction in the church: Insights from focus groups with older adults. *Review of Religious Research*, 41(4), 510–533. doi:10.2307/3512318

Lambert, N. M., & Dollahite, D. C. (2006). How religiosity helps couples prevent, resolve, and overcome marital conflict. *Family Relations*, 55(4), 439-449. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2006.00413.x

Lambert, N. M., Fincham, F. D., LaVallee, D. C., & Brantley, C. W. (2012). Praying together and staying together: Couple prayer and trust. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 4(1), 1-9. doi:10.1037/a0023060

Lazar, A., & Bjorck, J. P. (2008). Religious support and psychosocial well-being among a religious Jewish population. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 11(4), 403-421. doi:10.1080/13674670701486142

Levin, J. S. (1994). Religion and health: Is there an association, is it valid, and is it causal? *Social Science & Medicine*, 38(11), 1475-1482. doi:10.1016/0277-9536(94)90109-0

Levitt, H. M., Bamberg, M., Creswell, J. W., Frost, D. M., Josselson, R., & Suárez-Orozco, C. (2018). Journal article reporting standards for qualitative primary, qualitative meta-analytic, and mixed methods research in psychology: The APA Publications and Communications Board task force report. *American Psychologist*, 73(1), 26. doi:10.1037/amp0000151

Lu, Y., Marks, L., & Apavaloiae, L. (2012). Chinese immigrant families and Christian faith community: A qualitative study. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 41(2), 118-130. doi:10.1111/fcsr.12002

MacQueen K, McLellan, E., Kay, K., & Milstein, B. (1998). Codebook development for team-based qualitative analysis. *Cultural Anthropology Methods*, 10(2), 31-36.

doi:10.1177/1525822X980100020301

Mahoney, A. (2005). Religion and conflict in marital and parent-child relationships. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61(4), 689-706. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00427.x

Mahoney, A. (2010). Religion in families 1999 to 2009: A relational spirituality framework. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(4), 805–827. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00732.x

Mahoney, A., Pargament, K. I., Murray-Swank, A., & Murray-Swank, N. (2003). Religion and the sanctification of family relationships. *Review of Religious Research*, 220-236.

doi:10.2307/3512384

Marks, L. (2005). Religion and bio-psycho-social health: A review and conceptual model. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 44(2), 173-186. doi: 10.1007/s10943-005-2775-z

Marks, L. D. (2015). A pragmatic, step-by-step guide for qualitative methods. *Current Psychology*, 34(3), 494–505. doi:10.1007/s12144015-9342-

Marks, L. D., & Dollahite, D. C. (2001). Religion, relationships, and responsible fathering in Latter-day Saint families of children with special needs. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 18(5), 625-650. doi:10.1177/0265407501185004

Marks, L. D., & Dollahite, D. C. (2011). Mining the meanings and pulling out the processes from psychology of religion's correlation mountain. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 3(3), 181. doi:10.1037/a0022206

Marks, L. D., & Dollahite, D. C. (2017). *Religion and Families: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis.

- Marks, L. D., Dollahite, D., & Young, K. P. (in press). Strangers in their own land: Qualitative reports of struggles experienced by U.S. religious-ethnic minorities. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*.
- Marks, L., Nesteruk, O., Swanson, M., Garrison, B., & Davis, T. (2005). Religion and health among African Americans: A qualitative examination. *Research on Aging, 27*(4), 447-474. doi:10.1177/0164027505276252
- McCormack, M. M. (2013). Interfaith relations in the United States: Toward a multilevel community psychology approach. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 23*(3), 171-186. doi:10.1002/casp.2107
- McCullough, M., Pargament, K., & Thoresen, C. (2000). *Forgiveness: Theory, research and practice*. New York: Guilford.
- Miller, S. K. (2013). *Being both: Embracing two religions in one interfaith family*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Olson, J. R., Marshall, J. P., Goddard, H. W., & Schramm, D. G. (2015). Shared religious beliefs, prayer, and forgiveness as predictors of marital satisfaction. *Family Relations, 64*(4), 519-533. doi:10.1111/fare.12129
- Palkovitz, R. J. (2002). *Involved fathering and men's development: Provisional balances*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Patel, E. & Meyer, C. (2011). The civic relevance of interfaith cooperation for colleges and universities. *Journal of College and Character 12*(1), 1-9. doi:10.2202/1940-1639.1764.
- Pettigrew, T. F. (2008). Future directions for intergroup contact theory and research. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 32*(3), 187-199. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2007.12.002

- Petts, R. J., & Knoester, C. (2007). Parents' religious heterogamy and children's well-being. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 46(3), 373-389. doi:10.1111/j.1468-5906.2007.00364.x
- Putnam, R. D., & Campbell, D. E. (2012). *American grace: How religion divides and unites us*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Riley, N. S. (2013). *'Til faith do us part: How interfaith marriage is transforming America*. Oxford University Press.
- Sacks, J. (2015). *Not in God's name: Confronting religious violence*. New York: Schocken.
- Silk, M., & Walsh, A. (2011). *One nation, divisible: How regional religious difference shape American politics (Vol. 9)*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Stark, R. (2012). *America's Blessings: How Religion Benefits Everyone, Including Atheists*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Stokes, C. E., & Regnerus, M. D. (2009). When faith divides family: Religious discord and adolescent reports of parent-child relations. *Social Science Research*, 38(1), 155-167. doi:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2008.05.002
- Vaaler, M. L., Ellison, C. G., & Powers, D. A. (2009). Religious influences on the risk of marital dissolution. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71(4), 917-934. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00644.x
- Wilcox, W. B., (2004). *Soft patriarchs, new men: How Christianity shapes fathers and husbands*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilcox, W. B., Chaves, M., & Franz, D. (2004). Focused on the family? Religious traditions, family discourse, and pastoral practice. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 43(4), 491-504. doi:10.1111/j.1468-5906.2004.00251.x

Wuthnow, R. (1991). *Acts of compassion: Caring for ourselves and helping others*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Yahya, S., & Boag, S. (2014). "My family would crucify me!": The perceived influence of social pressure on cross-cultural and interfaith dating and marriage. *Sexuality & Culture*, 18(4), 759-772. doi:10.1007/s12119-013-9217-y

Table 1

*Summary of Findings*

<b>Theme 1. Religious Beliefs</b>	
<p>1a. Unifying Beliefs in Marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Specific beliefs regarding the sacredness and responsibilities of marital relationships</li> <li>ii. Shared beliefs create a common ground between husbands and wives</li> </ul>	<p>1b. Dividing Beliefs in Marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. When beliefs aren't fully shared, this can create fundamental and divisive differences for couples.</li> <li>ii. Specific beliefs regarding gender roles and sexuality</li> </ul>
<p>1c. Unifying Beliefs in Parent-Child Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Specific beliefs regarding child-rearing responsibilities</li> <li>ii. Shared beliefs create a common ground between parents and children.</li> <li>iii. Children become the primary focus</li> </ul>	<p>1d. Dividing Beliefs in Parent-Child Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Dissonance between religious beliefs and popular culture.</li> <li>ii. Differences between couples and their families of origin who belong to a different religions or have different beliefs</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 2. Religious Practices</b>	
<p>2a. Unifying Practices in Marital Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Shared practices allow spouses to spend quality time with each other</li> <li>ii. Religious practices provide opportunities to overcome differences and show their love for each other</li> </ul>	<p>2b. Dividing Practices in Marital Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Time spent apart from each other due to religious practices</li> <li>ii. Specific gender-based practices</li> </ul>
<p>2c. Unifying Practices in Parent-Child Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Religious practices often result in quality time spent as a family</li> <li>ii. Certain practices, particularly prayer, provided parenting guidance</li> <li>iii. Gender-based practices resulted in one-on-one time between children and their parent of the same sex</li> </ul>	<p>2d. Dividing Practices in Parent-Child Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Children want to participate in activities that conflict with religious practices</li> <li>ii. Children's desire to fit in with their peers conflicts with the religious practices parents' desire their children to participate in</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 3. Religious Community</b>	
<p>3a. Unifying Influence of Community on Marital Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Religious communities play an important role in the union formation</li> <li>ii. Couples give and receive support</li> </ul>	<p>3b. Dividing Influence of Community on Marital Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Spouses thinks their partner spends too much time with the faith community</li> </ul>
<p>3c. Unifying Influence of Community on Parent-Child Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Support in raising child</li> <li>ii. Provides parents and children a shared community to interact with each other in</li> </ul>	<p>3d. Dividing Influence of Community on Parent-Child Relationship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Spending time serving members of the religious community takes away from time with children</li> </ul>

Table 2

*Numerical Content Analysis of Qualitative Coding*

Theme	# References	# Sources	% Interviews	Average # Ref. per Int.
<b>Theme1: Religious Beliefs</b>				
1a. Unifying Beliefs: Marriage	551	146	73.7	2.8
1b. Dividing Beliefs: Marriage	79	59	31.2	.4
1c. Unifying Beliefs: Parent-Child	232	96	48.5	1.2
1d. Dividing Beliefs: Parent-Child	41	32	16.2	.2
<b>Theme 2: Religious Practices</b>				
2a. Unifying Practices: Marriage	606	146	73.7	3.1
2b. Dividing Practices: Marriage	92	59	29.8	.5
2c. Unifying Practices: Parent-Child	496	135	98.3	7.5
2d. Dividing Practices: Parent-Child	53	39	18.2	.3
<b>Theme 3: Religious Community</b>				
3a. Unifying Community: Marriage	74	51	25.8	.4
3b. Dividing Community: Marriage	20	19	9.6	.1
3c. Unifying Community: Parent-Child	86	59	29.8	.4
3d. Dividing Community: Parent-Child	7	7	3.5	.04
<b>Total</b>	3,871	198	100	19.5

## Appendix A

Appendix A, Table 1.

*Number and Percent of Families by Religious-Ethnic Community*

Religious-Ethnic Community	Number of Families	Percent of Families
<b>Black Christian</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>13%</b>
African American	26	13%
<b>Catholic &amp; Orthodox Christian</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11%</b>
African American	1	1%
Hispanic	7	4%
Native American	3	2%
White	10	5%
<b>Evangelical Christian</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>24%</b>
African American	1	1%
Asian American	24	12%
Hispanic	1	1%
Native American	6	3%
White	16	8%
<b>Jewish</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>16%</b>
White	30	16%
<b>Latter-day Saint Christian</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>14%</b>
African American	2	1%
Hispanic	3	2%
Pacific Islander	1	1%
White	22	11%
<b>Mainline Christian</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10%</b>
Asian American	1	1%
Native American	1	1%
White	18	9%
<b>Muslim</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>13%</b>
African American	2	1%
East Asian	6	3%
Middle Eastern	17	9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>100%</b>

Appendix A, Table 2.

*Codebook for Initial Coding*

Name	<b>[3a] Unifying</b>	<b>[3b] Dividing</b>
Description	Identifying with God/other, emulating, connection/built (or building) relationship, sense of oneness, openness/inclusion, shared goals/activities, spending time together, or belonging. Uniting with fellow adherents.	Exclusion of, separation from, or criticism against somebody, family members, group, God, or imaginary people “out there” due to religious/spiritual reason.
Inclusion criteria	Intention to describe a good, desirable bond in a collective body. A collective viewpoint is needed.	Intention to avoid, or conflict
Exclusion criteria	Loving one person unilaterally.	Ideas, individuality, preference, or mere difference
Typical exemplars	See Detailed description Moment of security felt as family	Separation of fellow adherents from non-adherents  Criticizing or staying away from people who speak immoral language  Awkwardness or tension in the relationship due to value difference
Atypical exemplars	Sacrificial effort for lasting marriage.	Shallowness of communication referred to in a negative manner  Pursuit of different directions
Close but No	Engaging in the same job (not necessarily trying to unite or enjoying unity).	Separation from worldly ideas or ideas inconsistent with faith  State of being separated without intention to separate involved in any of the parties (i.e. caused by merely outward situation)  Separation caused by racial reason.

## Appendix B

### Extended Literature Review: Influence of Religion on Extrafamilial Relationships

*Uniting and Dividing within Congregations.* While it is important to investigate the influence of religious communities on familial and other relationships, it is also important to look directly at interpersonal relationships within religious communities. Religious communities are often excellent sources of social support networks and strong friendships. These friendships often last longer than friendships from other social networks such as work (Krause, 2008). Research has shown that church-based relationships are often related to many benefits, including improved physical health (Ellison & Levin, 1998; Levin 1994), higher levels of optimism (Krause, 2002), decreased incidence and severity of various mental illness (Koenig et al., 2012), and longevity (Hummer, Rogers, Nam, & Ellison, 1999; Marks, Nesteruk, Swanson, Garrison, & Davis, 2005).

However, interpersonal relationships among church members are not always positive. Beliefs can be major sources of division within congregations, including disagreements over church doctrines and political stances, as well as differences between the congregation's leader(s) and the members' expectations (Becker, 1999; Dollhopf & Scheitle, 2013; Krause, Chatters, Meltzer, & Morgan, 2000). These differences often result in divisive interactions such as gossiping, a lack of reciprocity between members, and the formation of cliques (Krause et al., 2000). As mentioned briefly in the preceding section, expectations surrounding religious practices and behavior can also be a source of division between congregation members (Dollahite et al., 2004; Marks, Dollahite, & Young, forthcoming). While these divisive interactions may be less common than the positive interactions (Ellison & Lee, 2010), they are likely to be more potent and memorable than the positive interactions (Krause et al., 2000).

*Uniting and Dividing Across Interfaith Communities.* Interfaith technically denotes a different world religion, such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, whereas interdenominational refers to different religious denominations within a world religion such as Protestants and Catholics—or Orthodox and Reform Jews. However, interfaith is often used as an umbrella term to capture both differences between world religions and between religious denominations. For parsimony, throughout this paper, I will use interfaith as this larger umbrella term, capturing any difference in faith or denomination under it.

Compared to the large amount of research on religion and family relationships, as well as on relationships within congregation, there is a smaller literature focusing specifically on interpersonal interfaith relationships. The exception to this is the body of research focused on interfaith marriages. Because my sample contains only intra-faith couples, I will not go into depth on interfaith marriage. However, understanding how religious individuals feel towards interfaith marriages is useful to understanding where interfaith relationships stand as a whole. Interfaith marriages are becoming increasingly common, and religious people and parents are becoming more accepting of these unions (Yahya & Boag, 2014). Along with this, individuals generally feel more favorably towards religions from which they have friends or family members (Putnam & Campbell, 2012; Riley, 2013). Similarly, the more individuals know about a given religion, the more favorably they feel towards the religion (Patel & Meyer 2011; Putnam & Campbell, 2012). These ideas are consistent with the major tenets of intergroup contact theory, the idea that interpersonal contact is one of the best ways to reduce prejudice and malice between groups in conflict (Pettigrew, 2008). These interfaith interactions can be unifying as they often correct or explain the negative beliefs that one group holds about the other group.

Beyond this, the majority of research on interfaith relationships looks at these relationships from a macro-level perspective—focusing more on differences and interactions between groups as a whole, rather than on relationships between members of the groups. From a macro-level perspective, interfaith relationships have historically been a major source of conflict and differences (Putnam & Campbell, 2012). While interfaith conflict in America remains a valid concern, particularly for religious minorities (McCormack, 2013), the overall divide between religious groups appears to be diminishing. For example, studies show that attitudes on socially divisive issues between denominations have become less polarized over time (Hoffman & Miller, 1998). In their review of religion in America, Putnam and Campbell (2012) posit that while religion used to primarily divide faiths and denominations, the divide between religious groups is shrinking, but the divide between the religious and the secular is growing (see Marks et al., under review).

*Uniting and Dividing the Religious from the Secular Community.* Putnam and Campbell (2012) explained that the religious-secular divide is growing as people are moving from moderately religious to either highly religious or nonreligious. While there is limited research regarding how religion impacts interpersonal relationships within secular communities, there is evidence that these relationships generate significant struggles for religious individuals and families, and particularly for those who are religious minorities (Marks et al., forthcoming). Some of these struggles include dealing with animosity and intolerance, being misunderstood, as well as simply feeling different due to their religious practices and identity (Marks et al., forthcoming).

Despite this growing divide, there is a small body of literature focused on how being religious and part of a church community improves interpersonal relationships between religious individuals and those in their secular community. Religion may have a unifying effect on

relationships within the secular community for one of two reasons. First, the social skills religious individuals learn in their church community transfer to their social relationships outside of their religious community (Fiala et al., 2002; Lazar & Bjorck, 2008). The second reason is that the beliefs and practices taught in most religions (e.g., love your neighbor, charity, forgiveness, etc.) improve social skills and help strengthen relationships (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; Stark, 2012; Wuthnow, 1991).