

Background

- Parents transmit their beliefs about domains of knowledge to their children through parental testimony (Canfield & Ganea, 2014).
- Children's beliefs about entities that are not directly observable (e.g. God and germs), may be especially dependent on parental testimony (Harris, Pasquini, Duke, Asscher, & Pons, 2006).
- Parents' own religious beliefs might affect the nature of the parental testimony they provide to their children (Clegg, Cui, Harris, & Corriveau, 2019), potentially via certain discourse cues they produce during conversation.

Previous research suggests that:

- Parents produce more modulations of assertion (e.g. "I think", "we believe") when talking about endorsed figures (e.g. Santa Claus) than when talking about scientific entities (e.g. electricity, Canfield & Ganea, 2014).
- Reasoning about religious phenomena can involve referrals to their powers of causality (Harris et al., 2006).

Research Questions

- Does parents' level of religiosity affect the discourse cues they use when discussing religious entities with their children?
- Does community consensus on the entity's reality status moderate the discourse cues parents use when discussing religious entities with their children?

Method

- Of the 36 total participants, 28 were classified as Younger ($M_{age} = 5.81$; age range 5-7) and eight as Older ($M_{age} = 10.5$; age range 9-11).
- Parent-child dyads were given cards with the names of entities printed on them and asked to talk about them as they normally would at home.
- Because Christian entities tend to be more high-consensus in the United States (Clegg et al., 2019), we considered concepts related to Christianity as high-consensus items.
- A continuous "religiosity" score was calculated for each parent from whether they identified as religious, their frequency of worship, and their frequency of private worship.

High Consensus	Low Consensus
God	
Soul	
Heaven	Ghosts
Angels	Reincarnation
Creation	Fate
Noah's Ark	

Method (cont.)

Parent-child talk was transcribed and coded for the following discourse cues:

Discourse Cue	Example
Total no. of modulations of assertion	See below
➤ No. of self/family modulations	"I think", "we believe", "your Dad believes"
➤ No. of other modulations	"Some people think", "Christians believe"
Mention of variation of belief	"There are many different views"
No. of causal elaborations	"Angels protect us", "God created us"

Results

No main effects were found for **total number of modulations of assertion**.

No main effects were found for **self/family modulations of assertion**.

For **other modulations**, a significant main effect of Religiosity ($\beta = -.31$, $SE = .10$, $p = .005$) and a significant Religiosity x Consensus interaction ($\beta = .28$, $SE = .11$, $p = .01$) were found.

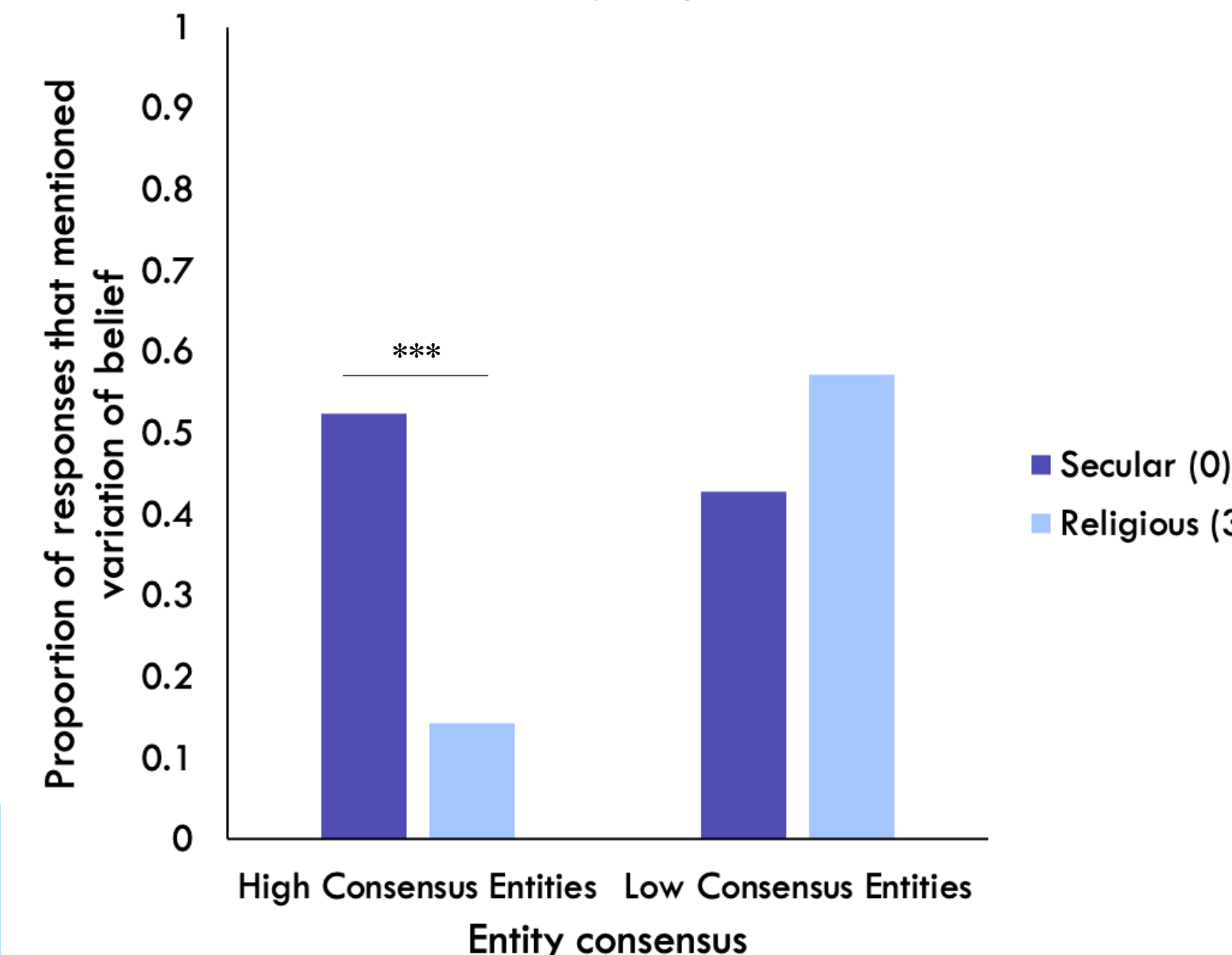
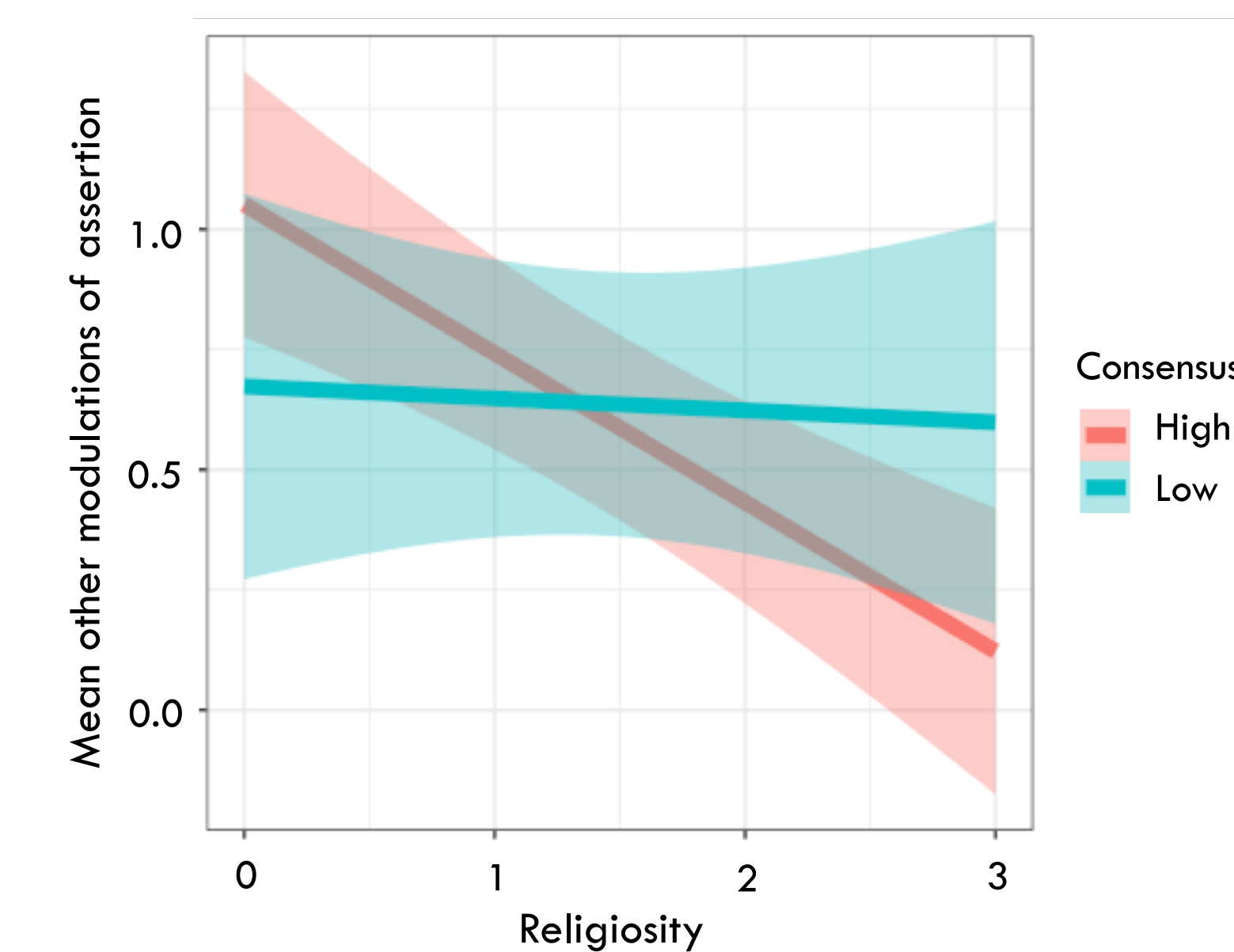
More religious parents produced fewer modulations of others' assertions for the high consensus entities, $\beta = -.31$, $SE = .11$, $p = .006$.

For **mention of variation of belief**, a significant main effect of Religiosity ($\beta = -.73$, $SE = .17$, $p < .001$) and a significant Religiosity x Consensus interaction ($\beta = .59$, $SE = .21$, $p = .005$) were found.

More religious parents were less likely to mention variation in people's beliefs about the high consensus entities, $\beta = -.73$, $SE = .17$, $p < .001$, $OR = .48$, $95\% CI = [.35, .67]$.

For **causal elaborations**, a significant main effect of Consensus ($\beta = -.34$, $SE = .16$, $p = .033$) was found.

Parents used more causal talk to refer to high consensus entities ($M = 1.38$, $SD = 1.53$) compared to low consensus entities ($M = 0.952$, $SD = 0.86$) in general.



Conclusions

- When discussing **high consensus** religious entities, **less religious parents** were more likely to...
 - Use **modulations of assertion that refer to other people** (e.g. "some people think") to preclude statements about religious entities.
 - Mention an overall **variation of belief** regarding religious entities.
- When discussing **high consensus** religious entities, **in general**, parents were more likely to use **causal elaborations** (e.g. "God created the earth") than when describing low consensus religious entities.

These findings may suggest that...

- More** religious parents hold firmer beliefs about high consensus religious entities and might therefore be more likely to exclusively voice their personal views.
- Less** religious parents might take a more objective, educational approach to discussing religious entities, and would therefore be more likely to mention and go into detail about others' views.
- Parents **generally** might infer more causality to an entity if there is more confidence in its existence within the community.

Future Directions

- The current study could be replicated cross-culturally.
- The discourse cues produced in parental testimony when talking about entities of other natures (e.g. scientific, fictional) could be investigated.
- The relationship between the discourse cues that are found to be affected by religiosity and children's beliefs about the religious entities could be explored.

References

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