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Concept of a Deity: Structure and Properties

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Abstract: Individuals attribute more psychological (e.g., forget) than biological (e.g., eat) or physical (e.g., be touched) properties to supernatural beings (Shtulman, 2008). It is unclear how those domains each contribute to an overall conception of a supernatural being (e.g., God). Undergraduate students ($N = 341$) responded to nine questions representing the three domains or factors (psychological, biological, and physical), composing an overall measure of God's anthropomorphic properties.

A confirmatory factor analysis was performed to assess the structure of undergraduates' anthropomorphic concept of God. Fit indices suggest acceptable model fit, $\chi^2(24) = 73.09$, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.952, SRMR = .051. All loadings were significant. Biological (0.99; 0.01) and physical (0.90; 0.19) factors loaded more strongly onto anthropomorphism, and had smaller variances, than the psychological (0.67; 0.56) factor. These findings suggest there are varied ways of conceptualizing the psychological (versus non-psychological) properties of God; thus, non-psychological properties are more predictive in God concepts.