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Effects of Gender Based Descriptors on a Deity and a Corresponding Religious Group

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Poster Presentation P22

**EFFECTS OF GENDER BASED DESCRIPTORS ON A DEITY AND A
CORRESPONDING RELIGIOUS GROUP**

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Group membership is highly influential in the structure of one's personal and social identities, but the values of such a group have the potential to conflict with other aspects of one's personal identity. One example might be one's chosen religious group, which can exert a great deal of influence over personal thoughts and beliefs, but can also offer points of conflict between group and personal level convictions. Religion has been critiqued by some as being predominantly patriarchal, eliciting and reinforcing gender stereotypes and sexism. These stereotypes, and potentially prejudice, can exist within the religious group's belief structure, whether spoken or tacitly understood. This is often cited within the Abrahamic religions, e.g., these groups maintain that their God does not claim biological sex nor gender, but their texts display predominantly masculine imagery as well as the convention to refer to their God as "He". The purpose of the present study is to determine whether individuals would be willing to consider broadening their view of their deity to include feminine imagery and the option of referring to their God as "She." In this study, participants were divided into six conditions and provided with a description of a hypothetical religious group and the deity around which the group is centered, each describing a deity that differed in sex pronouns and gender stereotyped traits. Data was analyzed to evaluate the impact of both gendered pronoun labels and traits used to a deity in individuals' preferences, as well as to determine which combination of these attributes elicits the most favorable response across participant groups. Statistical results and implications of this research will be discussed.