

Developmental Differences in Children's Views of God and the Effects of Prayer

Kirsten A. Lesage, Nicholas J. Shaman, Anondah R. Saide, & Rebekah A. Richert
University of California, Riverside

Introduction

- Children can distinguish possible events from impossible events by the age of 3 or 4.^{1, 2}
- Children may judge God as a possible causal mechanism for making impossible events possible.³
- Children tend to view God as more human-like than adults.⁴
- Hypotheses:
 - Children who have a non-human-like view of God will judge the impossible events with prayer as more possible than children who have a human-like view of God.
 - This will depend on age, with younger children judging impossible events as more possible than older children.

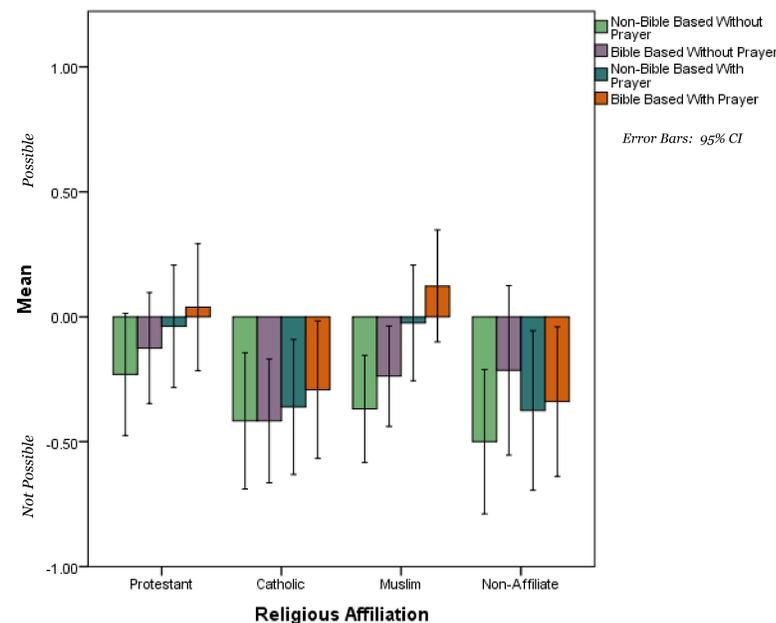
Participants

- 185 Children
 - Protestant Christian ($n = 58$)
 - Roman Catholic ($n = 37$)
 - Muslim ($n = 62$)
 - Religiously Non-Affiliated ($n = 28$)
- Gender: 58.92% Female, 41.08% Male
- Age: 3.52- to 6.46-years-old ($M = 4.74$, $SD = .70$)
 - Younger: 3.50 – 4.24 years ($n = 47$)
 - Middle: 4.25 – 5.00 years ($n = 61$)
 - Older: 5.01 – 6.50 years ($n = 69$)

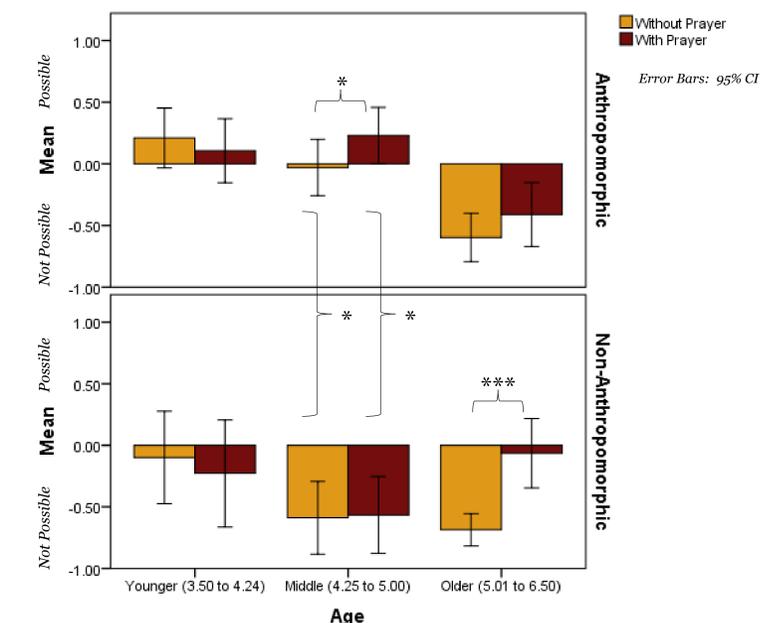
Procedure

- **Supernatural Causality:**
 - Participants judged the possibility of Bible-based (e.g., being swallowed by a whale and staying alive) and non-Bible based (e.g., becoming invisible) impossible events.
 - Participants then judged if praying to God to make the impossible event possible made it more possible.
- **Anthropomorphism of God:**
 - Participants were asked about 9 human-like abilities or needs of God (e.g., to forget or to get sick).
 - Positive averages coded as anthropomorphic ($n = 110$), negative averages coded as non-anthropomorphic ($n = 67$).
- All questions on 3-point scale: Yes [+1] to No [-1].

Results



- **Non-Bible Based Events Without Prayer:** $F(3, 153) = .874$, $p = .456$, $\eta_p^2 = .017$
- **Bible Based Events Without Prayer:** $F(3, 153) = .508$, $p = .677$, $\eta_p^2 = .010$
- **Non-Bible Based Events With Prayer:** $F(3, 153) = 1.265$, $p = .289$, $\eta_p^2 = .024$
- **Bible Based Events With Prayer:** $F(3, 153) = 2.298$, $p = .080$, $\eta_p^2 = .043$



- **Age X Anthropomorphism X Prayer:** $F(2, 179) = 4.603$, $p = .011$, $\eta_p^2 = .049$

Summary of Results & Discussion

- Age and how children view God in humanlike terms affects if they judge God as a possible causal mechanism for making impossible events possible.
- All religious affiliations judged the impossible events as generally not possible. Post-hoc comparisons indicated there were no significant differences between religious affiliations.
- Developmental differences indicate younger and middle children who had humanlike views of God judged the impossible events with prayer as more possible than same-aged children who had non-humanlike views of God. However, older children who had humanlike views of God judged the impossible events with prayer as less possible than older children who had non-humanlike views of God.

References

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Contact

Kirsten A. Lesage – kirsten.lesage@email.ucr.edu
Dr. Rebekah A. Richert – rebekah.richert@ucr.edu

