Developmental Differences in Children’s Views of God and the Effects of Prayer
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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 = 66)

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

- Religious Affiliation: Non-Bible Based Events Without Prayer: F(3, 153) = 8.74, p = .001, η² = .17
  - Bible Based Events Without Prayer: F(3, 153) = .50, p = .67, η² = .04
  - Non-Bible Based Events With Prayer: F(3, 153) = 1.26, p = .28, η² = .04
  - Bible Based Events With Prayer: F(3, 153) = 2.29, p = .08, η² = .04

- Age x Anthropomorphism X Prayer: F(2, 179) = 4.60, p = .01, η² = .05

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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