

# 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.<sup>1, 2</sup>
- Children may judge God as a possible causal mechanism for making impossible events possible.<sup>3</sup>
- Children tend to view God as more human-like than adults.<sup>4</sup>
- 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.

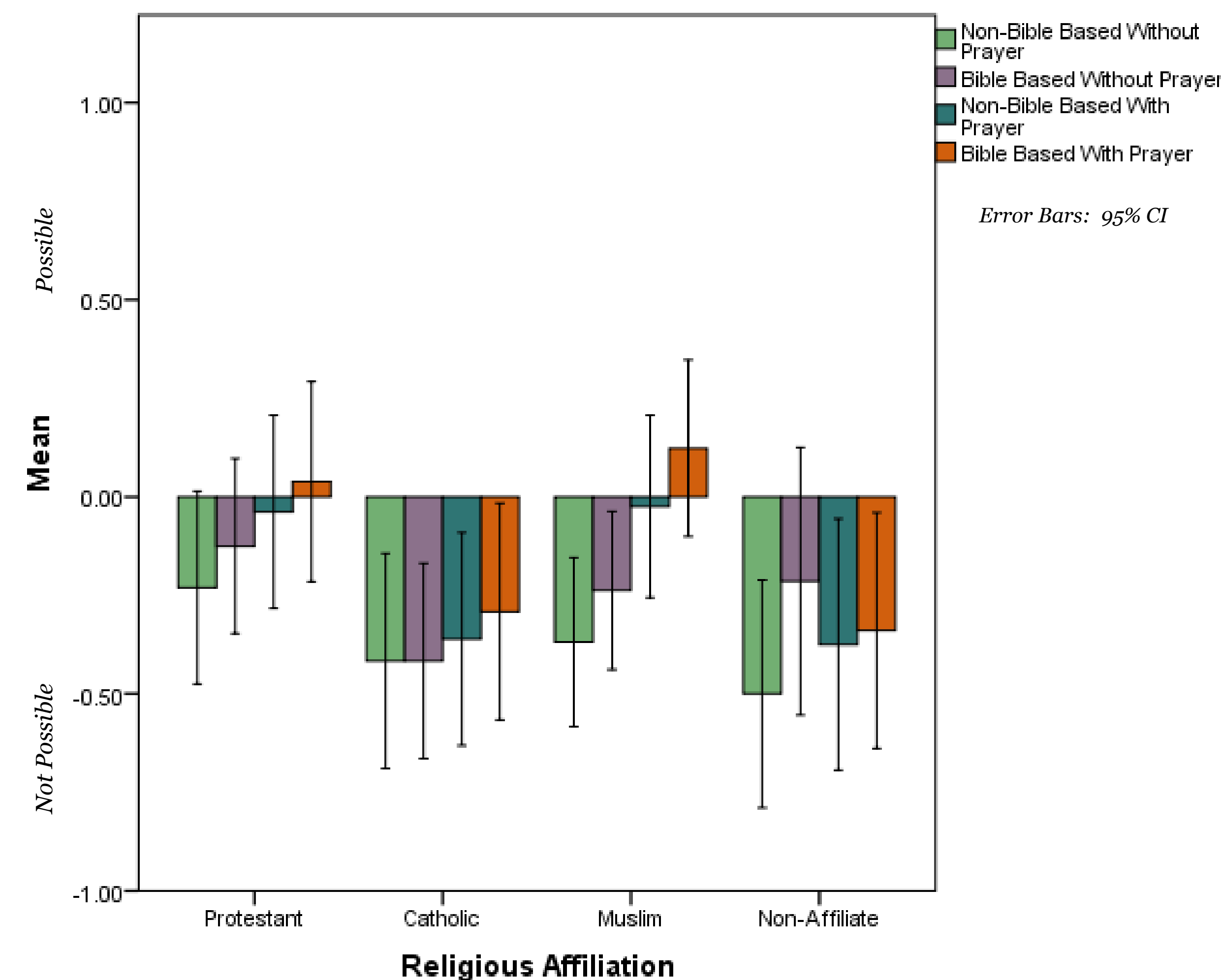
## Participants

- 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 ( $n = 69$ )

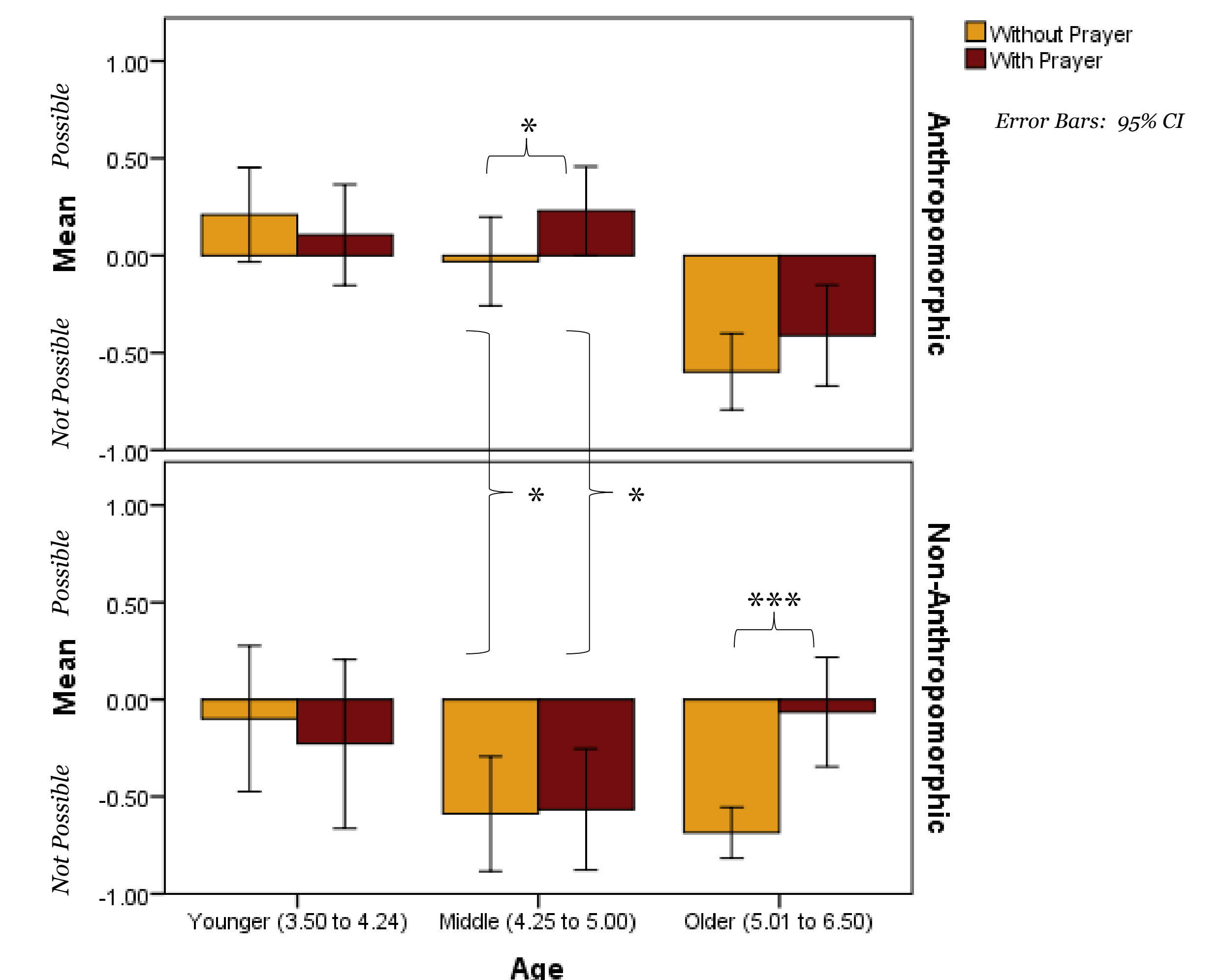
## Procedure

- **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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