Views on the Psychological, Biological, & Physical Properties of God Among Christian & Muslim Mother-Child Dyads
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Introduction

- 5-year-old children attribute more anthropomorphic (human-like) properties to God than their parents do1.
- As children get older they assign more fallible (human-like) beliefs to their mother but not to God2,3,4.
- Taken together, this suggests that children’s anthropomorphic conceptions of God undergo changes during the preschool years.

Research Questions:
- When do children’s conceptions of God come to match that of their parents’ conceptions?
- Does being raised in differing monotheistic religious traditions play a role in the degree to which children anthropomorphize God?

Methods

Participants
- 93 Mother-Child Dyads from Southern California area
- Religious Group: Muslim (n=37), Christian (n=56)
- Children: 3.5-6.46 years old (M=4.73, SD=0.77, 56% Female)
- Mothers: 21-51 years old (M=33.36, SD=5.51)

Anthropomorphism Scale
- Property categories: Psychological (e.g., can forget), Biological (e.g., needs to eat), Physical (e.g., can be touched).
- Participants answered “yes” (+1) or “no” (-1) to each question.
- Responses were averaged across categories for an overall anthropomorphism score.
- Children: Cronbach’s α = .829; Mothers: Cronbach’s α = .758

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>-39.56</td>
<td>23.57</td>
<td>-02.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>-99.16</td>
<td>-73.36</td>
<td>-83.31</td>
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References

Discussion

- As children get older (from ages 3.5 to 6.5), they attribute fewer anthropomorphic traits to God.
- Among Christian children, only the older ones (5 years and up) were able to reason about God in a normatively Christian way (i.e. as extraordinary).
- Muslim parents and their children were less anthropomorphic in their conceptions of God than Christians were overall.
- Islam and Christianity though both monotheistic religions, conceive of God in more or less anthropomorphic ways (e.g., Christians depict Jesus while Muslims do not depict any religious figures).

Future research should examine:
1) additional religious groups with differing narratives about deities, and 2) the impact of a wide range of religious experiences—all to better understand when the influence of cultural narratives are more or less influential in children’s developing conceptions of intangible agents (e.g., God).