

# With God, All Things Are More Possible: Differences in Possibility Judgments of Children

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## Introduction

- Children can distinguish possible events from impossible events by the age of 3 or 4.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>
- Children view Bible-based events and characters as more possible than non-Bible-based events and characters.<sup>4, 5</sup>
- It was hypothesized:
  - 1) Children will judge Bible-based events as more possible than non-Bible-based events.
  - 2) Children will judge prayer as a causal mechanism that makes impossible events more possible.
  - 3) Younger children will view impossible events as more possible than older children.

## Participants

- 145 Children
  - Protestant Christian ( $n = 52$ )
  - Catholic Christian ( $n = 30$ )
  - Muslim ( $n = 40$ )
  - Religiously Non-Affiliated ( $n = 23$ )
- Gender: 59.3% Female, 40.7% Male
- Age: 3.52- to 6.46-years-old ( $M = 4.80$ ,  $SD = .73$ )

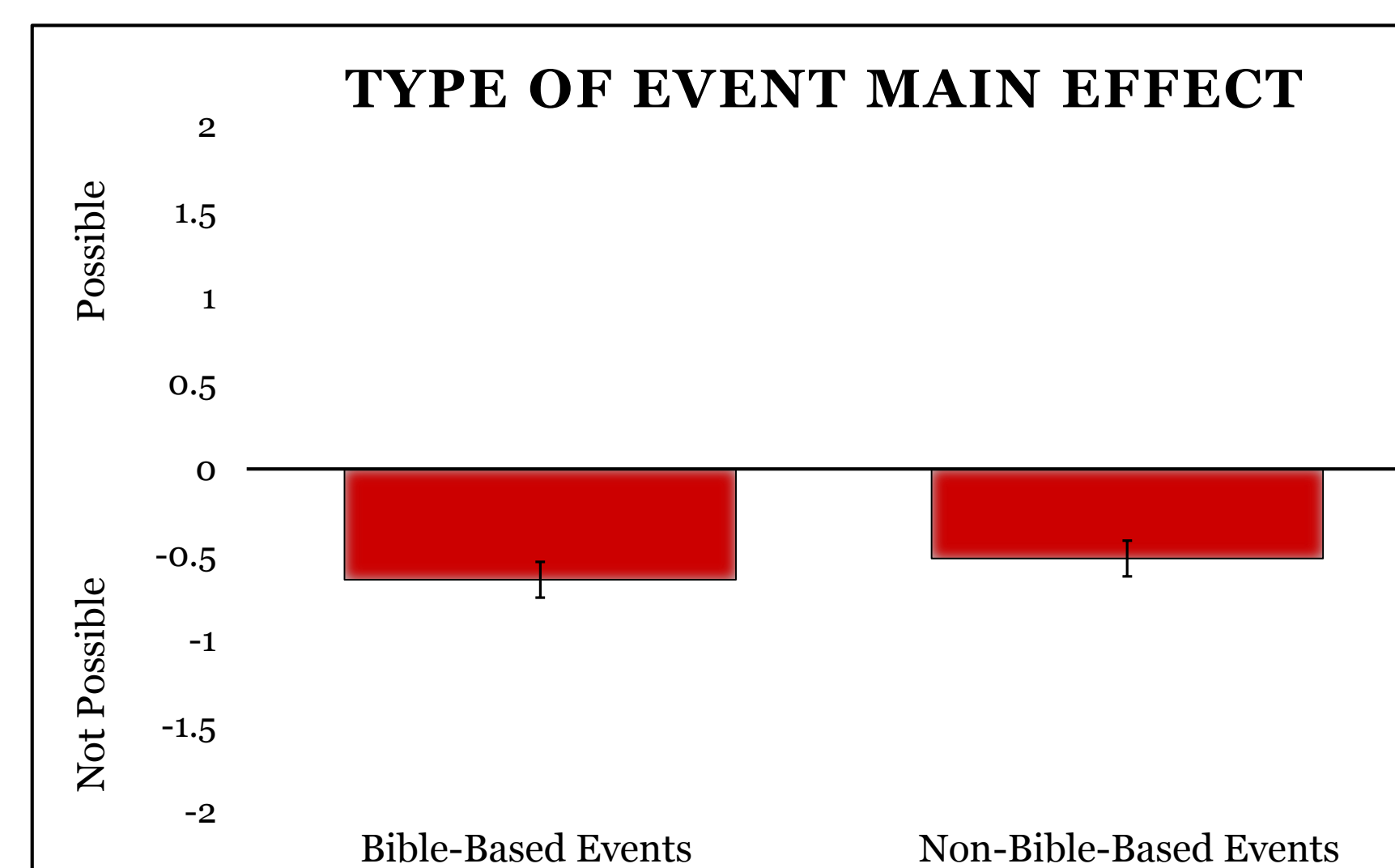
## Procedure

- 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 make the impossible event possible made it more possible.
- Possibility judgments on a 5-point Likert scale: Yes, Really Sure [+2] to No, Really Sure [-2].

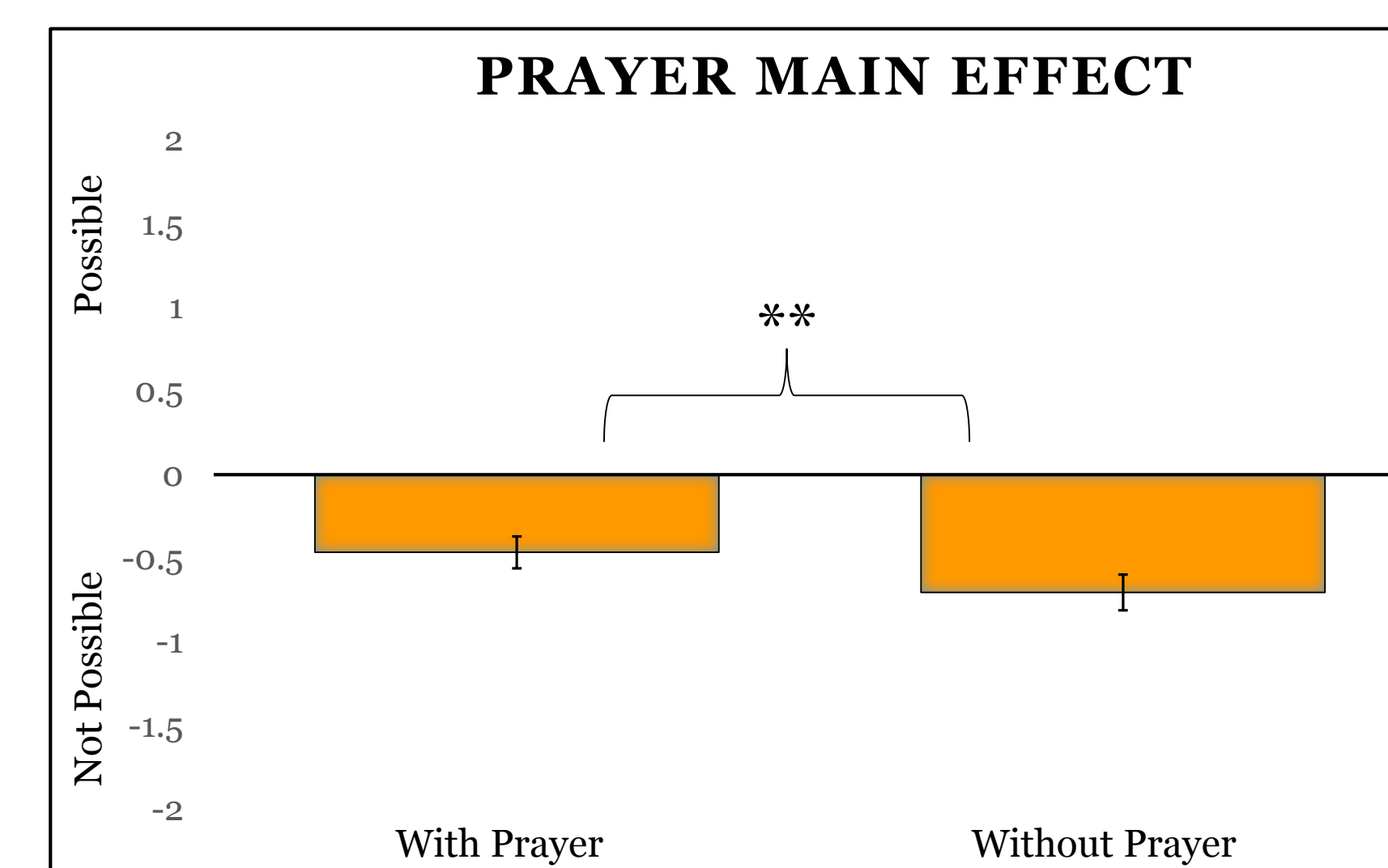
## Support

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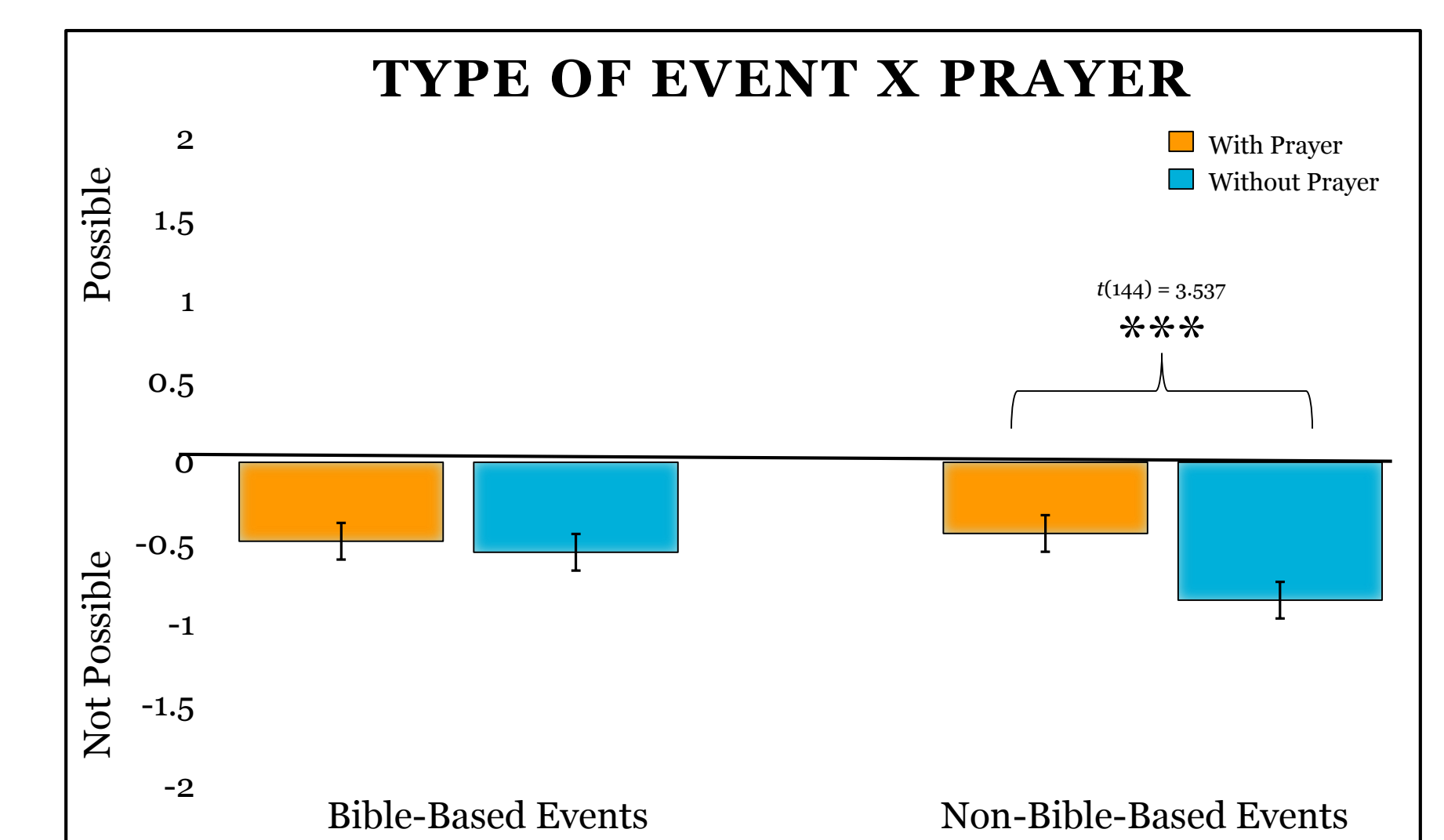
## Results



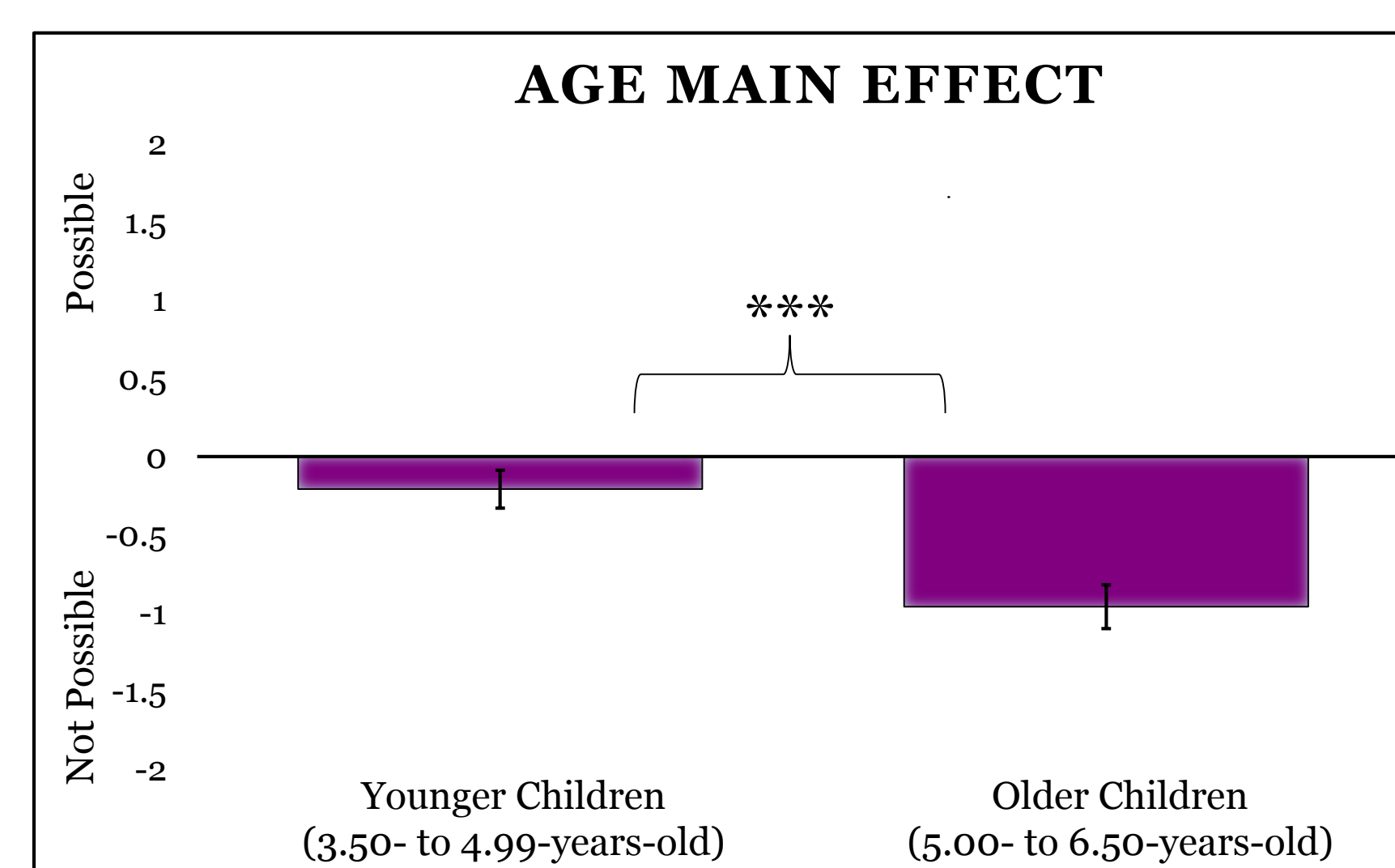
$F(1, 137) = 1.932, p = .167, \eta_p^2 = .041$



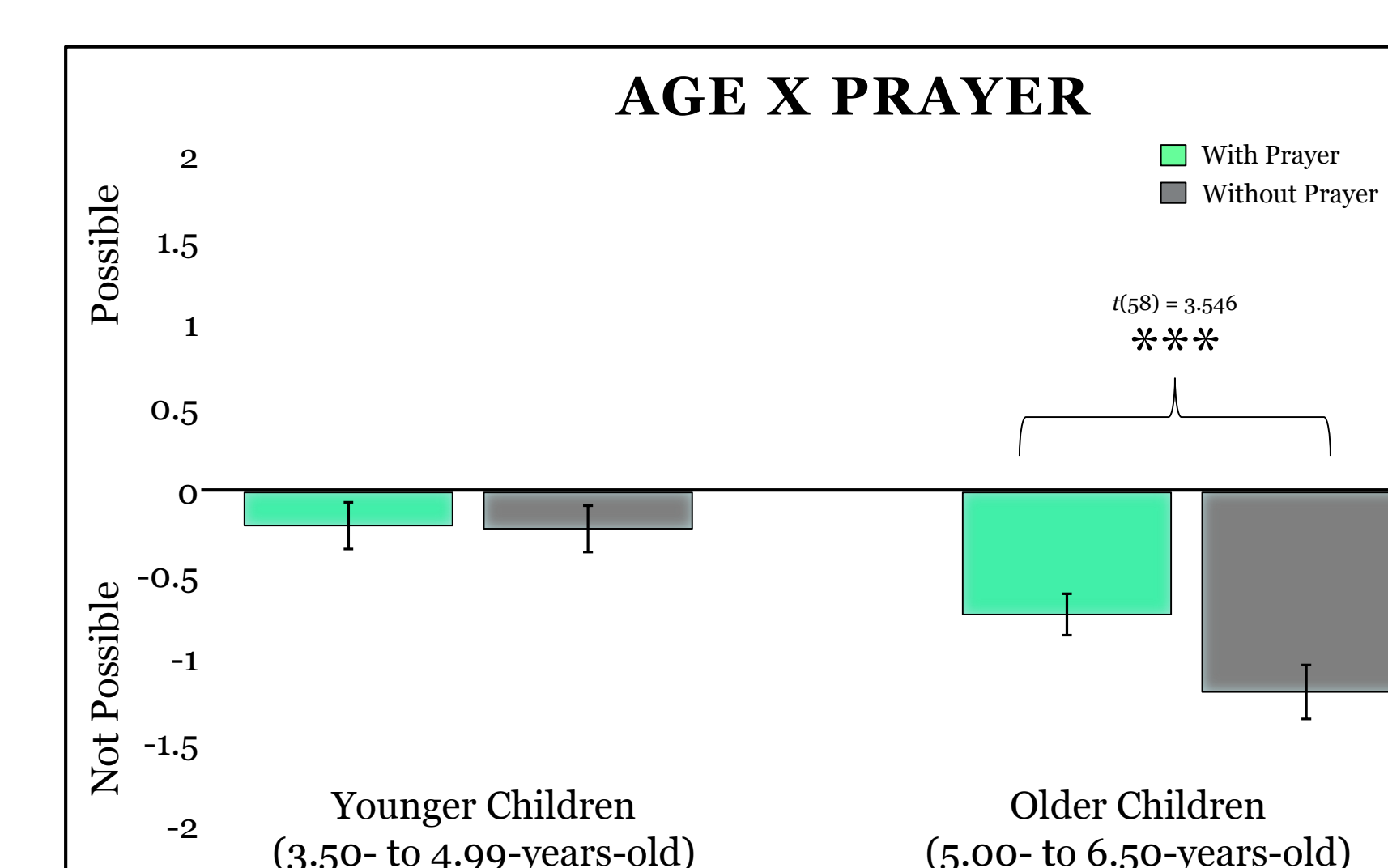
$F(1, 137) = 8.849, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = .061$



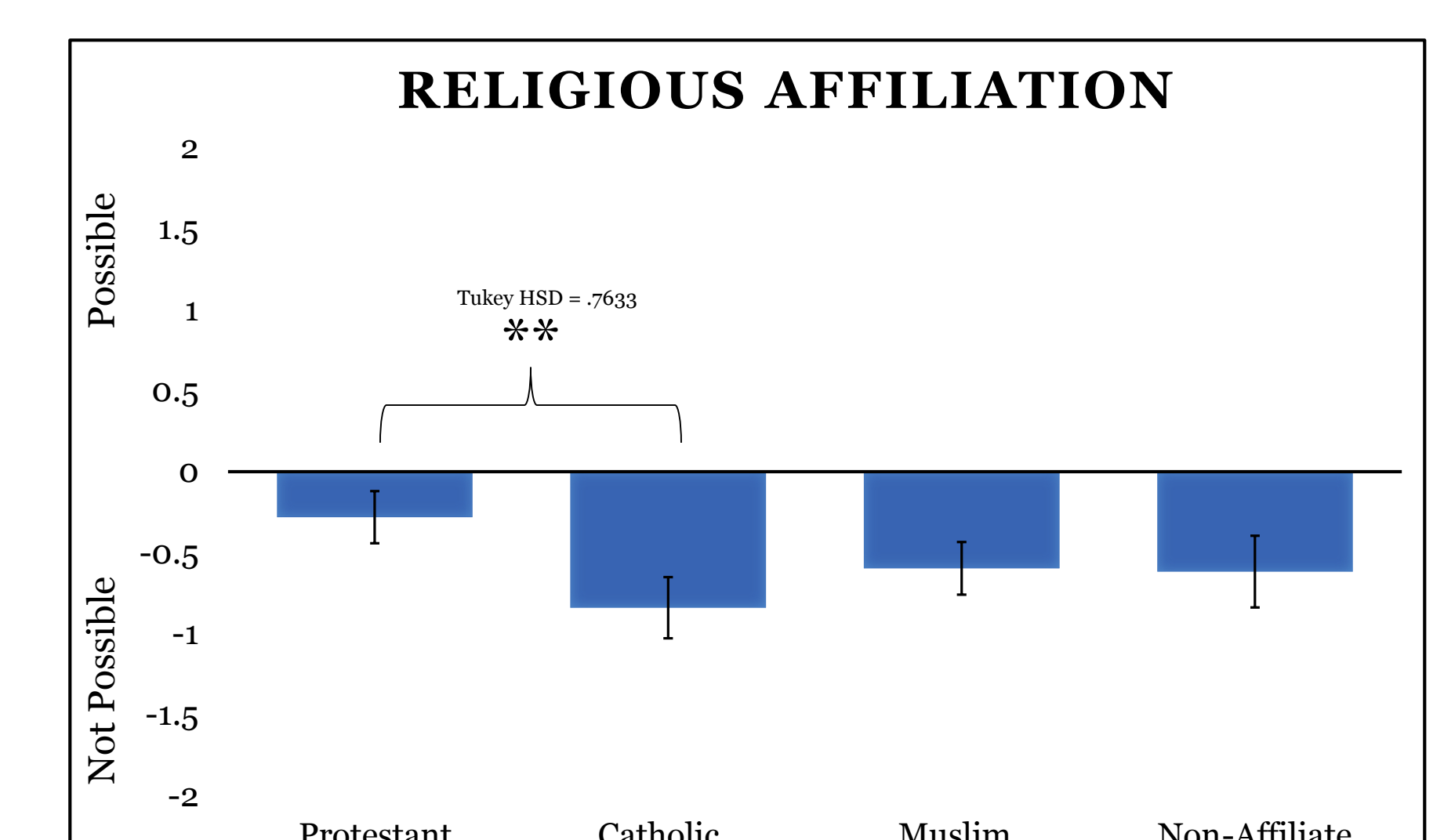
$F(1, 137) = 7.670, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .053$



$F(1, 137) = 16.512, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .108$



$F(1, 137) = 7.519, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .052$



$F(3, 137) = 1.758, p = .158, \eta_p^2 = .037$

## Summary of Results

- Children did not distinguish the possibility between Bible-based and Non-Bible-based impossible events.
- Children viewed prayer as a causal mechanism that made impossible events less impossible.
- Younger children ( $n = 86$ ) judged impossible events as less impossible than older children ( $n = 59$ ).
- All religious affiliations judged the events as generally impossible. Post-hoc comparisons indicated Protestant Christians differed from Catholic Christians. However there were no other differences among religious affiliation.

## References

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- 3) Woolley, J., & Cox, V. (2007). Development of beliefs about storybook reality. *Developmental Science*, 22, 123-152.
- 4) Corriveau, K. H., Chen, E. E., & Harris, P. L. (2014). Judgments about fact and fiction by children from religious and nonreligious backgrounds. *Cognitive Science*, 39, 1-30.
- 5) Cox Vaden, V., & Woolley, J. (2011). Does God make it real? Children's belief in religious stories from the Judeo-Christian tradition. *Child Development*, 82, 1120-1135.

## Discussion

- Even though children indicated all of the events were more possible with prayer, the means were generally negative indicating children still thought all the events were impossible. This contradicts previous research that found children distinguish between Bible-based and non-Bible-based impossible events.<sup>4,5</sup>
- Future research should consider the reasons why prayer is viewed as a causal mechanism for some events but not others.
- Future research should also consider the influence of religious and non-religious affiliations on possibility judgments.

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