



Sociocultural Influences on Concepts of God among Preschool Children

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Concepts of God

- Children's abstract concepts
 - Children learn abstract concepts from their cultural environment, not direct observation
- Children's concepts of supernatural agents
 - Abstract concepts

Concepts of God

- Theorists believed that children apply their concept of human beings to God ^{1,2}
- Anthropomorphism
 - Applying human properties to God or other agents or objects

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1) Piaget, 1929 2) Guthrie, 1993

Properties of God

- God's Knowledge ¹
 - 3 YO: God and humans have non-limited knowledge
 - 5 YO: Only God has non-limited knowledge
- God's Mortality ²
 - 3 YO: God and humans not limited by biological constraints
 - 5 YO: Only God has not limited by biological constraints
- Category Properties ³
 - Children attribute more psychological, biological, and physical properties to God than their parents do

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1) Barrett et al., 2001 2) Giménez-Dasi et al., 2005 3) Shtulman, 2008

Socio-cultural Input

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- God's Knowledge
 - Age trajectory replicated among Maya children ¹
 - Religiously schooled children view knowledge capabilities of other minds differently ²
- God's Mortality
 - Religious schooling had little impact on children's view of God's mortality ³

1) Knight et al., 2004 2) Lane et al., 2012 3) Giménez-Dasi et al., 2005

Development of Religious Concepts

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- Religious concepts are supported by developing cognitive abilities ¹
 - Children conceptualize God's knowledge as non-limited because prior to 4.5-YO, all agents have non-limited knowledge
- Requisite cognitive abilities must be developed in order for socio-cultural input to take root in a child's mind ²

1) Barrett et al., 2001 2) Rottman & Kelemen, 2013

Development of Religious Concepts

- **Socio-cultural Input**
 - Important for the development of religious concepts
- **However, this is undefined**
 - Which socio-cultural input?
 - What processes lead socio-cultural input to be internalized as religious concepts?

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Aims of Current Study

1. Examine the development of anthropomorphic concepts of God in early childhood
2. Examine the transmission of parent's concepts of God to children

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Study

- Longitudinal Study on Children's Religious Concepts
 - Five Waves of Data Collection
 - 6 months to 1-year apart
 - Early Childhood
 - 3 ½ to 5 ½ at Wave 1
 - Multiple Religious Affiliations
 - Protestant Christian
 - Roman Catholic
 - Muslim
 - Non-Affiliated

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Study

- Wave 1 Religious Cognition Measures
 - Agent Properties
 - Physical, Psychological, Biological, Emotional
 - God and Humans
 - Agent Knowledge
 - Theory-of-Mind Scales
 - God and Humans
 - Possible/Impossible Events
 - Religious & Non-Religious
 - With and Without Appealing to God
 - Understanding of Prayer
 - Function of Prayer's Behaviors
 - Inflexibility of Prayer's Behaviors
 - Influence on Social Identification

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Study

- Child Measures
 - Religious Cognition
 - Religious Exposure
 - Executive Functioning
- Parent Measures
 - Religious Cognition
 - Religious Exposure
 - Religiosity, Spirituality, Belief in God
 - Ethnotheories of Religious Upbringing

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Study

- Anthropomorphism of God
 - 9 questions about the anthropomorphic psychological, biological, and physical properties of God
 - Averaged for an overall anthropomorphism of God score:
 - *Not Anthropomorphic* [-2] to
 - *Anthropomorphic* [+2]
- Examples
 - Psychological
 - Could God forget things?
 - Could God get bored?
 - Biological
 - Could God get sick?
 - Does God need to eat food and drink water?
 - Physical
 - Could God get wet when it rains?
 - Could you touch God with your hand?

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Study

- Participants

	<i>N</i>	Female %	Age <i>M (SD)</i>
Protestant	59	56%	4.62 (.64)
Catholic	30	70%	4.89 (.71)
Muslim	34	44%	4.72 (.71)
Non-Affiliate	22	68%	4.71 (.62)

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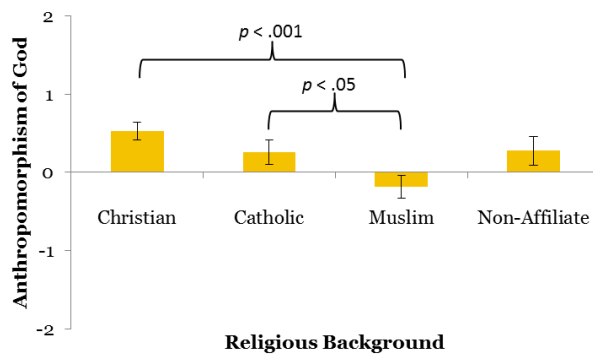


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Results

- Religious Background Differences

– $F(3, 141) = 4.925, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .095$



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Results

- Regression
 - Outcome Variable
 - Children’s Anthropomorphism of God
 - Predictor Variables
 - Children’s Age
 - Parent’s Anthropomorphism of God
 - Interaction between Age and Parent’s concept



Results

	B	B SE	β	95% CI for B	
				Lower	Upper
Model 1					
Age	-0.454	0.103	-0.338**	-0.633	-0.245
Adjusted R ²		0.108			
F Change		18.474**			
Model 2					
Age	-0.471	0.103	-0.351**	-0.675	-0.268
Parent’s Concept	0.269	0.086	0.239**	0.098	0.439
Adjusted R ²		0.16			
F Change		9.730**			
Model 3					
Age	-0.21	0.172	-.156	-0.55	0.13
Parent’s Concept	0.24	0.087	.213**	0.068	0.411
Age X Parent’s	0.268	0.142	.242 [†]	-0.013	0.549
Adjusted R ²		0.174			
F Change		3.557 [†]			

[†] < .10. * p < .05. ** p < .01.

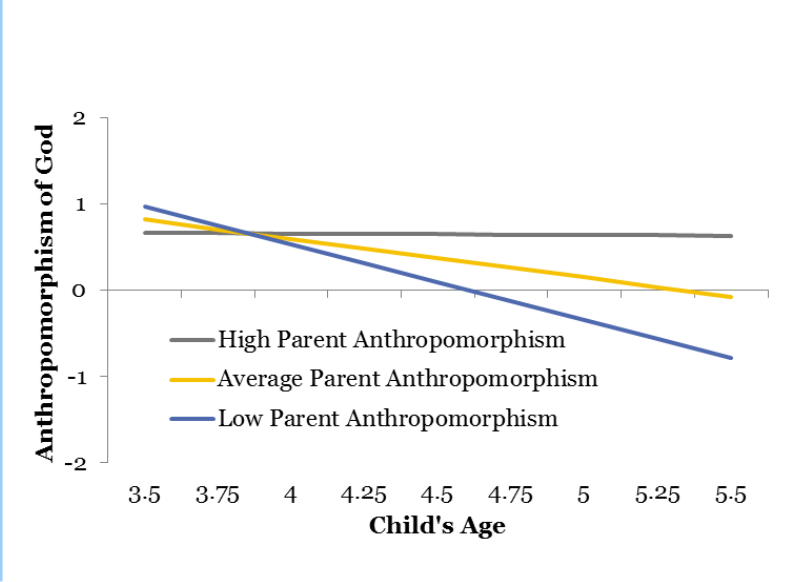


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Results

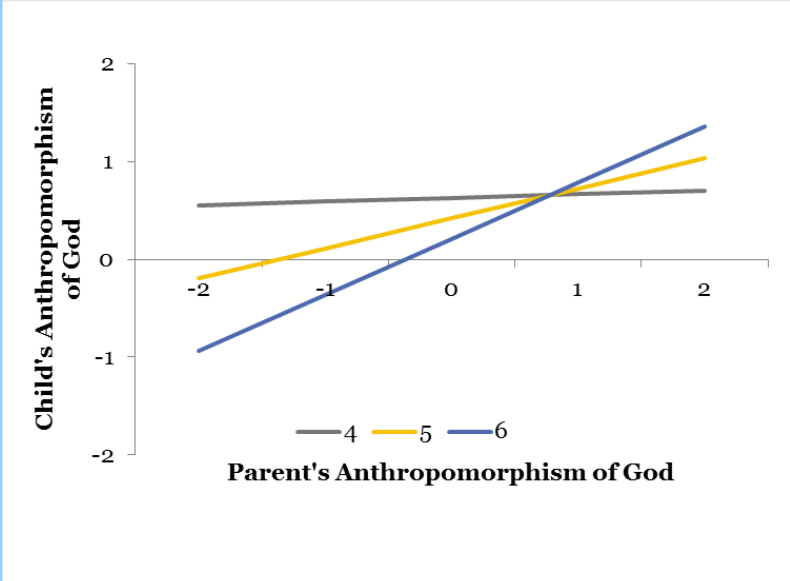


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Results



Discussion

- Summary of Findings
 - Muslim children anthropomorphize God significantly less than Protestant and Catholic children
 - Anthropomorphism of God decreases with age
 - Parents' concept of God is positively related to children's concept of God
 - Interaction
 - As age increases, the relationship between children's and parents' concept of God becomes stronger

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Discussion

- Result
 - Anthropomorphism of God decreases with age
- Explanation
 - Children are increasingly able to understand the abstract nature of God

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Discussion

- Result
 - As age increases, the relationship between children's and parents' concept of God becomes stronger
- Explanation
 - Children are internalizing their parent's concept of God

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Discussion

- Result
 - Muslim children anthropomorphize God significantly less than Protestant and Catholic children
- Explanation
 - Muslim parents also anthropomorphize significantly less than other religious groups
 - More evidence to support hypothesis that children internalize parent's concepts

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Discussion

- **Implications**
 - Parents act as one vehicle by which socio-cultural input is transmitted to the child (via the parents' belief system)
- **Future Directions**
 - Utilize the longitudinal data to determine causal relationships

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Other Correlations

- Children's Anthropomorphism
 - Children's Religious Exposure
 - $r = -.087, p = .296$
 - Knowledge Attribution of Mom
 - $r = -.384, p < .001$
 - Knowledge Attribution of God
 - $r = -.157, p = .063$



Other Correlations

- Children's Anthropomorphism
 - Parents' Belief in God
 - $r = .113$, $p = .187$
 - Parents' Belief in Soul
 - $r = .092$, $p = .279$
 - Parents' Religiosity
 - $r = -.062$, $p = .468$
 - Parents' Spirituality
 - $r = .075$, $p = .384$

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Other Correlations

- Children's Anthropomorphism
 - Parents' Religious Exposure
 - $r = -.091$, $p = .281$
 - Parents' Age
 - $r = -.117$, $p = .167$
 - Parents' Gender
 - $r = .072$, $p = .396$

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