

# The Effect of Parents' Beliefs and Religious Tradition on Children's Understanding of Prayer

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## Introduction

- Despite 2/3 of parents engaging in religious behavior with their children, little research examines to explain how children come to understand these behaviors<sup>1</sup>
- Some research has shown the influence of socio-cultural input on religious understanding in children<sup>2</sup>
- Prayer is a religious behavior with no directly observable results; thus, children's learning of prayer must come from their socio-cultural experiences

## Methods

### Child Demographics of Religious Affiliations

	Protestant Christian N = 62 M (SD)	Roman Catholic N = 29 M (SD)	Muslim N = 45 M (SD)
Age	4.61 (.83)	4.92 (.70)	5.10 (1.03)
Religious Exposure	4.03 (1.81)	3.01 (2.14)	4.49 (1.64)

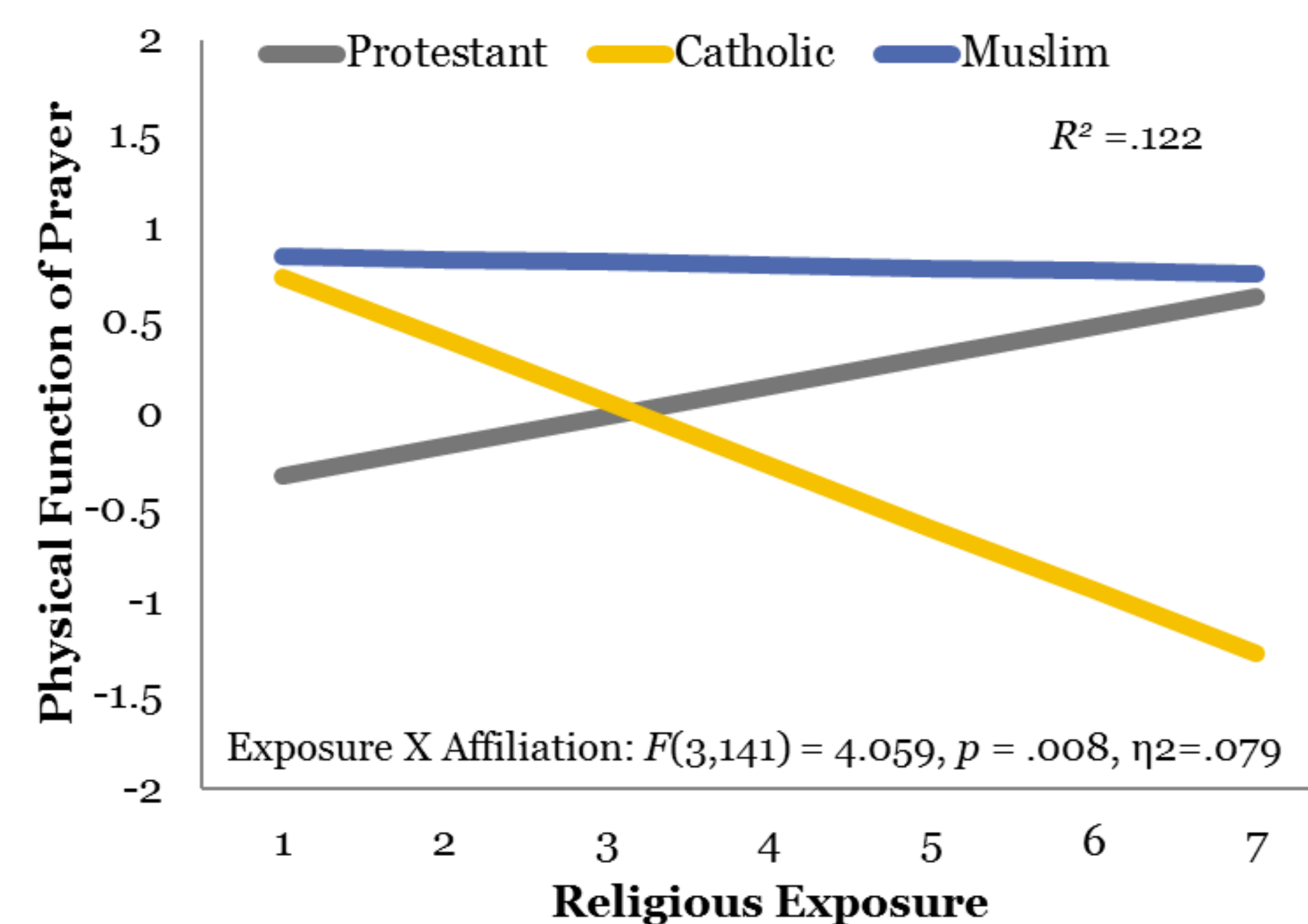
- Parents and children indicated if prayer had certain functions:
  - a) Physical: inhibiting behavior<sup>3</sup>
  - b) Communicative: communicating with God<sup>4</sup>
  - c) Symbolic: focusing the mind on God<sup>5</sup>

### Attributions of Prayer Function by Religious Affiliation

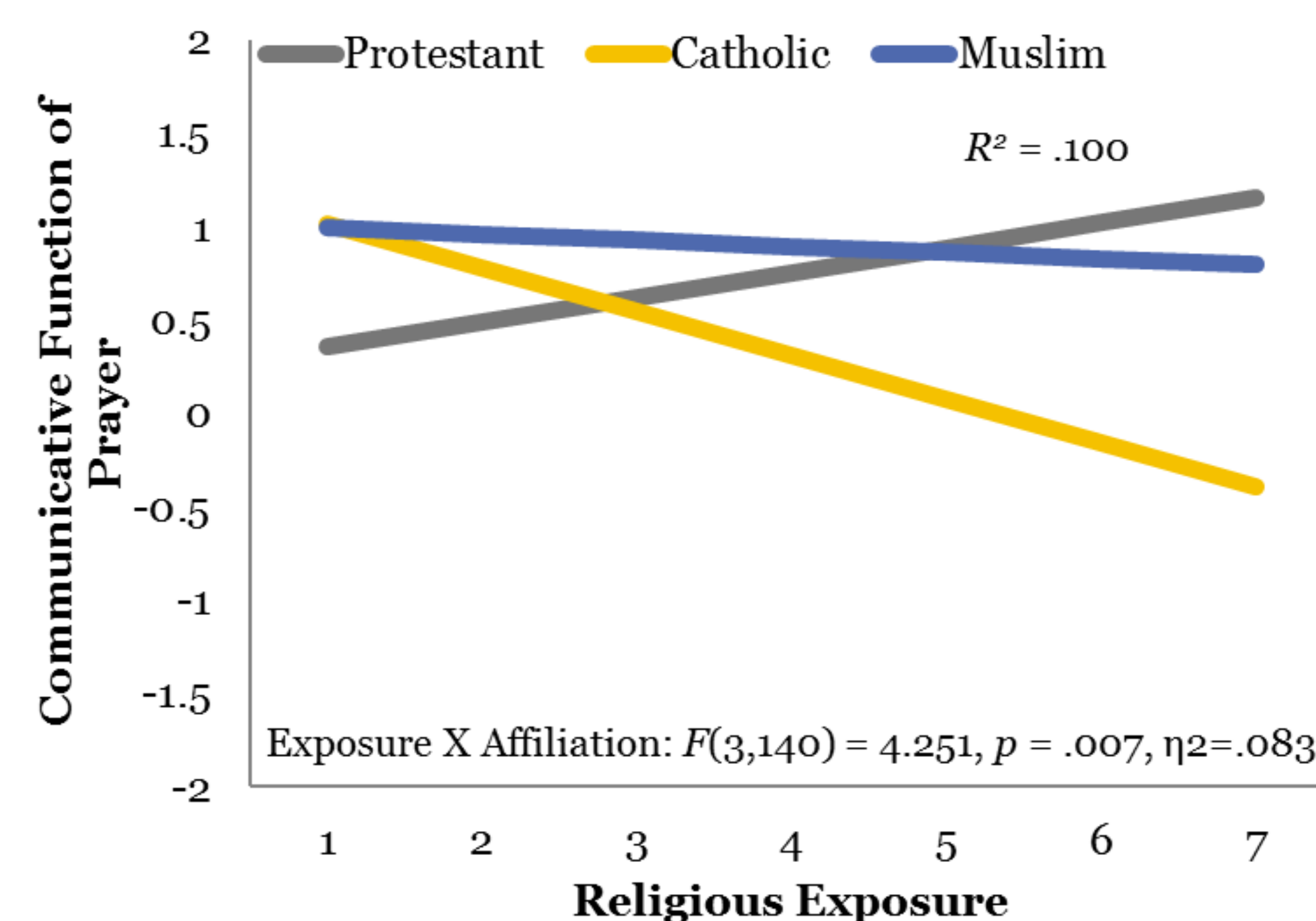
	Protestant Christian M (SD)	Roman Catholic M (SD)	Muslim M (SD)
Child			
Physical	0.24 (1.37)	0.09 (1.42)	0.78 (1.26)
Communicative	0.84 (1.14)	0.54 (1.34)	0.90 (1.33)
Symbolic	0.41 (1.35)	0.75 (.98)	1.13 (1.13)
Parent			
Physical	0.41 (.83)	0.64 (.83)	-0.47 (1.21)
Communicative	-0.66 (1.16)	0.05 (1.14)	-0.27 (1.29)
Symbolic	0.58 (0.89)	0.96 (.58)	0.52 (.94)

## Results

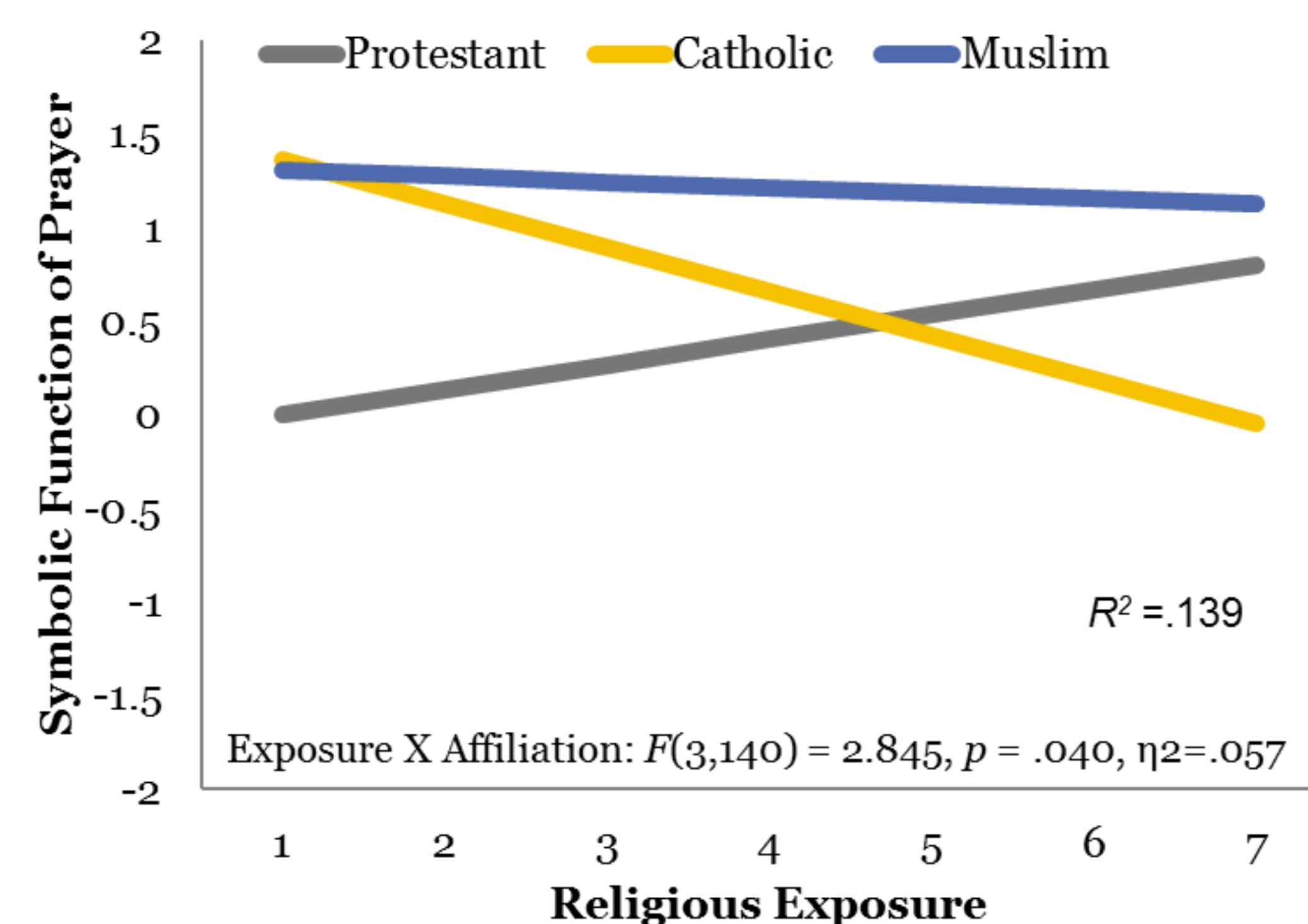
### Physical Function of Prayer



### Communicative Function of Prayer

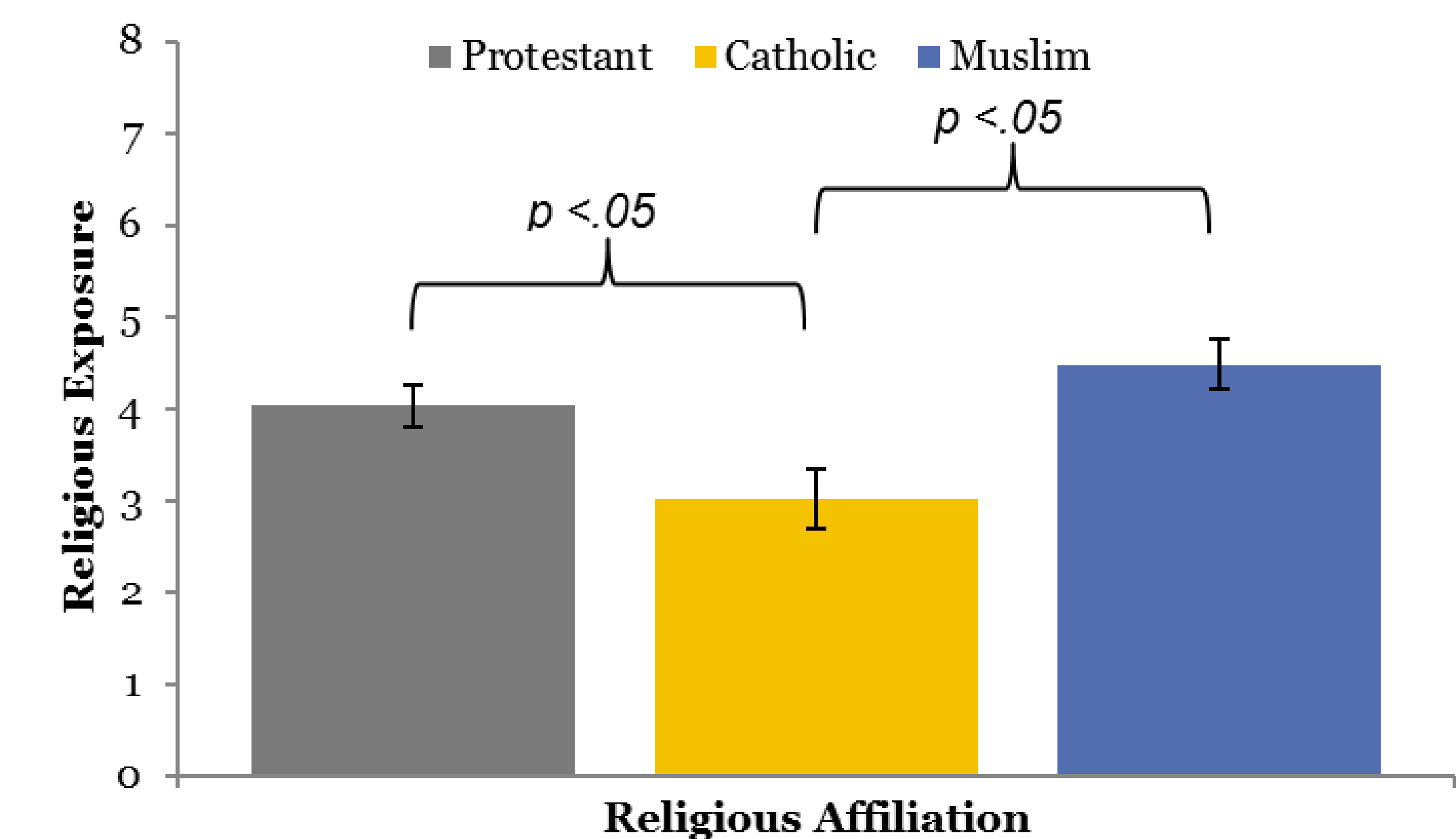


### Symbolic Function of Prayer



## Results

### Religious Exposure by Religious Affiliation



## Discussion

- Parent's understanding of prayer did not influence children's understanding of prayer
- Children's religious exposure did influence children's understanding of prayer based on religious affiliation
  - Protestant children attributed more function to prayer behaviors as their religious exposure increased
  - Catholic children attributed less function to prayer behaviors as their religious exposure increased
  - Muslim children's attribution of function to prayer was not influenced by religious exposure

## References

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- 4) Spilka, B., & Ladd, K. L. (2013). *The Psychology of Prayer*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
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