The Relationship Between Pretense and Children’s Views of Possibilities
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Introduction

• Children might judge whether impossible events are possible based on whether they can imagine circumstances that would allow for the event to happen in real life.¹
• Children might also incorporate events in pretend play, making up situations that fit in with the premise.²

Hypotheses:
1) Children who have higher pretense orientation might be more likely to judge impossible events as possible because they have more practice in imagining alternatives to reality.
2) There will be differences in the relationship between pretense and possibility judgments depending on whether or not a causal mechanism is presented.

Participants

• Children (N = 192), 3.38- to 6.98 years-old (M = 4.828, SD = .805)
• Protestant (n = 54)
• Catholic (n = 39)
• Muslim (n = 69)
• Religiously Non-Affiliated (n = 30)
• Gender: 56.1% Female, 43.9% Male
• Race & Ethnicity:
  • 35.4% White
  • 5.2% African American/Black
  • 19.8% Hispanic/Latino
  • 1% Native American
  • 10.9% Asian
  • 37.5% Decline to Answer

Procedure

• Pretense
  • Participants asked about their participation in pretense with a variety of activities (e.g., making up songs or plays)
  • Answers coded as No [-1] to Don’t Know [0] to Yes [+1] and summed for Pretense Total

• Supernatural Causality
  • Participants judged the possibility of 4 impossible events (e.g., becoming invisible)
  • Participants then judged if a supernatural causal mechanism (i.e., God) would make an impossible event possible
  • Answers coded as No [-1] to Don’t Know [0] to Yes [+1] and summed for Possibility Total and Possibility with God Total

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Protestant</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Non-Affiliated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretense</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>.656</td>
<td>.634</td>
<td>.736</td>
<td>.610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>(.312)</td>
<td>(.305)</td>
<td>(.299)</td>
<td>(.317)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility Without Supernatural Causal Mechanism</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>.649</td>
<td>.677</td>
<td>.613</td>
<td>.691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>(.778)</td>
<td>(.804)</td>
<td>(.634)</td>
<td>(.810)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility With Supernatural Causal Mechanism</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>.194</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>.444</td>
<td>.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>(.778)</td>
<td>(.804)</td>
<td>(.634)</td>
<td>(.810)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial Correlation of Pretense and Possibility Without Supernatural Causal Mechanism (Controlling for Age)</td>
<td>r(189) = .189**</td>
<td>r(51) = .303*</td>
<td>r(36) = .062</td>
<td>r(66) = .236†</td>
<td>r(27) = .183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial Correlation of Pretense and Possibility With Supernatural Causal Mechanism (Controlling for Age)</td>
<td>r(189) = .072</td>
<td>r(51) = .078</td>
<td>r(36) = .118</td>
<td>r(66) = .020</td>
<td>r(27) = .357†</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Results & Discussion

• Overall there was a small positive significant relationship between pretense and possibility judgments for impossible events without a supernatural causal mechanism. However, pretense and possibility judgments presented with a supernatural causal mechanism were not significantly correlated.
• These data indicate that children who regularly engage in pretend might decide if an event is possible by imagining alternatives to explain it.
• The relationship may be stronger for events that are presented without a potential causal mechanism because presenting a cause as an explanation for an impossible event removes the need for a child to create her or his own causal inferences about the event.

Support

Support for this research was generously provided by:
• Social Science Research Council’s New Directions in the Study of Prayer Grant
• John Templeton Foundation Grant

References


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