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Children Exposed To Religion Have Difficulty Distinguishing Fact From Fiction, Study Finds

The Huffington Post | By Shadee Ashtari
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Young children who are exposed to religion have a hard time differentiating between fact and fiction, according to a new [study](#) published in the July issue of Cognitive Science.

Researchers presented 5- and 6-year-old children from both public and parochial schools with three different types of stories -- religious, fantastical and realistic -- in an effort to gauge how well they could identify narratives with impossible elements as fictional.

The study found that, of the 66 participants, children who went to church or were enrolled in a parochial school were significantly less able than secular children to identify supernatural elements, such as talking animals, as fictional.

By relating seemingly impossible religious events achieved through divine intervention (e.g., Jesus transforming water into wine) to fictional narratives, religious children would more heavily rely on religion to justify their false categorizations.

"In both studies, [children exposed to religion] were less likely to judge the characters in the fantastical stories as pretend, and in line with this equivocation, they made more appeals to reality and fewer appeals to impossibility than did secular children," the study concluded.

Refuting previous [hypotheses](#) claiming that children are "born believers," the authors suggest that "religious teaching, especially exposure to miracle stories, leads children to a more generic receptivity toward the impossible, that is, a more wide-ranging acceptance that the impossible can happen in defiance of ordinary causal relations."

According to 2013-2014 [Gallup data](#), roughly 83 percent of Americans report a religious affiliation, and an even larger group -- 86 percent -- believe in God.

More than a quarter of Americans, 28 percent, also believe the Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken literally, while another 47 percent say the Bible is the inspired word of God.