



Personality Traits Predicting Individual's Religiosity - Contextual Dependencies

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Introduction

For decades, religiosity has been object of scientific research. Investigations revealed associations with partnership characteristics and health related outcomes (Doane, 2013; Village, Williams, & Francis, 2010). However, the driving forces behind religiosity have been widely neglected.

The Role of Agency and Communion

Recent studies revealed an interesting pattern of results in cross-country investigations, extending the commonly assumed role of personality traits (Gebauer, Paulhus, & Neberich, 2013; Gebauer et al., 2014). First, they confirmed the positive correlation between *communion* and religiosity in highly religious countries like the U.S. (where the majority of former investigations took place), which was explained by a tendency to assimilate. Second, they explained the weak and by trend negative correlation between *agency* and religiosity as a tendency to differentiate from the surrounding culture.

Hence, these results show that context has a moderating effect on the association between agency and religiosity as well as communion and religiosity.

The Big Two and the Big Five

Findings suggested a relationship between the Big Two personality dimensions of agency and communion and the Big Five. *Agreeableness* and *conscientiousness* were related to communion whereas *openness* and *extraversion* were related to agency (Gebauer et al., 2013; Gebauer et al., 2014; McCrae & Costa, 2008).

In our analyses we used agreeableness and openness as indicators of communion and agency, respectively. We investigated one facet of religiosity (i.e. religious service attendance) and tried to replicate the cross-country findings within Germany by comparing administrative districts.

Hypotheses

- Agreeableness predicts higher individual's religiosity, especially the more religious the administrative district is.
- Openness predicts lower individual's religiosity, especially the more religious the administrative district is.

Method

- Data**
- DFG funded 14-year long-term project "Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics" (pairfam); first five waves available
 - 2011 Census; population census, mainly based on administrative registers
- Sample**
- Participants of panel wave 1 (n=10,572), *M* = 26.4 years, *SD* = 8.44 years
 - 52% female; 72% pertain to a religious denomination
- Variables**
- Personality traits: BFI-K (Rammstedt & John, 2005)
 - Individual's religiosity: frequency of attending a religious institution or ceremony (e.g. church, synagogue), ranging from 1=never to 6=more than once a week
 - Context religiosity: percentage of people mentioning a religious denomination (e.g. Roman Catholic, Jewish)
- Analyses**
- Hierarchic ordinal (logistic) regression

Results

Table 1. Hierarchic Model Results for Both Personality Traits and Context Religiosity.

| | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>p</i> |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Main effect agreeableness | .169 | .028 | .001 |
| Main effect openness | .109 | .030 | .001 |
| Agreeableness x context | -.012 | .035 | .716 |
| Openness x context | -.099 | .037 | .008 |

Results controlled for age and sex.

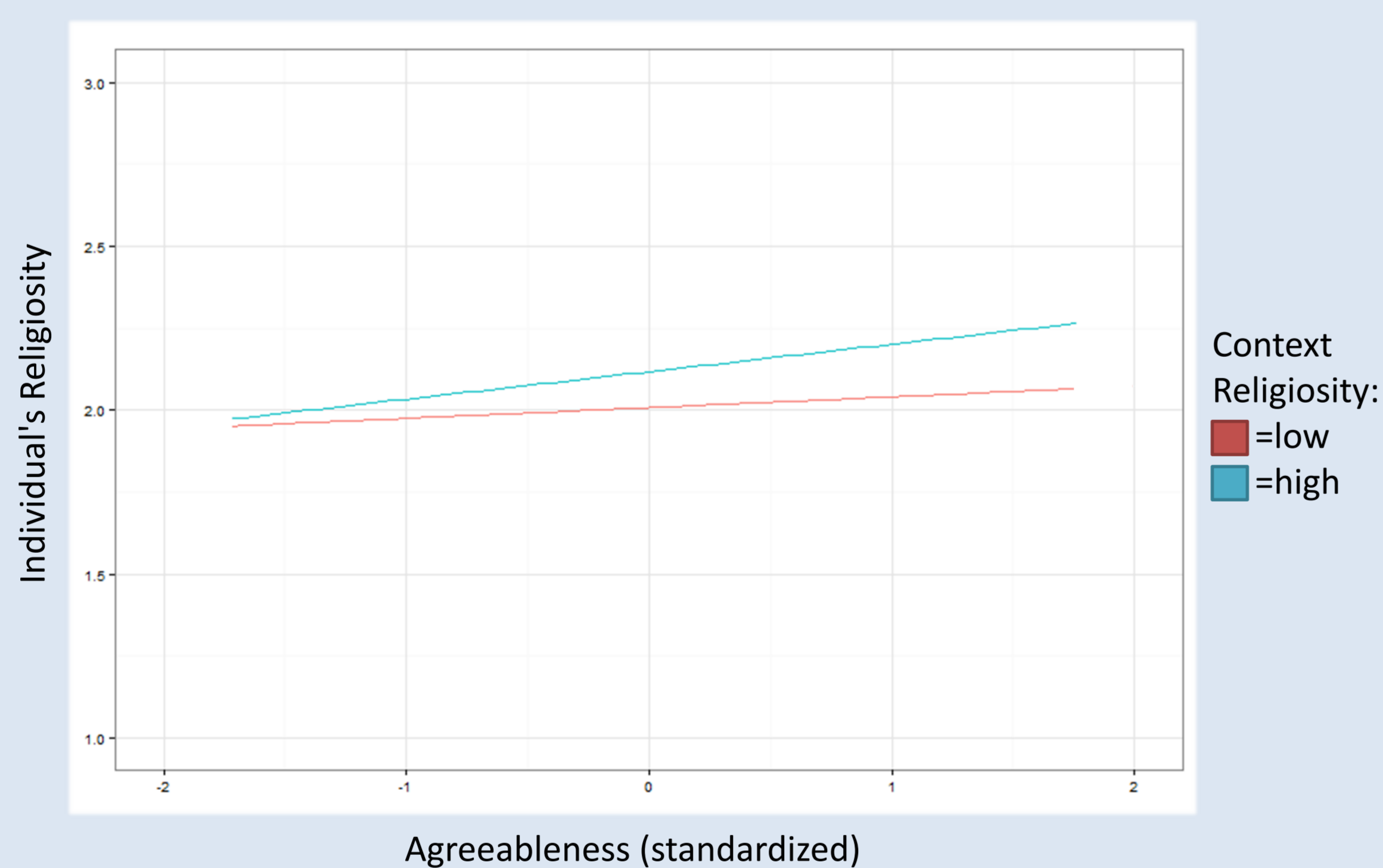
Agreeableness

We found the expected positive relation between agreeableness and individual's religiosity. The interaction of personality and context religiosity was not significant, but showed the expected direction.

Openness

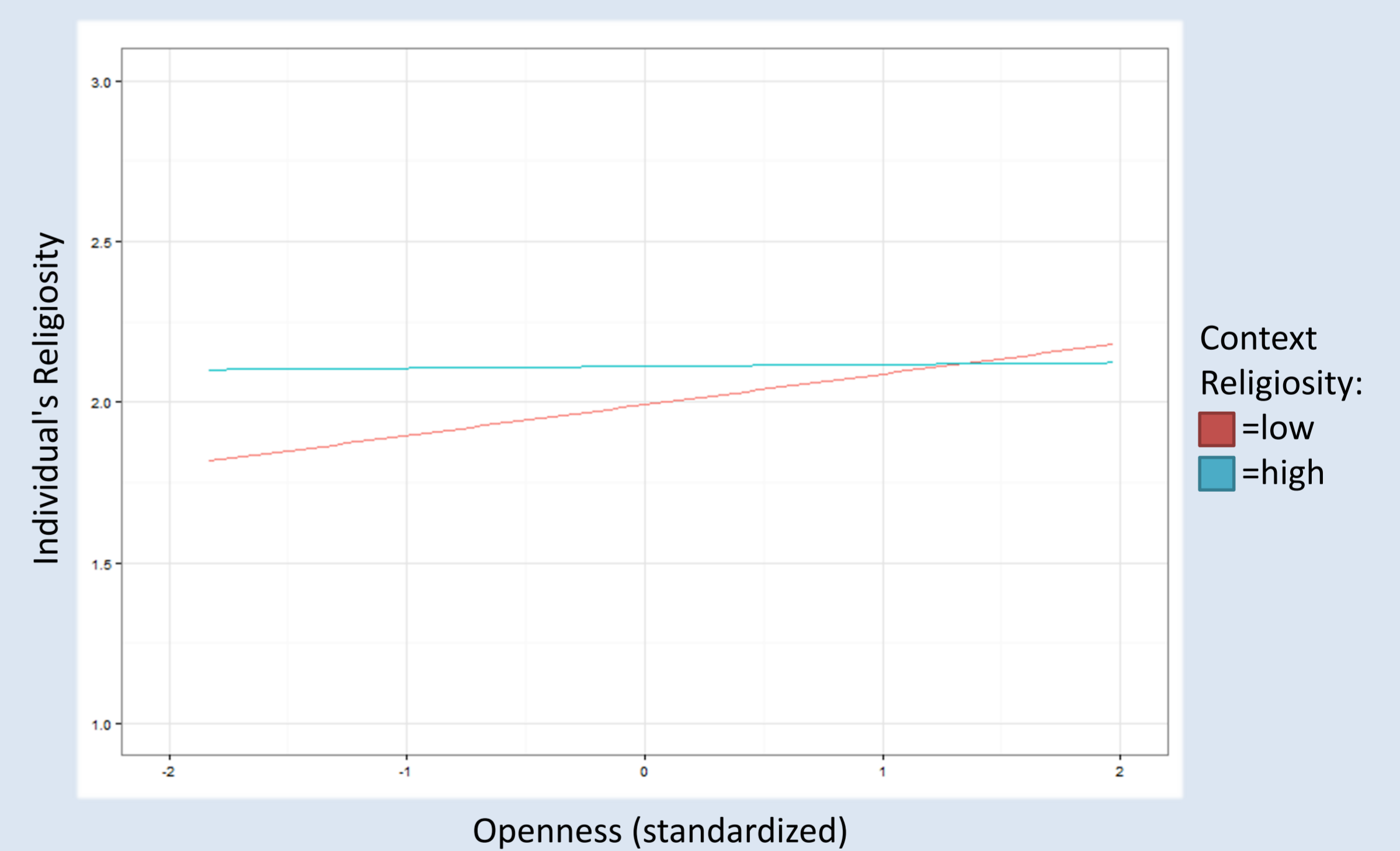
We found the expected negative interaction of openness and context religiosity.

Association between Agreeableness and Religiosity in Different Contexts



Association of agreeableness (standardized) and individual's religiosity within low religious contexts (red) and high religious contexts (blue). Both groups of context were classified by values more than one standard deviation beneath or above grand mean.

Association between Openness and Religiosity in Different Contexts



Association of openness (standardized) and individual's religiosity within low religious contexts (red) and high religious contexts (blue). Both groups of context were classified by values more than one standard deviation beneath or above grand mean.

Discussion

This study aimed to replicate cross-country research within Germany by comparing the association between personality traits and religiosity across administrative districts. A moderating effect of religiosity of context could partially be confirmed.

Agreeableness, used as an indicator of communion, was positively correlated to individual's religiosity. Furthermore, the interaction of personality and context religiosity pointed into the expected direction, although not significant.

Moreover the interaction between openness and context religiosity pointed into the expected direction confirming the prediction that openness is related to less individual's religiosity, especially in highly religious contexts.

Overall the results indicate that the cross-country findings by Gebauer et al. (2013) can be generalized to further contexts, at least concerning the facet of religiosity analysed in this study.

That the theoretically expectable interaction between agreeableness and context religiosity did not reach statistical significance can be explained by the insufficient

comparability of agreeableness and communion.

In the future, we intend to investigate the relationship between both, agency and communion and the Big Five in depth, especially with regard to longitudinal associations. This will shed more light on the association between the Big Five and religiosity.

With regard to practical implications, the fact that in different religious contexts (e.g. nations) religious people tend to have particular personality traits can possibly improve interpersonal and intercultural understanding. It could help to explain why the expression of one's own religious belief varies even within one religious denomination as it is known that personality traits have influence on one's own behaviour, for instance social anxiety and aggressive behaviour (Barlett, & Anderson, 2012; Kaplan, Levinson, Rodebaugh, Menatti, & Weeks, 2015).

To conclude, with the present study we showed that personality traits, individual's religiosity and context religiosity interact dynamically. We hope that future research will continue to investigate the underlying processes.

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