

The Power of God: Believers and Nonbelievers Differences in Big-Five Factors of Personality

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It is expected that our personality traits influences our perceptions and behaviors in all daily situations. One of those situations we can put our eyes on refers to religious belief. Some studies already found correlations between the big five factors of personality and religiosity, spirituality, open mature religion, religious fundamentalism and extrinsic religion (e.g. Henningsgaard & Arnau, 2008; Saroglou, 2002). Shariff and Norenzayan (2011) found that people behave differently depending on the kind of god they believe in. So, it seems reasonable to expect some personality patterns in those who have a religious belief, and those who have not.

Objective

In this study, we test differences between religious believers and non-believers for the big five personality factors.

Method

Participants

A sample of 4,641 Brazilians, from all states of Brazil (42,1% from Rio Grande do Sul), answered our questionnaire, mean age 27.8 years, 48,1% were undergraduates, 66% were women.

Procedures

We collected data via internet, the participants were recruited through invitations by emails and links in social network websites.

Most participants reported having a religious belief, 72%. As shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, believers showed higher scores in the factors of extroversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness; the nonbelievers in neuroticism and openness. We found significant differences between believers and nonbelievers for all personality factors. Although differences were found in all factors, the differences were more prominent for Agreeableness ($d = 0.51$) and Openness ($d = -0.32$). Analyzing the agreeableness facets, as seen in Table 2 and Figure 2, believers show higher scores in all three facets, but, in particular, in Kindness ($d = 0.36$) and Pro-sociality ($d = 0.51$).

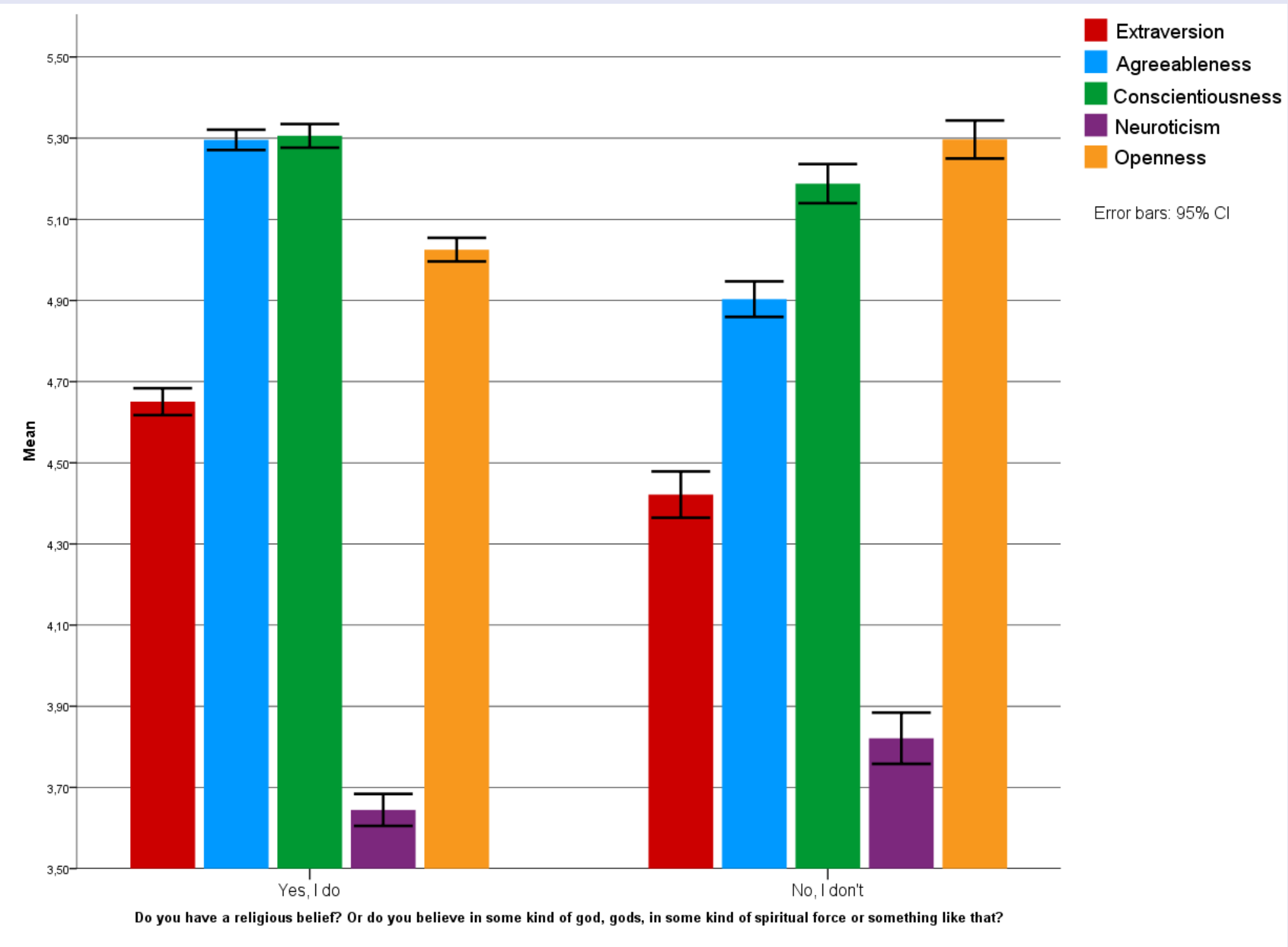


Figure 1. Means and 95% confidence intervals for believers and non believers and personality factors

Table 2. Mean differences between believers and non believers and facets of agreeableness

Variable	Believers		Non believers		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Kindness	5.85	0.89	5.51	1.03	0.36
Pro-sociability	5.39	1.03	4.82	1.16	0.51
Confidence in others	4.41	1.42	4.24	1.45	0.12

Note. T-test for compare means of believers and non believers and agreeableness' facets was all significance with $p\text{-value} < 0.01$.

Table 1. Mean differences between believers and non believers and personality factors

Variable	Believers		Non believers		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Extraversion	4.65	0.98	4.42	1.05	0.23
Agreeableness	5.30	0.74	4.90	0.80	0.51
Conscientiousness	5.31	0.86	5.19	0.88	0.14
Neuroticism	3.64	1.16	3.82	1.16	-0.15
Openness	5.03	0.86	5.30	0.86	-0.32

Note. T-test for compare means of believers and non believers and personality factors was all significance with $p\text{-value} < 0.01$.

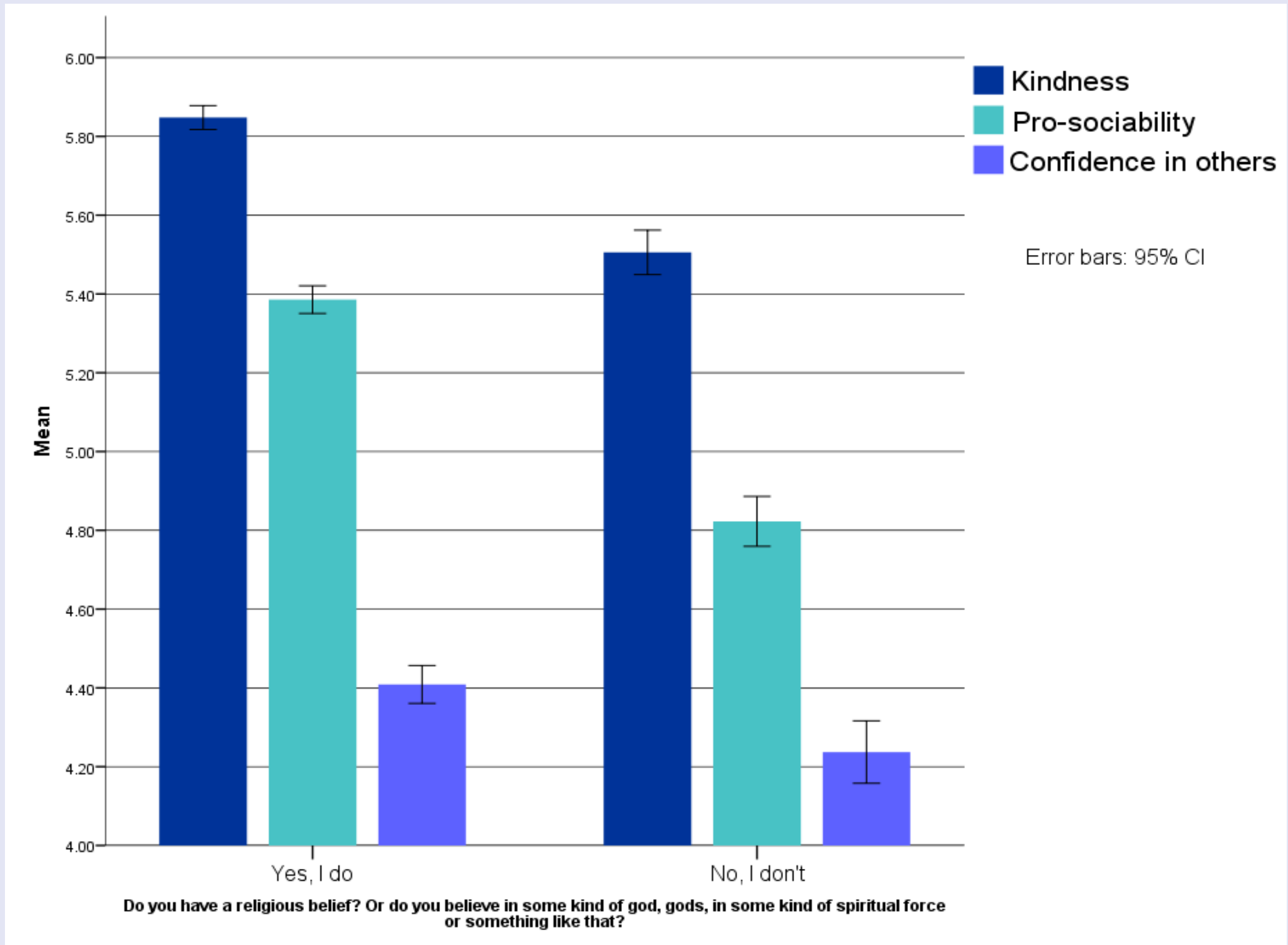


Figure 2. Means and 95% confidence intervals for believers and non believers and Agreeableness' facets.

Conclusion

Our findings indicate that there is a relationship between personality traits and religious beliefs, in particular, believers seem to be more outgoing, altruistic and self-disciplined. On the other hand, those who do not have a belief appear to be more emotionally instable and opened to new experiences.

References

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