Religiousness is associated with higher empathic concern – evidence from self- and other-ratings

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BACKGROUND: Several investigations have demonstrated a positive association between **religiosity** and **emotional empathy**. However, most of these studies relied on self-report measures, and therefore were criticized for reflecting **a self-delusion of believers**. To address this issue we conducted a simultaneous examination of **self-** and **other-ratings** of empathy and religiousness.

METHOD

Participants: 236 Polish adults participants (88 male, 145 female) and 223 of their close acquaintances (e.g., partners, close friends).

Measures: Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983), Belief in God & Religiosity, and Social Desirability Scale (Fronczyk & Witkowska, 2016).

RESULTS

- Self-reported empathy correlated positively with self-reported belief in God and self-reported religiosity.
- Other-rated empathy was positively associated with other-rated and self-reported belief in God and religiosity.
- These effects were observed for one type of emotional empathy, i.e., other-oriented feelings of compassion and sympathy.
- The results remained significant controlling for gender, age, and social desirability.

CONCLUSION: The association between religiousness and emotional empathy **is not purely subjective** but could also be validated through an external assessment.

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More **religious** individuals reported **higher emotional empathy** and were also perceived as **more empathic by others.**

Figure 1. *Religious denomination structure for primary participants (N=236)*

- Roman Catholics — 65%
- Protestants — 6%
- Orthodox — 2%
- Others — 5%
- 22%
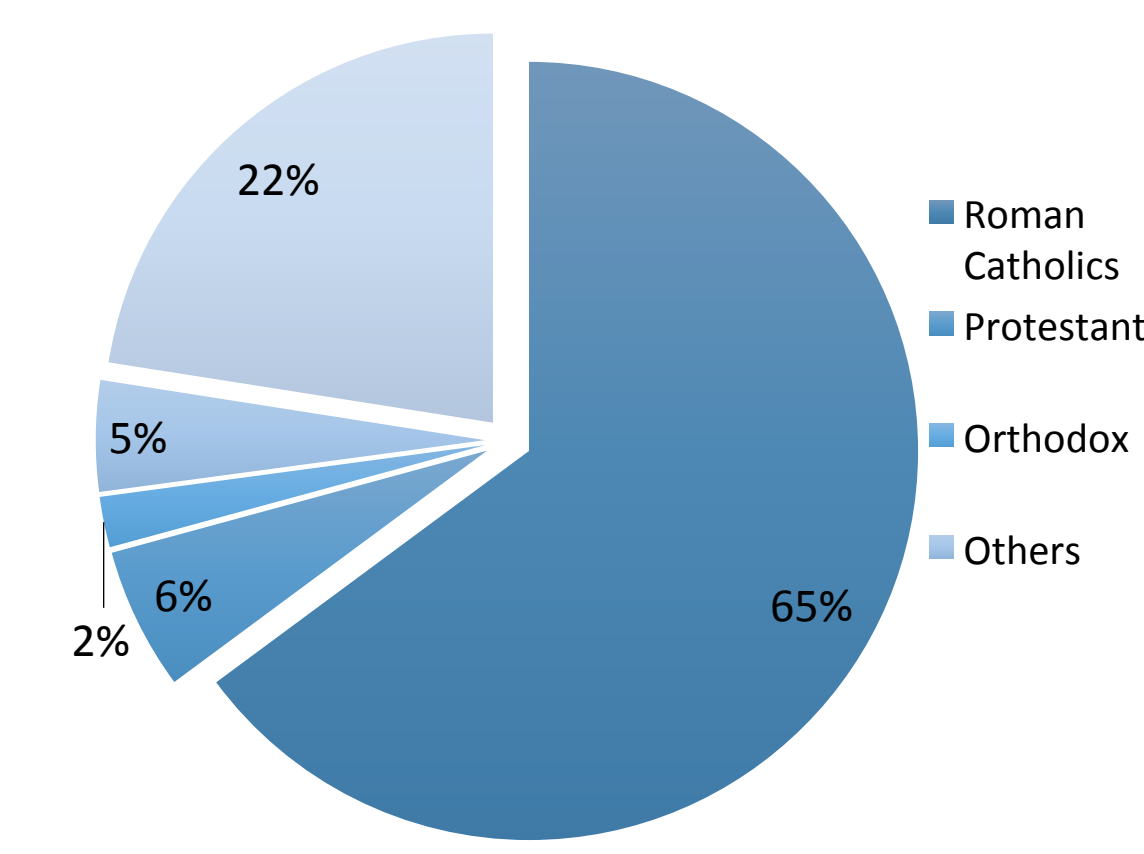
Table 1. *Simplified correlation matrix.*

	Self-report		Other-ratings		
	Belief	Religiosity	Empathy	Belief	Religiosity
Self-report					
Empathy	.33**	.32**	.40**	.29**	.35**
Belief		.86**	.29**	.70**	.74**
Religiosity			.28**	.69**	.77**
Other-ratings					
Empathy				.31**	.36**
Belief					.85**
Religiosity					-

Table 2. *Regression analysis with religiosity as a dependent variable.*

		Self-report			Other-ratings		
		ΔR^2	β	p	ΔR^2	β	p
Step 1		.01			.01		
	Gender		-.10	.117		-.07	.296
	Age		.02	.745		.06	.376
Step 2		.08**			.13**		
	Gender		-.02	.811		.04	.599
	Age		.03	.635		.07	.265
	Empathy		.30	.000		.37	.000

Figure 2. *SEM model linking second-order factors of empathy and religiousness.*

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