

Paranormal Belief, Evaluation of Paranormal Experiences, Schizotypy¹ and Reality Testing

Results:

The project consisted of two phases. Phase I (respondents 1215) sought to develop a new measure of paranormal belief (the Manchester Metropolitan University New, MMU-N). Principal components analysis identified eight factors: Hauntings, Alien Visitation, Superstition, Psychokinesis, Religious Beliefs, Astrology, ESP and Witchcraft. Each factor was coherent, possessed conceptual clarity and demonstrated good internal reliability. The MMU-N measure overall and its subscales correlated positively with: traditional measures of paranormal belief (Revised Paranormal Belief Scale, & Australian Sheep Goat Scale), anomalous beliefs (urban legends & conspiratorial beliefs) and paranormal experiences. Additionally, the MMU-N correlated with reality testing¹ deficits in a manner similar to the established paranormal measures. Phase II (respondents 305) examined the degree to which specific probabilistic biases (misperception of chance & conjunction fallacy) were associated with belief in the paranormal and reality testing. Participants completed measures assessing probabilistic reasoning, belief in the paranormal and reality testing. Findings were consistent across belief measures. The best predictor of paranormal belief and reality testing deficits was perception of randomness. Comparisons (below vs. above the median) supported this finding. The results provide support for the notion that paranormal believers are more likely to misinterpret chance phenomena as non-random. Proneness to standard conjunctions was not associated with belief in the paranormal. However, believers solved fewer paranormal conjunctions than non-believers.

Footnote¹: This project was approved on the understanding that reality testing and cognitive bias would be explored rather than schizotypy.

Area(s) of interest: Paranormal Beliefs, Experiences and Reasoning Bias

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