



Paranormal belief, manic-depressiveness, and magical ideation: a replication

Michael A. Thalbourne^{1*} and Christopher C. French²

¹*Department of Psychology, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA 5005 Australia and* ²*Psychology Department, Goldsmiths' College, University of London, New Cross, London, England*

(Received 1 August 1994)

Summary—A previous study conducted in Australia has suggested that persons who believe in and claim experience of the paranormal tend to score higher on measures of manic-depressiveness and magical ideation. The present study sought to confirm these findings in an English sample of 114 university students using as measures of belief in the paranormal the Australian Sheep–Goat Scale and as well the Survey of Belief in Extraordinary Phenomena. As predicted, paranormal belief was significantly correlated with measures of manic-, depressive-, and manic-depressive experience, as well as magical ideation. It was noted, moreover, that manic-depressive experience was moderately correlated with magical ideation, suggesting some overlap between the relevant conditions.

INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of reports are appearing which suggest that belief in and alleged experience of 'the paranormal'—usually defined as ESP, psychokinesis and life after death—are more prevalent amongst persons who score high on scales measuring dimensions of clinical interest. One of the earliest of these reports was by Windholz and Diamant (1974), who found, amongst other things, that believers in 'extraordinary phenomena' scored higher on the Hypomania and Schizophrenia scales of the MMPI. It is therefore not unreasonable to expect that believers might score higher on measures relating to manic-depressiveness, and also to aspects of schizotypy (for which see Thalbourne, 1994). Indeed, Thalbourne and Delin (1994) have recently brought forward evidence in an Australian study that while, on average, putatively normal students, manic-depressives, and schizophrenics do not differ in level of paranormal belief, believers in all three samples were more likely to score higher on history of depressive experience, history of manic-like experience, manic-depressive experience, and magical ideation.

The present study sought to replicate these findings using an English sample of normal university students to whom were administered both the Windholz and Diamant scale and a variant of the Thalbourne and Delin measure of belief in the paranormal (since it is of interest to know to what extent different measures overlap, especially since the older scale covers some topics not strictly speaking in the domain of the paranormal, such as UFOs and graphology).

METHOD

Subjects

Ss were 114 students (32 males, 74 females, eight no information, mean age 23 yr) taking a psychology practical class at Goldsmiths' College, University of London in 1993.

Measures

A questionnaire was collated containing: (1) the forced-choice version of the 18-item Australian Sheep–Goat Scale (ASGS), as a measure of belief in, and alleged experience of, ESP, psychokinesis and life after death (Thalbourne & Delin, 1993; Thalbourne, submitted); (2) the 35-item Survey of Belief in Extraordinary Phenomena (SOBEP), constructed by Windholz and Diamant (1974); (3) the 18-item Manic-Depressiveness Scale (Thalbourne, Delin & Bassett, 1994), which can be broken down into Manic-Experience and Depressive-Experience, each subscale being nine items long; and (4) the 30-item Magical Ideation Scale (Eckblad & Chapman, 1983), and a shorter 22-item version of this scale which excluded eight items clearly relevant to the paranormal.

RESULTS

The data were analysed using Pearson correlation coefficients, with two-tailed tests of significance.

It should first be noted that the two measures of belief in the paranormal correlated very highly ($r = 0.74$, $P < 0.001$). Results using one measure should therefore usually generalize to the other.

Ss who scored high on the Australian Sheep–Goat Scale tended to score higher on Manic Experience ($r = 0.19$, $P = 0.045$), Depressive Experience ($r = 0.27$, $P = 0.004$), the combined Manic-Depressiveness Scale ($r = 0.28$, $P = 0.002$), the full Magical Ideation Scale ($r = 0.65$, $P < 0.001$) and the abridged Magical Ideation Scale ($r = 0.58$, $P < 0.001$).

Results for SOBEP mirrored those of the ASGS, but at a lower level. The correlation with Manic Experience was not in this instance significant ($r = 0.14$), but those who scored high on SOBEP did tend to score higher on Depressive Experience

* To whom all correspondence should be addressed.

($r = 0.21$, $P = 0.028$), Manic-Depressiveness ($r = 0.21$, $P < 0.023$), Magical Ideation ($r = 0.61$, $P < 0.001$), and on the abridged Magical Ideation Scale ($r = 0.54$, $P < 0.001$). As in the case of the ASGS, abridging the Magical Ideation Scale evidently leads to only a small reduction in the level of the relationship between the two variables.

Finally, it is of interest to note that there was, as expected, a significant positive correlation between Manic Experience and Depressive Experience ($r = 0.32$, $P < 0.001$), and, of perhaps greater theoretical importance, a significant and moderate correlation between Manic-Depressiveness and the (full) Magical Ideation Scale ($r = 0.46$, $P < 0.001$).

DISCUSSION

The results are consistent with those of previous studies in suggesting that persons who believe in and claim experience of ESP, psychokinesis and life after death (and perhaps other extraordinary phenomena) tend to score higher on measures relating both to affective disorder (to a modest extent) and (to a stronger degree) to schizotypy. Indeed, these psychopathological measures tend to be related to each other, and it may therefore be that there is a common factor between them all that is related to belief in the paranormal. That common factor may be something that the different psychoses (or proneness to different psychoses) share at some fundamental level, as suggested by the factor-analytic work of Thalbourne and Delin (1994).

Acknowledgements—We wish to thank Dr George Windholz for providing a copy of SOBEP, and Sally Beales and Joan Painter for their assistance in collecting data.

REFERENCES

- Eckblad, M. & Chapman, L. J. (1983). Magical ideation as an indicator of schizotypy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 51, 215–225.
- Thalbourne, M. A. (1994). Belief in the paranormal and its relationship to schizophrenia-relevant measures: A confirmatory study. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 33, 78–80.
- Thalbourne, M. A. (submitted). Further studies of the measurement and correlates of belief in the paranormal.
- Thalbourne, M. A. & Delin, P. S. (1993). A new instrument for measuring the sheep-goat variable: Its psychometric properties and factor structure. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 59, 172–186.
- Thalbourne, M. A. & Delin, P. S. (1994). A common thread underlying belief in the paranormal, creative personality, mystical experience and psychopathology. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 58, 3–38.
- Thalbourne, M. A., Delin, P. S. & Bassett, D. L. (1994). An attempt to construct short scales measuring manic-depressive-like experience and behaviour. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 33, 205–207.
- Windholz, G. & Diamant, L. (1974). Some personality traits of believers in extraordinary phenomena. *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society*, 3, 125–126.