

Research Note: Creative Personality and Belief in the Paranormal

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Abstract

Eight studies were identified as containing correlations between creative personality and belief in the paranormal. Fifteen analyses were uncovered, all positive and all but two significant. The median correlation was a moderate .345. It was therefore concluded that sheep tend to have a more highly creative personality than do goats.

Introduction

One of the many variables that might be supposed to be related to paranormal belief is creative personality. Creative personality consists of various personality characteristics which, to quote Davis, Peterson, and Farley (1974, p. 33), "...regularly haunt the literature describing the creative person". In fact, a number of studies have examined the relationship between paranormal belief and creative personality. It is the purpose of this paper (1) to describe the earlier of these studies; (2) describe in some detail the Creative Personality Scale, since it was much used in later studies; (3) describe the measure of belief in the paranormal used in all these studies but one; (4) list in a table all available studies of paranormal belief and creative personality, and tabulate the correlation published (or calculated through re-analysis); (5) work out the overall median correlation as the best estimate of the correlation in the population; and (6) discuss the results.

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The early studies

The earliest study was apparently the one by Joesting and Joesting (1969): a minimally described sheep-goat scale correlated positively and significantly with the Torrance Creative Motivation Inventory (Torrance, 1963).

Davis et al (1974) compiled a 7-item Belief in Psychical Phenomena Test and correlated it with two attitude/motivation type instruments, both developed by Torrance (1971): the 50-item *What Kind of Person are You? (WKPAY?)*, and the 30-item *Personal-Social Motivation Inventory (PSMI)*. The authors also had access to actual ratings of creativity. They analyzed each sex separately, and found two out of three correlations were significantly positive in each case, the Personal-Social Motivation Inventory common to both sets of results.

Moon (1975), using a three-alternative question, found that visual arts students showed significantly higher belief in ESP than did students in other disciplines.

There was then a gap of 19 years when no more research of this kind was reported.

The Creative Personality Scale

Research resumed in the 1990s, all of it using a specially constructed scale to measure creative personality: it consisted of nine true-false items, five of which came from the Torrance Creative Motivation Inventory (Torrance, 1971, pp. 95-96) and four of which were constructed specifically for the scale. The items may be found in the Appendix to Thalbourne (2000). The resulting scale, which was first devised by Thalbourne and Delin (1994), had an internal reliability coefficient (Cronbach alpha) of .62. As to the validity of the scale, two semi-formal studies have been conducted:

All questionnaire participants arriving in a given time period at the author's office for verbal feedback ($N = 28$) were asked (in advance of consulting their scores for creative personality) whether in the past year or 2 they had engaged in "significant creative activities." Answers included drawing, poetry, drama, music, other literature, other categories (such as painting, decorating, and crafts), and the total number of activities was calculated. No attempt was made to verify these reports. Nevertheless, creative personality correlated significantly with total number of creative activities (τ corrected for ties = .32, $p = .02$, two-tailed), with

drama ($\tau = .36, p = .007$), with drawing ($\tau = .34, p = .01$) and with poetry ($\tau = .27, p = .04$). The creative personality scale can thus be said to have received at least partial validation (Thalbourne, 1998, p. 405).

A similar procedure was followed using 50 participants in a later study (Thalbourne, 2000). The writing of poetry showed a significant positive correlation with the Creative Personality Scale (Kendall's $\tau = .25$, corrected for ties, $p = .01$). The writing of other literature, such as novels and short-story writing, showed a marginally significant correlation: $\tau = .19, p = .07$. Thus the conclusion from both studies is that there is some evidence of construct validity.

The Rasch Australian Sheep-Goat Scale

Note that in the studies using the Creative Personality Scale, the measure of the paranormal belief variable was originally the 18-item visual analogue Australian Sheep-Goat Scale (Thalbourne & Delin, 1993). However, Lange and Thalbourne (2002) derived a 16-item Rasch Australian Sheep-Goat Scale, which was here used in all cases except for Thalbourne, Bartemucci, Delin, Fox and Nofi (1997). Rasch scaling involves the process of "top-down purification" in which items biased for gender and/or age are eliminated, the scale is checked for unidimensionality, and the result is a scale with good reliability and an interval-level measure. The two items that were rejected were the ones on after-life issues.

Results

Including the early work, a total of 8 relevant studies, containing 15 distinct analyses, were located. Except for one case (Moon, 1975), Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for the measure of belief in the paranormal and the given measure of creative personality. Table 1 contains these correlational data.

The Pearson correlations range from .03 to .47. Thus all the analyses are in the positive direction. All but two are significant. It was deemed that the best measure of central tendency for this set of correlations was the median, since it is less affected by extreme correlations. The median correlation is a moderate .345. There thus appears to be good evidence that believers in the paranormal are more likely to display signs of creative personality and indeed, some evidence of creativity itself.

Table 1: Pearson correlations between creative personality and various measures of belief in the paranormal.

| Study | Sample | Creative Personality Scale | | |
|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|----------|
| | | N | <i>r</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Joesting & Joesting (1969) | Students | 53 | .45 | .01 |
| Davis, Peterson & Farley (1974) | | | | |
| WKPAY? | Male students | 36 | .25 | n.s. |
| PSMI | | | .34 | < .05 |
| Creativity ratings | | | .47 | < .01 |
| WKPAY? | Female students | 101 | .27 | < .01 |
| PSMI | | | .26 | < .01 |
| Creativity ratings | | | .03 | n.s. |
| Moon (1975) | Students | 458 | ^a | < .001 |
| Thalbourne & Delin (1994) | Students | 241 | .38 | < .001 |
| Thalbourne & Delin (1994) | Manic-depressives | 86 | .35 | < .001 |
| Thalbourne & Delin (1994) | Schizophrenics | 38 | .43 | .010 |
| Thalbourne & Delin (1995) | Students | 123 | .42 | .001 |
| Thalbourne, Bartemucci, Delin, Fox & Nofi (1997) | Students/ General public | 370 | .37 | < .001 |
| Thalbourne (1998) | Students | 242 | .30 | < .001 |
| Thalbourne, Keogh & Crawley (1999) | Students | 248 | .32 | < .001 |

^aChi-square (*df* = 2) = 22.13.

Discussion

Two issues arise for discussion. The first is that, like the sheep-goat variable itself, creative personality and creativity may each be predictive of psi scoring. There are a number of statements which assert this relationship (e.g., Angoff & Shapin, 1970; Murphy, 1963), and some experimental evidence bears this out (e.g., Schlitz & Honorton, 1992).

The second issue is more sobering, and that is that creative personality is correlated not only with the sheep-goat variable but also with indices of ostensible psychopathology. In most of the Thalbourne studies creative personality is moderately to highly correlated with magical ideation (Eckblad & Chapman, 1983: an index of schizotypy) and also significantly correlated with the Rasch Manic-Depressiveness Scale (Lange, Thalbourne, Houran & Lester, 2002), both of which *prima facie* suggest that persons higher in creativity may be more prone to psychosis. One way of testing this possibility is to correlate the Creative Personality Scale with the variable Neuroticism (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1991), which is a measure of proneness to psychiatric symptoms, located

in both Thalbourne (1998) and Thalbourne, Keogh and Crawley (1999). The result was that in neither study was the Creative Personality Scale significantly correlated with Neuroticism. Thus, high scorers on the Creative Personality Scale do not necessarily tend towards neuroticism. The observed correlations between creative personality and magical ideation and manic-depressiveness suggest instead a non-pathological personality type analogous to “the happy schizotype”, “who is functional despite, or even because of, his or her anomalous experiences” (McCreery & Claridge, 1995, p. 142). This model is being increasingly invoked in the psychology of belief in the paranormal. However, it should also be pointed out, as did Brugger and Taylor (2003, p. 229), that there are significant relationships between creativity, schizotypy and right hemisphere language processing, and a feature of schizotypy is reported belief in, and experience of, the paranormal (Thalbourne, 2003).

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