

Bial

200/08 - "The Effect of Paranormal Belief and Cognitive-Perceptual Factors on Mnemonic Performance: An Experimental Investigation"

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Objectives: The project addressed two fundamental questions. First, whether high scores on paranormal belief were associated with disrupted true memory and susceptibility to false memories. Second, whether any 'observed' memory effects could be explained by cognitive-perceptual factors associated with paranormal belief (i.e., schizotypy, transliminality, and delusional ideation).

Methods: Two established experimental techniques were used: the Deese-Roediger-McDermott (DRM; Deese, 1959; Roediger & McDermott, 1995) and the misinformation paradigm (e.g., Loftus, Miller & Burns, 1978).

Results: Phase I (DRM paradigm) found that participants scoring above (vs. below) the median for belief in the paranormal and delusional ideation produced higher numbers of false memories for critical lures (associative false memory). Level of paranormal belief and level of cognitive-perceptual factor had no effect upon true memory (presented items), or other measures of false memory (non presented list items & non presented critical lures). Overall, paranormal belief and cognitive-perceptual factor scores were not predictors of mnemonic performance (true & false memory). In addition to this, neither level of paranormal belief, nor level of cognitive-perceptual factor had a consistent effect on the quality of memories as measured by the remember-know procedure.

Phase II (misinformation effect) found that only level of paranormal belief affected mnemonic performance. Participants in the upper quartile scored higher on true memory and recognised more misinformation items (false memory) than participants in the lower quartile. The cognitive-perceptual measures had no effect on memory. Whilst, positive correlations were observed between signal detection measures of memory (true d' , false d' , & unrelated information) these measures failed to correlate with either paranormal belief, or the cognitive-perceptual measures. Finally, level of paranormal belief and level of cognitive-perceptual factor had no effect on remember-know responses.

Conclusions: Level of paranormal belief and scores on associated cognitive-perceptual factors were not found to reliably predict mnemonic performance.

Discussion: Further research is required if the relationship between paranormal belief and mnemonic performance is to be fully understood.

Publications: Findings are currently being disseminated via conference and are in preparation for journal submission.

Keywords: Paranormal belief; cognitive-perceptual; memory.