

rational psi information, possibly because the former is more salient. Thirdly, assuming these assumptions prove to be true, a part of what constitutes psi abilities might be open to learning and even transfer.

THE CREATION AND VALIDATION OF THE BELIEF IN THE SUPERNATURAL SCALE

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ABSTRACT

This study presents the development and validation of the Belief in the Supernatural Scale (BitSS). The BitSS acknowledges the nuanced nature of religious and paranormal beliefs and enables researchers to measure them both together, and separately, with equal degrees of clarity. The measurement of these concepts has been problematic as the primary measure in the field, the revised Paranormal Belief Scale (rPBS) (Tobacyk & Milford, 1983), contains a ‘traditional religious belief’ subscale indicating that religious belief is regarded by researchers as being an aspect of paranormal belief. The term ‘supernatural belief’ has been used to refer to either ‘paranormal’ or ‘religious’ concepts and such arbitrary usage is dependent upon what the researcher is investigating. In contrast, Metaphysical Chauvinism theory (Beck & Miller, 2001) suggests that people can believe in different ‘supernatural’ concepts and that there should be a separation of religious and paranormal beliefs.

While measures such as the rPBS and the Australian Sheep Goat Scale (ASGS) are sound measures, there is a need for a scale that can measure the overarching concept of supernatural belief, incorporating both religious and paranormal beliefs, whilst maintaining the distinctions between them. Two studies were carried out to create and validate a new scale to measure supernatural belief. A total of 382 participants (study one) and 318 (study two) were recruited from the University of Derby and via social media. In study one an item pool was created by taking items from previous scales that measure religious, spiritual, and paranormal belief.

There were three stages in the process of selecting items for the item pool; stage one was the initial search for scales to draw items from; stage two was an evaluation of the scales from the initial search; the third and final stage was the evaluation and possible modification of the items. A 204-item pool for the new scale was generated. This was reduced to a pool of 71 items after review by experts and non-experts assessing for face validity and if they agreed the items were measuring religious, spiritual, or paranormal belief, this was then analysed using inter-rater reliability showing a ‘fair agreement’ between reviewers. An Exploratory Factor Analysis was run on the 71 items to establish item redundancy and initial factor groupings in the proposed scale. A

44 item, five factor solution was selected. The factors were labelled in the following way: factor one was named 'mental and psychic phenomena' due to the items in the factor related to such things as ESP or mental telepathy. Factor two was labelled 'religious belief', with the items focussing mainly on religious belief and different aspects of God. The third factor was named 'psychokinesis', having items that related to concepts such as levitation or the movement of objects using the mind.

The fourth factor was named 'supernatural entities', with items relating to supernatural beings such as demons, angels or a supreme being. The fifth factor was named 'common paranormal perceptions', having items that relate to haunting or poltergeists. The aim of study two was to conduct a Confirmatory Factor Analysis on the BitSS developed in study one using a fresh sample of participants. The fit indices showed that the data were not a perfect match to the model. It was concluded that this was due to the model's complexity and the large sample size. Therefore, the model structure and the number of items were retained. The model was also correlated with three other measures of spirituality, religiosity, and paranormal belief. The BitSS scale highly correlated with the scale measuring paranormal belief, and moderately with the other two scales. The BitSS scale showed good test-retest reliability with a three-month follow-up study showing a high correlation.

The new scale successfully captures the nature of supernatural belief and provides a wide range of items. The clear delineation of religious and paranormal belief emerging from these factor analyses supports the Metaphysical Chauvinism theory (Beck & Miller, 2001) and concurs with previous research that distinguishes religious and paranormal believers. This further strengthens the proposition that religious belief should not be defined as a paranormal belief. The five factors of the new scale encompass the aspects of the supernatural well and are easy to interpret, by having a strong meaning based on theory, research and previous scales and factors. The new scale provides insight into how these three concepts of religious, spiritual and paranormal belief might fit together. While religious and paranormal belief show a clear divide, spiritual belief is spread amongst the factors. While the rPBS is a psychometrically sound scale the BitSS has more items covering fewer factors than the rPBS and arguably a clearer factor structure. The BitSS adds another useful tool for the measurement of these types of belief that can be used alongside the rPBS, ASGS and other measures to assess the personality and cognitive correlates of these types of belief.