

FIVE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS IN PARAPSYCHOLOGY

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Despite over 75 years of laboratory work, parapsychology continues to struggle with the basic questions about the nature of the psi experience and the development of a comprehensive theory that encompasses all psi phenomena. Laboratory techniques are limited due to the deductive nature of the studies and the strict barriers that are constructed between the researcher and the phenomena being investigated. The dispassionate nature of an experimental researcher is a benefit in laboratory work, but it does not allow the experience of the study participants to be included in the research process.

Parapsychology would benefit from the inclusion of various qualitative research techniques in the quest to understand the nature of consciousness and to help to develop a theory of psi and survival.

Five qualitative research methods are presented including information about data collection methods, data analysis techniques, sampling, reporting and validation. Each of these techniques is described separately along with discussions about why a researcher might choose to utilize a qualitative research method rather than follow a strict experimental or quantitative protocol. The qualitative methods outlined are Narratives, Case Studies, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, and Ethnographies.

Finally, multiple examples are provided from the field of parapsychology which discuss how each method could be applied to help to advance the understanding of the psi experience and to contribute to future quantitative studies. Parapsychological researchers are encouraged to develop a better understanding of the value of qualitative research techniques and to utilize the results of qualitative studies to structure and develop better experimental methodologies in the laboratory setting.

IGNORANCE IS BLISS? EXPLORING PARANORMAL BELIEFS, COPING AND HAPPINESS IN A UK AND SINGAPOREAN SAMPLE

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Previous research has indicated that belief in unusual phenomena and superstitious thinking may increase in times of stress (Keinan 1994; 2002). Further, believers in the paranormal often display avoidant coping strategies with little to no problem solving. These findings may, therefore, reflect a specific coping mechanism for stressful situations. However, little research has explored the possible interaction between the perception of stress and coping style on belief and further, an assessment of perceived happiness. Consequently, the current study aimed to explore possible associations between perceived stress and happiness, coping and paranormal belief. Further, these relationships were explored and compared in a sample of Western (UK) and South East Asian (Singapore) participants.

Ninety-two male and female participants aged between 19 and 61 years (mean age=36.56 \pm 11.74 years) from the UK and 145 male and female participants aged between 18 and 57 years (mean age=23.03 \pm 5.51 years) from Singapore completed an online battery of psychological measures assessing paranormal belief (Revised Paranormal Belief Scale; Tobacyk, 1988), superstitious thinking (Superstitions Questionnaire; Zebb & Moore, 2003), perceived stress (Perceived Stress Scale, Cohen, 1994), coping (Ways of Coping Revised, Lazarus & Folkman, 1985) and happiness (Oxford Happiness Questionnaire; Hills & Argyle, 2002). Participants were predominantly students recruited using convenience sampling. Data were analysed using a series of backwards enter multiple regression analyses to determine the predictors of paranormal belief.

For all participants, level of education (a higher score being indicative of a lower educational qualification), happiness and coping were significant predictors of global paranormal belief ($R^2=.22$, $F(6, 225)=10.787$; $p<.01$). Specifically, a lower level of education ($\beta=.20$; $p<.00$) greater happiness ($\beta=.16$; $p<.05$) and coping in the form of low problem solving ($\beta=-.16$; $p<.05$) and greater positive reappraisal ($\beta=.24$; $p<.00$) were associated with greater belief. Further, a lower level of education ($\beta=.13$; $p<.05$) and coping (low problem solving ($\beta=-.18$; $p<.05$) and high distancing ($\beta=.31$; $p<.00$) were associated with significantly greater superstitious thinking ($R^2=.21$, $F(7, 224)=8.239$; $p<.01$).

In terms of crosscultural differences, paranormal belief was significantly greater in Singaporeans but no significant differences in happiness and perceived stress between the two nations were noted. In terms of predicting belief, level of education was a significant predictor of both global paranormal belief ($\beta=.36$; $p<.00$) and superstitious thinking ($\beta=.25$; $p<.05$) for participants in the UK ($R^2=.16$, $F(3, 85)=5.345$; $p<.01$ and $R^2=.12$, $F(2, 86)=5.776$; $p<.01$ respectively). For Singaporeans, greater happiness ($\beta=.23$; $p<.00$) significantly predicted greater paranormal belief in addition to low problem solving ($\beta=-.19$; $p<.05$), high avoidance ($\beta=.21$; $p<.05$) and greater distancing ($\beta=.34$; $p<.00$) coping strategies ($R^2=.22$, $F(5, 137)=7.832$; $p<.01$). Further, the combination of high perceived stress and low problem solving was also a significant predictor of superstitious thinking in Singaporeans ($R^2=.27$, $F(5, 137)=9.919$; $p<.00$; $\beta=-.19$; $p<.00$).

The findings support the suggestion that belief in the paranormal may reflect a specific pattern of coping characterised by greater propensity for distancing and avoidance with low problem solving. Further, the combination of high stress and low problem solving may increase the propensity for belief and superstitious thinking, particularly in a South East Asian population.

Further research is required to determine whether this apparent coping mechanism is protective or maladaptive in the long run and whether cultural differences may mediate this effect.

THE CURRENT STATE OF PSI STUDIES AND THE PUBLIC CONCEPT OF PARAPSYCHOLOGY IN THE UKRAINE

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Background. For more than a half of a century Ukraine was an integral part of the USSR – a country with a big traditions of parapsychological research and even governmental grant programs for psi studies (Kernbach, 201). Moreover, there is a relatively high level of paranormal beliefs among the Ukrainian population (according to Haraldsson’s 1999-2002 years survey). The extremely high popularity of TV show “Psychic Challenge” with thirteen seasons (a higher number can be found only in Russia) and the existence of such “paranormal” professions as “fortune-teller” and “astrologist” in the National Occupational Classification of Ukraine (edition of year 2010) are two striking examples of the high belief in authenticity of psi phenomena in Ukraine. At the same time, there are no publicly available data on current research projects, educational programs, and professional establishments in the field of parapsychology in the Ukraine. Moreover, no data on the concept of parapsychology among the modern Ukrainian population is available at the moment.

Purpose. 1) To perform a comprehensive assessment of the current state of parapsychological research and education options in the Ukraine; 2) to analyze the dominant public concepts of parapsychology in modern Ukraine.

Methods. A list of establishments and societies claiming their relation to parapsychology was formed through iterative search with “Google” and “Yandex” search engines. Available educational programs, financial support and periodicals were searched both with search engines and manually on the sites of establishments found on the step 1 and official higher institutions. Publications of Ukrainian authors on parapsychological subjects in peer-reviewed journals were searched in Lexscien and Scopus databases. Analysis of all found data was performed manually. The public concept of parapsychology was formed on the basis of two mini-studies: 1) street interviews in Kiev, Lviv and Odessa (more than 1500 responders in total); 2) Advanced searches in Google by key-words and word combinations in the Ukrainian, Russian and English languages with/without territorial consideration. The integration of results and drawing of conclusions were carried out manually.