

**The relation between synchronicity and paranormal beliefs**

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**Abstract**

The aim of this research is to find out whether people that believe more in the paranormal also experience more synchronicities. There were 16 participants, who were recruited from the social networks of the researchers. A questionnaire was composed out of the Revised Paranormal Beliefs Scale and the Weird Coincidence Scale-2. The questionnaire was distributed online via Qualtrics. A correlation was calculated between the paranormal beliefs scale and the synchronicities scale. The result was a correlation of 0,707. The conclusions from this research are that there is a strong correlation between paranormal beliefs and synchronicity, and thus that people who believe more in the paranormal seem to experience more synchronicities. A recommendation for future research would be to replicate the research with a higher number of participants to increase reliability and validity. Suggested ideas for further research would be to look at the relation synchronicity and the feeling that one can influence events and whether this gives people faith, whether synchronicity makes people superstitious, the relation between paranormal beliefs and life satisfaction and the disadvantages of strong paranormal beliefs. These findings can then be used to increase well-being and life satisfaction.

*Keywords:* synchronicity, paranormal beliefs, magical thinking

### **The relation between synchronicity and paranormal beliefs**

Just as you are about to call your sister, she calls you. You dream about a friend you have not seen in a long time, and only a few days later you run into him or her. You think about a song, and when you turn on the radio, you hear this song. You might have experienced some remarkable coincidences like the ones above in your own life. These coincidences, that seem a little bit too remarkable to be just coincidences. These coincidences are called synchronicities.

Carl Jung was the first to come up with the term synchronicity (Lawson, 2008). Roderick Main (2020) has collected different extracts from Jung's work and combined them into the book *Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal*. The book presents Jung's central ideas and his theory of synchronicity. In his theory of synchronicity Jung described synchronicity as: 'the view that the structure of reality includes a principle of acausal connection which manifests itself most conspicuously in the form of meaningful coincidences.' (Main, 2020, p.1) Jung described synchronicities as 'coincidences' which were connected so meaningfully that their 'chance' of concurrence would represent a degree of improbability that would have to be expressed by an astronomical figure' (original text by Jung from 1952, edited by Main in 2020, quote is to be found on page 8 of the introduction from the book by Main).

I have experienced synchronicities in my life and they give me a sense of that there might be more between heaven and earth that causes these things. Because as we say in Dutch 'toeval bestaat niet' (coincidences do not exist) and things happen for a reason. In the mind of the empirical scientist, however, this sounds like a paranormal belief. This train of thought made me wonder if people who believe more in the paranormal also experience more synchronicities and if there would be benefits to wellbeing from that.

Jung was also interested in the paranormal, but unfortunately he says nothing about the relationship between paranormal beliefs and synchronicity. Paranormal phenomena are defined as phenomena that would go against the limiting principles of science (Broad, 1949). An example of a basic limiting principle would be that a mental event cannot cause a physical event. Under this principle, synchronicity could be seen as a paranormal phenomenon. This made me wonder if there would be a relation between paranormal beliefs and synchronicity. Tobacyk & Wilkinson (1990) investigated the relation between paranormal beliefs and magical thinking. In their paper, they describe magical thinking as beliefs and experiences of causation that cannot be true. Because synchronicity is a belief or experience of a causation that cannot be true, synchronicity can be seen as a case of magical thinking. A significant relation was found between magical thinking and paranormal beliefs. Because synchronicity and magical thinking are quite alike, there might also be a relation between paranormal beliefs and synchronicity.

Further literature research mainly gave results on terms related to paranormal beliefs and synchronicity. Griffiths et al. (2019) wrote an article about superstition and perception of illusory control. They found that when people have strong superstitious beliefs, there's a bias in the interpretation of events. Events that confirm superstitions are being counted as stronger evidence than events that disconfirm superstitions. Lindeman & Svedholm (2012) wrote an article about how paranormal beliefs and superstitious beliefs denote the same thing. They concluded that superstitious beliefs and paranormal beliefs denote the same thing. Translating this to the current research question, it could mean that when a person who believes in the paranormal experiences a synchronicity, his belief in the paranormal is reinforced.

Rogers et al. (2016) wrote an article about the misattribution hypothesis. The article looks, amongst others, at the impact of paranormal beliefs on attributions towards a remarkable coincidence. With their study, they found out that when attributing cause,

paranormal believers are more likely to attribute it to paranormal mechanisms than to coincidence. That could mean that people who believe in the paranormal will more likely attribute the cause of a remarkable coincidence to synchronicity.

Van Elk (2013) wrote an article about how paranormal believers are more prone to illusory agency detection than sceptics. In his research, Van Elk found that people who believe in the paranormal have a stronger tendency to detect agency, such as the presence of patterns and other agents like animals or humans, than people who don't believe in the paranormal. Translated to the topics of synchronicity and paranormal beliefs, this would mean that people who believe more in the paranormal are more likely to attribute the cause of a remarkable coincidence to an illusory agent like, for example, synchronicity.

The literature about the relationship between paranormal beliefs and synchronistic experiences is rather limited and since the literature above is about related terms, there is not yet an exact answer to the research question. The research question of the current research is: do people who believe more in the paranormal experience more synchronicities? Based on aforementioned literature, the expectation is that there will be a relation between the variables paranormal beliefs and synchronicity. More specifically, the hypothesis is that there will be a correlation between belief in the paranormal and synchronicities which is at least moderate ( $>0.3$ ). To collect information about the research question, a questionnaire will be set up and participants will be recruited to fill it out. The questionnaire will consist out of items measuring paranormal beliefs and of items measuring how many synchronicities a person experiences. A correlation will then be calculated between the two.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were recruited via the social networks of the researchers. There was no reward to be obtained by participants. There were a total of 38 participants, of which 22 were

left out because of incompleteness of the questionnaire. The data of the remaining 16 participants were used for analysis.

### **Procedure**

The questionnaire was to be filled out online via Qualtrics. First, the participants were introduced to the study and the concept of synchronicity was explained. Thereafter participants were asked to sign the confidentiality statement. Participants then filled out three questionnaires in the following order: Weird Coincidences Scale-2 (WCS-2), Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) and Revised Paranormal Beliefs Scale (RPBS). After completing the three questionnaires, participants were asked about their country of origin. At last, there was a honesty check. The total duration of the questionnaire was approximately 10 minutes.

### **Measures**

For the current research question, not all parts of the questionnaire were relevant. The research was performed by two researchers with two different research questions. Only the WCS-2 and the RPBS were of interest for the research question of this paper. Below follows a description of the two scales.

#### ***Revised Paranormal Beliefs Scale***

The RPBS (Tobacyk, 2004) is a questionnaire to measure how strongly a person believes in paranormal phenomena. All items from RPBS were used. The RPBS consists of 26 items that are scored on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'. The 26 items can be divided into four subscales, namely *Traditional Religious Belief*, *Psi*, *Superstition* and *Spiritualism*. The reliability of these four subscales is, in order, 0,95, 0,71, 0,89 and 0,91. The reliability of the full RPBS is 0,92. The validity is satisfactory, although there has been some disagreement about the different subscales.

#### ***Weird Coincidence Scale-2***

The WCS-2 (Coleman et al. 2009) measures how often a person experiences meaningful coincidences. All items from the WCS-2 were used. The WCS-2 consists of 13 items that are scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'I experience this never' to 'I experience this very frequently'. The items can be divided into two factors: Interpersonal and Agentic. The reliability of the WCS-2 is 0,7.

### **Analysis**

To answer the research question, a correlation was calculated between the degree of paranormal beliefs and the amount of synchronistic experiences. The statistical software used was IBM SPSS Statistics.

### **Results and discussion**

The hypothesis was that there would be at least a moderate correlation ( $>0.3$ ) between belief in the paranormal and synchronicity. First, SPSS was used to calculate descriptive statistics of the WCS-2 and RPBS scales. Those can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
WCS_Total	16	1,75	4,25	2,7135	0,70970
PBS	16	1,58	5,38	3,2236	1,18872

Then the correlation between the scales WCS-2 and RPBS was calculated. The correlation was 0,707. This is a stronger correlation than the expected correlation of 0,3 mentioned in the hypothesis. This means that belief in the paranormal and synchronicities



seem to be strongly correlated. It looks like people who believe more in the paranormal experience more synchronicities.

In the introduction, the article by Tobacyk & Wilkinson (1990) was mentioned. They found a significant relation between magical thinking and paranormal beliefs. Because a synchronicity can be seen as a case of magical thinking, it was hypothesized that there would also be a relation between paranormal beliefs and synchronicity.

Griffiths et al. (2019) wrote an article about superstition and perception of illusory control. They found a positive relation between superstitious beliefs and a bias in the interpretation of events. Superstitious beliefs and paranormal beliefs denote the same thing Lindeman & Svedholm (2012), and so it was hypothesized that when a person who already believes in the paranormal experiences a synchronicity, his belief in the paranormal is reinforced. Finding that there seems to be a strong positive correlation between paranormal beliefs and synchronicity, we could end up in a cycle. This would mean that when a person with strong paranormal beliefs experiences a synchronicity, this persons beliefs in the paranormal grow. As the belief in the paranormal gets stronger, this person might start to experience even more synchronicities, which further heightens the paranormal beliefs and so on.

Rogers et al. (2016) wrote about the misattribution hypothesis. They found that paranormal believers are more likely to attribute the cause of events to paranormal mechanisms than to coincidence. This would entail that people who believe in the paranormal will more likely attribute the cause of a remarkable coincidence to synchronicity. It seems that there is a strong positive correlation between paranormal beliefs and synchronicity. Incorporating these findings would mean that the stronger a person's believe in the paranormal is, the more likely this person will attribute the cause of a remarkable coincidence to synchronicity. As a consequence, this person experiences more synchronicities.

Van Elk (2013) wrote about paranormal beliefs and illusory agency detection. He found that people who believe more in the paranormal have a stronger tendency to detect agency, which would mean that these people would be more likely to attribute the cause of a remarkable coincidence to synchronicity. In this study we found that there seems to be a positive relation between synchronicity and paranormal beliefs. The stronger a person's paranormal beliefs, the more often this person will interpret a remarkable coincidence as a synchronicity. The person then experiences more synchronicities.

Unfortunately, the study also had some limitations. One of them is that there was only a small number of participants. The goal was to use the University of Groningen SONA program to recruit participants. This program rewards students with credits when they participate in research. Unfortunately we did not manage to do so because the application process was complicated and required too much time. A small number of participants can influence the reliability and validity of the research in a negative way. In case someone wants to replicate this research, an advice would be to recruit a larger number of participants. Another limitation was that about half of the participants did finish the questionnaire, but did not agree to the informed consent or for allowing us to use their data. Participants had to tick a box to do so, but a lot did not do so. The result of this was that we were not able to use the data of these participants. In future research we should think of a way to make people aware that this is necessary if we want to use the data.

Nevertheless, the research gives an idea of the relation between paranormal beliefs and synchronicity. It also leads to some new questions. For example, when people experience synchronicities, do they get the idea that they can influence events? In the introduction, the example of thinking about the song and it then being on the radio was given. When this happens a lot, the person might get the idea that he or she can control which songs are on the

radio. When people feel like they can influence such things, does this give them faith? Does it make them believe that there is some higher power they can trust in?

Another interesting topic is superstition. Does experiencing synchronicities make a person superstitious? When two coincidences happen at the same time and a person makes a causal connection between the two, he or she might believe that he has caused an event to happen. An advantage of superstition could be that it might give a sense of control over life by performing certain actions. A disadvantage might be that when people cannot carry out their rituals or actions, they might become subject to irrational fear. It could also lead to an extremely rigid lifestyle, because of the need to perform certain actions.

Believing more in the paranormal seems to cause people to experience more synchronicities and to experience the accompanying advantages, like a sense of control and faith. The current research was done in collaboration with Manuel Picard, who researched the relationship between synchronicity and life satisfaction. Picard (2022) found a correlation of 0,312 between synchronicity and life satisfaction. Seeing that both paranormal beliefs and life satisfaction are positively correlated to synchronicity, the question rises whether people who believe more in the paranormal are more satisfied with their lives. But next to advantages, does having a greater believe in the paranormal also have disadvantages?

Altogether, this research gives us an idea about the relationship between paranormal beliefs and synchronicity. The relation is in line with previous literature on terms related to synchronicity and paranormal beliefs. From this research, a lot of new questions arise. Do people who experience synchronicity feel like they can influence events? Does this give them faith? Might synchronicities make a person superstitious? Are people who believe more in the paranormal more satisfied with their lives? And what are the disadvantages to have strong paranormal beliefs? These questions might be interesting to research in the future, as their answers may give ideas to improve the well-being and satisfaction with life of people.

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