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A Quantitative Investigation into the Paranormal Beliefs of the Contemporary Vampire Subculture

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Abstract

It has been argued that the growing resurgence of contemporary vampire literature has resulted in re-emergence of the vampire as a new sexy modern beast to which one is no longer in fear, but rather to a creature that is respected desired and even wanted (Hjelm, 2009). Alongside the literature on fictional vampires, there exists a subculture of 'real' vampires who exist within a community that could be viewed as a new category of person (Laycock, 2010). The current study utilises quantitative responses to an online questionnaire established to measure levels of religious and paranormal beliefs among those who claim adherence to the real vampire subculture. A total of 1,384 respondents affiliated with the vampire subculture completed the Revised Paranormal Belief Scale (Tobacyk, 2004). The data confirm that paranormal beliefs are held by a proportion of the subculture; that differences emerge between different groups affiliated with the subculture; and that, in general, the vampire subculture is more accepting of paranormal beliefs than the general public.

Keywords: *Paranormal Beliefs, Quantitative Research, Vampires*

Introduction

There exists in most of society a subculture of individuals who define themselves as being 'real' vampires. This group, distinct from the vampires of fiction (Hjelm, 2009; Jackson, 2012; Goodall & Williams, 2012), are defined by many (Laycock, 2009, 2010; Keyworth, 2002) as those individuals who have the need to consume (feed) on blood, the energy generated by others, or a combination of the both.

This group has been subject to much curiosity from researchers and authors for a number of years. These pieces of work often focus on individual cases to understand the complexities of this subculture, with specific reference to beliefs, customs and lifestyles. For example, Ramsland (1998) focused on case studies to identify the underlying reasons why individuals would choose to contribute to a vampiric lifestyle. These accounts of the vampire subculture demonstrate a deeply complex infrastructure in which different communities have developed. Developing this work, Russo (2005) and the VEWRS (2012) survey have highlighted that the community exists with varying groups of individuals each taking a specific worldview. Included in this network are sanguinarian vampires (those that consume blood), psychic vampires (those who draw on psychic energies), and hybrid vampires (those that combine different spiritual energies with vampirism). Alongside, this community also plays host to donors (who give their blood willingly to vampires), enthusiasts (those who are neither donor nor vampire, but sympathetic to the lifestyle), and role-players (those who wish to be vampires, and play the lifestyle). Russo (2005) highlights how, often, these different groups are in conflict with each other. For example, it is noted that the vampires will view role-players with disdain as simply being individuals interested in playing games (Laycock, 2010). It is therefore reasonable to assert that differing groups within the subculture will bring differing beliefs, opinions and motivations.

Keyworth (2002) provided a sociological extrapolation of the socio-religious beliefs of the vampire subculture. Keyworth's work highlights a community that is bonded by a shared belief system based around the notion of the vampire, but divided into distinct groups such as: vampires, blood-donors, mystical members that are appealed by the vampire spirituality, blood fetishists, and role-players. For Keyworth, this segmented and polycentric network of participants was held together by a fascination with the nature of 'vampirism.'

Following on from this work, Laycock (2010) argued that the presence of such a community is subject to a paradigmatic shift within contemporary understandings of what it is to be human. The challenge raised by Laycock's (2010) analysis allows individual vampires to be seen as a new category of human. Yet despite the framing of vampires as a new category of humans, the social and psychological worlds in which they live reflect the standards of human life (Ramsland, 2002; Russo, 2005), especially with regard to group structures, social etiquette and the reciprocity of norms and sanctions. Perhaps one key element that binds all writings on vampires together seems to be the connection of vampirism as behaviour and vampirism as a religious or spiritual manifestation. Williams (2016) developed the argument of the religious underpinnings of the real vampire through an exploration of over 219 unsolicited qualitative comments to a quantitative survey disseminated to this group. The analysis of these results demonstrated that, with regard to religious belief, three distinct themes emerged. First, it was noted that the vampiric lifestyle itself was not seen as a religious one, but rather religion was held in distinction from being a vampire. Second, there was an affiliation with pagan religion and philosophies. Third, there was an openness and acceptance of a transcendent plane that was manifest through spiritual entities. Further, these were borne out in religious experiences reflective of the underlying concepts of

the religious beliefs. The analysis revealed that the vampire subculture was open to the guiding force of spiritual energies be these as transcendent 'other,' or in the form of traditional religious Gods. Williams' (2016) work, however, suffers from two weaknesses. The first is that only comments from sanguine, psychic or hybrid vampires were included for analysis, and therefore the results give a limited view of the subculture as a whole. Second, the comments were collected as unsolicited comments at the end of a questionnaire designed to assess religious beliefs. Therefore, Williams had no opportunity to engage the respondents in dialogue to develop further their thoughts.

One way to address these weaknesses would be to employ an established measure of religious belief. Given the nature of the religious experiences established by Williams (2016), it can be argued that this subculture is open to paranormal experiences. The Revised Paranormal Belief Scale (RPBS; Tobacyk, 1988, 2004) provides a 26-item scale that measures paranormal belief on seven orthogonal subscales: traditional religious belief, psi, witchcraft, superstition, spiritualism, extraordinary life forms, and precognition. Tobacyk's conceptualisations of paranormal belief were driven by the understanding that paranormal phenomena are those that violate the basic principles of Western science (Tobacyk, 2004). Tobacyk proposed seven distinct areas of paranormal belief to be assessed (Traditional religious belief, psi, witchcraft, superstition, spiritualism, extraordinary life forms and precognition), with these groupings being confirmed in other studies (Lange, Irwin, & Houran, 2000). It is against this background that the current paper is set. The paper aims to develop the academic analysis of Keyworth (2002), Laycock (2010) and Williams (2016) by providing a map of the paranormal beliefs (as operationalized by Tobacyk, 1988, 2004) among all identified groups within the 'real' vampire subculture.

Methods

Participants

An online questionnaire was distributed via established real vampire internet forums. A total of 2,598 responses were received of which 1,384 were fully completed. The sample was equally divided between males (50%) and females (50%) with 10 respondents failing to provide their gender. With regards to age, 11% were aged under 20, 47% were in their twenties, 24% were in the thirties, 11% were in their forties, 3% were in their fifties, 1% in their sixties and 3% aged 70 or over. With regard to affiliation with the vampire community, the majority (57%) of sample were vampires made up of sanguine vampires (20%), psychic vampires (18%) and hybrid vampires (19%). The remainder of the participants were donors (5%), role-players (8%), or vampire enthusiasts (30%).

Measures

Paranormal Belief was measured using the Tobacyk Revised Paranormal Belief Scale (Tobacyk & Milford, 1983; Tobacyk, 2004). This 26-item measure operationalizes paranormal

belief in seven areas: traditional religious beliefs, psi-phenomena, cases of witchcraft, belief in superstitions, belief in spiritualism, belief in extraordinary life forms, and belief in precognition. Each item is assessed on a five-point Likert-type scale: agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, and disagree strongly. Higher scores in this scale indicate a more accepting view of paranormal phenomena.

Analytical strategy

In order to properly assess the differing levels of agreement between each group a cross-tabulation routine utilising a chi-square routine was employed. The tables presented below record the percentage of those who endorsed (that is agreed and agreed strongly) a statement within each categorical group. The tables also present a chi-square value which demonstrates the variance between groups, alongside the probability levels. Following the guidelines established by the American Psychological Society, the cut-off point for probability has been established at $p < .05$.

Results

Table one presents the cross-tabulation with chi-square routine for the Revised Paranormal Belief Scale as divided by the differing components of paranormal belief highlighted within the scale. With relation to traditional religious beliefs, statistically significant differences can be seen on all four items. With regards to the items 'the soul continues to exist though the body may die' and 'there is a heaven and hell' it was demonstrated that hybrid vampires were more likely to affirm these statements (31.2% and 12.7%), with role-players least likely to affirm these statements (13.3% and 5.7%). With regards to the statements 'there is a devil' and 'I believe in God,' those who claim to be psychic vampires were more likely to affirm these items (17.5% and 18.3% respectively), with role-players least likely to affirm these statements (5.7% and 6.7% respectively). All other groups recorded roughly similar endorsement scores for each item.

When focus is turned to the items regarding psi there are statistically significant differences between the groups on all four items. With regard to the item 'mind reading is not possible' sanguine vampires recorded the highest endorsement (7.5%), while role-players recorded the lowest level of endorsement (1.9%). With the remaining three items there appears a clear pattern in which hybrid vampires recorded the highest levels of affirmation and role-players record the lowest levels of affirmation. Hybrid vampires were more likely to attest that: some individuals are able to levitate objects (25.4%) than role-players (6.7%); psychokinesis does exist (26.9%) than role-players (8.6%); and a person's thoughts can influence the movement of a physical object (25.4) than role-players (7.6%). All other groups recorded roughly similar endorsement scores for each item.

With regard to the items focusing on witchcraft, it is clear that statistically significant differences are present on all four items between the groups. Further, it is clear that hybrid vampires were more likely to affirm these items, with role-players being least likely to affirm these items. Hybrid vampires were more likely to attest that: black magic really exists (29.6%) than role-players (9.5%); witches do exist

Table One: Crosstabulations with Chi-square analysis for the Tobacyk Revised Paranormal Belief Scale

Item	Sanguine	Psychic	Hybrid	Donor	Role-player	Enthusiast	χ^2	p<
Traditional Religious Beliefs								
The soul continues to exist though the body may die	22.6	28.2	31.2	21.5	13.3	17.8	38.83	.001
There is a devil	14.3	17.5	16.5	8.9	5.7	11.7	29.19	.001
I believe in God	15.8	18.3	16.9	7.6	6.7	10.0	29.93	.001
There is a heaven and a hell	10.8	11.1	12.7	6.3	5.7	8.3	24.81	.01
Psi								
Some individuals are able to levitate (lift) objects	18.3	21.0	25.4	19.0	6.7	9.3	50.59	.001
Psychokinesis does exist	19.4	23.0	26.9	21.5	8.6	10.3	52.74	.001
A person's thoughts can influence the movement of a physical object	19.4	22.6	25.4	17.7	7.6	10.3	44.70	.001
Mind reading is not possible	7.5	3.6	5.4	3.8	1.9	4.9	45.31	.001
Witchcraft								
Black magic really exists	23.3	25.4	29.6	22.8	9.5	15.4	39.62	.001
Witches do exist	24.0	30.6	33.5	22.8	10.5	16.9	49.23	.001
Through the use of formulas and incantations, it is possible to cast spells on persons	20.8	24.2	29.2	17.7	5.7	12.5	50.89	.001
There are actual cases of witchcraft	24.0	28.6	30.8	24.1	10.5	15.4	45.85	.001
Superstition								
Black cats can bring bad luck	2.5	3.2	2.3	3.8	1.0	3.4	29.65	.001
If you break a mirror you will have bad luck	5.4	4.4	7.7	6.3	6.7	6.1	31.35	.001
The number "13" is unlucky	1.8	1.6	1.9	2.5	1.0	2.7	30.95	.001
Spiritualism								
Your mind and soul can leave your body and travel	23.3	30.6	30.8	26.6	11.4	16.4	41.97	.001
During altered states the spirit can leave the body	23.3	29.4	30.0	22.8	11.4	14.4	46.35	.001
Reincarnation does occur	17.9	22.6	26.5	22.8	10.5	11.2	46.89	.001
It is possible to communicate with the dead	20.1	25.8	27.3	21.5	8.6	13.0	41.73	.001
Extraordinary life forms								
The abominable snowman of Tibet exists	5.0	4.8	7.7	7.6	2.9	4.9	17.44	NS
The Loch Ness monster of Scotland exists	6.8	5.6	10.8	8.9	1.9	5.6	24.72	.01
There is life on other planets	21.5	25.8	28.8	25.3	15.2	17.4	21.24	.05
Precognition								
Astrology is a way to accurately predict the future	7.2	6.7	10.8	8.9	1.9	6.1	25.65	.01
The horoscope accurately tells a person's future	6.5	5.2	6.9	8.9	1.9	4.4	17.99	NS
Some psychics can accurately predict the future	17.9	23.4	25.8	15.2	7.6	11.0	43.15	.001
Some people have an unexplained ability to predict the future	20.4	26.6	28.8	20.3	8.6	12.2	53.40	.001

(33.5%) than role-players (10.5%); through the use of formulas and incantations, it is possible to cast spells on persons (29.2%) than role-players (5.7%) and; there are actual cases of witchcraft (30.8%) than role-players (10.5%). All other groups recorded roughly similar endorsement scores for each item.

With regard to superstition, it is demonstrated that statistically significant differences are present on all three items between the groups. For both of the items that 'black cats bring back luck' and 'the number 13 is unlucky' donors were more likely to endorse these items (3.8% and 2.5% respectively) than role-players (1.0% and 1.0% respectively). For the item 'if you break a mirror you will have bad luck' hybrid vampires were more likely to endorse this (7.7%), with psychic vampires being least likely to endorse the item (4.4%). All other groups recorded roughly similar endorsement scores for each item.

With regard to spiritualism, it is demonstrated that statistically significant differences are present on all four items between the groups. For this section a similar pattern emerges in which role-players are less likely to endorse the items. For example, while roughly similar proportions of psychic (30.6%) and hybrid (30.8%) vampires endorse that your mind and soul can leave your body and travel, this figure drops among role-players (11.4%). Similarly, while roughly similar proportions of both psychic (29.4%) and hybrid vampires endorse that during altered states the spirit can leave the body, this figure drops among role-players (11.4%). With regard to the final two items, hybrid vampires were more likely to endorse that reincarnation does occur (26.5%) than role-players (10.5%) and that it is possible to communicate with the dead (27.3%) than role-players (8.6%). All other groups recorded roughly similar endorsement scores for each item.

With regard to extraordinary life forms, no statistically significant differences were recorded on the item 'the abominable snowman of Tibet exists' with 5% of sanguine vampires, 4.8% of psychic vampires, 7.7% of hybrid vampires, 7.6% of donors, 2.9% of role-players and 4.9% of enthusiasts agreeing with this statement. With regard to the remaining statements, the pattern emerges that hybrid vampires were more likely to endorse that the Loch Ness monster of Scotland exists (10.8%) than role-players (1.9%), and that there is life on other planets (28.8%) than role-players (15.2%). All other groups recorded roughly similar endorsement scores for each item.

Finally, with regard to precognition, no statistically significant differences were recorded on the item 'the horoscope accurately tells a person's future' with 6.5% of sanguine vampires, 5.2% of psychic vampires, 6.9% of hybrid vampires, 8.9% of donors, 1.9% of role-players and 4.4% of enthusiasts agreeing with this statement. The remaining statements demonstrated that hybrid vampires were more likely to endorse that: astrology is a way to accurately predict the future (10.8%) than role-players (1.9%); some psychics can accurately predict the future (25.8%) than role-players (7.6%) and; some people have an

unexplained ability to predict the future (28.8%) than role-players (8.6%). All other groups recorded roughly similar endorsement scores for each item.

Table two presents the percentage endorsements for the Revised Paranormal Belief Scale for the real vampire community and, for comparative purposes, for university students as collected by Williams and Roberts (2016) in order to test the extent to which the beliefs recorded by this subculture differ to those of a broadly general population with similar characteristics. The data demonstrate that, with regard to traditional religious belief sanguine vampires, psychic vampires, and hybrid vampires endorse all items to roughly similar levels as a university population, with donors, role-players and enthusiasts recording lower scores on all four items.

With reference of psi, the data demonstrate that those affiliated with the vampire community as either sanguine vampires, psychic vampires, hybrid vampires or donors are more accepting of levitation, psychokinesis and the potentiality of an individual's thoughts can move a physical objects (around 30%). For these three items the student population, role-players and enthusiast record roughly similar endorsement levels (between 10% and 17%). However, the student population was more likely to endorse that mind reading was not possible (18%) than any group affiliated with the vampire subculture (each group recording less than 10% endorsement).

With reference to belief in witchcraft, the student population were less likely to affirm the four items than sanguine, psychic and hybrid vampires. In particular, when asked to affirm if through the use of formulas and incantations, it is possible to cast spells on persons while only 9% of the student population affirmed this belief, the portion rose to nearly a third among hybrid vampires (29.2%) and to around a fifth for sanguine vampires (20.8%), psychic vampires (24.2%) and donors (17.7%). The remaining items demonstrated that sanguine vampires, psychic vampires and hybrid vampires were more accepting of black magic (around 25%), the existence of witches (around 30%), and that there are actual cases of witchcraft (between 24% and 31%) and the general population who recorded an around 18% endorsement for each of these items.

With regards to superstitious belief, around a tenth of the student population endorsed that black cats can bring bad luck (10%), that if you break a mirror you will have bad luck (10%), and that the number 13 is unlucky (7%). Among those affiliated with the vampire community, however, these items were less likely to be endorsed (all recording a percentage endorsement of 7% or less).

In terms of spiritualism, similar patterns emerged as were recorded for belief in psi. In general the student population (recording between 15% and 22% endorsement) were less accepting of these beliefs than sanguine vampires (with the exception of belief in reincarnation), psychic vampires, hybrid vampires, and donors (each recording between 20% and 30% endorsement), but more likely to

Table Two: Item endorsement comparison between vampire groups and Williams & Roberts (2016 data).

Item	Sanguine	Psychic	Hybrid	Donor	Role-player	Enthusiast	Student Pop
Traditional Religious Beliefs							
The soul continues to exist though the body may die	22.6	28.2	31.2	21.5	13.3	17.8	30
The is a devil	14.3	17.5	16.5	8.9	5.7	11.7	15
I believe in God	15.8	18.3	16.9	7.6	6.7	10.0	20
There is a heaven and a hell	10.8	11.1	12.7	6.3	5.7	8.3	14
Psi							
Some individuals are able to levitate (lift) objects	18.3	21.0	25.4	19.0	6.7	9.3	9
Psychokinesis does exist	19.4	23.0	26.9	21.5	8.6	10.3	10
A person's thoughts can influence the movement of a physical object	19.4	22.6	25.4	17.7	7.6	10.3	5
Mind reading is not possible*	7.5	3.6	5.4	3.8	1.9	4.9	18
Witchcraft							
Black magic really exists	23.3	25.4	29.6	22.8	9.5	15.4	17
Witches do exist	24.0	30.6	33.5	22.8	10.5	16.9	18
Through the use of formulas and incantations, it is possible to cast spells on persons	20.8	24.2	29.2	17.7	5.7	12.5	9
There are actual cases of witchcraft	24.0	28.6	30.8	24.1	10.5	15.4	18
Superstition							
Black cats can bring bad luck	2.5	3.2	2.3	3.8	1.0	3.4	10
If you break a mirror you will have bad luck	5.4	4.4	7.7	6.3	6.7	6.1	10
The number "13" is unlucky	1.8	1.6	1.9	2.5	1.0	2.74	7
Spiritualism							
Your mind and soul can leave your body and travel	23.3	30.6	30.8	26.6	11.4	16.4	15
During altered states the spirit can leave the body	23.3	29.4	30.0	22.8	11.4	14.4	16
Reincarnation does occur	17.9	22.6	26.5	22.8	10.5	11.2	19
It is possible to communicate with the dead	20.1	25.8	27.3	21.5	8.6	13.0	22
Extraordinary life forms							
The abominable snowman of Tibet exists	5.0	4.8	7.7	7.6	2.9	4.9	3
The Loch Ness monster of Scotland exists	6.8	5.6	10.8	8.9	1.9	5.6	7
There is life on other planets	21.5	25.8	28.8	25.3	15.2	17.4	34
Precognition							
Astrology is a way to accurately predict the future	7.2	6.7	10.8	8.9	1.9	6.1	7
The horoscope accurately tells a person's future	6.5	5.2	6.9	8.9	1.9	4.4	6
Some psychics can accurately predict the future	17.9	23.4	25.8	15.2	7.6	11.0	23
Some people have an unexplained ability to predict the future	20.4	26.6	28.8	20.3	8.6	12.2	27

affirm these beliefs than role-players and enthusiasts (recording between 9% and 16% endorsement).

With regard to extraordinary life forms, those who affiliated themselves as being sanguine, psychic or hybrid vampires and donors (between 5% and 8%) were more likely to believe that the abominable snowman of Tibet exists, compared to role-players, enthusiast and the student population (between 3% and 5%). With regard to the item concerning the Loch Ness monster, hybrid vampires were more likely to endorse this item (10%) than any of the other groups (between 2% and 9%). Finally, the student population was more likely to endorse that there is life on other planets (34%), than any vampire group (between 15% and 29%).

With regard to precognition, the pattern emerged that those who affiliated with the group as role-players and enthusiast were less likely to endorse that astrology is a way to accurately predict the future (2% and 6% respectively), that horoscopes accurately tells a person's future (2% and 4% respectively), that some psychics can accurately predict the future (8% and 11% respectively), and that some people have an unexplained ability to predict the future (9% and 12% respectively). Among the remaining vampire groups, and the student group, levels of endorsement on each item were roughly similar.

Discussion

This paper has been concerned with exploring the paranormal beliefs of members of the 'real' vampire subculture. Drawing on data collected from 1,384 participants, the current paper has been concerned with establishing the levels of paranormal belief (as operationalized by Tobacyk) among the different adherents in this subculture. Three main conclusions emerge from the data.

The first conclusion concerns the extent to which paranormal beliefs are accepted by the vampire subculture. As Tobacyk (1988, 2004) has argued, paranormal beliefs remain part of an individual's understanding of the world. Further, Williams (2016) argued, by drawing on qualitative data, that the vampire subculture was open to paranormal and spiritual experiences. The current data confirm that a small group within the vampire subculture are open to traditional religious beliefs, psi, witchcraft, spiritualism and some elements of precognition. However, this group is less accepting of extraordinary life forms (with the exception of the belief in life on other planets, which could be argued to be a difficult item to relate to paranormal belief given current scientific discoveries) and superstitious beliefs. This findings go some way to support the findings of Williams (2016) that while there is belief in transcendent planes (such as heaven and hell), there is a general understanding among this group that the transcendent can influence the everyday through such experiences as the levitation of objects, the transferability of the soul, and the ability to predict the future. For the vampire subculture, then, the paranormal is

seen as having an influence on the everyday lives of the participants.

The second conclusion concerns the assertions of Russo (2005) and Laycock (2010) that the vampire subculture can be seen as a fragmented one formed around an 'in-group' and 'out-group' in which role-players are seen as agitants to the community. The data presented here reveal that the group with the most divergent view with regard to paranormal beliefs are the role-players, and to a certain extent general enthusiasts. That is to say, role-players are seemingly less accepting of the paranormal worldview held by some members of the community who assign the title vampire or donor to themselves. This divergence of core beliefs would go some way to explain the perceived intolerances between these groups.

The third conclusion concerns the extent to which the vampire subculture can be seen as different to a group of participants from a similar demographic. The results here demonstrate that the vampire subculture (in particular those who assigned themselves as vampire and donor) were more accepting of most paranormal beliefs than a student population. Conversely, the student population was more accepting of superstitious paranormal beliefs than the vampire subculture. These findings support the notions argued by Keyworth (2002) and Laycock (2010) that the vampire subculture can be viewed as distinct from 'mainstream' culture, and that this group is developing their own set of worldviews in which coherence can be found (Williams, 2016). Future research is now needed to further explore these findings, and expand the range of religious and paranormal beliefs tested among these groups.

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