



Beliefs in personality disorders: a test with the Personality Disorder Belief Questionnaire

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Abstract

The hypothesis that each personality disorder (PD) is characterized by a specific set of beliefs was tested in a sample of 643 subjects, including non-patient controls, axis-I and axis-II patients, diagnosed with SCID-I and -II interviews. Beliefs of six PDs (avoidant, dependent, obsessive–compulsive, paranoid, histrionic, borderline) were assessed with the Personality Disorder Belief Questionnaire (PDBQ). Factor analyses supported the existence of six hypothesized sets of beliefs. Structural equation modeling (SEM) supported the hypothesis that each PD is characterized by a specific set of beliefs. Path coefficients were however in the medium range, suggesting that PDs are not solely determined by beliefs. Nevertheless, empirically derived cutoff scores of the six belief subscales were reasonably successful in classifying subjects, percentages ranging from 51% to 83%. It appeared that there was a monotonical increase in scores on each belief subscale from non-patient controls, to patients without any PD, to patients with PDs (other than the pertinent PD), to patients with the pertinent PD. This suggests that PD-related beliefs are at least partly associated with (personality) psychopathology in general. Another explanation is that many patients' position on the underlying dimensions is not high enough to lead to a DSM PD diagnosis, but high enough to lead to an elevated belief score.

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1. Introduction

In cognitive views of personality disorders, an important role is given to the patient's beliefs or schemas that are assumed to underlie the patient's dysfunctional behavior and emotions (Beck, Freeman et al., 1990; Beck et al., 2001). These views hypothesize that each personality disorder (PD) is characterized by a specific set of beliefs.

Various suggestions have been made about the beliefs that are central in PDs. Young (1990) has suggested that 18 themes like self-sacrifice and entitlement are fundamental dimensions in personality pathology (see Schmidt, Joiner, Young, & Telch, 1995 for a psychometric evaluation of Young's Schema Questionnaire). So far, it is unclear how these themes exactly relate to the PDs as defined by the DSM. Beck et al. (1990) offer an extensive list of beliefs for most DSM-III-R PDs. Arntz, Dietzel, & Dressen (1999) have suggested that specific beliefs characterize borderline PD (BPD).

Based on Beck et al. (1990), Beck and Beck (1991) have developed the Personality Belief Questionnaire (PBQ). The PBQ has been investigated in several studies. Trull, Goodwin, Schopp, Hillenbrand, and Schuster (1993) tested the PBQ in a sample of 188 students, and found that reliability of subscales was good (Cronbach alpha's 0.77–0.93). The authors concluded that intercorrelations between subscales were too high (up to 0.65, median 0.40), and correlations with other PD measures too low (median correlation with corresponding PDQ-R scale 0.37). Factor analyses did not reproduce the hypothesized subscales. This may have been caused by the non-clinical sample, leading to a limited number of factors (e.g., 'psychopathology') dominating the variance. Fydrich, Schmitz, Hennch, and Bodem (1996) investigated a German version in 282 psychiatric patients, and found good evidence for the subscales in terms of internal consistency (Cronbach alpha 0.78–0.91). But, no data on factorial validity were reported. The PBQ subscales correlated poorly (0.09, antisocial) to good (0.57, dependent) with corresponding SCID-II trait scores (median correlation 0.32), but tests of specificity were not reported. A study in a clinical sample by Beck et al. (2001) also found promising results. This study largely confirmed that each of five PDs (avoidant, dependent, obsessive-compulsive, narcissistic and paranoid) was specifically characterized by the corresponding beliefs as assessed with the PBQ. But, this study did not investigate the factor analytic structure of the PBQ, thus, in a sense, omitting a first step in investigating a self-report instrument.

Independently from Beck and Beck's PBQ, Dressen and Arntz (1995) developed the Personality Disorder Belief Questionnaire (PDBQ). For each PD, 20 beliefs were formulated, partly on the basis of the Appendix in Beck et al. (1990; with permission), excluding items describing symptoms, impulses, emotions, and behaviors, and partly on the basis of hypotheses of the constructors. All beliefs hypothesized to be specific to BPD were constructed by the authors, since the Appendix of Beck et al.'s (1990) book does not give a list of BPD beliefs (see Arntz, 1994; Arntz et al., 1999 for hypothesized themes of BPD beliefs). Arntz et al. (1999) investigated some of the properties of a short PDBQ version (assessing avoidant, dependent, obsessive-compulsive, paranoid, histrionic, and BPD beliefs) in a small sample of borderline and cluster-C PD patients, and non-patient controls. It was demonstrated that the six subscales of the PDBQ were highly reliable (internal consistency) and stable (despite a mood induction), and that the BPD subscale was a very good predictor of BPD as assessed with the SCID-II. The borderline PDBQ subscale also mediated the relationship between childhood trauma reports and SCID-II BPD

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