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## Patterns of self-reported happiness and substance use in the context of transliminality

Michael A. Thalbourne \*, James Houran

*Department of Psychology, University of Adelaide, Adelaide SA 5005, Australia*

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### Abstract

Two hundred psychology undergraduates completed the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, an expanded version of the Kumar–Pekala Drug-Use Scale, the Revised Transliminality Scale, and an assortment of single-item true/false statements thought to be relevant particularly to transliminality. Based on previous theorizing and research it was predicted that persons scoring high on the Revised Transliminality Scale (1) are more likely to be unhappy, and (2) engage in greater usage of illicit drugs. Only the second of these predictions was upheld. A further aim of this study was to compare the drug use of highly transliminal participants who were happy against those who were unhappy: it was predicted that unhappy high transliminals would report greater use of illicit drugs, and the findings supported this hypothesis.

Using the enter method of multiple regression, transliminality and happiness were jointly examined in relation to the drug variables and a number of single-item variables of a mostly negative nature. Happiness was found to correlate negatively with a large number of items (providing some degree of construct validity). The correlations tended to be positive with transliminality, indicating more drug use, more self-destructive behaviors, and a greater tendency to withdraw from excessive stimulation.

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*Keywords:* Happiness; Substance use; Transliminality; Happy high transliminals

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61-8-8303-5693; fax: +61-8-8303-3770.

*E-mail addresses:* [michael.thalbourne@psychology.adelaide.edu.au](mailto:michael.thalbourne@psychology.adelaide.edu.au); [psym-tha@complex.psych.adelaide.edu.au](mailto:psym-tha@complex.psych.adelaide.edu.au) (M.A. Thalbourne).

## 1. Introduction

This is the third in a series of papers in this *Journal* (Thalbourne, Crawley, & Houran, 2003; Thalbourne & Houran, 2000) in which we investigate correlates of a construct known as transliminality—the hypothesised tendency for psychological material to cross “limens,” or thresholds, into or out of consciousness (Thalbourne & Houran, 2000, p. 853). Psychologists have long speculated about transliminal processes (e.g., Freud, 1933; Hartmann, 1991; James, 1902/1982; Lewin, 1936; MacKinnon, 1971), but the construct was only recently given an operational definition and method of measurement by Thalbourne (1998) in terms of a 29-item, true/false Transliminality Scale that was derived from factor analysis.

Subsequent “top-down purification”<sup>1</sup> analyses of this measure (Lange et al., 2000) revealed that 17 of the original 29 test items constituted a single, linear Rasch (1960/1980) hierarchy. This Rasch scaled version of Thalbourne’s (1998) original measure, termed the *Revised Transliminality Scale* (RTS; Lange et al., 2000), validates a common dimension underlying seven psychological domains: Hyperesthesia (heightened sensitivity to environmental stimuli), (fleeting) Hypomanic or Manic Experience, Fantasy-Proneness, Absorption, Positive (and perhaps obsessional) Attitude towards Dream Interpretation, Mystical Experience, and Magical Ideation. The concept of transliminality bridges psychological concepts that have been previously regarded as independent domains. Accordingly, the psychological material that is hypothesized to cross thresholds can encompass a wide range of imagery, ideation, affect, and perception. Moreover, several studies reviewed by Thalbourne (2000b) and Houran, Hughes, Thalbourne, and Delin (submitted for publication) on the construct validity of the RTS reveal that scores are positively correlated with a number of anticipated mental phenomena, including *synaesthesia* (fusion of perceptual modalities), *physiognomic perception* (fusion of perception and feeling), and *structural eidetic imagery* (fusion of imagery and perception). Accordingly, these data support the hypothesis (Thalbourne et al., 2003; Thalbourne, Houran, Alias, & Brugger, 2001) that transliminality is a perceptual-personality variable which has a basis in cognitive disinhibition (enhanced “interconnectedness” or “hyperconnectivity” among frontal-subcortical loops and primary or secondary sensory areas and/or sensory association cortices).

It is a clinically, and potentially theoretically, important finding that scores on the RTS are weakly but significantly correlated with substance use, alcohol being included as a drug (Thalbourne, 2001:  $r = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). *Why do those who score as “high transliminals” engage in such behavior and how might the answer to this question inform our understanding of transliminality?* One answer is that high transliminality is close to psychosis—usually an unpleasant state—and it is hypothesised that such individuals seek to escape from this aversive state. They could be called “unhappy high-transliminals” as stimulation perhaps reaches overload levels and

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<sup>1</sup> Top-down purification refers to a set of Rasch scaling procedures outlined by Lange, Irwin, and Houran (2000) that identify and remedy differential item functioning in questionnaires, i.e., response biases related to extraneous variables such as respondents’ ages, genders, or even cultures. Furthermore, Rasch scaling yields measures that have *interval-level* properties. It is important to address response biases, because they can elicit spurious factor structures of test items, as well as erroneous findings from statistical analyses (cf., Lange et al., 2000, 2001). Therefore, the techniques outlined in Lange et al. (2000) and Lange, Thalbourne, Houran, and Storm (2000) overcome the limitations of classical test theory and are considered the gold standard in scale construction.

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