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Authors

Lobato, Emilio

Zimmerman, Corinne

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Belief in the unbelievable: The relationship between tendencies to believe pseudoscience, paranormal, and conspiracy theories

Emilio Lobato

Illinois State University

Corinne Zimmerman

Illinois State University

Abstract: This research investigated how pseudoscientific, paranormal, and conspiracy beliefs relate to each other. Preliminary research indicates that holding one type of unsubstantiated belief predicts holding other types of belief (Lobato et al., 2014). We administered a survey (n=420) asking about belief in specific pseudoscientific, paranormal, and conspiracy claims. We also examined cognitive predispositions towards analytical and intuitive thinking, open-minded thinking, and ontological knowledge. Pseudoscientific beliefs were predicted by beliefs about paranormal and conspiracy claims; paranormal beliefs were predicted by beliefs about pseudoscientific and conspiracy claims; and conspiracy beliefs were predicted by beliefs about pseudoscientific and paranormal claims. Other individual difference variables were minimally predictive of each kind of belief. However, individuals predisposed towards intuitive thinking and who made ontological confusions were more likely to endorse paranormal and conspiracy claims. These results partially replicate Lobato et al. (2014), but provide a more nuanced description of the characteristics of believers and skeptics.