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Examining the underpinnings of belief in the
Da Vinci Code conspiracy.

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The functional nature of conspiracy beliefs: Examining the underpinnings of belief in the *Da Vinci Code* conspiracy

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Abstract

Focusing on a contemporary conspiracy theory popularized in the novel *The Da Vinci Code* (Brown, 2002), we examined the underlying psychological factors and individual differences that may predict belief in conspiracy theories, and assessed such beliefs' resistance to counterevidence. Our results suggest that belief in the *Da Vinci Code* conspiracy may be associated with coping with existential threat and death-related anxiety. In addition, the extent to which participants believed in the conspiracy was associated with the endorsement of congruent (New Age spiritual) and competing (Christian religious) beliefs, in opposite directions. Finally, exposure to counterevidence resulted in belief reduction, specifically among more religious participants (i.e. among those endorsing a competing belief system). We suggest that belief in modern conspiracy theories may help individuals attain or maintain a sense of meaning, control,

Conspiracy theories may help individuals attain or maintain a sense of meaning, control, and security.

Highlights

• We examined predictors of belief in the *Da Vinci Code* conspiracy theory. • Conspiracy beliefs were positively associated with death-related anxiety. • This relationship was mediated by religious and New Age beliefs. • Exposure to counterevidence reduced conspiracy beliefs for religious individuals. • Conspiracy beliefs may help individuals attain a sense of meaning and security.



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Keywords

Conspiracy theories; Existential anxiety; Belief resilience; Belief systems; Meaning maintenance

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