

EXPLANATORY VIRTUES AND BELIEF IN CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Do people believe conspiracy theories have qualities typical of good explanations?

Our predictions: **(1)** belief in a conspiracy will increase ascriptions of explanatory virtues, **(2)** some explanatory virtues will be more strongly correlated with belief in conspiracy theories than others, and **(3)** conspiracies will be perceived as better explanations when they try to *refute* official versions of events.

Methods. In two within-subjects experiments (n=301 & n=335), we presented passages by conspiracy theorists (a direct explanation or a refutation explanation) and collected ratings for six explanatory virtues.

Results. **(1)** In general, participants thought conspiracies have explanatory virtues, **(2)** Some virtues were more characteristic of conspiracies than others, **(3)** when conspiracies were framed as refutations, they were less likely to be ascribed explanatory virtues, except perceived expertise.

Future work will compare ascriptions of explanatory virtues in conspiracies and official explanations to determine if ascription of virtue predicts tendency to believe a conspiracy rather than the official version.

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