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## Introduction

- Conspiracy theories attempt to explain certain events and circumstances by attributing responsibility to secret groups of power that maliciously plot against the general public. Conspiratorial beliefs are often motivated by the sense of fulfilling some type of psychological need (i.e., epistemic, existential, social). The conspiratorial mindset likely evolved as an adaptive function for early humans who would have increased their chances of survival by remaining cautious of potential danger from groups of others.
- QAnon developed into an online conspiracy theory in 2017 and operates under the assumption that a national war between good versus evil is being concealed from public knowledge. According to Q, Donald Trump's term in office was part of "The Plan" to expose the extent of criminal behavior (e.g., human trafficking, child abuse, etc.) that is frequent among individuals who make up the so-called "deep state" (i.e., high profile individuals with influential power and control). "The storm" refers to excessive social conflict that is predicted to occur prior to society reaching the point of "The Great Awakening".
- We propose four research questions that specifically relate to the awareness and understanding of QAnon among Murray State college undergraduates:



- RQ1: How prevalent are beliefs in the Q-Anon conspiracy theory among college undergraduates at Murray State?
- RQ2: Does belief in the Q-Anon conspiracy theory correlate with a more general belief in conspiracy theories?
- RQ3: How does belief in the Q-Anon conspiracy theory breakdown according to demographic variables?
- RQ4: How do college undergraduates at Murray State first come to hear about Q-Anon and what do they know about it?



## METHOD

### Participants

- University undergraduates ( $N = 39$ ) recruited through Murray State's cloud-based research software were redirected to the web-based platform, LyceumSurvey, where they then completed a series of survey questions.

### Materials

- Belief in Q-Anon.** The 15-item QAnon Belief Scale (QBS) measures participants level of agreement with basic claims of Qanon (10 items;  $\alpha = .85$ ) along with other factors associated with the awareness of Qanon.
- Conspiratorial thinking.** The 15-item Generic Conspiracist Belief scale (GCB; Brotherton, French, & Pickering, 2013) assesses participants general level of conspiratorial thinking. Each question refers to a general belief that would be representative of support for various conspiracy theories (e.g., "Secret organizations communicate with extraterrestrials but keep this fact from the public"), items are rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Higher scores indicate higher levels of conspiratorial thinking ( $\alpha = .96$ ).
- Gullibility.** The 12-item Gullibility Scale (GS; Teunisse et al., 2019) measures participants self-reported tendencies towards accepting false information as true despite the presence of external indications of concern (e.g., "My friends think I'm easily fooled"), items are rated on a Likert-type scale, each point associated with a descriptive label (1: *definitely not true*; 2: *probably not true*; 3: *not sure/cannot decide*; 4: *probably true*; 5: *definitely true*). Higher scores indicate higher levels of gullibility ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

### Preliminary Analysis

- Among the current sample ( $N = 39$ ), 24.4% of participants ( $n = 11$ ) indicated belief in QAnon.
- The correlation between QBS ( $M = 4.45$ ;  $SD = 1.56$ ) and GCB scale ( $M = 2.83$ ;  $SD = .94$ ) was positive and strong,  $r(37) = .70$ ,  $p < .001$ .
- The GS ( $M = 2.85$ ;  $SD = 1.09$ ) was negatively correlated with the QBS,  $r(37) = -.16$ ,  $p = .34$  and the GCB scale,  $r(37) = -.37$ ,  $p = .04$ .

## Discussion

- Consistent with previous findings, belief in QAnon was positively correlated with a more conspiratorial mindset.
- The negative correlations between levels of gullibility and both conspiracy theory scales are likely attributable to the self-report nature of the GS.
- These findings help to illuminate the spectrum of QAnon endorsement relevant to its place within the historical hierarchy of conspiratorial beliefs.