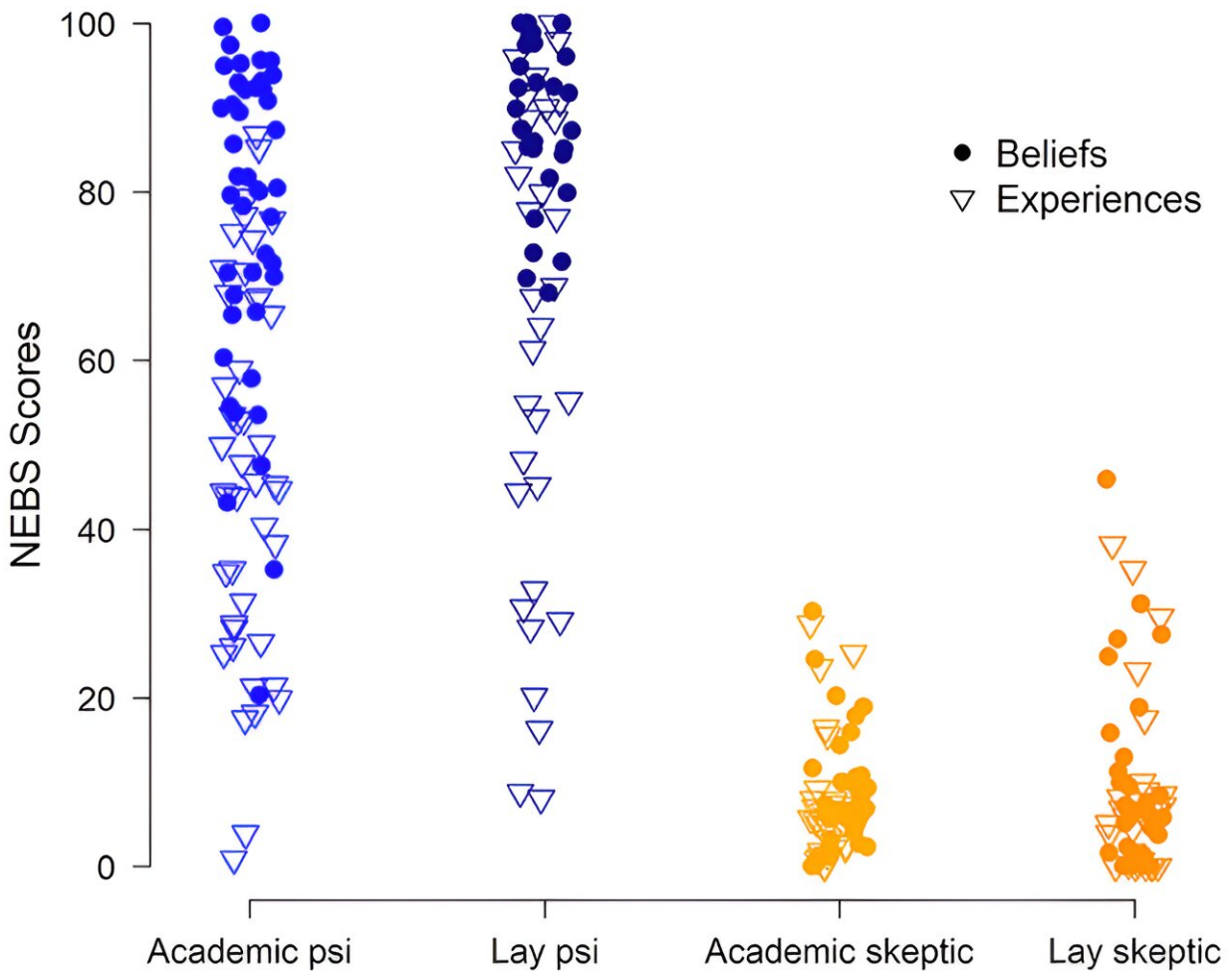


Are psi researchers more like lay believers or skeptics?

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Dot plot showing Noetic Experiences and Beliefs Scale (NEBS) scores (Y-axis) by study group (X-axis). Academic psi (N = 44) and lay psi (N = 32) groups showed higher belief and experience scores than the academic skeptic (N = 35) and lay skeptic (N = 33) groups. Credit: *Frontiers in Psychology* (2024). DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1398121

A study shows that academics who work with psi differ from lay psi individuals, but not from skeptics, in actively open-minded thinking. Despite their firm belief in psi phenomena, psi researchers demonstrate a commitment to sound reasoning about evidence that is no different from that of skeptics.

Psi [phenomena](#), such as extra-sensory perception (the purported ability to perceive information without using one's physical senses) or psychokinesis (the supposed influence of mental processes on [physical systems](#)), have long captivated the interest and curiosity of humanity, and belief in psi is relatively high among the general population.

However, this belief is often viewed with skepticism and dismissed as irrational and unscientific, particularly among academics. This is despite academic research on psi phenomena dating back to the 19th century and continuing today with academic studies published in psychology and neuroscience journals.

In stark contrast to academics in general, most researchers in the field of psi seem to endorse the reality of psi. But are they that different from skeptics with similar academic backgrounds in considering inconsistent evidence and in their motivation to search for the "correct" answer? And concerning lay believers, do psi researchers differ in how they approach knowledge, evidence, and ambiguity?

In the article "Cognitive styles and psi: psi researchers are more similar to skeptics than to lay believers," [published](#) in *Frontiers in Psychology* in June, Marieta Pehlivanova and co-authors report that they investigated the differences in cognitive styles among four heterogeneous groups regarding belief in psi, attitudes toward and involvement in related research: academic psi researchers, lay psi believers, academic skeptics

and lay skeptics.

The researchers from the University of Virginia School of Medicine (U.S.) aimed in this study to test the hypothesis that academic psi researchers may exhibit different cognitive styles to lay individuals interested in psi, but similar to skeptics. Unsurprisingly, they found that, given their different engagement with psi phenomena, psi researchers reported significantly greater belief in and perceived experience with psi phenomena compared to academic skeptics, confirming prior findings.

However, the results also showed that, as hypothesized, psi researchers and academic skeptics showed no difference in the cognitive styles of actively open-minded thinking and the need for cognitive closure. On the other hand, psi researchers showed greater actively open-minded thinking compared to lay believers, suggesting that they are more willing to consider evidence contradicting their beliefs.

Together, these findings suggest that "these two groups (academic psi researchers and academic skeptics), which are philosophically and empirically at odds with each other regarding evidence for psi phenomena, do not differ in their endorsement of the principles of 'good' thinking about evidence," emphasizes Pehlivanova.

More information: Marieta Pehlivanova et al, Cognitive styles and psi: psi researchers are more similar to skeptics than to lay believers, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1398121](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1398121)

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