

# Study finds 'surprising' level of paranormal belief

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**By Hannah Elliott**

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DALLAS (ABP)—With Halloween fast approaching, adults across the nation are loading up on candy and decorations, planning to hunker down for a night of trick-or-treaters, parties and hi-jinx. But how many of them actually believe in the ghosts and aliens they so often display on their houses?

More than some might think.

A new study found 37 percent of Americans believe in haunted houses. More than half believe dreams can foretell the future. Twenty percent believe it's possible to communicate with the dead. And about a quarter of the people surveyed believe some UFOs are spaceships from other worlds.

The Baylor University researchers who conducted the [2006 Baylor Study of Religion](#), released last month, found a “surprising” level of belief in paranormal things among people outside traditional religions.

Similarly, a [December 2005 Harris Poll](#) reported four in 10 Americans believe in ghosts, 28 percent believe in witches, and a quarter of Americans believe in astrology.

Those are surprising findings for a culture that values verifiable science and conservative religious beliefs.

Perhaps most surprising is the role education plays in determining belief in the paranormal. But it's not what you think. Those who attended college were more likely than those who did not to believe in UFOs and alternative healing therapies, according to the Baylor study.

[Lesley Northup](#), an associate professor of religion and culture at [Florida International University](#), is an expert on religion and broadcasting. He said he wasn't surprised that educated people tend to be more interested in the paranormal, since it's the more advanced classes in high school and college that challenge students to question the possibility of things beyond the physical world.

Apparently, with exposure to abstract concepts like [quantum physics](#) and the vastness of the universe comes the willingness to consider the possibility that things aren't exactly what they seem.

"In fact, science is telling us that lots of things we don't understand are going on in the natural world," Northup said. "Parallel universes and all of these things certainly may be true, in science. This is kind of a natural progression from a very modernist view of the world to a postmodernist view. Science is actually leading the way in terms of metaphysics now."

There's also a religious factor for some people's beliefs, Northup said. Reality is a menu to choose from, and people are looking to things besides conventional religion to substantiate that perception, he added.

"More and more people are choosing for themselves what they think is Truth," he said. "They pick and choose from different religions. Most people will say they're not religious, but they're spiritual. They don't want to brand themselves with a particular religious group, but they still believe in supernatural forces."

Among evangelical Christians—who believe strongly in Jesus’ virgin birth and physical resurrection—several studies have reported that they’re the least likely of all religious groups to believe in the paranormal.

In the [National Study of Youth and Religion](#), funded by the Lilly Endowment, Mormon teens were also especially unlikely to believe in psychics. Conversely, 26 percent of Catholic teens—the highest of any religious group—reported believing in paranormal events.

Women have a proportionally high incidence of belief in supernatural and paranormal events. [Chris Bader](#), an assistant professor of sociology who participated in the Baylor study, said millions of Americans, many of them women, share paranormal beliefs and experiences that don’t fit under any religious umbrella.

According to Bader, women are twice as likely as men to believe that psychics can foresee the future, that astrology works and that people can communicate with the dead. What’s more, females showed the highest percentages of belief on most of the items the survey listed, like Atlantis, aliens and the healing properties of crystals.

Still, he said, “belief in the paranormal is not that common, with the exception of a couple of items. Belief in God is very common.”

That belief in God takes many forms, especially in television shows and movies. Shows like *Heroes*, *Medium* and *Touched by an Angel* depict simplistic views of God or paranormal activity. And that’s indicative of the current culture, Northup said.

“There’s a growing acceptance of the fact that not everybody has to be religious in the same way,” he said. “There’s a growing acceptance of the fact that science and religion are not necessarily at odds with each other. This is just the pattern of the world. Sooner or later, regardless, there’s going to be change.”

Plus, he said, [Einsteinian physics](#)—his theories of special and general relativity —have opened up a new realm and way of looking at the world. And that attitude has started to seep into the social consciousness.

“People begin to open up to what used to be thought of as bizarre concepts of reality,” Northup said.

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