

Contamination Threat Bias Predicts Left and Right-Wing Authoritarian Support

Introduction

This research focuses on threats of contamination, which we define as latent spreadable harms. Individual differences in how biased one is in their perceptions of a contamination threat as particularly harmful or spreadable may have implications for social cognition.

However, much research has focused on affective or emotional responses to contamination threats, rather than on biased perceptions of the threats themselves. We developed the contamination threat bias scale (CTBS) to fill this gap.

To test the predictive validity of our scale, we wanted to test whether specific CTBS subscales differentially predict social attitudes.

Authoritarianism is best understood as a preference for group conformity rather than individual autonomy, is activated by perceived threat, and is expressed separately via left-wing authoritarianism (LWA) and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA).

We thus test whether biases regarding certain domains of contamination threat predict left and right-wing authoritarianism as one example of social attitudes.

Method

N = 379 Prolific Workers

- Mean age = 46.51 (SD = 14.45)
- 59.4% men, 39.1% women, 1.6% other
- 83.4% White, 11.3% Black, 5.3% Asian, Native American, or Hispanic

Contamination Threat Bias Scale (CTBS)

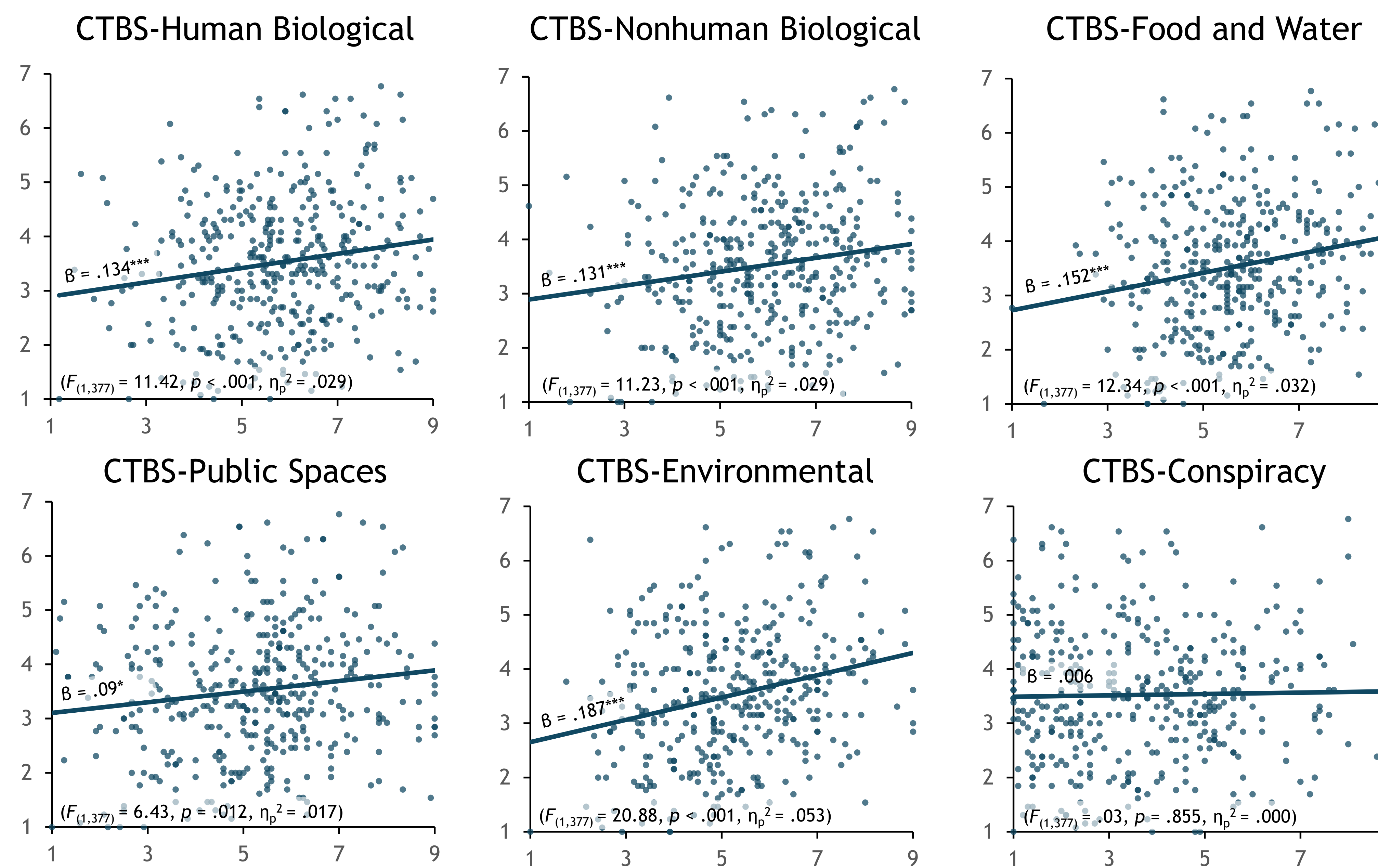
- Measures individual differences in biases toward perceiving contamination threats across 6 domains: Human-Biological, Nonhuman-biological, Food and Water, Public Spaces, Environmental, and Conspiracy

Left-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (LWA)

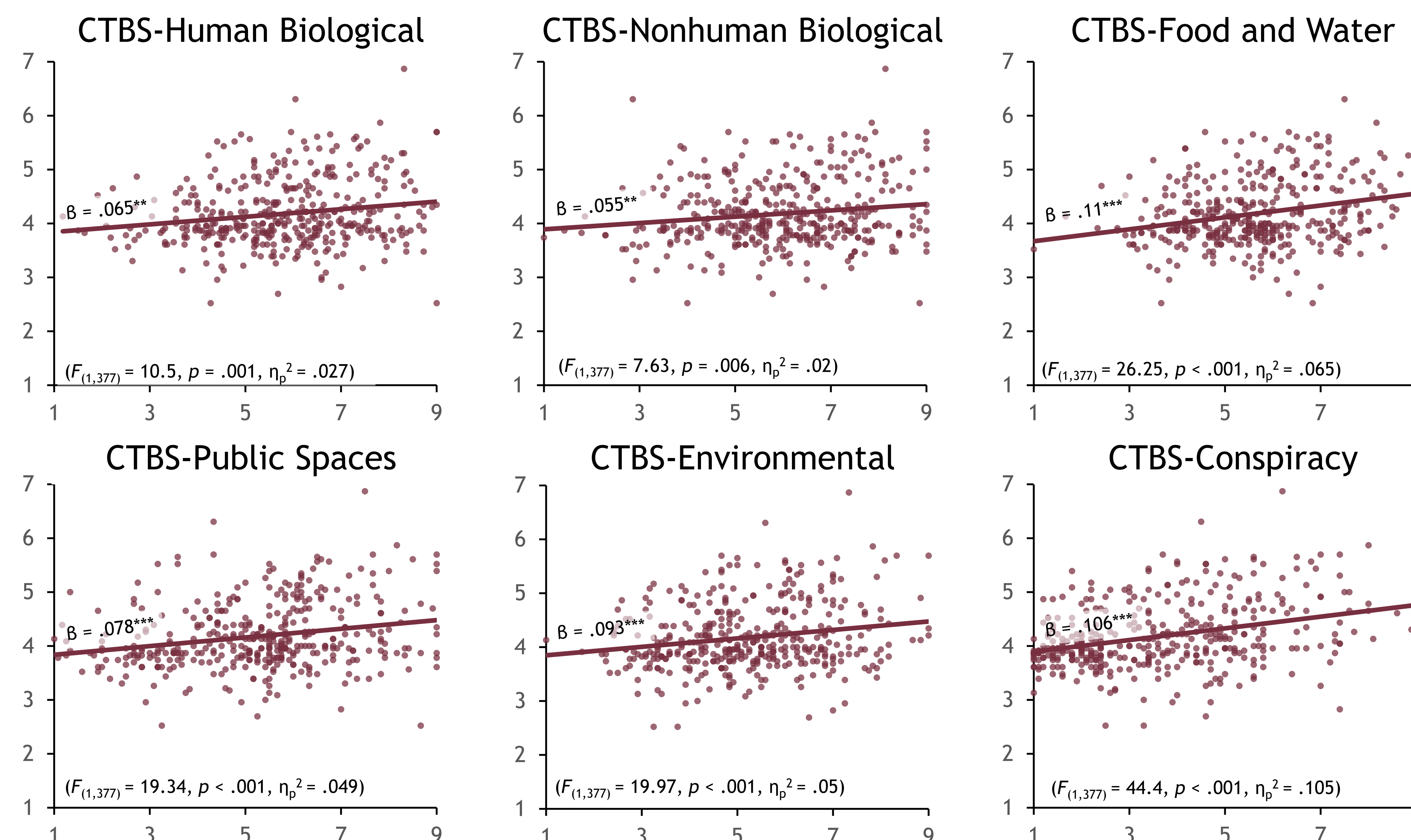
- Measures support for left-wing authoritarianism
- Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA)
- Measures support for right-wing authoritarianism

Results

CTBS PREDICTING LWA



CTBS PREDICTING RWA



Discussion

Authoritarianism serves as a test of predictive validity given that supporters of left and right-wing authoritarianism arrive at similarly oppressive attitudes through opposing reasoning.

Regression analyses were used to determine how strongly specific contamination threat domains which uniquely predict RWA or LWA.

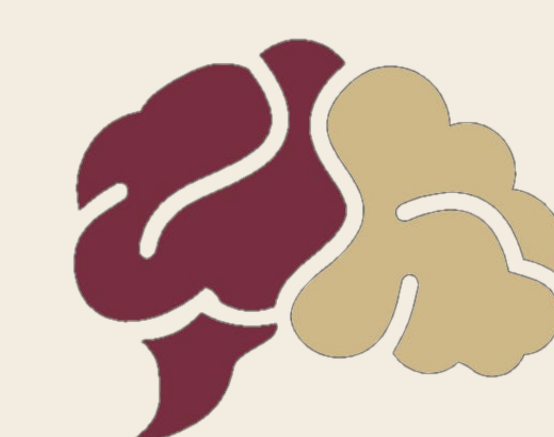
We found that biases concerning food and water or conspiratorial contamination threats best predicted right-wing authoritarianism, and biases concerning environmental contamination threats best predicted left-wing authoritarianism.

Our results provide some evidence for the predictive validity of the CTBS in the realm of social attitudes. The subscales of the CTBS each index a related but separable bias, and those biases differentially predict social attitudes.

The current work also demonstrates the usefulness of considering contamination threat bias when answering questions regarding stigma, avoidance, and support for hostile or exclusionary political policy toward an outgroup that may be perceived as contaminating.

Further work should (1) continue to test the unique predictive validity of the CTBS subscales across a wider range of social attitudes and (2) should investigate factors which may moderate or be moderated by contamination threat biases.

Resources & Lab Info



MARCH RESEARCH LABORATORY

