"Historia est Magistra Vitae"?

The Impact of Historical Victimhood on Current Conspiracy Beliefs

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Abstract

Conspiracy beliefs constitute a propensity to attribute major events to powerful agents acting against less powerful "victims". In this article we test whether collective victimhood facilitates conspiracy thinking. Study 1 showed that perceived group victimhood is associated with generic and group-specific conspiracy beliefs, but only for individuals who identify highly with their ingroup. Study 2 employed an experimental design to show that experimentally increased group victimhood leads to increased endorsement of conspiracy beliefs among high in-group identifiers, but decreases endorsement of conspiracy beliefs among low identifiers. This effect was mediated by lack of trust towards outgroup members. Study 3 sought to replicate Study 2 in a different socio-political context. While Study 3 did not directly support the relationship between victimhood, group identification and conspiracy beliefs, an integrated meta-analysis of all three studies provides evidence for a significant interaction of victimhood and group identification in predicting conspiracy beliefs.

Keywords: collective victimhood, conspiracy theories, group commitment

"Our holiest ancestors' mysterious wound is dressed in blood, like a royal banner (…) Thou shalt not give up Poland into the hands of her thieves, those who aim to steal her from us and to resell her to the world", wrote the Polish poet Jarosław M. Rymkiewicz after the tragic aviation crash in which president Lech Kaczyński died. This crash created fertile ground for many conspiracy theories attributing it to a secret plot of the liberal Polish government and the Russian authorities (Grzesiak-Feldman & Haska, 2015). Interestingly, many of these theories referred to negative historical experiences of the Polish nation, such as the Katyń massacre of Polish officers by the Red Army during WWII, the Soviet occupation of Poland, and the communist past.

Victims Learning Lessons from the Past

Since ancient times people have treated history as the key source of guidance for interpretations of contemporary events, the *magistra vitae* in Cicero's words. As Halbwachs (1994) argued, the historical collective experiences of one's national, religious or ethnic group provide a framework for interpreting contemporary events. These experiences may also be viewed through the lens of collective memory – a subjective, contemporary representation of the group's past (Halbwachs, 1980). In this respect, the representations of the past shared by the members of a group form a structure that defines the role of the group (e.g. as "victims of the occupation"), and legitimize current political actions (Liu & Hilton, 2005).

This seems particularly true for tragic historical events, which can leave indelible marks in human memory due to a general human propensity to attend to, learn from, and use negative information far more than positive one (see Lewicka, Czapinski, & Peeters, 1992; Vaish, Grossmann, & Woodward, 2008). Group members who were victimized in violent conflict are less prone to support humanitarian law (Elcheroth, 2006), which suggests that their victimizing experiences decrease their trust in institutions. Historical victimhood also leads to mistrust of legal norms and support for exclusion of outgroup members (Vollhardt and Bilali, 2015), support for

strong authoritarian leaders and social distance from outgroups (Bilewicz, Winiewski, Kofta, & Wojcik, 2013; Goertzel, 1994; Grzesiak-Feldman & Haska, 2015). Moreover, victimized groups develop a mindset encouraging them to interpret all further events as subsequent acts of victimization (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009), delegitimizing rival groups (Bar-Tal and Halperin, 2011). Schori-Eyal, Klar, & Ben-Ami (2017) coined the term "perpetual ingroup victimhood orientation". This term exemplifies the belief that a group is consistently a victim persecuted by other competing outgroups throughout its national history. This orientation builds on the perception that harm and injustice against the ingroup occurs not accidentally, but is caused intentionally by powerful enemies of the ingroup (Cairns & Roe, 2003; Enns, 2012). Interestingly, many of these characteristics pertaining to people and groups who have been historically victimized are shared by those believing in conspiracy theories.

Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories attribute the cause of negative events to machinations of powerful groups that act in a secret way and conceal their goals (Keeley, 1999). People endorse conspiracy theories in order to explain shocking negative events that threaten the social order, like political and economic crises, tragedies that claim many lives (e.g. the 9/11 terrorist attack in the US), or incidents involving prominent individuals (like the death of Princess Diana) Van Prooijen & Douglas (2017). In fact, situational threats to control and reminders of a lack of control increase compensatory beliefs in conspiratorial powers (Sullivan, Landau, & Rothschild, 2010; Van Proijen & Acker, 2015; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008). In conditions of uncertainty, people are generally more likely to endorse conspiracy theories (Kofta, Soral, & Bilewicz, 2020; Whitson, Galinsky, & Kay, 2015), again suggesting that conspiracy thinking might be motivated by negative experiences linked to loss of control or uncertainty (Bilewicz & Sedek, 2015). These negative experiences are expected to be particularly salient to individuals belonging to victimized groups.

Conspiracy beliefs have also been found to be related to lack of social and institutional trust (Goertzel, 1994; Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999), and to decreased trust in government (Einstein & Glick, 2015). In fact, authoritarian support is another trait that is shared by both victimized and conspiracist individuals, as belief in conspiracies has been found to significantly correlate with right-wing authoritarianism (Imhoff & Bruder, 2014). Finally, people who believe in one conspiracy theory are more prone to believe in other such theories, (Goertzel, 1994; Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic, & Furnham, 2010; Swami et al., 2011, Wood, Douglas, & Sutton, 2012), suggesting a monological *conspiracy mentality* (Bruder et al., 2013; Goertzel, 1994; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014). This is reminiscent of the tendency of victimized groups to interpret any subsequent event as victimizing.

Conspiracy Thinking and Victimhood as Lessons Learned from the Past

Given the commonalities between the experience of victimhood and belief in conspiracy theories just outlined, in this article we advance the hypothesis that historical victimhood may constitute an antecedent of belief in conspiracy theories. Previous research already suggests that victimhood experiences may be related to endorsement of conspiracy theories. Nelson, Adams, Branscombe, and Schmitt (2010) found that a group with a long history of race-based victimization (African Americans) is likely to perceive a current race-based conspiracy as more plausible and the conspiracy-informant as more credible compared to a non-racially discriminated group (European Americans). The conspiracy-informant's perceived credibility was actually mediated by historical knowledge of past anti-Black conspiracies. The role of past victimhood in conspiracy beliefs was confirmed in a subsequent study showing that exposure to past anti-Black conspiracies increased the perceived plausibility of current race-based conspiracies.

Despite this preliminary evidence, many aspects of the relationship between victimhood and conspiratorial thinking remain unclear. First, the causal relationship between group victimhood and conspiracy beliefs has yet to be directly examined. Second, it remains unclear

whether group victimhood leads to group-specific conspiracy beliefs or to a general propensity to endorse conspiracy explanations. Furthermore, previous research remains agnostic as to the psychological processes that allow victimizing collective experience to be translated into individual endorsement of conspiracy theories. For example, well-known psychological findings about identity fusion (e.g. Swann, Gomez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009) and self-stereotyping (e.g. Latrofa, Vaes, & Cadinu, 2012) suggest that shared victimizing experiences within a group may constitute a framework for an individual's conspiratorial perception of socio-political life, to the extent that the individual identifies with the group (see Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Another issue deserving empirical examination concerns those aspects of group victimhood that underlie its translation into conspiracy thinking. For example, it could be hypothesized that group victimization increases conspiracy beliefs by either reducing trust towards other groups or reducing perceived control, two factors clearly related both to the experience of group victimhood and to conspiracy thinking. The present research tried to comprehensively address all these questions.

Overview of the Current Research

We conducted three studies testing our main hypothesis that historical collective victimhood fosters conspiracy thinking, both in the form of a generic conspiracy mentality, and as a belief in specific conspiracy theories. Based on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) we also expected self-categorization to be an underlying central mechanism in the translation of group victimhood to conspiracy beliefs. Therefore, in our studies we also examined the role of group identification in explaining the link between victimhood and conspiracy beliefs. Specifically, we expected that use of the ingroup experience of victimization as a source of knowledge about the nature of the social world and intergroup relations would occur primarily among individuals who highly identify with their group. Finally, in Studies 2 and 3 we tested whether outgroup trust and

perceived control may mediate the effects of perceived group victimhood on conspiracy beliefs through group identification. Table 1 gives an overview of our hypotheses per study.

[Insert Table 1 here]

We sought to test our hypotheses in two different countries, Poland and Greece. Both countries are characterized by a stable, low level of generalized trust (Adam, 2008). In Greece, the 2008 economic crisis has directly affected the everyday life of Greek citizens, as evidenced by the rapid rise in unemployment (Kretsos, 2014). The economic crisis has also triggered feelings of victimization, powerlessness and even a discourse of "foreign occupation", involving the construction of an external enemy, seen as responsible for the crisis and its consequences (Lialiouti & Bithymitris, 2015). Such crisis-related images were intensified by the media and led to the emergence of Anti-German conspiracy theories that fueled severe protests, for instance in May 2010, against the first memorandum between Greece and the European Union (Davou, 2015; Davou & Demertzis, 2013).

While Poland, has not faced any severe economic recession in the last two decades, a major political crisis has evolved in the wake of the Polish Air Force plane crash in Smolensk, Russia, on April 10, 2010, that killed 96 officials, including the Polish president (Harding, 2010). Many conspiracy theories have been put forward to explain the catastrophe (Borger & Pidd, 2011). Two years after the crash, the belief in Russian sabotage as the cause of the crash (the so-called *Smolensk Conspiracy*) was endorsed by 25% of Poles (see Grzesiak-Feldman & Haska, 2012).

Study 1

The aim of Study 1 was to establish a relation between endorsement of conspiracy theories and group victimhood. We tested this hypothesis in regard to group-related as well as general conspiracy beliefs in a Greek survey. We used the context of the financial crisis to operationalize the group-specific conspiracy theories, by ascribing the cause of the crisis to foreign political and financial powers (see Mylonas, 2011). We also sought to assess people's explicit opinion on the

acceptability of conspiracy beliefs. Despite the intuitive widespread impression that the term conspiracy theory has a bad connotation leading to suppression of conspiracy explanations (Douglas & Sutton, 2008; Klein, Van der Linden, Pantazi, & Kissine, 2015) and consideration of conspiracy beliefs as sources of social stigma (Lantian, Muller, Nurra, Klein, Berjot & Pantazi, 2018), a study by Wood (2016) failed to observe that people are derogative with respect to conspiracy theories. Given that the evidence concerning the acceptability and legitimacy of conspiracy theories, we also included a measure of the acceptability of conspiracy theories as explanatory constructs of historical events, as an alternative meta-cognitive measure of adherence to conspiracy theories.

Additionally, in this study we examined the role of group identification in explaining the link between victimhood and conspiracy beliefs. We expected that those individuals who identify with their group the most would also be the ones to use the ingroup experience (of victimization) as a source of knowledge about the world. We also looked at sense of collective control as a possible correlate of conspiracy thinking and collective victimhood. We chose to measure the sense of collective control, rather than personal control, considering that a potential relation between collective victimhood and conspiracy would pertain to collective-oriented rather than personal-oriented psychological constructs (Paulhus, 1983).

Method[1]

Participants and procedure. One hundred sixty students in two Greek universities voluntarily completed a paper-pencil questionnaire about perceptions of historical events distributed in auditoriums before or after class. Five participants who did not report being Greek were excluded from the analyses. The final sample consisted of 155 participants (96 females, age range from 18 to 80, M_{age}= 22.47, SD = 6.99). Due to missing values, sample sizes were not identical across analyses. Ethical approval had been secured by X University, the affiliated institution of one of the authors at the time of the study. Material for the Greek study was translated

using a backtranslation procedure. Participants provided their consent before starting the survey. At the end, they were fully debriefed.

Measures. Unless otherwise indicated, all measures were assessed using a 7–point scale (1 = "I strongly disagree" to 7 = "I strongly agree"). The composite scores were constructed by averaging the items composing each scale.

Collective victimhood (α = .61) "was measured with the three following items: "No other nation has suffered in the course of history as much as we did", "Greeks have suffered a lot in their history" and "We Greeks have almost always been victims of other nations."

Conspiracy mentality (α = .86) was assessed with the *Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire* (Bruder, Haffke, Neave, Nouripanah, & Imhoff, 2013), measured on a 0-100% scale.

Belief in a ***Financial conspiracy*** (α = .61) was measured with 3 items ascribing the origins of the current Greek economic crisis to German plans and policies (e.g. "The financial crisis in Greece is the result of a German conspiracy").

Perceived legitimacy of conspiracy theories (α = .64) was measured with three items: "Believing in conspiracy theories is legitimate", "Conspiracy theories are reasonable explanations of some events or phenomena" and "Most conspiracy theories are wrong".

Group identification (α = .90) was measured by adapting the national identification scale of Roccas, Klar and Liviatan (2006) to the Greek context[2]. This scale captured two aspects of group identification: attachment (10 items, α = .89, e.g., "I love Greece") and glorification (α = .81, 6 items, e.g., "Other countries can learn a lot from Greeks"). Based on their high intercorrelation, $r = .53$, $p < .001$, we constructed a composite score of group identification by averaging the two subscales.

Sense of collective control was measured with the item "We Greeks are in control of our lives".

Results[3]

Descriptive statistics and correlations appear in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 Here]

Collective victimhood correlated significantly both with belief in a financial conspiracy and with perceived legitimacy of conspiracy theories. However, the positive relationship with conspiracy mentality did not reach conventional levels of significance. None of the conspiracy-related variables were related to the sense of collective control, a measure that was itself positively related to victimhood.

Next, we examined whether the correlations between victimhood and our three indicators of conspiracy-related attitudes (financial conspiracy, conspiracy mentality and perceived legitimacy of conspiracy thinking) were moderated by group identification. We ran three multiple linear regression testing the effects of victimhood, identification (both centered) and their interaction. The results of this analysis are reported in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 here]

As shown in Figure 1, identification moderates the effect of victimhood on all three conspiracy-related dependent variables[4]. Analyses of the simple slopes of this interaction revealed that high scores on collective victimhood were related to a greater endorsement of conspiracy mentality ($B = 6.18$, $SE = 1.73$, $p < .001$), financial conspiracy beliefs ($B = 0.57$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$) and conspiracy legitimacy ($B = 0.41$, $SE = 0.12$, $p < .001$) among people who identify more with their in-group (one *SD* above the mean). The slopes for low-identifiers were not significant[5].

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Discussion

Study 1 provided evidence for a link between feelings of victimhood and conspiracy thinking, namely both group-related conspiracy beliefs specific to the Greek context and positive perceptions of conspiracy thinking. However, Study 1 failed to detect a direct positive relationship between generalized conspiracy mentality and perceived group victimhood. Nonetheless, when taking into account ingroup identification, a robust relationship between collective victimhood and all three conspiracy-related measures appeared. Study 1, thus, suggests that the propensity to see socio-political life through the lenses of conspiracy theories as a result of group victimhood is higher when commitment to one's victimized ingroup is high. The finding of a positive relationship between perceived legitimacy of conspiracy beliefs and victimhood even suggests a rationalization of conspiracy beliefs on behalf of victimized people.

A puzzling finding of Study 1 resides in the observation of a positive correlation between victimhood and sense of control. Additionally, we did not find the expected relation between lack of control and belief in conspiracy theories supported by past research (e.g. Van Prooijen & Acker, 2015). This might be partly explained by our choice to measure collective aspects of perceived control. It is possible that conspiracy thinking is mostly related to interpersonal and personal aspects of perceived control (see Bruder et al., 2013) rather than on collective ones and past research indeed relied on measures of personal control (see Van Proijen & Acker, 2015).

Having established both a relationship between group victimhood and conspiracy mentality, as well as the role of group identification in this relationship, we tried to further assess whether this link is causal by implementing an experimental design in Study 2. In addition, we tried to identify those aspects of collective victimhood that explain the relation between victimhood and conspiracy thinking observed among high-identifiers.

Study 2

In this experimental study, we sought to examine whether experimentally induced victimhood might increase beliefs in conspiracy theories. We also aimed at increasing the external

validity of our findings about the role of group commitment in conspiracy thinking as a result of victimization. To this end, we conducted this study in another national context, Poland. We addressed group-related conspiracy beliefs (the belief in Smoleńsk conspiracy), as well as two indices of generic conspiracy thinking: general conspiracy mentality (as in the previous studies) and political paranoia. Since the latter captures the tendency to endorse conspiracy explanations specifically in the field of politics and was created and widely used in the context of Polish socio-political reality (Korzeniowski, 2010; Radkiewicz, 2010), we used it to complement the more general and contextually neutral measure of conspiracy mentality.

Another goal of Study 2 was to further examine the link between victimhood, group identification and endorsement of conspiracy thinking by testing two potential mediators, namely, decreased trust towards other groups and the decreased sense of collective control. Following Bruder et al.'s (2013) suggestion and given our previous results showing the lack of a relationship between conspiracy thinking and perceived collective control, this time we decided to use an alternative measure of this construct which focused on the socio-political aspect of perceived control.

Method

Participants and procedure. Three hundred eighty-six participants were recruited through an online research panel in Poland. To ensure that our sample included only participants of Polish origin, we excluded from the analyses five participants who did not report being of Polish nationality. Furthermore, in order to avoid random answers that frequently occur in online surveys, at the end of the study we asked participants to indicate whether they provided thought-out and honest answers or random answers. Twenty participants were excluded from the analyses because they admitted providing random answers. Finally, we excluded eight participants who failed to provide an answer to at least one of the two above-mentioned questions. The final sample of 353 participants was comprised of 56.4% women and 43.1% men, as well as 0.6% of

participants who indicated "other gender." Participant age ranged from 22 to 36 (M = 29.85, SD = 3.06; four participants failed to provide their age).

Design. We tested the effect of perceived victimhood on conspiracy thinking using a between-groups design: an experimental group (salience of group historical victimhood) vs. a control group (salience of group history). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions and asked to complete an anagram task. Following Shah and Kruglanski (2002), we presented participants with strings of letters to be "unscrambled." The task included 10 such strings. Participants were informed that the words were chosen from Polish history textbooks. In the experimental condition the words were related to Polish victimhood (such as names of important places of Polish victimization, e.g. Katyń). In the control group, the words were not associated with any experience of national victimhood, but rather were related to neutral historical events (such as dynasty names). Participants were asked to complete the task as fast as they could.

A manipulation check at the end of the questionnaire tested whether the manipulation actually increased the accessibility of national victimhood in the experimental condition. Participants were presented with the first few letters of six words and asked to complete the words with the first idea that came to their minds. Three of the syllables presented to them corresponded to an anagram presented in the experimental condition and the other to anagrams presented in the control condition. Two independent coders rated whether each word filled-in by the participants was (1) or was not (0) related to national victimhood. As the raters proved reliable, ICC = .89 with 95% CI [0.72; 0,94], $F(351, 351) = 11.86$, $p < .001$, we averaged their answers.

Measures. The second part of the questionnaire focused on the endorsement of conspiracy theories and the relevant moderator and mediators. Unless otherwise indicated, all measures were on 7-point scales (1 = "I strongly disagree" to 7 = "I strongly agree"). The composite scores were calculated by averaging the items composing each scale.

For brevity, we now used the shorter 9-item version of Roccas et al.'s (2006) scale to measure ***Group identification***. The scale proved reliable (α = .92).

Conspiracy mentality (α = .85) was assessed with the same measure as in the previous studies.

Political paranoia was measured with a 6–item scale (Korzeniowski, 2012). It contained items like "People, who claim that world powers are conspiring against Poland, are right," and "We will never know who has and who will have control over us.". The reliability of the scale was very good (α = .92).

To measure group-related conspiracy beliefs we constructed a ***Belief in the Smolensk conspiracy*** scale (α = .69) consisting of four items based on the public discourse about the Smolensk catastrophe, e.g. "Polish and Russian authorities jointly conceal the truth about the catastrophe," and "The Smolensk catastrophe was just an accident, the result of a combination of many independent factors" (reversed).

Sociopolitical control (α = .61) was measured with a 10-item scale (Paulhus, 1983). Example items are: "The average citizen can have an influence on government decisions," and "With enough effort we can wipe out political corruption" (reversed).

Intergroup trust (α = .54) was assessed with a 3-item scale *(*Witkowska, Bilewicz, Cehajic-Clancy, 2019), e.g. "I trust that other nations want to exploit my nation," and "Despite the events that occurred in the past, I think we can trust other nations."

Results

Correlations and descriptive statistics appear in Table 4. The three conspiracy-related variables were positively inter-correlated. However, only two of them were related to identification: conspiracy mentality and political paranoia. As in Study 1 and as expected based on past literature, perceived socio-political control was negatively correlated to conspiracy beliefs.

[Insert Table 4 here]

According to a Mann-Whitney U test, the manipulation check showed that the experimental group generated significantly more victimhood-related words than the control, indicating greater salience of group victimhood (U = 10,336.50, p < .001). We first tested the effect of victimhood salience on conspiracy thinking, by comparing the means of the three conspiracy-related variables across conditions. No effect of victimization salience on conspiracy mentality, $F(1,353)=.0003$, p = .99, η_p^2 <.001, political paranoia, $F(1,351)=.90$, p = .34, η_p^2 =.003) or belief in the Smolensk conspiracy, $F(1,353)=.40$, p = .53, η_p^2 =.001 was found. Given our expectation to observe the effect of group victimhood particularly among participants high in identification (based on Study 1), we conducted a series of moderation analyses repeating all the steps implemented in Study 1 for the 3 dependent variables we used. This analysis, summarized in Table 5, showed a significant victimhood × group identification interaction for all the three conspiracy-related dependent variables[6].

[Insert Table 5 here]

As shown in Figure 2, the findings of Study 2 were corroborated, since victimhood increased political paranoia (B = 0.51, SE = 0.22, β = .17, p = .02) and conspiracy mentality (B = 0.68, SE = 0.30, β = .16, p = .02) among high-identifiers, though it did not affect the belief in the Smolensk conspiracy (B = 0.20, SE = 0.14, β = 0.10, p = .16). At the same time, among low-identifiers we observed a decrease in the belief in the Smolensk conspiracy (B = -0.37, SE = 0.14, β = -.19, p = 0.01) as well as a decrease in conspiracy mentality (B = -0.80, SE = 0.30, β = -.19, p = 0.01), while no analogous effect was found for political paranoia (B = -0.28, SE = 0.22, β = -.10, p = .20).

[Insert Figure 2 here]

As we previously found a strong effect of victimization on conspiracy mentality for high identifiers, the next step was to examine whether this was due to high identifiers having lower trust and/or lower perception of control. To this end we tested a mediated moderation (Muller,

Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005) using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (model 8; Hayes, 2013). This analysis was conducted using bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals with 1,000 bootstrap samples. We found indirect effects of the two-way interaction through outgroup trust on conspiracy mentality (*IE* = -.14, *SE* = .07, 95% CI [-.29; -.02]), political paranoia (*IE* = -.15, *SE* = .07, 95% CI [-.29; -.02]), and belief in the Smolensk conspiracy (*IE* = -.08, *SE* = .04, 95% CI [-.16; -.01]). The total effects of the two-way interaction on conspiracy mentality (*B* = 0.56, *SE* = 0.16, *p* = .001, 95% CI [0.25, 0.87]), belief in the Smolensk conspiracy (*B* = 0.21, *SE* = 0.08, *p* = .01, 95% CI [0.07, 0.36]), and political paranoia (*B*= 0.30, *SE* =0.11, *p* = .01, 95% CI [0.07; 0.52]) decreased when outgroup trust was entered into the regression model (*B* = 0.42, *SE* = 0.15, *p* = 0.01, 95% CI [0.12, 0.12], *B* = 0.13, *SE* = 0.07, *p* = .06, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.26] and *B* = 0.13, *SE* = 0.10, *p* = .15, 95% CI [-0.05, 0.34] respectively).

No such effect was observed for sociopolitical control as a mediator.

Discussion

Study 2 showed that experimentally induced group victimhood increases conspiracy thinking in individuals who are highly committed to their group. This effect is not explained by the availability of general historical information, but is rather specifically driven by the accessibility of group victimhood. Besides replicating the victimhood x identification interaction of Study 1, in Study 2 the relationship between conspiracy mentality and group victimhood was only revealed when the interaction term of victimhood and identification was taken into account. Interestingly, Study 2 not only provided evidence for an increase of conspiracy beliefs among high identifiers but also for a reduction in conspiracy beliefs, as a response to victimization, among low-identifiers. The discrepancy in this respect between Studies 1 and 2 might be accounted for by a number of factors, such as the different victimhood operationalization across

the two studies, decreased power in Study 1, or due to the different samples, and the respective sociopolitical contexts of the two studies.

The inverse patterns observed for the high and low identifiers may be explained in terms of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), as individuals who are not committed to their ingroup display different reactions to social threat (i.e. group victimization) compared to highly committed individuals. For example, low identifiers may try to emphasize heterogeneity within the group (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Excessive disbelief in conspiracy theories that are widely supported among one's ingroup members could then be used to emphasize one's own distinctiveness (cf. Imhoff & Lamberty, 2018; Lantian et al., 2018).

Finally, Study 2 revealed that the effect of group victimhood on conspiracy thinking observed among high-identifiers was mediated by the level of trust towards other groups, but not by perceived control over socio-political events. This suggests that the link between past group trauma and conspiracy thinking has a relational nature and cannot be reduced to mere control restoration mechanisms.

Study 3 sought to replicate Study 2 in the Greek context.

Study 3

Study 3 was a direct replication of Study 2 this time on a Greek population. The method was the same as in Study 2 with minor adaptations dictated by the different socio-political context.

Method

Participants and procedure. Study 3 was preregistered on OSF, and its sample size was estimated based on a prior power analysis to detect the effect size revealed in Study 2. (https://osf.io/rxu5e?view_only=4f5adcf1c10148a1bef8462150044dcc) suggesting that we would need 342 participants to detect the moderation effect from Study 2 (the most complex of the analyses that we ran, for which we could conduct a proper power analysis). Ethical approval was secured by X University. Participants were recruited online via the Prolific Academic

platform and were compensated £1.5 for their time in completing the survey. Recruitment took place from 7th to 8th May 2020.

Three hundred forty two Greek participants were recruited through Prolific Academic. To minimize random answers, we included two attention check questions where participants were explicitly instructed to respond on a specific point of the scale. All participants passed the attention checks. Our sample consisted of 37.2 women and 62.8% men. Participant age ranged from 18 to 61 (M = 27.25, SD = 7.71).

Design. The exact same between-groups design and procedure as in Study 2 were used: An experimental group (salience of group historical victimhood) vs. a control group (salience of group history). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions and were asked to complete an anagram task as in Study 2. Participants were informed that the words were chosen from Greek history textbooks and asked to solve the anagrams. In the experimental group anagrams were 10 Greek victimhood-related words (e.g. *German Occupation*) while in the control group they were victimhood-unrelated words describing historical events or figures (e.g. *Rigas Feraios*). Participants were asked to complete the task as fast as they could.

Stimuli. Based on a pretest (N = 50) –where Greek participants were asked to indicate the extent to which each of 30 history key-words related to Greek victimization (on a 7-point scale)– we selected 10 key-words that were judged to be victimhood-related (M = 4.59, SD = .72) and 10 that were judged to be unrelated to victimhood (M = 1.56, SD = 1.26). The 10 victimhood-related and unrelated key words differed significantly from each other in their victimization scores ($t(39) = 14.09$, $p < .001$).

Measures.

A similar manipulation-check as in Study 2 was included. Participants were presented with the first few letters of six words, 3 of which corresponded to anagrams presented to the experimental and 3 of which corresponded to anagrams from the control condition. Two

independent raters decided whether each of the manipulation check words was victimhood-related (1) or not (0), and their coding's proved reliable, *ICC* = .96 with 95% CI [0.95; 0.97], $F(343, 343) = 53.96$, $p < .001$, and where therefore averaged per participant.

As before, the second part of the questionnaire was similar to that in Study 2 focusing on the endorsement of conspiracy theories and the relevant moderator and mediators. All measures were assessed using 7-points scale (1 = "I strongly disagree" to 7 = "I strongly agree") and composite scores were calculated by averaging the items composing each scale.

The same ***Group identification*** scale as in Study 1 was included (α = .95).

Conspiracy mentality (α = .85) was assessed with the same measure as in the previous two studies.

COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs Because this study was run during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, we took the opportunity and included a scale of COVID-19-related conspiracy beliefs as an alternative conspiracy belief measure. This scale consisted of 5 items like "COVID-19 is a bacteriological weapon used by the Chinese Government to create panic in the West." and "The current pandemic started accidentally when COVID was transmitted from animal to a man in a Chinese animal market." (reversed). The reliability of the scale was good (α = .87).

As a measure of group-related conspiracy beliefs we extended the 3-item ***Financial conspiracy belief*** scale from Study 1 by introducing two extra items, e.g. "The financial crisis of the last decade is a result of a plan to seize the Greek banking system, implemented by the big European banks". This was in an effort to improve the scale's reliability which, indeed, now was better (α = .72).

Lack of sociopolitical control (α = .78) was now measured with a 4-item scale by Kofta, Soral, and Bilewicz (2020), which recently proved to have a very good reliability. Example items are: "We are all insignificant within the machinery of politics." and "Although they decide about our fate, those in power do not care about our will".

As an ***Intergroup trust*** scale (α = .79) we complemented the 3-items from Study 2 with two items from the World Values Survey e.g. "Generally speaking, I trust people of other nationalities".

Results

Correlations between all measured variables are reported in Table 6. As per our pre-registration, we first computed outliers for each variable following Leys et al. (2013) median absolute deviation method with a constant of 3. Only in the COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs and the outgroup trust scales were outliers detected (five individuals in each scale). All analyses reported hereafter involving any of these variables were run without the outliers. As expected, the three conspiracy-related variables were positively inter-correlated and all three of them were positively correlated to ingroup identification. As also expected based on past literature, lack of perceived socio-political control was positively correlated to conspiracy beliefs and negatively correlated to outgroup trust. Outgroup trust on the other hand, negatively correlated with all the other variables.

[Insert Table 6 here]

The manipulation check showed that participants in the experimental condition generated significantly more victimhood-related words than the control group, indicating a greater salience of group victimhood in this group, U = 11,128.50, p < .001, in line with the experimental manipulation. As before, we first tested the effect of victimhood salience on conspiracy thinking, by comparing the means of the three conspiracy-related variables across conditions. No effect of victimization salience on conspiracy mentality, $F(1,342)=.33$, p = .56, η_p^2 <.001, financial conspiracy beliefs, $F(1,342)=.24$, p = .62, η_p^2 <.001 or COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs, $F(1,337)=.29$, p = .59, η_p^2 =.001 was detected. Given the finding that the effect of group victimhood was moderated by group identification in Studies 1 & 2, we proceeded with all the steps of the moderation analyses in Studies 1 and 2 for the 3 dependent variables. These analyses, summarized in Table 7, did not reveal a significant victimhood × group identification

interaction for any of the three conspiracy-related dependent variables, although the interactions were in the same direction as in Studies 1 and 2 (B = .06, SE = .05, 95%CI[-.04, .15]. p = .213 for conspiracy mentality; B = .02, SE = .04, 95%CI[-.07, .10]. p = .380 for financial conspiracy belief; B = .03, SE = .05, 95%CI[-.07, .13]. p = .543). Given these findings we did not further proceed to estimate simple slopes of victimhood in the different identification groups nor to run the mediated moderation model run in Study 2.

[Insert Table 7 here]

Discussion

In Study 3 we failed to detect the moderation of the effect of victimhood on conspiracy beliefs by the extent of Identification to the ingroup. This was surprising as this study was a very close replication of Study 2 and the expected effect had already been detected correlationally in the same socio-political context in Study 1. At the same time, the historical contexts in Studies 1 and 3 differed quite dramatically, granted the COVID-19 pandemic. One repercussion that this pandemic may have had on our measured variables is that while the Greek population has a long history of perceived and actual victimization (Lialiouti & Bithymitris, 2015), during the pandemic Greece was considered to be a world example of "success story" with very few victims and a national strategy of global approval (Hatzigeorgiou and Minakshi, 2020). This fact may have diluted feelings of victimhood among the Greek population making it harder to actually manipulate such feelings.

Although we based our sample size selection on a power analysis, another reason for the present unexpected findings might be lack of power. Since detection of an ordinal interaction effect demands sufficiently more power than main effects (Perrugini et al., 2018) it is always possible that our study only achieved power to detect the main effect of identification on conspiracy beliefs but not the Identification x Victimhood interaction. More generally, Study 3 may reflect sampling error, measurement error, or other artifacts, even if a true effect is actually

present in the population (Schimmack, 2012). To overcome such limitations, a useful strategy is to interpret effect size magnitude and consistency based on results of meta-analyses (Braver et al. 2014; Schmidt and Hunter 1977). In the next section we report the results of an integrative data meta-analysis. This method of estimating effect sizes is preferable to simply estimating the average meta-analytic effect of the individual three studies being statistically more powerful and, thus preferable when one has access to the original datasets (Cooper & Patall, 2009; Curran & Hussong, 2009).

Integrative analysis of the data from Studies 1-3

The effect we are interested in is the moderated effect of victimhood on conspiracy beliefs by ingroup identification. We were therefore interested in the size of the coefficient of interaction between victimhood and group identification when this is regressed on our various measures of conspiracy belief. Across the three datasets we z-transformed the Identification and all conspiracy-belief variables included in the three studies. This was to overcome scale variabilities across scales and studies, and to make all conspiracy-related variables comparable. In addition, we transformed the continuous victimhood variable in Study 1 into a binary “high” vs “low” victimhood variable (depending on whether participants scored above or below the scale mean), in line with the coding of the victimhood variable in Studies 2 and 3. We then aggregated all data in a multi-level dataset organized by subject, each with their repeated conspiracy belief measures and run a mixed-model analysis with subject as a random intercept and the following fixed factors: Victimhood, Identification and their interaction, Study (1 vs 2 vs 3) and the interaction of Study with the Victimhood x Identification interaction term, in order to account for different sizes of the interaction effects across studies.[7] This integrated meta-analysis revealed a significant interaction coefficient of Victimhood-by-Group Identification, alongside smaller but

significant effects of Identification, Study and the Interaction between Study and the Victimhood-by-Group Identification interaction term as exhibited in Table 8.[8]

[Insert Table 8 here]

The meta-analytic simple slope of victimhood among high identifying individual was positive *B* = .14, 95%CI[.07, .21] whereas the meta-analytic simple slope of victimhood among low identifying individuals was negative *B* = -12, 95%CI [-.19, -05]. Thus, taken together, our data across the three studies reveal that perceived ingroup victimhood predicts various measures of conspiracy beliefs. More specifically, our aggregated data support the idea that victimhood increases conspiracy belief for people who identify closely with their national ingroup, whereas victimhood decreases conspiracy beliefs among people who don't tend to identify with their ingroup. The three-way interaction attests to the fact that the two-way interaction of focal interest was variable across studies and simple slopes analyses suggest that the three-way interaction was only significant among low (*B*= -.07, 95%CI[-.12, -.02]) but not high identifiers (*B*= -.02, 95%CI[-.08, .04]). Thus, the effects of victimhood on conspiracy beliefs were more variable across the low than the high identifiers, although this effect should be taken with caution given the relatively small number of studies.

Given that the integrated meta-analysis did provide support for a significant moderation of the relationship between victimhood and conspiracy beliefs by ingroup identification, we attempted to test the moderated mediation effect from Study 2 on the aggregated data from Studies 2 and 3, which both included measures of outgroup trust and socio-political control. In line with the evidence from Study 2, we found indirect effects of the two-way interaction through outgroup trust on the various conspiracy belief indexes (*IE* = -.10, *SE* = .02, 95% CI [-.15; -.07]. The total effects of the two-way interaction on conspiracy belief indexes (*B* = 0.12, *SE* = 0.02, *p*

< .001, 95% CI [0.08, 0.16] decreased when outgroup trust was entered into the regression model (B = 0.6, SE = 0.02, p = 0.03, 95% CI [0.02, 0.10]. As in Study 2, no such effect was observed for the sociopolitical control as a mediator.

General Discussion

The series of three studies present a comprehensive examination of the link between perceptions of group victimhood and conspiracy thinking. In one correlational study we found that conspiracy beliefs are more widespread among people who perceive their ingroup to have been collectively victimized. This effect was corroborated with several measures of conspiratorial thinking, including generic conspiracy mentality, context-specific conspiracy theories, perceived legitimacy of conspiracy theories and political paranoia. Moreover, the effect proved to be consistent across two different socio-political contexts: Greece and Poland. Studies 1-2 independently showed that the sense of collective victimhood was related to conspiracy beliefs particularly among people who identify highly with their ingroup. Study 2 specifically provided the first experimental evidence that salience of group victimhood may actually increase endorsement of conspiracy beliefs among high identifiers, while decreasing endorsement of conspiracy beliefs among low identifiers. While Study 3 did not directly replicate the effect of Study 2, our aggregated data strongly support the idea that perceived group victimhood is related to conspiracy beliefs and that this relationship is indeed moderated by the extent of ingroup identification. Our data also provide support for the idea that lack of outgroup trust mediates this relationship, unlike perceived control.

From the perspective of social identity theory (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), group victimization could be then viewed as an example of threat to one's social identity. Historical victimization threatens one's group image as powerful and competent, and people's reaction to such threats may depend on the strength of group commitment. Social identity

theory predicts that individuals who highly identify with a group react to such threats with a readiness for collective action as well as an increased tendency to derogate outgroups.

In this research, we suggest that these reactions might take the form of conspiracy theory endorsement – an attempt to protect the ingroup by confronting its alleged enemies. Indeed, the integrated meta-analysis of Studies 2 and 3 revealed the relational nature of the observed link, showing that the effects of perceived victimhood on conspiracy thinking are mediated by trust towards other groups. This suggests that what high identifiers learn from the group trauma is distrust towards others, which in turn leads to a greater endorsement of conspiracy theories.

Our findings contribute to the literature on the effects of group victimhood showing how collective experience may translate into individual cognitions such as conspiracy mentality. Such conspiratorial cognitions may result in abstention from political action, or health-promoting behaviors (Jolley & Douglas, 2014a; 2014b). Furthermore, conspiratorial thinking, was recently shown to actually create an ingroup-outgroup gap (Bilewicz et al., 2019). Thus, we propose that perceived victimization may create a spiral of negative outcomes, some of which may directly result from feelings of victimhood, while some others may be mediated by conspiracy beliefs and in turn moderated by the extent to which one identifies with the group that has been the target of victimization.

Our results might also suggest a potential adaptive function of conspiracy thinking, which may actually help protect the ingroup in a dangerous social environment, especially if subjective victimhood indeed results from an actual experience of victimization by outgroup members. Previous research has demonstrated that conspiracy believers display greater political engagement and civic control of political decisions, as well as a greater inclination to actively oppose authorities blamed for evil intentions (Douglas, Sutton, Jolley, & Wood, 2015; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014). Interestingly, our research shows that such a readiness to confront alleged group

enemies occurs in settings where being over-cautious seems justified by previous experience. This would make conspiracy beliefs a true "lesson learned from the past."

Limitations and Perspectives

The three studies presented here present a robust relationship between group victimhood and conspiracy thinking among people highly identified with their groups. While the present studies advance our understanding of the link between victimization and conspiracy thinking, these findings need further validation in the future. One point that requires further clarification is the extent to which perceived group victimhood is causally linked to conspiracy beliefs. While Study 2 provides straightforward support for causality, Study 3 does not. As argued, this may be due to the specific context of data collection for Study 3. On the other hand, it is possible that the manipulation of ingroup victimhood perceptions is possible in some social contexts (Poland), but not in others (Greece). Future studies might want to directly assess the external validity of experimental manipulations tapping into cultural and historical constructs. Regardless of causality considerations, our results are relatively unambiguous about the existence of a relationship between victimhood and conspiracy beliefs and the role that ingroup identification and outgroup trust play in this relationship.

Our studies did not provide any evidence for the fact that perceptions of control may mediate the link between victimhood and conspiracy beliefs. This may seem counterintuitive, given that perceived control is independently linked to both perceptions of victimhood and conspiracy thinking. Study 1, which employed a coarse one-item measure of perceived collective control, did not even document a relationship between perceived control and conspiracy thinking. The fact that this expected relationship was, in fact, found in Studies 2 and 3 with measures of individual socio-political control suggests that the relationship between control and conspiracy thinking may be of personal existential rather than social and collective nature (Douglas, Sutton &

Cichoska, 2017). Further research could capitalize on the differences between individual and national levels of control (Fritsche et al., 2013), and would benefit from a validation of the relevant scales.

Finally, in future extensions of this research it would be worthwhile to include several better-developed measures of inclusive and exclusive victim consciousness (Vollhardt, 2012; Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015), as well as competitive victimhood (Noor, et al., 2012). We expect that a better measurement of these two concepts would show a unique role of inclusive victimhood beliefs as decreasing the propensity to believe in outgroup conspiracies and evil intentions (Cohrs, McNeill, & Vollhardt, 2015; Vollhardt, Bilewicz, & Olechowski, 2015).

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[1] The study was initially designed as an experiment with the goal of manipulating the salience of group victimhood with different historical narratives presented to participants. Specifically, participants in the "victimization" group read a short excerpt highlighting examples of historical victimhood (e.g. Great fire of Smyrna). Participants in the "glorification" group read a text highlighting examples of historical glorification (e.g. Greek-Italian war). Due to the failure of this manipulation (the manipulation check showed no differences between the victimhood salience condition and the other experimental $p > 0.27$ or control –no historical text presented– conditions, $p = 1.00$), only correlations were analyzed.

[2] Three of the scale's original items were modified to fit the Greek reality.

[3] Results of t-tests per study testing whether the average mean scores of each scale differ from the scales' mean point can be found in OSF (https://osf.io/r6ahy/?view_only=64f60b6fbdcf44d68a455f259c0357b9).

[4] We repeated all the analyses for each of the two national identification subscales separately and found similar results: Glorification and attachment were significant moderators of the relationship between victimhood and both conspiracy mentality and the belief in financial conspiracy. Glorification (but not attachment) moderated the effect of victimization on perceived conspiracy legitimacy.

[5] We also measured historical determinism – a belief that events are predetermined and constrained by powerful forces which might be one of the correlates of conspiracy thinking (scale created by authors) but due to the poor reliability of the scale ($\alpha = .48$) we did not present its results in the paper. Historical determinism was positively correlated with conspiracy mentality ($r = .30$, $p < .001$) and negatively to victimhood ($r = -.34$, $p < .001$). We also measured Perceived Collective Continuity (PCC, Sani et al., 2007) of the in-group since we expected a 3-way interaction of PCC, identification and victimhood. As the expected three-way interaction of PCC, identification and victimhood was not significant, we did not include PCC into our analyses. The same is true for Study 2.

[6] We repeated all of the analyses for each national identification subscale separately and found similar results: Glorification and attachment were significant moderators of conspiracy mentality, political paranoia and belief in the Smolensk conspiracy. However, for the Smolensk conspiracy only the negative slope for low identifiers proved significant.

[7] While we were not theoretically and directly interested in the differential effects of Study, which means that Study would be included as a random factor, a similar model with Intercepts and Slopes of study as random effects was non-singular. We, therefore, decided to include Study as a fixed factor, which is also warranted by the small number of studies.

[8] Being correlational in nature, Study 1 differed significantly from Studies 2 and 3. Still, we decided to meta-analyse data from all three studies, as the more data, the more power the meta-analysis would have. A similar meta-analysis conducted on the two experimental studies only, largely confirmed the main results of the 3-study meta-analysis. Specifically, in a mixed-model analysis with subject as a random intercept and Victimhood, Identification, their interaction, Study (2 vs 3) and the interaction of Study with the Victimhood x Identification interaction term revealed a significant interaction of Victimhood-by-Group Identification (B = .34, SE =.15, 95%CI [.04, .64], p = .025), alongside a main effect of Identification (B = .21, SE =03, 95%CI [.15, .26], p < .001). Victimhood (B = -.03, SE =03, 95%CI [-.09, .03], p = .329), Study (B = .04, SE =06, 95%CI [-.07, .16], p = .469) and the Interaction between Study and the Victimhood-by-Group Identification interaction term (B = -.00, SE =06, 95%CI [-.21, .02], p = .112) were not significant. Simple slope analyses again revealed that Victimhood decreased conspiratorial thinking among low identifiers (B = -.13, SE =04, 95%CI [-.21, -.04], p = .003). The simple slope coefficient of Victimhood for high identifiers was positive but fell short of statistical significance levels (B = .08, SE =04, 95%CI [-.01, .16], p = .074).

Table 1
Focal Hypotheses per study

Studies	Hypotheses
1. (correlational)	1. Perceived victimhood related to conspiracy beliefs 2. Relationship between victimhood and conspiracy beliefs moderated by ingroup identification.
2. (experimental)	1. Exposure to victimhood-salience material increases conspiracy beliefs. 2. Group identification moderates the effects of victimhood salience on conspiracy beliefs. 3. Outgroup trust and perceived control mediates the effects of perceived group victimhood and group identification
3. (experimental)	1. Exposure to victimhood-salience material increases conspiracy beliefs. 2. Group identification moderates the effects of victimhood salience on conspiracy beliefs. 3. Outgroup trust and perceived control mediates the effects of perceived group victimhood and group identification

Table 2

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics in Study 1

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Identification (1-7)	5.08 (.88)					
2. Conspiracy Mentality (1-11)	-.05	7.97 (1.70)				
3. Legitimacy of CT (1-7)	.34**	.32**	4.36 (1.26)			
4. Financial Conspiracy (1-7)	.33**	.33**	.33**	4.77 (1.11)		
5. Victimhood (1-7)	.54**	.07	.34**	.46**	4.61 (1.21)	
6. Sense of control (1-7)	.19*	-.07	.-.01	.08	.31**	4.31 (1.85)

Note. Study 2 (N = 155): Values are Pearson correlation coefficients. Means and standard deviations (parenthesized) are reported in the diagonal. *: $p < .05$ **: $p < .001$. The parentheses next to the scales' names represent the scale's range. Legitimacy of CT = Legitimacy of Conspiracy Theories

Table 3
Regression Coefficients in Study 1

	Conspiracy Mentality		Belief in Financial Conspiracy		Legitimacy of Conspiracy Theories	
Predictor variables	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Step 1						
Id	-.25	1.94	. 13	.11	.32*	.13
Victimhood	.21	1.39	.38***	.08	.23*	.09
Model *F*	*F* (2,144) = 1.28		*F* (2,144) = 22.02***		*F* (2,144) = 13.13***	
R^2	.02		.23		.15	
Step 2						
Id x Victimhood	.43***	1.16	.20**	.07	.19*	.08
Model *F*	*F* (3,143) = 5.52**		*F* (3,143) = 18.17***		*F* (3,143) = 10.85***	
R^2	.10		.28		. 19	
ΔR^2	.07***		.04**		.03*	

Note. Study 2 (*N* = 155): Values are unstandardized regression coefficients. *: $p < .05$, **: $p < .01$; ***: $p < .001$. Id = Identification

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations in Study 2

	1	2	3	4	5	
1. Identification (1-7)	4.23 (1.36)					
2. Conspiracy Mentality (1-11)	.13*	6.64 (2.07)				
3. Political Paranoia (1-7)	.12*	.70***	4.42 (1.47)			
4. Smolensk Conspiracy (1-7)	.09^{+}	.38***	.46***	2.81 (.96)		
5. Sociopolitical control (1-7)	.19***	-.31***	-.40***	-.18**	3.60 (.81)	
6. Outgroup trust (1-7)	-.10^{+}	-.36***	-.51****	-.44***	.17**	4.

Note. Study 2 (N = 353): Means and standard deviations (parenthesized) reported in the diagonal. Other values present Pearson correlation coefficients. *: $p < .05$ **: $p < .01$ ***: $p < .001$

Table 5

Regression Coefficients in Study 2

	Conspiracy Mentality		Political Paranoia		Belief in Smolensk Conspiracy	
Predictor variables	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Step 1						
Id	.20*	.08	.12*	.06	.07^{+}	.04
Victimhood	-.05	.22	.12	.16	-.08	.10
Model *F*	*F* (2,350) = 3.11*		*F* (2,348) = 2.75^{+}		*F* (2,350) = 1.86	
R^2	.02		.02		.01	
Step 2						
Id x Victimhood	.56**	.16	.30**	.12	.21**	.08
Model *F*	*F* (3,349) = 6.19***		*F* (3,347) = 4.12**		*F* (3,349) = 3.94**	
R^2	.05		.03		.03	
ΔR^2	.03**		.02*		.02**	

Note. Study 2 (*N* = 353): Values are unstandardized regression coefficients. *: $p < .05$, **: $p < .01$. Id = Identification

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations in Study 3

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Identification (1-7)	4.07 (1.26)					
2. Conspiracy Mentality (1-11)	.25***	4.86 (1.18)				
3. COVID-19-CB (1-7)	.39***	.46***	2.57 (1.30)			
4. Financial CB (1-7)	.34***	.59***	.60***	3.29 (1.04)		
5. Sociopolitical control (1-7)	.01^{+}	.45***	.18**	.34***	4.99 (1.14)	
6. Outgroup trust (1-7)	-.33***	-.43***	-.47***	-.53***	-.23***	4.90 (.98)

Note. Study 3 (N = 344): Means and standard deviations (parenthesized) reported in the diagonal. Other values present Pearson correlation coefficients. *: $p < .05$ **: $p < .01$ ***: $p < .001$

Table 7

Regression Coefficients in Study 3

	Conspiracy Mentality		Financial Conspiracy Belief		COVID-19 Conspiracy	
Predictor variables	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Step 1						
Id	.24**	.05	.28**	.04	.40**	.05
Victimhood	-.04	.06	-.03	.05	-.04	.06
Model *F*	*F* (2,341) = 11.86**		*F* (2,341) = 22.27**		*F* (2,336) = 29.79**	
R^2	.06		.12		.15	
Step 2						
Id x Victimhood	.06	.05	.02	.04	.03	.05
Model *F*	*F* (3,340) = 8.39***		*F* (3,340) = 14.45**		*F* (3,335) = 3.94**	
R^2	.07		.12		.15	
ΔR^2	.004		.00		.001	

Note. Study 2 (*N* = 353): Values are unstandardized regression coefficients. *: $p < .05$, **: $p < .01$. Id = Identification

Table 8

Integrated Analysis of conspiracy measures used across all three studies

Predictor variables	*B*	*SE*	95% CI
Id	.21**	.03	[.16, 26]
Victimhood	-.004	.03	[-.06, .05]
Study	.11*	.03	[.04, .19]
Id x Victimhood	.48**	.13	[.22, .75]
Id x Victimhood x Study	-.11**	.04	[-.19, -.03]

Note. Integrated analysis ($N = 2559$): Values are unstandardized regression coefficients. *: $p < .05$, **: $p < .01$. Id = Identification.

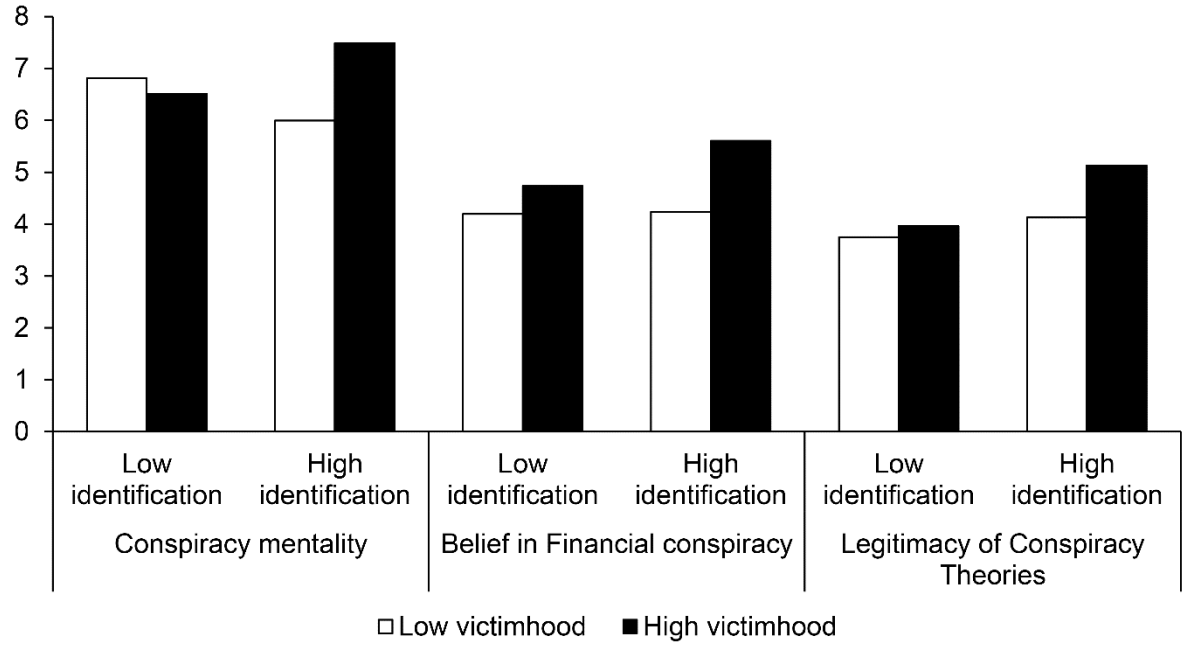

Figure 1. Scores on the three conspiracy-related dependent variables in Study 2, as a function of perceived victimhood and group identification.

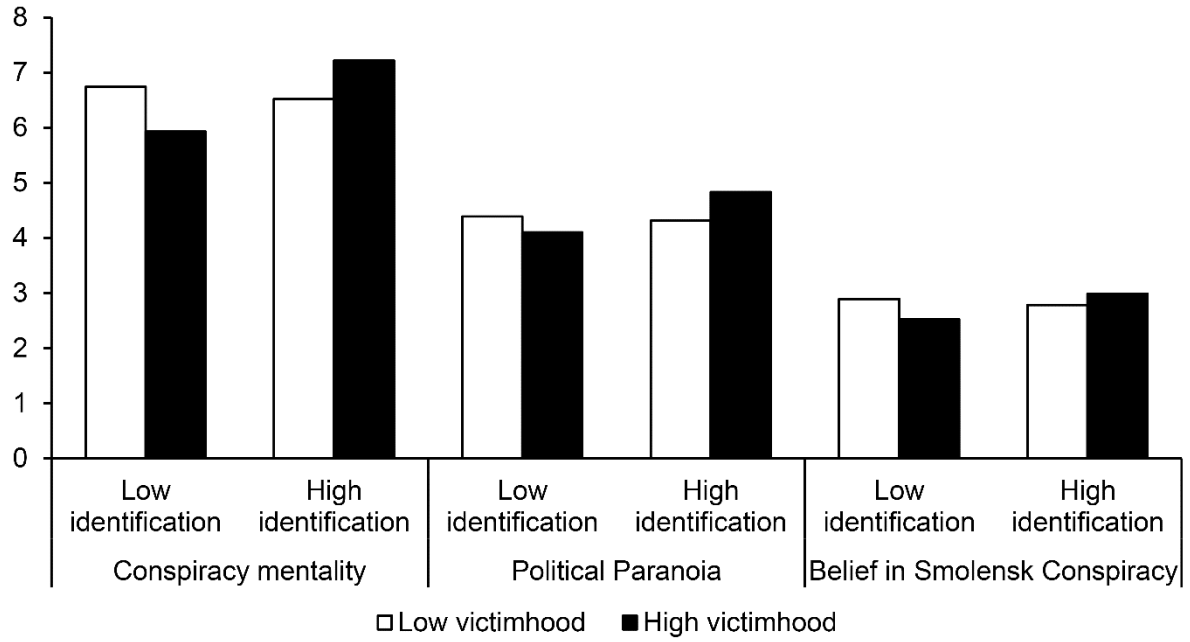

Figure 2. Scores on the three conspiracy-related dependent variables in Study 3, as a function of victimhood group and group identification.