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PERCEIVED POWER AND CONSPIRACY THEORY BELIEF

by

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THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The University of Houston-Clear Lake
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements
For the Degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in Psychology

THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE

DECEMBER, 2021

PERCEIVED POWER AND CONSPIRACY THEORY BELIEF

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Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to my thesis committee, my friends, and my family who have provided nothing but encouragement and support throughout this endeavor. Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis chair, Dr. Amanda Johnston, for providing me with the opportunity to conduct this research. Her mentorship, insight, and unwavering support have inspired me more than I could ever express. To put it simply, there is no one else I would rather spend hours on a zoom call discussing conspiracy theories with.

Aside from my thesis chair, I am grateful to Dr. Lauren Brewer who has followed my academic journey with great enthusiasm and provided me with mentorship for years. Without her profound belief in me during my undergraduate years, I would not have found my love for research. I would also like to thank Dr. Beth Hentges for dedicating her time to reviewing my work. Her words of encouragement and ongoing support provided a great deal of motivation during this time.

Lastly, this research would not have been possible without my friends and family. I appreciate them giving me the time and space I needed for this research. Moreover, I am incredibly grateful for them putting up with me during our discussions about Jeffrey Epstein, or 9/11 truthers, or any other possible conspiracy theory; their sacrifices, of time and sanity, will never be forgotten.

ABSTRACT

PERCEIVED POWER AND CONSPIRACY THEORY BELIEF

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As conspiracy theories become increasingly intertwined with politics, it is important to understand the formation of conspiracy theory belief. Currently in the field of psychology, there is no consensus regarding the factors that lead to conspiracy theory endorsement. As this field of study is relatively new, research has yet to explore the role of perceived power, the power that one *feels* they have regardless of real-world power. I argue that decreased perceived power is related to an increased endorsement of conspiracy theories. A diverse sample of 347 participants were recruited via MTurk to complete a series of questionnaires. Perceived power was measured through a questionnaire regarding participants' personal perceived privilege and oppression based on six aspects of identity: gender, religion, race, sexual orientation, economic status, and political affiliation. Participants were also asked to rate their belief in political conspiracy theories. When asked directly to rate their privilege and oppression, decreased privilege ratings or increased oppression ratings led to higher conspiracy theory belief in: cisgender men asked about gender privilege or oppression, White participants asked about race privilege or oppression, heterosexuals asked about sexual orientation privilege or

oppression, and Christians asked about religious privilege or oppression. Additionally, Republicans who reported higher political affiliation oppression also reported higher belief in conspiracies. However, cisgender women who reported higher gender privilege reported higher belief in conspiracies. The same is true for Atheists with higher perceived religious privilege and Black participants with higher perceived race privilege.

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CHAPTER I:

PERCEIVED POWER AND CONSPIRACY THEORY BELIEF

It is impossible to ignore the rise of conspiracy theory belief in recent months. Conspiracy theorists have overtaken social media sites leading to Youtube, Twitter, and Facebook shutting down the accounts of QAnon “influencers” (Ortutay, 2020). The acceptance of conspiracy theories may seem innocuous as most people wave them off as ludicrous or not based in reality. However, like many other conspiracy theories, QAnon conspiracies rely largely on anti-Semitism as an underlying message (ADL, 2018). This sort of wide-spread conspiracy endorsement may lead to acceptance of fascist ideology or even violence as we saw during the storming of the capitol on January 6th (Stanley, 2020).

Conspiracy theory belief refers to the acceptance or endorsement of a belief that an event or circumstance is the result of a powerful group working covertly. Conspiracy theory belief is a relatively new field of study for social psychologists. Researchers have sought to understand what leads certain individuals to accept conspiracy beliefs. Poon, Chen, and Wong (2020) found that individuals who were ostracized were more likely to endorse conspiracies. Georgiou, Delfabbro, and Balzan (2019) found that people with lower education levels were more susceptible to conspiracy theory belief. However, Enders and Smallpage (2019) found that factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, race, or minority status were not adequate predictors of conspiracy theory belief. Despite these various findings, there is no universally accepted consensus about the factors that lead to conspiracy acceptance.

Sense of power may offer an explanation for conspiracy theory acceptance. Power is difficult to define despite its clear effect on social hierarchies. The meaning of power is obscured by the many forms it takes, occurring covertly, overtly, interpersonally, and

systemically (Hamilton & Sharma, 1996). Fiske (1993) defines power as asymmetrical control over another individual's outcomes. In line with Fiske's (1993) definition, Kraus, Chen, and Keltner (2011) found that increased power allowed individuals to feel increased control over others' outcomes. Hamilton and Sharma (1996) state that power is related to the concepts of agency and influence; furthermore, oppression gives rise to power and the concepts cannot exist separately.

Power is pervasive, influencing human behavior and wellbeing. The approach/inhibition theory of power posits that individuals with high power tend to have a positive affect while those with low power have a negative affect (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Our attitudes and beliefs are also influenced by power. Those in high power groups, such as those based on race, class, or gender, are more likely to engage in stereotype belief (Keltner et al., 2003). Given the often derogatory and stereotypic nature of conspiracy theories, an individual's perceived power may be a driving factor for conspiracy theory belief.

Despite the power structures in the United States remaining largely unchanged, White threat (e.g., anxiety over loss of power) is well documented. Craig and Richeson (2014) found that making White participants aware of demographic shifts away from a White majority led to more conservative views. Cohen, Fowler, Medenic, and Rogowski (2017) found that 48% of White Millennials surveyed agreed that White people were as discriminated against as Black people or any other minority. Whether the actual loss of power faced by the White population is real or imagined, the perceived power loss is noteworthy (Stanley, 2020).

System justification theory posits that individuals are motivated to defend, bolster, or rationalize the status quo in order to meet relational, epistemic, and existential needs (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Van der Toorn and colleagues (2014)

found that a sense of powerlessness motivated system justification and legitimization of hierarchy. Similarly, Jolley, Douglas, and Sutton (2018) found that conspiracy theory belief performed a system justification function; participants exposed to conspiracy theories were more likely to attribute social problems to a small group of actors rather than to systemic issues. Furthermore, Jost and colleagues (2003) argue that politically conservative ideology emphasizes a resistance to change and rationalization of inequality; this ideology is motivated by the need to manage fear of loss, ambiguity, and uncertainty.

Conspiracy theories give individuals something tangible to blame for issues rather than abstract concepts like systemic inequality (Jolley et al., 2018). I propose that as individuals feel threatened by the recognition or resolution of systemic inequality in society, they seek to justify and rationalize their perceived loss of power rather than legitimizing ongoing systemic issues. In line with previous literature, those who feel a loss of power may blame factors like a cabal, paid protestors, or a powerful elite for the shifting politics that lead to this perceived mistreatment. This endorsement of conspiracy theory belief would allow those with lower perceived power to justify their conditions within the existing system without placing blame on the system itself.

As power is a complex abstract system of personal, environmental, and systemic factors, it is nearly impossible to measure in its entirety. For the purpose of this study, perceived power will be operationalized through a participant's reported privilege. While power and privilege are separate social concepts, it is undeniable that these concepts are heavily intertwined. Liu (2017) found that White wealthy men used privilege to access and sustain power whereas White working-class men used privilege to build social relationships and legitimate racial inequality.

According to Black and Stone (2005) privilege is defined by five components. First, it is a special benefit not available to everyone. Second, it is inherently granted and

not earned through merit. Third, it is related to being in a preferred societal status or role. Fourth, privilege is exercised in a way that benefits the privileged while oppressing and excluding others. Finally, individuals with privilege are often unaware of the privilege they hold. Based on this definition of privilege, it is clear that individuals with power (or privilege) are often unaware of their own privilege and may feel oppressed and powerless even when this oppression is not based in reality; therefore, utilizing this operationalization allows for a more complete understanding of participants' perceived power rather than their actual real-world power.

In this study my aim is to explore the relationship between perceived power, operationalized as perceived privilege, and conspiracy theory belief. Based on the aforementioned background literature, I hypothesize that there will be a strong negative relationship between these constructs. This means as perceived power is decreased, conspiracy theory belief will be increased.

CHAPTER II:

METHOD

Participants

I recruited 384 participants via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) but removed 37 due to low quality responses, leaving a final sample of 347 participants. Participants were compensated \$2 for 45 minutes of their time. The participants were between the ages of 19 and 80 with an average age of 45.21 ($SD=14.52$). About half of the participants were assigned female at birth (54%) and a majority were cisgender men (45%) or cisgender women (52%). The sample was largely White (76%), with the remaining participants self-identifying as Black (8%), Asian (6%), more than one racial or ethnic identity (7.2%), Latino/Hispanic (2%), or Other (<1%). Additionally, the sample was mostly Christian (53%), followed by Agnostics (14%), Atheists (12%), non-religious (10%), and Others (11%). Political party affiliation was relatively balanced between Republicans (30%), Democrats (37%), and Independents (27%) with 5% identifying with other parties. For additional demographic information, see table 1. Exclusionary criteria included anyone under the age of 18 and anyone who had lived in the United States for less than five years.

Table 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Sample Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Sex assigned at birth		
Male	161	46.4
Female	186	53.6
Gender		
Cisgender man	156	45
Cisgender woman	180	51.9
Transgender man	2	0.6
Non-binary	2	0.6
Genderqueer/gender nonconforming	1	0.3
Other	2	0.6
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	281	81
Mostly heterosexual	18	5.2
Bisexual	25	7.2
Mostly homosexual	1	0.3
Homosexual	5	1.4
Asexual	7	2
Pansexual	5	1.4
Other	2	0.6
Race or ethnicity		
White, Caucasian, or European	265	76.4
Black, African American, or African	26	7.5
Asian, Pacific Islander, or Asian-American	20	5.8
Latino/Latina, Latin American, Chicano/Chicana, or Hispanic	7	2
Arab, Arab-American, or Middle Eastern	1	0.3
Native American or American Indian	1	0.3
South Asian	1	0.3
More than one race or ethnicity	25	7.2
Political party		
Democratic	124	35.7
Republican	105	30.3
Independent	92	26.5
Libertarian	14	4
Green party	3	0.9
Political orientation- overall		
Strongly conservative	29	8.4
Moderately conservative	51	14.7
Slightly conservative	48	13.8
Moderate	91	26.2
Slightly liberal	36	10.4
Moderately liberal	51	14.7
Strongly liberal	40	11.5

Sample Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Political orientation- social issues		
Strongly conservative	30	8.6
Moderately conservative	43	12.4
Slightly conservative	33	9.5
Moderate	78	22.5
Slightly liberal	49	14.1
Moderately liberal	54	15.6
Strongly liberal	58	16.7
Do not know	4	1.2
Political orientation- economic issues		
Strongly conservative	47	13.5
Moderately conservative	56	16.1
Slightly conservative	51	14.7
Moderate	73	21
Slightly liberal	26	7.5
Moderately liberal	47	13.5
Strongly liberal	43	12.4
Do not know	4	1.2
Religious affiliation		
Christian	185	53.3
Agnostic	48	13.8
Atheist	41	11.8
Non-religious/secular	34	9.8
Buddhist	9	2.6
Jewish	5	1.4
Hindu	1	.3
Muslim/Islam	6	1.7
Other	18	5.2
Denomination of Christianity		
Catholic	69	19.9
Non-denominational	35	10.1
Baptist	28	8.1
Methodist	11	3.2
Church of Christ	8	2.3
Lutheran	7	2.0
Presbyterian	6	1.7
Episcopal	4	1.2
Other	17	4.9
Highest level of education		
Less than high school	1	0.3
High school or equivalent	45	13
Some college (did not or have not graduated)	57	16.4
Associate's degree (2 year)	33	9.5
Bachelor's degree (4 year)	136	39.2
Trade/vocational degree	20	5.8
Master's degree	45	13
Professional degree (e.g., J.D., D.D.S., M.D.)	6	1.7
Doctorate (e.g., Ph.D)	3	0.9

Sample Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Childhood annual household income (in U.S.D.)		
Less than \$15,000	33	9.5
\$15,000 - \$25,000	47	13.5
\$25,001 - \$35,000	61	17.6
\$35,001 - \$50,000	65	18.7
\$50,001 - \$75,000	59	17
\$75,001 - \$100,000	42	12.1
\$100,001 - \$150,000	25	7.2
Greater than \$150,000	15	4.3
Current annual household income (in U.S.D.)		
Less than \$15,000	21	6.1
\$15,000 - \$25,000	34	9.8
\$25,001 - \$35,000	54	15.6
\$35,001 - \$50,000	53	15.3
\$50,001 - \$75,000	74	21.3
\$75,001 - \$100,000	50	14.4
\$100,001 - \$150,000	35	10.1
Greater than \$150,000	25	7.2
Current geographical setting		
Suburban	160	46.2
Urban	88	25.4
Rural	57	16.5
Small town	41	11.8

Note. N=347

Design

This study was a correlational design intended to establish a relationship between perceived power and conspiracy theory belief. Because this is a correlational study, either of these variables can be considered the predictor or predicted variables. There were no separate conditions in this study; every participant viewed the exact same content and completed the same measures.

Materials

Conspiracy theory belief

Conspiracy theory belief was measured using a self-constructed Conspiracy Belief Scale (Appendix A) and the Conspiracy Mentality Scale (Appendix B) developed by Bruder, Haffke, Neave, Nouripanah and Imhoff (2013). The Conspiracy Belief

Scale consisted of common conspiracy theories regarding politics and economics. Participants rated the extent to which they believed the conspiracy theory was true, the extent to which they believed it was possible, and the extent to which they were familiar with the conspiracy theory. The extent to which the participant believed the conspiracy was true or possible was rated on a Likert-type scale from “0%” to “100%” with “0%” being “certainly not” and “100%” being “certainly.” The participants rated their familiarity with the conspiracy theory on a Likert-type scale from “0%” to “100%” with “0%” being “not familiar at all” and “100%” being “extremely familiar.” The Conspiracy Mentality Scale included items such as “I think that politicians usually do not tell us the true motives for their decisions” and “I think that government agencies closely monitor all citizens.” This scale utilized a Likert-type scale from “0%” to “100%” with “0%” being “certainly not” and “100%” being “certainly.”

Privilege

Perceived privilege was measured using a self-constructed Perceived Privilege Questionnaire (Appendix C). This questionnaire asked participants to assess the extent to which domains of their identity have helped or hurt them in their lives. The indirect portion of the questionnaire included items like “To what extent do you feel your race has impacted you in professional relationships” and “To what extent do you feel your sexual orientation has impacted you in friendships.” This questionnaire utilized a seven-point Likert-type scale with one being “hurt greatly” and seven being “helped greatly.” Additionally, participants were asked directly “To what extent do you feel you have privilege due to your gender” and “To what extent do you feel you have privilege due to your religion” on a six-point Likert-type scale with one being “not at all” and six being “a great deal.”

The Privilege Oppression Inventory (Appendix D) developed by Hays, Chang, and Decker (2007) was used as an additional measure of perceptions of privilege. This scale looked at factors such as White privilege awareness, sexism awareness, heterosexism awareness, and Christian privilege awareness. It included items such as “Christianity is valued more in this society than other religions” and “I believe that being White is an advantage in society.” Participants rated these statements on a seven-point Likert-type scale with one being “strongly disagree” and seven being “strongly agree.”

Trust in government

Citizens’ trust in the government was measured using the Trust in Government Scale (Appendix E) developed using items from Seyd (2016). This scale included items such as “In general, politicians tell the truth” and “Governments waste a lot of public money.” Items were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale with one being “strongly disagree” and seven being “strongly agree.”

Sense of control

Sense of control was measured utilizing the MIDI Sense of Control Scale (Appendix F) developed by Lachman and Weaver (1998). This scale consisted of items such as “I can do just about anything I really set my mind to do” and “Other people determine most of what I can and cannot do.” Items were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale with one being “strongly disagree” and seven being “strongly agree.”

Sense of power

Sense of power was measured utilizing the Sense of Power Scale (Appendix G) developed by Anderson, John, and Keltner (2012). This scale included items such as “I think I have a great deal of power” and “My ideas and opinions are often ignored.” This scale utilized a seven-point Likert-type scale with one being “strongly disagree” and seven being “strongly agree.”

Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance was measured using an adapted version of the Uncertainty Avoidance Measure (Appendix H) developed by Shirokova, Osiyevskyy, and Bogatyreva (2016). This measure included items such as “In my opinion, orderliness and consistency should be stressed, even at the expense of experimentation and innovation” and “I prefer to lead a highly structured life with few unexpected events.” This measure utilized a seven-point Likert-type scale with one being “strongly disagree” and seven being “strongly agree.”

Need for closure

Need for cognitive closure was measured using the short version of the revised Need for Closure Scale (Appendix I). This scale was originally developed by Kruglanski, Webster, and Klem (1993) and was revised by Roets and Van Hiel (2011). The Need for Closure Scale included items such as “When I have made a decision, I feel relieved” and “I don't like situations that are uncertain.” The scale used a seven-point Likert-type scale with one being “strongly disagree” and seven being “strongly agree.”

Political ideology

Political ideology was measured using the Resistance to Change-Beliefs Scale (Appendix J) developed by White and colleagues (2020). This scale measured political conservatism using items such as “Following traditions tends to create a closed-minded society” and “Established traditions are the best way to run society.” This scale used a seven-point Likert-type scale with one being “strongly disagree” and seven being “strongly agree.”

Views on media and politics

Participants' views regarding politics and media were measured using measures of Political Attitudes and Reliance on and Credibility of Online Political

Sources (Appendix K) developed by Johnson and Kaye (2013). These measures ask about selective exposure, selective avoidance, perceived credibility of sources, reliance on sources, political knowledge, and self-efficacy. These scales included items such as “how likely are you to purposely connect to online political sources that share your point of view on political issues?” and “how knowledgeable are you about politics in general?” Items were rated using either five-point or ten-point Likert-type scales that vary by item.

Procedure

In an effort to avoid demand characteristics and social desirability bias, this study utilized deception regarding the true structure of the study. During the informed consent, participants were told that they would be participating in two separate studies, each with their own series of measures, rather than a single study. This two-study structure was intended to create a separation between the questions about privilege and the questions about conspiracy theories. In an effort to control for order effects, the study was counterbalanced such that the two “separate studies” could be presented in either order. After reading the informed consent, participants were asked to click a box indicating whether they consented. If participants did not consent, they were redirected back to MTurk. If participants consented, they were randomly assigned one of the two “separate studies”. The privilege portion of the study included the Perceived Privilege Questionnaire, the Privilege Oppression Inventory, the Need for Closure Inventory, Sense of Control scale, the Sense of Power scale, the Uncertainty Avoidance index and the Resistance to Change-Beliefs scale, respectively. The conspiracy theory portion of the study included the Trust in the Government scale, the Conspiracy Mentality scale, the Conspiracy Belief scale, and the measures of Political Attitudes and Reliance on and Credibility of Online Political Sources, respectively. After finishing the first portion (i.e.,

privilege or conspiracy theory, based on counterbalancing) , participants received a message indicating that they had completed the first study and they were proceeding to the second study. After completing both the privilege and conspiracy theory portions, participants were asked to complete a demographic measure (Appendix L) before proceeding to the final check questions (Appendix M). During the final check questions participants were asked what they believed the point of this study was, if they answered questions truthfully, and if they falsified information. Following the final check questions, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation before being redirected back to MTurk.

CHAPTER III:

RESULTS

As aforementioned, I recruited 384 participants via MTurk. Of those 384 participants, 37 were excluded from analyses due to failing three or more of the six attention checks, failing the final check questions, not having resided in the United States for the past five years, or not finishing the survey. This left a final sample of 347 participants. SPSS was utilized to examine the correlations among all measures; however, the focus of my thesis is on the association between conspiracy theory belief and perceived power, operationalized as privilege, so only those results will be discussed. This analysis focuses solely on the self-constructed Conspiracy Question Scale (Appendix C) and the self-constructed Perceived Privilege Questionnaire (Appendix A). Additional analyses with all other measures are beyond the scope of my thesis and will not be discussed. My primary prediction was that there would be a strong negative correlation between perceived power and conspiracy theory belief. That is, as perceived power decreased, conspiracy theory belief would increase.

Conspiracy Statements

The Conspiracy Belief Scale (Appendix C) asked participants to gauge the extent to which they thought each conspiracy theory was possible or true and the extent to which they were familiar with each conspiracy theory. In analyzing these measures, I chose to focus on differences by political party affiliation, as conspiracy theory belief is a partisan issue (Smallpage, Enders, & Uscinski, 2017). In recent years, this partisan divide has been the subject of media scrutiny and may be a contributing factor to events such as the insurrection on January 6th, 2021. Therefore, it is important to consider the differences between Republicans', Democrats', and Independents' ratings of conspiracy theories' familiarity, possibility, and truth. For these analyses, Libertarians ($n=14$) and

Green Party members ($n=3$) were excluded as the sample sizes for these groups were too small to create meaningful comparisons.

Familiarity

On average, participants were moderately familiar with the conspiracy theories ($M=55.23$, $SD=22.69$). The participants were least familiar with the Denver International Airport theory ($M=26.11$, $SD=34.53$) and most familiar with the 9/11 theory ($M=75.53$, $SD=30.15$). A one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated there was not a significant difference in overall familiarity by political party affiliation $F(2,318)=.778$, $p >.05$. However, a series of ANOVAs and subsequent post hoc testing revealed that there were significant differences between political parties' familiarity of individual conspiracy theories; see Table 2 for post hoc comparisons by item.

Possibility

On average, ratings of possibility of the conspiracy theories were relatively low across the sample ($M=35.69$, $SD=23.79$). The Jeffrey Epstein theory was rated the highest possibility overall ($M=58.97$, $SD=28.63$), while the Covid-19 theory was rated the lowest possibility overall ($M=25.19$, $SD=32.60$). An ANOVA revealed there was a significant difference in overall ratings of possibility by political party affiliation $F(2,318)=19.27$, $p <.001$. Post hoc testing indicated that across all conspiracy theories, Democrats' ratings of possibility ($M=26.68$, $SD=21.92$) were significantly lower than those of Republicans ($M=45.12$, $SD=23.98$, $p <.001$) or Independents ($M=37.07$, $SD=21.64$, $p <.05$). Once again, post hoc tests found differences between political parties' ratings of possibility across individual conspiracy theories; see Table 3 for post hoc comparisons by item.

Truth

On average, the participants' ratings of the conspiracy theories' truth ($M=31.93$, $SD=22.71$) were similar to their ratings of possibility ($M=35.69$, $SD=23.79$). An ANOVA

revealed that truth ratings significantly differed based on participants' political party affiliation $F(2,318)=17.58, p<.001$. Post hoc testing revealed Democrats rated the overall truth of conspiracy theories significantly lower ($M=23.56, SD=21.83$) than either Republicans ($M=40.38, SD=22.38, p<.001$) or Independents ($M=33.54, SD=20.40, p<.05$). The Jeffrey Epstein conspiracy theory was given the highest truth rating across Republicans ($M= 63.62 SD=28.63$), Democrats ($M=44.03 SD=27.44$), and Independents ($M=59.13 SD=27.96$). However, each political group varied on the conspiracy theory they thought was least true. A series of ANOVAs and subsequent post hoc testing revealed significant differences across several conspiracy theories shown in Table 4.

Summary of conspiracy statement results

In sum, all political parties were about equally familiar with conspiracy theories overall. However, as seen in Table 2, the political parties differed on familiarity with individual conspiracy theories such as the George Soros theory, the child sex trafficking theory, and the Jewish cabal theory. Ratings of conspiracy theories' possibility and truth also differed across political groups, with Democrats giving the lowest ratings overall. Interestingly, all political groups believed the Jeffrey Epstein theory to be the most true, but differed on their opinions of the least true theory.

Table 2
Conspiracy Familiarity Across Political Parties

Conspiracy Theories	Overall		Republicans		Democrats		Independents	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
All conspiracies	55.23	22.69	54.18	21.68	54.24	23.58	57.71	22.64
A group of international elites (The New World Order) controls governments, industry, and media organizations, with the goal of establishing global dominance.	67.81	29.29	64.48	30.29	66.05	30.65	74.02	25.34
The Denver International Airport stands above an underground city which serves as a headquarters of the New World Order.	26.11	34.53	22.86	34.13	25.40	33.58	30.76	36.11
George Soros is secretly funding leftist groups such as antifa and Black Lives Matter protestors.	53.96	37.98	60.00*	38.89	47.38*	37.37	55.87	36.77
Jeffrey Epstein did not kill himself, but was murdered by elites aiming to protect information regarding their child sex-trafficking ring.	72.93	30.98	77.62*	27.23	67.50*	33.87	74.89	30.11
9/11 was an inside job by the U.S. government.	75.53	30.15	74.48	31.19	75.61	29.89	76.63	29.55
A wealthy elite society, consisting mostly of Jewish people, controls the government in the U.S.	46.98	36.15	37.70*	34.19	51.31*	35.97	51.63*	36.95
There is an ongoing “White genocide” aiming to turn White people into a minority or cause their extinction altogether.	38.45	35.78	35.00	34.36	39.50	36.33	40.98	36.71
Elites, such as politicians and Hollywood celebrities, are running an international child sex-trafficking ring.	57.23	35.88	54.76	35.47	57.58	36.01	59.57	36.40
President Trump is fighting to take down child sex-trafficking rings controlled by Democratic politicians.	42.68	38.62	44.13	37.64	40.50	38.98	43.91	39.53
Covid-19 is a hoax to control American citizens.	69.94	33.34	70.58	33.23	70.25	33.04	68.80	34.19

*= $p < .05$

Table 3
Conspiracy Possibility Across Political Parties

Conspiracy Theories	Overall		Republicans		Democrats		Independents	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
All conspiracies	35.69	23.79	45.12**	23.98	26.68**	21.92	37.07*	21.64
A group of international elites (The New World Order) controls governments, industry, and media organizations, with the goal of establishing global dominance.	45.89	30.91	54.48**	29.87	36.21**	29.18	49.13*	31.08
The Denver International Airport stands above an underground city which serves as a headquarters of the New World Order.	26.66	27.28	31.05	29.90	22.60	26.39	27.07	24.65
George Soros is secretly funding leftist groups such as antifa and Black Lives Matter protestors.	46.79	31.93	66.19**	28.13	28.63**	25.10	49.13**	30.66
Jeffrey Epstein did not kill himself, but was murdered by elites aiming to protect information regarding their child sex-trafficking ring.	58.97	28.63	66.57**	27.83	49.19**	27.57	63.48**	27.43
9/11 was an inside job by the U.S. government.	29.56	31.39	33.08	34.25	24.88	28.35	31.85	31.45
A wealthy elite society, consisting mostly of Jewish people, controls the government in the U.S.	28.72	28.50	31.81	29.83	24.63	27.47	30.65	27.96
There is an ongoing “White genocide” aiming to turn White people into a minority or cause their extinction altogether.	27.52	28.90	38.29**	31.45	18.26**	24.59	27.39*	27.09
Elites, such as politicians and Hollywood celebrities, are running an international child sex-trafficking ring.	38.56	32.05	48.76**	32.42	28.77**	29.64	39.89*	31.15
President Trump is fighting to take down child sex-trafficking rings controlled by Democratic politicians.	28.14	31.52	44.48**	34.53	14.96**	24.05	26.85*	28.20
Covid-19 is a hoax to control American citizens.	25.19	32.60	36.25**	37.37	15.74**	26.09	25.22	30.94

*= $p < .05$ **= $p < .001$

Table 4
Conspiracy Truth Across Political Parties

Conspiracy Theories	Overall		Republicans		Democrats		Independents	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
All conspiracies	31.93	22.71	40.38**	22.38	23.56**	21.83	33.54*	20.40
A group of international elites (The New World Order) controls governments, industry, and media organizations, with the goal of establishing global dominance.	42.50	32.36	49.14**	32.44	33.98**	32.43	46.30*	30.95
The Denver International Airport stands above an underground city which serves as a headquarters of the New World Order.	22.70	25.72	27.40*	27.94	18.69*	25.81	22.72	22.09
George Soros is secretly funding leftist groups such as antifa and Black Lives Matter protestors.	42.64	31.99	62.38**	29.76	23.95**	24.09	45.33**	29.48
Jeffrey Epstein did not kill himself, but was murdered by elites aiming to protect information regarding their child sex-trafficking ring.	54.77	29.22	63.62**	28.63	44.03**	27.44	59.13**	27.96
9/11 was an inside job by the U.S. government.	24.81	29.39	26.80	30.53	19.59*	26.56	29.57*	30.88
A wealthy elite society, consisting mostly of Jewish people, controls the government in the U.S.	24.87	27.24	26.57	26.85	22.25	27.94	26.87	27.24
There is an ongoing “White genocide” aiming to turn White people into a minority or cause their extinction altogether.	23.44	26.74	32.12**	28.61	15.95**	23.61	23.48*	25.70
Elites, such as politicians and Hollywood celebrities, are running an international child sex-trafficking ring.	34.78	29.02	43.62**	30.92	26.39**	29.85	35.87	29.02
President Trump is fighting to take down child sex-trafficking rings controlled by Democratic politicians.	25.66	30.80	40.29**	34.43	13.47**	24.04	25.00*	27.28
Covid-19 is a hoax to control American citizens.	21.90	30.55	31.17**	35.16	14.08**	26.14	21.74	27.64

*= $p<.05$ **= $p<.001$

Perceived privilege

Perceived privilege was measured using a self-constructed Perceived Privilege Questionnaire (Appendix A). The questionnaire touched on six aspects of identity: gender, religion, race, sexual orientation, economic status, and political affiliation. The indirect portion of the questionnaire asked participants to rate the extent to which these six aspects of identities helped or hurt them across ten domains such as getting into university or interacting with law enforcement. In analyzing this section of the questionnaire, scores across the ten different domains were averaged for each of the six aspect identities.

The direct portion of the questionnaire directly asked participants to rate their privilege or oppression based on the six aspects of identity. For example, participants were asked both “To what extent do you think you have privilege due to your race?” and “ To what extent do you feel you have been oppressed due to your race?” Both portions of the Perceived Privilege Questionnaire were analyzed in relation to the Conspiracy Belief Scale. For the sake of distinction, I will refer to the first, aggregated, portion as “indirect” and the second portion, featuring the privilege and oppression ratings, as “direct”.

Perceived privilege for each of the six aspects of identity was analyzed utilizing respective demographic information. Gender identity was analyzed by participants’ gender, religion was analyzed by participants’ religion, and so on. The one exception to this rule is perceived economic privilege. Although I collected both childhood and current income, I chose to exclusively analyze childhood income. This decision was made as childhood income is often pointed to as a sign of struggle, privilege, or oppression regardless of current income. For these analyses, conspiracy belief was

measured solely through truth ratings. While familiarity and possibility are important aspects of conspiracy belief, truth ratings pinpoint participants' actual belief.

Gender

Gender analyses were conducted solely for cisgender men and cisgender women as other gender identities' sample sizes were too small to provide meaningful results. When looking at indirect measures, results for cisgender women were contrary to my hypothesis; there was a weak positive correlation between perceived gender privilege and total conspiracy truth ratings $r(178) = .363, p < .001$. For cisgender men there was no correlation between perceived privilege and total conspiracy theory truth ratings $r(154) = .009, p > .05$.

When looking at direct measures, in line with my hypothesis, cisgender men who reported less privilege, $r(154) = -.135, p < .05$, and more oppression, $r(152) = .391, p < .001$, were more likely to rate the conspiracy theories as true overall. Interestingly, cisgender women do not show any relationship between privilege, $r(178) = .060, p > .05$, and oppression, $r(178) = -.101, p > .05$, and overall conspiracy theory truth ratings.

Religion

Analyses of religion focused on Agnostics, Atheists, Christians, and non-religious/secular groups. Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, and others did not have large enough sample sizes to make meaningful conclusions. On the indirect measure, Atheists showed a moderately positive correlation between perceived privilege and overall conspiracy theory truth ratings, $r(39) = .413, p < .05$. Agnostics, $r(46) = .146, p > .05$, Christians, $r(183) = .100, p > .05$, and non-religious/secular groups, $r(32) = .232, p > .05$, did not show any such correlations.

Looking at the direct measures, Atheists once again showed a positive correlation between perceived religious privilege and truth, $r(38) = .333, p < .05$. In line with my

hypothesis, Christians showed a weak positive relationship between perceived oppression and ratings of conspiracies' truth, $r(182) = .259, p < .05$. For Agnostics, $r(45) = .168, p > .05$, Christians, $r(180) = .50, p > .05$, or non-religious/secular groups, $r(31) = .206, p > .05$, there were no correlations between perceived religious privilege and overall conspiracy truth ratings. There were also no correlations between perceived religious oppression and overall conspiracy truth ratings for Agnostics, $r(44) = -.033, p > .05$, Atheists, $r(38) = .194, p > .05$, or non-religious/secular groups, $r(31) = -.110, p > .05$.

Race

Analyses of perceived race privilege included White, Black, and Asian/Pacific Islander participants. The remaining racial or ethnic categories did not contain enough participants to provide meaningful results. Additionally, participants of more than one race or ethnicity were excluded as the group was comprised of a wide array of identities and thus would not have provided interpretable results.

For the indirect measure, my hypothesis was supported by a weak negative correlation between White participants' perceived race privilege and total conspiracy theory truth ratings, $r(263) = -.123, p < .05$. However, Black, $r(24) = .293, p > .05$, and Asian/Pacific Islander, $r(18) = -.08, p > .05$, participants did not show any correlation between these variables.

In support of my hypothesis, when asked directly about race privilege or oppression, White participants who reported less privilege, $r(265) = -.391, p < .001$, and more oppression, $r(265) = .355, p < .001$, had a higher overall belief in conspiracy theories' truth. On the other hand, for Black participants, higher perceived race privilege was correlated with higher overall conspiracy truth ratings, $r(23) = .355, p < .05$. Black participants did not show any correlation between perceived oppression and overall conspiracy truth ratings, $r(24) = .167, p > .05$. Asian/Pacific Islander participants did not

have any correlations between either perceived privilege, $r(18) = .241, p > .05$, or oppression, $r(18) = .147, p > .05$, and overall conspiracy belief.

Sexual orientation

Perceived sexual orientation privilege was analyzed looking at heterosexuals (100% heterosexual) and bisexuals. No other sexual orientation had a large enough sample size to be analyzed. When looking at indirect measures, heterosexuals did not show any correlation between perceived sexual orientation privilege and overall conspiracy belief, $r(279) = -.067, p > .05$. However, bisexuals did show a moderately positive correlation between perceived sexual orientation privilege and overall conspiracy belief, $r(23) = .540, p < .05$.

In support of my hypothesis, when asked directly, heterosexuals who reported less privilege, $r(277) = -.274, p < .05$, and more oppression, $r(270) = .230, p < .001$, were more likely to rate the conspiracy theories as true overall. Bisexuals once again had a positive correlation between perceived privilege and overall conspiracy theory truth ratings $r(23) = .491, p < .05$. However, there was no correlation between perceived oppression and conspiracy theory belief for bisexuals, $r(23) = .330, p > .05$.

Economic

As aforementioned, perceived economic privilege was analyzed by annual income during childhood. The groups include those with less than \$15,000 a year, those with between \$15,000 and \$25,000, those with between \$25,001 and \$35,000, those with between \$35,001 and \$50,000, those with between \$50,001 and \$75,000, those with between \$75,001 and \$100,000, and those with between \$100,001 and \$150,000. Participants with annual childhood incomes above \$150,000 were excluded from the analysis due to an inadequate sample size.

On the indirect measure, those with childhood incomes below \$15,000 displayed a weakly negative relationship between perceived economic privilege and overall conspiracy belief, $r(31) = -.377, p < .05$. However, those with childhood incomes between \$25,001 and \$35,000, $r(59) = .246, p < .05$, and those with childhood incomes between \$50,001 and \$75,000, $r(57) = .239, p < .05$, who reported higher economic privilege were more likely to rate conspiracy theories as true. When asked directly, those with annual childhood incomes between \$15,000 and \$25,000 showed a positive relationship between perceived economic oppression and overall conspiracy theory belief, $r(45) = .326, p < .05$. The same is true for those with annual childhood incomes between \$50,001 and \$75,000, $r(56) = .391, p < .05$.

Political

Perceived political privilege was analyzed using Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Libertarian and Green Party participants were excluded due to inadequate sample sizes. On the indirect measure Democrat participants' total perceived political privilege was positively correlated with truth ratings, $r(122) = .363, p < .05$. There were no such correlations for either Republicans, $r(103) = -.038, p > .05$, or Independents, $r(90) = -.081, p > .05$. However, when asked directly, Republicans' perceived political oppression was positively correlated with overall conspiracy truth ratings, $r(101) = .232, p < .05$. Independents show a similar pattern with conspiracy truth ratings, $r(89) = .323, p < .05$, correlating positively with perceived political oppression. Oddly, Democrats showed relatively equal correlations for conspiracy theory truth ratings across both perceived political privilege, $r(119) = .470, p < .001$, and oppression, $r(119) = .478, p < .001$.

CHAPTER IV:

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between conspiracy theory belief and perceived power, operationalized as perceived privilege. I hypothesized that those who reported lower perceived privilege would report higher conspiracy belief. Depending on the measures used, my hypothesis was partially supported. Directly asking about participants' perceived privilege or oppression yielded the most significant results while less direct methods varied.

When asked directly, cisgender men who reported less gender privilege or more gender oppression were more likely to think conspiracy theories were true. The same is true of White participants asked about race privilege or oppression, heterosexuals asked about sexual orientation privilege or oppression, or Christians asked about religious privilege or oppression. Additionally, Republicans who reported higher oppression also reported higher belief in conspiracies. Democrats showed an odd pattern in relation to perceived political privilege and oppression; the relationships between conspiracy belief and privilege and conspiracy belief and oppression were nearly identical. As Democrats reported feeling more political privilege, they believed conspiracy theories more; but, as their ratings of political oppression increased so did their conspiracy theory belief.

However, cisgender women who reported higher gender privilege also reported higher belief in conspiracies. This pattern is also seen in Atheists with higher perceived religious privilege, and Black participants with higher perceived race privilege. It is possible then, that decreased perceived privilege is related to higher conspiracy theory belief only for those at the top of the social hierarchy in each category while those lower in the hierarchy demonstrate the opposite pattern.

Limitations

Although my hypothesis is partially supported by the results, it is appropriate to recognize several potential limitations. Firstly, while the sample was diverse, some demographics were underrepresented. This means I was unable to adequately compare subgroups such as White participants to minority groups or heterosexual participants to LGBTQ+ participants. Secondly, as this study was a non-experimental design, it is unable to provide causal explanations for the presented trends. Thirdly, on average, the participants were not extremely familiar with the presented conspiracy theories. Without a full understanding of the conspiracy theories, it may have been difficult for them to assess their belief of the conspiracy. Fourthly, the perceived privilege questionnaire was self-developed and would benefit from future validation. It is possible that the domains I chose to include, such as romantic relationships or ability to get a job, do not apply to all of the six aspects of identity that were analyzed. Perhaps, then, it is necessary to consider the weight of direct versus indirect questionnaires. Lastly, conspiracy theorists may have an inherent distrust for institutions such as universities. Therefore, it is possible that this study primarily attracted participants who do not endorse conspiracy beliefs.

Future Directions

If conspiracy theory belief is related to perceived power then there is a need to extend the current findings. As previously stated, there are still analyses left to be conducted following this study; it is still necessary to explore data collected on trust in the government, credibility of online political sources, need for closure, and so on. Future research may explore the causal relationship between perceived power and conspiracy theory belief; as a relationship seems to exist, an experimental design would strengthen the understanding of conspiracy belief formation. Future studies should explore how manipulating sense of power can influence conspiracy theory endorsement. Researchers

may explore the relationship between Democrats and perceived privilege more in depth, as they present a unique pattern. Acquiring larger samples of minority groups could provide better grounds for comparative analysis. There are aspects of intersectionality that could be analyzed such as the intersection between race and political party affiliation. It may also be important to recruit participants who are more aware of conspiracy theories, but do not feel threatened by university researchers.

Implications

This study could provide insight into the role of power, or privilege, in conspiracy belief. As conspiracy theorists take over social media, it is important to explore the factors that contribute to conspiracy belief (Ortutay, 2020). In understanding these factors, we are taking a step to potentially prevent extremism. As Stanley (2020) argued, conspiracy endorsement can be a stepping stone to endorsement of fascist ideology which may, in turn, lead to violence. It may be the case that those who are powerful but perceive oppression feel isolated and unable to express their sense of powerlessness in the mainstream. Although these individuals may not actually be oppressed, they still truly feel that they are; thus, they might turn away from mainstream spaces and turn to conspiratorial spaces that validate and endorse their point of view. Through these conspiratorial spaces, individuals can potentially become radicalized and continuously endorse more extreme theories. Perhaps, though, it is the other way around and those who believe in conspiracies begin to feel powerless or oppressed due to conspiratorial messaging. By pursuing this research, and building our body of knowledge, we gain better insight into how conspiracy beliefs are formed. In doing so, we can potentially find interventions to prevent extremism caused by conspiratorial thinking.

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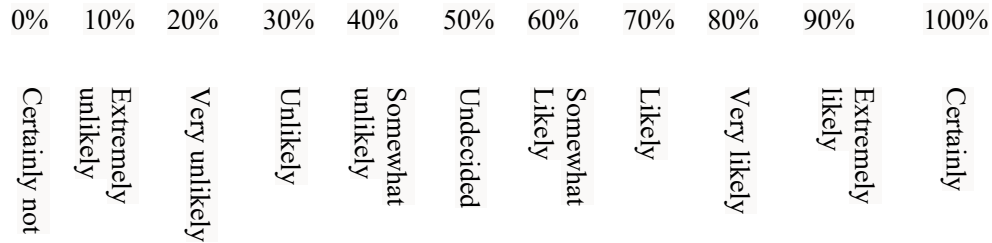
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APPENDIX A:

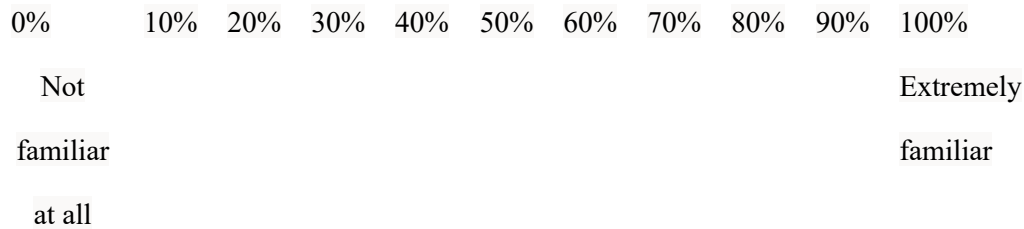
CONSPIRACY BELIEF MEASURE

For each statement please indicate to what extent you believe that it is true

For each statement please indicate to what extent you believe that it is possible



Please indicate the extent to which you are familiar with each statement



1. A group of international elites (The New World Order) controls governments, industry, and media organizations, with the goal of establishing global dominance.
2. The Denver International Airport stands above an underground city which serves as a headquarters of the New World Order.
3. George Soros is secretly funding leftist groups such as antifa and Black Lives Matter protestors
4. Jeffery Epstein did not kill himself but was murdered by elites aiming to protect information regarding their child sex-trafficking ring
5. 9/11 was an inside job by the U.S. government

6. There is an ongoing “White genocide” aiming to turn White people into a minority or cause their extinction altogether
7. A wealthy elite society, consisting mostly of Jewish people, controls the government in the U.S.
8. Elites, such as politicians, are running an international child sex-trafficking ring
9. President Trump is fighting to take down child sex-trafficking rings controlled by Democratic politicians
10. Covid-19 is a hoax to control American citizens

APPENDIX B:

CONSPIRACY MENTALITY SCALE

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
There are no right or wrong answers!

Response scale for each item:

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Certainly not	Extremely unlikely	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Undecided	Somewhat Likely	Likely	Very likely	Extremely likely	Certainly

1. I think that many very important things happen in the world, which the public is never informed about
2. I think that politicians usually do not tell us the true motives for their decisions
3. I think that government agencies closely monitor all citizens
4. I think that events which superficially seem to lack a connection are often the result of secret activities
5. I think that there are secret organizations that greatly influence political decisions

Source:

Bruder, M., Haffke, P., Neave, N., Nouripanah, N., & Imhoff, R.. (2013). Measuring individual differences in generic beliefs in conspiracy theories across cultures: Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire. *Frontiers in Psychology, Vol 4*.
doi:<https://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00225>

APPENDIX C:

PERCEIVED PRIVILEGE

Please use this scale to answer the following questions:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hurt	Hurt	Hurt a	Had no	Helped a	Helped	Helped
greatly	somewhat	little	effect	little	somewhat	greatly

1. To what extent do you feel your gender identity has impacted you in:
 - a. Renting an apartment/house
 - b. Professional relationships
 - c. Getting and maintaining a job
 - d. Being accepted into a college or university
 - e. Interactions with law enforcement
 - f. Friendships
 - g. Romantic relationships
 - h. Receiving healthcare
 - i. Everyday life
2. To what extent do you feel your religion has impacted you in:
 - a. Renting an apartment/house
 - b. Professional relationships
 - c. Getting and maintaining a job
 - d. Being accepted into a college or university
 - e. Interactions with law enforcement
 - f. Friendships
 - g. Romantic relationships
 - h. Receiving healthcare
 - i. Everyday life
3. To what extent do you feel your race has impacted you in:
 - a. Renting an apartment/house
 - b. Professional relationships
 - c. Getting and maintaining a job
 - d. Being accepted into a college or university
 - e. Interactions with law enforcement
 - f. Friendships

- g. Romantic relationships
 - h. Receiving healthcare
 - i. Everyday life
4. To what extent do you feel your sexual orientation has impacted you in:
- a. Renting an apartment/house
 - b. Professional relationships
 - c. Getting and maintaining a job
 - d. Being accepted into a college or university
 - e. Interactions with law enforcement
 - f. Friendships
 - g. Romantic relationships
 - h. Receiving healthcare
 - i. Everyday life
5. To what extent do you feel your economic status has impacted you in:
- a. Renting an apartment/house
 - b. Professional relationships
 - c. Getting and maintaining a job
 - d. Being accepted into a college or university
 - e. Interactions with law enforcement
 - f. Friendships
 - g. Romantic relationships
 - h. Receiving healthcare
 - i. Everyday life
6. To what extent do you feel your political affiliation has impacted you in:
- a. Renting an apartment/house
 - b. Professional relationships
 - c. Getting and maintaining a job
 - d. Being accepted into a college or university
 - e. Interactions with law enforcement
 - f. Friendships
 - g. Romantic relationships
 - h. Receiving healthcare
 - i. Everyday life

Please use this scale to answer the following questions:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all					A great deal

1. To what extent do you feel you have privilege due to your gender
2. To what extent do you feel you have privilege due to your religion
3. To what extent do you feel you have privilege due to your race
4. To what extent do you feel you have privilege due to your sexual orientation
5. To what extent do you feel you have privilege due to your economic status
6. To what extent do you feel you have privilege due to your political affiliation

Please use this scale to answer the following questions:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all					A great deal

1. To what extent do you feel you have been oppressed due to your gender
2. To what extent do you feel you have been oppressed due to your religion
3. To what extent do you feel you have been oppressed due to your race
4. To what extent do you feel you have been oppressed due to your sexual orientation
5. To what extent do you feel you have been oppressed due to your economic status
6. To what extent do you feel you have been oppressed due to your political affiliation

APPENDIX D:

PRIVILEGE OPPRESSION INVENTORY

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
There are no right or wrong answers!

Response scale for each item:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly	Somewhat	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Somewhat	Strongly
disagree	disagree	a little	agree	a little	agree	agree
			nor			
			disagree			

Factor 1: White Privilege Awareness

1. Being White and having an advantage go hand in hand.
2. I believe that being White is an advantage in society.
3. Whites generally have more resources and opportunities.
4. Whites have the power to exclude other groups.
5. Government policies favor Whites.
6. There are benefits to being White in this society.
7. Individuals do not receive advantages just because they are White.
8. White cultural characteristics are more valued than those of people of color
9. Most White high-level executives are promoted based on their race.
10. The lighter your skin color, the less prejudice and discrimination you experience.
11. The media (e.g., television, radio) favors Whites.
12. Many movies negatively stereotype people of color
13. The majority of positive role models in movies are White

Factor 2: Heterosexism Awareness

1. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals lack power in the legal system.
2. Heterosexuals have access to more resources than gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals

3. Openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals lack power in today's society
4. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals do not have the same advantages as heterosexuals
5. Many gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals fear for their safety.
6. The media negatively stereotypes gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals.
7. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals experience discrimination.
8. Some individuals are devalued in society because of their sexual orientation.
9. I think gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals exaggerate their hardships
10. Heterosexuals are treated better in society than those who are not heterosexual

Factor 3: Christian Privilege Awareness

1. Christians hold a lot of power because this country is based on their views.
2. Christianity is valued more in this society than other religions.
3. Christians are represented positively in history books.
4. Society is biased positively toward Christians.
5. To be Christian is to have religious advantage in this country.
6. Christians have the opportunity of being around other Christians most of the time.
7. Christian holidays are given more prominence in society than non-Christian holidays
8. Christianity is the norm in this society

Factor 4: Sexism Awareness

1. I am aware that men typically make more money than women do.
2. I am aware that women are not recognized in their careers as often as men.
3. Women are disadvantaged compared to men.
4. Women lack power in today's society compared to men.
5. Women experience discrimination.
6. Femininity is less valued in this society.
7. There are different standards and expectations for men and women in this society.
8. Advertisers set standards for how women should appear.

Source:

Hays, D., Chang, C., & Decker, S. (2007). Initial development and psychometric data for the privilege and oppression inventory. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*. 40. 66-79. 10.1080/07481756.2007.11909806.

APPENDIX E:

TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
There are no right or wrong answers!

Response scale for each item:

- | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly
disagree | Somewhat
disagree | Disagree
a little | Neither
agree | Agree
a little | Somewhat
agree | Strongly
agree |
- nor
disagree
1. Politicians are happy to promise things at an election but forget their promises afterwards (R)
 2. Politicians change their minds all the time
 3. Politicians usually try to help their constituents
 4. Generally speaking, politicians are competent
 5. In general, when things go wrong politicians admit their mistakes
 6. In general, politicians tell the truth
 7. Governments waste a lot of public money (R)
 8. Governments distort the facts to make their policies look good (R)
 9. Politicians generally know what they are doing
 10. In general, politicians don't really understand the problems facing ordinary people (R)
 11. Politicians tend to look after their own interests rather than trying to help others (R)
 12. Governments treat each group within society equally
 13. Politicians try to keep their promises
 14. Politicians tell us as little about what they get up to as they can (R)

Source:

Seyd, B. (2016, March). How should we measure political trust. In Brighton, *Political Studies Association Annual Conference* (pp. 21-23).

APPENDIX F:

MIDI SENSE OF CONTROL SCALE

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers!

Response scale for each item:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree a little	Neither agree	Agree a little	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
			nor			
			disagree			

1. There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life.
2. I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life.
3. I can do just about anything I really set my mind to do.
4. Other people determine most of what I can and cannot do.
5. What happens in my life is often beyond my control.
6. When I really want to do something, I usually find a way to succeed at it.
7. There are many things that interfere with what I want to do.
8. Whether or not I am able to get what I want is in my own hands.
9. I have little control over the things that happen to me.
10. There is really no way I can solve some of the problems I have.
11. Sometimes I feel that I am being pushed around in life.
12. What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me.

Scoring: The total score is calculated by summing the scores for perceived constraints (1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, & 11), and personal mastery (3, 6, 8, & 12) separately. Do not score the form if more than 2 items are missing in the mastery category, or if 4 or more items are missing from the constraints category. To calculate scores for each subscale, reverse-score each item and calculate the average of all items (Lachman & Weaver, 1998). Using

this scoring method, higher scores on the mastery subscale indicate higher levels of perceived mastery, and higher scores on the constraints subscale indicates higher levels of perceived constraints. To calculate respondents' overall sense of control, researchers reverse-score items in the personal mastery subscale so that higher scores mean more control, and then calculate the average of the two subscale scores (Lachman & Agrigoroaei, 2010).

Source:

Lachman, M. E., & Weaver, S. L. (1998). The sense of control as a moderator of social class differences in health and well-being. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 74(3), 763.

APPENDIX G:

SENSE OF POWER SCALE

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers!

Response scale for each item:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

1. I can get people to listen to what I say.
2. My wishes do not carry much weight.(r)
3. I can get people to do what I want.
4. Even if I voice them, my views have little sway. (r)
5. I think I have a great deal of power
6. My ideas and opinions are often ignored (r)

Source:

Anderson, C., John, O. P., & Keltner, D. (2012). The personal sense of power. *Journal of personality*, 80(2), 313-344.

APPENDIX H:

UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE MEASURE

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers!

Response scale for each item:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree a little	Neither agree or disagree	Agree a little	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

1. In my opinion, orderliness and consistency should be stressed, even at the expense of experimentation and innovation.

2. I prefer to lead a highly structured life with few unexpected events.

3. In my opinion, societal requirements and instructions should be spelled out in detail so citizens know what they are expected to do.

Source:

Shirokova, G., Osiyevskyy, O., & Bogatyreva, K. (2016). Exploring the intention–behavior link in student entrepreneurship: Moderating effects of individual and environmental characteristics. *European Management Journal*, 34(4), 386-399.

APPENDIX I:

NEED FOR CLOSURE SCALE

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
There are no right or wrong answers!

Response scale for each item:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly	Somewhat	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Somewhat	Strongly
disagree	disagree	a little	agree	a little	agree	agree
			nor			
			disagree			

1. I don't like situations that are uncertain.
2. I dislike questions which could be answered in many different ways.
3. I find that a well ordered life with regular hours suits my temperament.
4. I feel uncomfortable when I don't understand the reason why an event occurred in my life.
5. I feel irritated when one person disagrees with what everyone else in a group believes.
6. I don't like to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it.
7. When I have made a decision, I feel relieved
8. When I am confronted with a problem, I'm dying to reach a solution very quickly.
9. I would quickly become impatient and irritated if I would not find a solution to a problem immediately.
10. I don't like to be with people who are capable of unexpected actions.
11. I dislike it when a person's statement could mean many different things.
12. I find that establishing a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more.
13. I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life.
14. I do not usually consult many different opinions before forming my own view.
15. I dislike unpredictable situations.

Source for original scale:

Kruglanski, A. W., Webster, D. M., & Klem, A. (1993). Motivated resistance and openness to persuasion in the presence or absence of prior information. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65(5), 861.

Source for revised scale:

Roets, A. & Van Hiel, A. (2011). Item selection and validation of a brief, 15-item version of the need for closure scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 50, 90-94

APPENDIX J:

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE-BELIEFS SCALE

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
There are no right or wrong answers!

Response scale for each item:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree a little	Neither agree or disagree	Agree a little	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

1. Approaches used by people in the past are generally the most effective.
2. If society is going to change, it should occur slowly and naturally.
3. The established way of doing things should be protected and preserved.
4. Fast or radical changes are unwise and dangerous.
5. Traditions reflect wisdom and knowledge.
6. Making sudden changes tends to create more problems than solutions.
7. Slow, gradual change helps prevent catastrophes and mistakes.
8. Quick changes are acceptable if they restore things to how they were before.
9. Following traditions tends to create a closed-minded society. (R)
10. Established traditions are the best way to run society.

Preference for tradition: 1,3,5,9,10

Preference for gradual change; 2,4,6,7,8

Source:

White, K. R., Kinney, D., Danek, R. H., Smith, B., & Harben, C. (2020). The Resistance to Change-Beliefs Scale: Validation of a new measure of conservative ideology.

Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 46(1), 20-35.

APPENDIX K: POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND RELIANCE ON AND CREDIBILITY OF ONLINE POLITICAL SOURCES

Selective Exposure

- 1.) On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 indicates not at all likely and 10 = extremely likely, how likely are you to purposely connect to online political sources that SHARE your point of view on political issues?

Selective Avoidance

- 2) On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 indicates not at all likely and 10 = extremely likely, how likely are you to purposely connect to online political sources that CHALLENGE your point of view on political issues?

Credibility

The next set of questions asks you to rate the

BELIEVABILITY/FAIRNESS/ACCURACY/DEPTH of the following sources:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Not very	Somewhat	Believable/Fair/Accurate/In- depth	Very

- a. The Blaze (R)
- b. Breitbart (R)
- c. Fox News (R)
- d. InfoWars (R)
- e. The Ben Shapiro Show (R)
- f. BBC (C)
- g. Reuters (C)
- h. USA Today (C)
- i. The Hill (C)
- j. CNN (L)
- k. Vox (L)
- l. NPR (L)

- m. The New York Times (L)
- n. HuffPost (L)

Reliance

How much do you rely on the following sources for political information?

- | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------|-----------------|
| Don't rely on | Rarely rely on | Sometimes rely | Rely on | Heavily rely on |
| at all | | on | | |
- a. The Blaze (R)
 - b. Breitbart (R)
 - c. Fox News (R)
 - d. InfoWars (R)
 - e. The Ben Shapiro Show (R)
 - f. BBC (C)
 - g. Reuters (C)
 - h. USA Today (C)
 - i. The Hill (C)
 - j. CNN (L)
 - k. Vox (L)
 - l. NPR (L)
 - m. The New York Times (L)
 - n. HuffPost (L)
 - o. Political blogs in general
 - p. Social media accounts in general

Political Knowledge: (Index of Political Knowledge and Election Knowledge)

- 1) On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 = absolutely not knowledgeable and 10 = absolutely knowledgeable, how knowledgeable are you about politics in general?

Trust (index of the first three trust items) & Self-efficacy (index of the last four efficacy items)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = neutral 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

- a. Most of our leaders are devoted to the service of our country.
- b. Politicians never tell us what they really think
- c. I don't think public officials care much about what people like me think.
- d. I feel I could do as good of a job in public office as most other people.
- e. I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics.
- f. I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.
- g. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.

Source:

Johnson, T. J., & Kaye, B. K. (2013). Measures of Political Attitudes and Reliance on and Credibility of Online Political Sources [Database record]. Retrieved from PsycTESTS. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/t24125-000>

Media Bias Source: <https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-ratings>

APPENDIX L:

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 1) What is your age (in years)? _____ [Participant will fill in the blank]
- 2) What sex were you assigned at birth, on your original birth certificate?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
- 3) What is your current gender identity?
 - a. Cisgender man
 - b. Cisgender woman
 - c. Transgender man
 - d. Transgender woman
 - e. Genderqueer/Gender nonconforming
 - f. A different identity
- 4) How would you describe your sexual orientation?
 - a. 100% heterosexual (straight)
 - b. Mostly heterosexual (straight but somewhat attracted to people of your own gender)
 - c. Bisexual (attracted to two or more genders)
 - d. Mostly homosexual (gay/lesbian but somewhat attracted to people of the opposite gender)
 - e. 100% homosexual (gay/lesbian)
 - f. Asexual (not really sexually attracted to anyone)
 - g. Pansexual (attracted to people regardless of their sex or gender identity)
 - h. Other (please specify) _____ [Participant will fill in the blank]
- 5) With what race or ethnicity do you identify? Select all that apply:
 - a. Black, African American, or African
 - b. Arab, Arab-American, or Middle Eastern
 - c. Asian, Pacific Islander, or Asian-American
 - d. White, Caucasian, or European
 - e. Latino/Latina, Latin American, Chicano/Chicana, or Hispanic
 - f. Native American or American Indian
 - g. South Asian
 - h. Biracial/Multiracial
 - i. Other (please specify): _____ [Participant will fill in the blank]
- 6) With which political party do you most closely identify?
 - a. Republican
 - b. Democrat
 - c. Independent
 - d. Libertarian

- e. Green Party
 - f. None of the above
- 7) With which political orientation do you identify most strongly?
- a. Strongly conservative
 - b. Moderately conservative
 - c. Slightly conservative
 - d. Moderate
 - e. Slightly liberal
 - f. Moderately liberal
 - g. Strongly liberal
- 8) What is your political orientation regarding fiscal issues?
- a. Very Conservative
 - b. Moderately conservative
 - c. Slightly Conservative
 - d. Moderate
 - e. Slightly liberal
 - f. Moderately liberal
 - g. Very liberal
 - h. Do not know
- 9) What is your political orientation regarding social issues?
- a. Very Conservative
 - b. Moderately conservative
 - c. Slightly Conservative
 - d. Moderate
 - e. Slightly liberal
 - f. Moderately liberal
 - g. Very liberal
 - h. Do not know
- 10) What is your religious affiliation (NOTE: "Christian" includes those who consider themselves Catholic). If you practice more than one religion, please select the religion with which you identify most strongly.
- a. Agnostic
 - b. Atheist
 - c. Buddhist
 - d. Christian
 - e. Jewish
 - f. Hindu
 - g. Muslim/Islam
 - h. Non-religious/secular
 - i. Other (please specify): _____ [Participant will fill in the blank]

- 11) [If participant selects Christian] What is the denomination of Christianity that you practice?
- a. Catholic
 - b. Church of Christ
 - c. Baptist
 - d. Lutheran
 - e. Methodist
 - f. Non-denominational
 - g. Presbyterian
 - h. Episcopal
 - i. Other (please specify): _____ [Participant will fill in the blank]
- 12) What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- a. Less than high school
 - b. High school or equivalent
 - c. Some college (did not or have not graduated)
 - d. Trade/Vocational degree
 - e. Associate's degree (2 year)
 - f. Bachelor's degree (4 year)
 - g. Master's degree
 - h. Professional degree (e.g., J.D., D.D.S., M.D.)
 - i. Doctorate (e.g., Ph.D)
- 13) What was your annual household income during childhood (in U.S. dollars)?
- a. less than \$15,000
 - b. \$15,000 - \$25,000
 - c. \$25,001 - \$35,000
 - d. \$35,001 - \$50,000
 - e. \$50,001 - \$75,000
 - f. \$75,001 - \$100,000
 - g. \$100,001 - \$150,000
 - h. greater than \$150,000
- 14) What is your current annual household income? (in U.S. dollars)
- a. less than \$15,000
 - b. \$15,000 - \$25,000
 - c. \$25,001 - \$35,000
 - d. \$35,001 - \$50,000
 - e. \$50,001 - \$75,000
 - f. \$75,001 - \$100,000
 - g. \$100,001 - \$150,000
 - h. greater than \$150,000
- 15) In what geographical setting do you currently live?
- a. Suburban

- b. Urban
- c. Rural
- d. Small town
- e. Other (please specify): _____ [Participant will fill in the blank]

APPENDIX M:
FINAL CHECK QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you think is the point of this study? That is, what do you think the researchers are studying? [Participant will fill in the blank]
- 2) Did you answer the questions in this study (across all sections) honestly?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
- 3) If you did not answer the questions honestly, why not? [Participant will fill in the blank]
- 4) Did you make-up or falsify your answers to any questions in this study (across all sections)?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
- 5) If you did make-up or falsify your answers to questions, why? [Participant will fill in the blank]