

VU Research Portal

Mao, Jiayan; Guo, Yongyu; Yang, Shenlong

published in Journal of Psychological Science 2021

document version Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

document license Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act

Link to publication in VU Research Portal

citation for published version (APA)

Journal of Psychological Science, 44(1), 169-176. Mao, J., Guo, Y., & Yang, S. (2021). http://www.psysci.org/EN/abstract/abstract10695.shtml

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
 You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal?

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

Download date: 19. Nov. 2023

阴谋论信念的产生机制 ——社会认知视角的三种解释^{*}

前家焱¹ 郭永玉^{**1} 杨沈龙² (¹南京师范大学心理学院,南京,210097)

(2西安交通大学人文社会科学学院社会心理学研究所,西安,710049)

摘要、社会心理学将阴谋论视作一种意识形态上的信念,并定义为人们将重大的政治或社会事件归因为有权力的群体或个人暗中预谋以达成其目的的解释倾向。社会认知视角为个体这种阴谋论信念的产生提供了三种解释。错觉模式感知导致人们认知上倾向于在不相关的事件之间建立联系;敏感性动因觉察影响人们过度感知并假定事件背后的动因、目的和意图等;投射是将自己愿意参与阴谋的意图归因于事件中的他人。

关键词 阴谋论信念 错觉模式感知 动因觉察 投射

1 阴谋论信念

转基因食品是否是西方国家灭绝中国人口的一种"屠龙"战略?长春长生疫苗事件背后究竟是何人在从中牟利?英国集装箱藏尸案受害人被误传为中国国籍,又出自哪些群体的别有用心?甚至引起新冠肺炎的新型冠状病毒连同当年的 SARS 病毒真如坊间所传,是他国的人造病毒?近年来,国内媒体关于这些社会事件背后的阴谋论报道层出不穷,而"阴谋论"一直是政治学、社会学等社会学科关注的重要研究内容,也被心理学研究者当作文明社会生活的一个显著特征(Douglas & Sutton, 2018)。根据以往社会心理学研究者的定义,阴谋论被视作一种意识形态上的信念,即阴谋论信念(belief in conspiracy theories),它是指人们将重大的政治或社会事件归因为有权力的群体或个人暗中预谋以达成其目的的解释倾向(白洁等, 2017; Goertzel, 1994;

Green & Douglas, 2018; Uscinski & Parent, 2014)。纵观古今富有争议的国内外重大事件,虽然人们对具体事件背后所缠绕的每种具体阴谋论说法的相信程度各不相同,但持有阴谋论信念的个体更容易相信这些阴谋论,或者以阴谋论的眼光和视角来解释事件。

1.1 为什么要从信念的角度探讨阴谋论

将阴谋论作为一种意识形态上的信念进行探讨,不仅仅是为了将它作为一种心理变量服务于实验研究,更重要的是持有阴谋论信念并不是只相信某一种具体的阴谋论观点,而是对所有的阴谋论观点都有着普遍相信的态度。以往的研究中至少有两点发现足以证明。

首先,关于不同事件背后阴谋论的信仰之间具有强相关性(Goertzel, 1994; Green & Douglas, 2018; Swami et al., 2010), Goertzel(1994)认为这是阴谋论信念成为一种独立信念系统的证据。在该系统

^{*} 本研究得到国家社会科学基金重点项目(20AZD084)、国家自然科学基金面上项目(71971120)、教育部人文社会科学研究青年基金项目(18YJC190029)和中央高校基本科研项目(XZY032020034, SK2019027)的资助。

^{**} 通讯作者:郭永玉, E-mail: yyguo@njnu.edu.cn DOI:10.16719/j.cnki.1671-6981.20210124

中,各种信仰、观念相互支持并发展出一种封闭的世界观,在这种世界观的影响下,对一种阴谋论的信仰也会强化对另一种阴谋论的信仰,如此不断循环。正是由于该信念系统的封闭性,人们如果相信一条阴谋论是真实的,那么所有的阴谋论都有可能是真的(Douglas & Sutton, 2018)。

其次,人们可能会对同一事件持有多种阴谋论 观点,即使这些观点彼此不一致,甚至是相互矛盾 的(Douglas & Sutton, 2018; Wood et al., 2012)。例如, 围绕着戴安娜王妃之死产生了大量的阴谋论,有的 声称她是被英国王室谋杀的,有的则认为她在别人 的帮助下伪造了自己的死亡,以便远离狗仔队的镜 头,过上另一种生活,这两种阴谋论观点显然相互 矛盾,但民众却可能同时信奉这两种观点,这似乎 能更直观地说明持有阴谋论信念区别于只相信某一 具体的阴谋论观点。因为作为一个上位的信念系统 具有指导个体情绪和行为反应的目的,它的"格式 塔"或整体一致性可能比处于系统中核心外围的信 念之间的一致性更重要 (Abelson, 1986; Simon et al., 2004)。Wood 等人(2012)通过实验也验证了,对 两个相互矛盾的阴谋论的同时信奉(外围信念)可 以通过官方掩盖了真相这一上位信念来解释。因此, 阴谋论信念作为一种上位信念并不会拘泥于某一特 定的阴谋论说法,而更应该被理解为一种潜在的解 释倾向,这种倾向会使人对权威产生怀疑、对官方 解释产生排斥等(Wood & Douglas, 2015)。

正是由于对不同事件阴谋论观点的信仰之间的强相关性,和对同一事件相互矛盾的阴谋论观点的同时信奉,才使得阴谋论信念独立于只相信某一具体的阴谋论观点,成为一种整体的、连贯的心理结构(Sutton & Douglas, 2014),成为一个独立的、可以纳入心理学研究范畴的变量,这一发现也支撑起了关于阴谋论的整个心理学研究(Douglas & Sutton, 2018)。

1.2 阴谋论信念有何特点

基于人们阴谋论信念的产生源自相似的心理过程,以及阴谋论极易受到社会环境的影响这两点,van Prooijen 和 Douglas (2018)回顾了该研究领域过去十年的发展,提炼出关于阴谋论信念的四个基本原则:普遍性的(universal)情绪性的(emotional)社会性的(social)、后果性的(consequential)。

普遍性是指阴谋论信念并不局限于特定的时空或文化,从传统社会到现代社会,世界各地的

人们都容易受到阴谋论的影响(West & Sanders, 2003);情绪性是指阴谋论信念往往与焦虑(Green & Douglas, 2018)、不确定感(van Prooijen & Jostmann, 2013)、缺乏控制感(van Prooijen & Acker, 2015)等消极情绪紧密相关;社会性是指阴谋论信念通常被认为是群体间的信念,即假设一个强大且有敌意的群体正在密谋与自己所感知到的内群体发生冲突,因此,强烈的内群体认同和外群体威胁会共同激发人们的阴谋论信念(Jolley et al., 2020; Lamberty & Imhoff, 2018; van Prooijen & van Lange, 2014; van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018);后果性是指阴谋论信念会对个人的健康、人际关系和安全等重要的生活领域以及政治参与、环保态度和极端运动等社会发展领域产生消极影响(Imhoff & Bruder, 2014; Silva et al., 2017)。

阴谋论信念的这四个基本原则逐渐引起了社会心理学研究者们的重视,特别是其消极性后果这一方面。哪怕是出于内群体认同而做出的维护群体不受威胁的行为,也并非总是产生亲社会的结果(van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018)。因此,阴谋论信念的消极影响大于积极影响的观点已经成为了研究者们的共识(白洁等,2017; Brotherton & Eser, 2015; Del Vicario et al., 2016; Jolley & Douglas, 2014),而想要对其进行合理干预,必须先厘清阴谋论信念的产生机制。

2 基于社会认知视角的解释

以往的研究试图从不同视角阐释人们为什么会选择信奉阴谋论。早期的研究主要关注人格变量和个体差异,如大五人格(Swami et al., 2010, 2011),但与之相关的研究结果往往难以重复(Brotherton et al., 2013; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014)。也有研究发现,阴谋论信念与不信任感(Goertzel, 1994)、无能为力感(Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999),甚至是偏执型人格(Oliver & Wood, 2014)、非临床性妄想思维(Dagnall et al., 2015)和精神分裂性人格特质(Barron et al., 2014; Darwin et al., 2015)有关。但近来阴谋论心理学领域的研究逐渐减少了对人格因素的关注,甚至对将阴谋论信念与近似病态的人格特质相联系的观点提出了质疑(Douglas & Sutton, 2018)。

此外,从动机视角出发,减少认知上的不确定性,以及理解外部世界的认知动机(Marchlewska et al., 2018; van Prooijen & Jostmann, 2013)、避免

外部威胁并提升控制感与安全感的存在动机(白洁等,2017; Landau et al., 2015; van Prooijen & van Dijk, 2014)以及维护个人和内群体有能力和道德的正面形象的社会动机(Cichocka et al., 2016; Cichocka et al., 2016; Douglas et al., 2017)都能够诱使个体在一定情境下产生阴谋论信念。但是,来自动机路径的解释似乎更需要与特定情境的启动联系在一起。

除了人格和动机的视角,也有研究者从进化 心理学和精神病理学等角度来解释阴谋论信念的 形成 (Ståhl & van Prooijen, 2018; van Der Tempel & Alcock, 2015)。值得注意的是,并非只有极端的阴 谋论拥护者才会形成高阴谋论信念 (Oliver & Wood, 2014),即使是普通民众也可能产生,它更像是人 们日常认知过程的产物(Douglas & Sutton, 2018), 同时,相比于其他研究视角,社会认知视角似乎更 能反映一种稳定的意识形态上的信念形成的内在心 理过程。近来的研究者也更多地从认知的角度来关 注这些心理过程、认知偏差及思维方式可能是什么, 并且,认知机制的揭示也可能帮助到普通民众抵制 有害的阴谋论 (Douglas et al., 2016)。因此,基于 阴谋论信念是一种稳定的心理归因倾向,下面将从 "强加因果"(错觉模式感知)、"归因偏差"(敏 感性动因觉察)、"由己推因"(投射)这三种社 会认知的归因角度来解释阴谋论信念的产生机制。

2.1 错觉模式感知

模式感知(pattern perception)是指识别一组刺激之间有意义的相互关系来理解世界的自动化倾向(Whitson & Galinsky, 2008; Zhao et al., 2014)。 通过模式感知,个体可以理解外部事件并对未来做出预测。然而,当个体缺乏控制感或感到不确定时,这一功能性过程会发生扭曲,因为人们会将实际上并不相关的刺激(事件)联系起来,导致错觉模式感知(illusory pattern perception)——在一组实际上是随机的或无关的刺激之间识别出有意义的相互关系,并以此对未来刺激进行预测(van Prooijen et al., 2018; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008)。

简而言之,模式感知是一种关于人和事之间因果关系的假设(Shermer, 2011)。通过在人、事件和其他重要刺激之间确定因果关系来理解世界,有助于我们识别威胁和机会,预见行为的后果,并战略性地调整我们的行为以适应环境和形势的要求,这种能力对于人类的生存是不可或缺的(van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018)。然而,阴谋论往往是

一种强加因果联系的错觉模式。前人的研究也指出,错觉模式感知是人们持有包括阴谋论信念在内的许多非理性信念的核心(Douglas & Sutton, 2018; Shermer, 2011)。例如,持有阴谋论信念的个体会高估事件之间存在关联的概率(Brotherton & French, 2014);阴谋论信念也与在随机或混乱的刺激中感知模式的倾向有关,特别是在随机抛硬币的结果序列和无结构的现代艺术绘画中寻找并感知模式(van Prooijen et al., 2018; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008)。

Whitson 和 Galinsky (2008) 通过实验发现当操 纵被试丧失控制感时,其错觉模式感知会增加,阴 谋论信念也随之增强。这从侧面表明"阴谋论信念 根植于错觉模式感知这一认知过程" (van Prooijen & Acker, 2015; van Prooijen et al., 2018) , 因为阴谋 论建立的相关模式使不可预测、不确定和具有潜在 威胁的环境变得更加可预测和安全 (van Prooijen et al., 2018), 也在一定程度上恢复了个体所丧失的控 制感。van Prooijen 等人(2018)不仅验证了错觉模 式感知和阴谋论信念之间的相关关系,还通过实验 操纵被试阅读一段支持(或不支持)阴谋论的文章, 结果发现,与反阴谋论条件下的被试相比,支持阴 谋论条件下的被试会赋予世界上的事件之间更强的 因果联系(模式感知),这反过来又预测了被试一 系列不相关的非理性信念。由此可见,错觉模式感 知作为重要的认知基础,会影响人们认知上倾向于 在无关的事件之间建立联系,甚至强加事件之间的 因果关系,从而笃信阴谋论的解释,进而形成阴谋 论信念。

2.2 敏感性动因觉察

Heider 和 Simmel (1944) 曾发现人们倾向于将抽象的几何图形的移动描述成有生命、有情感的动物和人类的行为,这种认知倾向类似于文学中的拟人化修辞手法。据此,后来的研究者提出了敏感性动因觉察(hypersensitive/hyperactive agency detection)的概念,即将不存在目的、动因的人或事物赋予目的、动因的倾向(白洁等,2017; Barrett, 2004, 2007; Johnson & Barrett, 2003)。

敏感性动因觉察一直被心理学研究者用来解释为什么人们会产生超自然信念(Barrett, 2007; Douglas et al., 2016),同时,阴谋论信念与超自然信念之间存在着显著的正相关关系(Brotherton et al., 2013; van Der Tempel & Alcock, 2015; van Prooijen et al., 2018)。因此,有研究者认为,敏感性动因觉察

对这两种信念的作用机制相似,它会导致个体高估所谓阴谋者的权力、恶意和预见能力,而低估了意外、人为失误和偶然性的作用(Shermer, 2011; van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018),从而发生归因偏差并产生阴谋论信念。

也有不少研究直接考察了敏感性动因觉察与 阴谋论信念之间的关系 (Douglas et al., 2016; van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018)。 例如, Brotherton和 French (2015) 通过实验验证了高阴谋论信念的个 体有过度目的论 (inferences of intentionality) 的倾 向 而过度目的论就是一种典型的敏感性动因觉察。 拟人论 (anthropomorphism) 作为另一种敏感性动 因觉察,其与阴谋论信念之间的正相关关系也被大 量研究所证实 (Douglas et al., 2016; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014; van Der Tempel & Alcock, 2015)。与敏感性动 因觉察这种归因偏差类似,合取谬误(conjunction fallacy) 也是一种常见的归因偏差,并且有研究发 现支持阴谋论的人更容易陷入合取谬误这种认知偏 差 (Brotherton & French, 2014)。这些认知上的偏 差往往被认为是一种基于直觉的思维方式,而直觉 思维 (Swami et al., 2014) 与阴谋论信念高度相关, 理性的分析性思维则会削弱人们的阴谋论信念(Ståhl & van Prooijen, 2018; Swami et al., 2014) .

社会心理学的研究发现,普通人确实倾向于拟 人化思维,在他们眼中,天气事件、机器运动,甚 至几何图形的移动都是有意为之的,是有能动性的 (Douglas & Sutton, 2018; Heider & Simmel, 1944) Barrett (2004) 认为人们这种拟人化思维是因为人 的大脑天生对环境中的动因觉察非常敏感,人们能 够及时寻找到动因、理解一件事(特别是在模棱两 可的情境下)并迅速作出反应,对于生理需求和社 会生存都有着重要意义。据此, Klein (2013)提 出,人们对历史事件持有阴谋论的态度是由于高估 了有意识的意图在使这些事件发生的过程中所发挥 的作用,也就是说,阴谋论是源于一种人们将事件 背后的社会力量拟人化的倾向,这种观点也得到了 政治学、哲学等跨学科的支持 (Douglas & Sutton, 2018)。因此,基于敏感性动因觉察这一归因偏差 的认知过程,人们倾向于及时在环境中寻找动因, 甚至拟人化事件背后的社会力量,假定目的、动因 和意图等,从而产生一种稳定的意识形态上的阴谋 论信念。

2.3 投射

投射 (projection)是指将自己的想法、感觉、动机或行为倾向归因于他人的过程 (Douglas & Sutton, 2011, 2018)。与受弗洛伊德影响的早期防御机制模型不同,现代理论模型倾向于将投射视作一种理解社会环境的手段,是一种社会认知过程,在这个过程中,由于缺乏更为直接或客观的信息,个体在判断他人可能在想什么、做什么以及如何感受时依赖于个体对自己的了解与认知 (Ames, 2004)。

具体而言,现实中的人们常常会接触到各种媒体背后交错的谣言与阴谋论,而人们又渴望那些具有社会意义和影响、并且引起强烈情绪反应的事件都能有一个解释(Leman & Cinnirella, 2007),但个人总是缺乏了解事件背后真相的直接途径,只能透过复杂的信息网络去理解事件中的他人究竟做了什么(Douglas & Sutton, 2011; Leman & Cinnirella, 2007; Wallace, 1999),此时,投射作为一种社会认知机制可以帮助人们选择其中的某种解释 比如阴谋论)来理解事件(Ames, 2004)。例如,如果人们相信自己愿意创造艾滋病毒,那么他们就不太可能否定政府与科学家创造了艾滋病毒这一阴谋论。这是一种由个体对"我愿意做这件事"的感知推动了对"他人做了这件事"的阴谋感知。

Douglas 和 Sutton (2011) 通过问卷和实验两 种手段探索了投射对阴谋论信念形成的作用。他 们首先测量(或操纵)了被试的马基雅维利主义 (machiavellianism)水平,这是一种与谋取个人利益、 剥削他人、不择手段的意愿相关的人格特质(Castille et al., 2018), 它可以作为一个人道德倾向的衡量指 标;接着,通过评估对17条阴谋论项目的认可程度 来测量被试的阴谋论信念;同时,对于每一项目, 被试都被要求将自己处于所谓阴谋者的位置上来评 估自己参与该行动的可能性。结果发现了马基雅维 利主义与阴谋论信念之间的正相关关系,个人参与 阴谋的意愿起到了中介作用,这也验证了一个人的 道德倾向和阴谋论信念之间的关系是通过将这些道 德品质投射到他人的身上来实现的。因此,投射是 一种"由己推因"的社会认知过程,它促使人们基 于对自己的了解与认识来推断事件中他人的想法和 做法等,将"我愿意参与这件事"的自我感知投射 于他人,从而推动产生了"他人密谋策划了这件事" 的阴谋论信念。

3 小结与讨论

阴谋论信念作为一种意识形态上的信念,它不是对各种不同阴谋论观点之信仰的简单累积,而是从其中抽象出来的,更普遍、更系统、甚至更稳定的心理变量。基于此,研究者从多种视角来探究阴谋论信念的产生机制(Douglas et al., 2017; Ståhl & van Prooijen, 2018; van Der Tempel & Alcock, 2015),本文梳理了社会认知视角下的错觉模式感知、敏感性动因觉察和投射这三种解释路径。尽管这三者都有相应的理论和实证支撑,对于阴谋论信念的产生都具有一定的解释力,但是又很难说明其中的任何一种因素是独立于其他心理机制之外、独立产生阴谋论信念的路径。

因此,未来研究首先要将动机因素与认知视角 相结合。具体来说,错觉模式感知能够使人们通过 在外部刺激(事件)之间建立有意义的联系来理解 和应对复杂的外部世界,甚至是预测不确定的未来 社会生活。van Prooijen 和 van Dijk (2014) 认为在 这个过程中,具有影响和威胁的外部事件增加了人 们"制造"意义的动机,也就是说,焦虑的情绪和 迫切希望找出发生了什么的愿望使得人们阴谋论信 念增强。而 Whitson 和 Galinsky (2008) 则认为外 部事件的威胁会使人们丧失控制感,控制感的缺乏 又会激发人们观察和寻找模式, 阴谋论提供的解释 可以将令人不安而又变化莫测的现实置于某个群体 的控制之下,从而成为一种恢复个体控制感的补偿 机制。无论是受到减少不确定感的认知动机还是提 升控制感的存在动机的诱发,都足以表明阴谋论信 念的产生是认知路径与动机路径共同作用的结果。 同样的,敏感性动因觉察是人们在进化的过程中, 与环境互动而发展出的一种适应性认知功能,也是 为了在一定程度上识别并避免潜在的外部威胁,满 足社会生存需要,这似乎也暗示了探究阴谋论信念 的产生机制要将认知与动机路径结合起来。

其次,未来研究要将人格因素与认知视角相结合。目前针对投射这一社会认知过程与阴谋论信念的相关研究还比较少,已有的研究是将投射与个体的道德品质,特别是马基雅维利主义这类人格特质联系在一起(Douglas & Sutton, 2011),共同解释阴谋论信念的产生,这说明,脱离人格因素,投射这一认知路径难以独立揭示心理机制。或许真的如van Der Tempel 和 Alcock (2015) 所说,阴谋论信

念的产生本就源于一个复杂的心理过程,而学者们 在研究了大量的社会、人格和认知变量之后似乎发 现,上述种种与阴谋论信念产生相关的认知过程其 实也在同时满足个体一个或者多个的心理需求—— 例如理解复杂的事件和外部世界的需求 (Barron et al., 2014; Marchlewska et al., 2018),减少不确定感 的需求(van Prooijen & Jostmann, 2013; Whitson et al., 2015),补偿控制感的需求(Landau et al., 2015; van Prooijen & van Dijk, 2014) ,缓解如焦虑之类的 消极情绪的需求 (Goertzel, 1994; Green & Douglas, 2018),或者仅仅是简单地在后现代世俗社会中探 索和表达个人价值观的需求 (Raab et al., 2013; van Der Tempel & Alcock, 2015)。因此,未来的研究势 必要将人格、动机和社会认知等多重研究视角结合 起来,更深入、更全面、更系统地揭示阴谋论信念 的产生机制。

最后,未来研究还应注重研究样本、方法和学 科的多元化。阴谋论的心理学研究已经开展了二十 多年, van Prooijen 和 Douglas (2018) 仍然坚持认 为这是一个新兴的研究领域,而我国国内甚至东方 文化背景下的主题研究还处于起步状态。Goreis 和 Voracek (2019) 对阴谋论心理学领域实证文献进行 了元分析,所统计的全部96篇文献中仅有4篇是以 亚洲为背景展开的研究(占比 4.2%)。然而,我国 近年的社会危机事件不断,与转基因食品、疫苗事 件等相关的阴谋论甚至还引起了严重的社会恐慌, 造成了恶劣的社会影响。如何针对阴谋论信念展开 有效的心理学干预策略已经引起了研究者们的重视 (茆家焱等,2019)。此外,该研究领域还有一些 固有缺陷亟待完善,例如:未来的研究应该更加注 重实验设计和纵向研究以确立变量间的因果关系; 仍需长期关注和扩大极端阴谋论者这类样本,以得 出更为坚实的结论;引入质性访谈、追踪对阴谋论 材料的眼动反应和测量对阴谋论材料的反应时等手 段,为阴谋论信念的测量拓宽思路等。阴谋论从来 都不局限于心理学的研究范畴,哲学、政治学、社 会学、传播学等学科用着带有各自学科特色的语言、 彼此相互独立的方法来描述和研究这一现象。因此, 未来研究更应注重弥合各自学科定义、理论与方法 论的分歧,对阴谋论这一日渐普遍、影响甚广的社 会现象进行跨学科的深入探讨。

参考文献

白洁,郭永玉,徐步霄,杨沈龙.(2017).阴谋论的心理学探索.心理科学,

- 40(2), 505-511.
- 白洁,郭永玉,杨沈龙. (2017). 人在丧失控制感后会如何?——来自补偿性控制理论的揭示. *中国临床心理学杂志*, *25*(5), 982-985, 981.
- 茆家焱, 杨沈龙, 郭永玉. (2019). 信奉阴谋论的动机及干预手段. *中国临床心理学杂志, 27*(3), 623-627, 529.
- Abalakina-Paap, M., Stephan, W. G., Craig, T., & Gregory, W. L. (1999). Beliefs in conspiracies. *Political Psychology*, 20(3), 637-647.
- Abelson, R. P. (1986). Beliefs are like possessions. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 16(3), 223-250.
- Ames, D. R. (2004). Inside the mind reader's tool kit: Projection and stereotyping in mental state inference. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87*(3), 340-353.
- Barrett, J. L. (2004). Why would anyone believe in God? Walnut Creek. CA: AltaMira Press.
- Barrett, J. L. (2007). Is the spell really broken? Bio-psychological explanations of religion and theistic belief. *Theology and Science*, *5*(1), 57-72.
- Barron, D., Morgan, K., Towell, T., Altemeyer, B., & Swami, V. (2014). Associations between schizotypy and belief in conspiracist ideation. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 70, 156-159.
- Brotherton, R., & Eser, S. (2015). Bored to fears: Boredom proneness, paranoia, and conspiracy theories. *Personality and Individual Differences, 80,* 1-5.
- Brotherton, R., & French, C. C. (2014). Belief in conspiracy theories and susceptibility to the conjunction fallacy. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 28(2), 238-248
- Brotherton, R., & French, C. C. (2015). Intention seekers: Conspiracist ideation and biased attributions of intentionality. *PLoS ONE*, *10*(5), e0124125.
- Brotherton, R., French, C. C., & Pickering, A. D. (2013). Measuring belief in conspiracy theories: The generic conspiracist beliefs scale. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *4*, 279.
- Castille, C. M., Buckner, J. E., & Thoroughgood, C. N. (2018). Prosocial citizens without a moral compass? Examining the relationship between Machiavellianism and unethical pro-organizational behavior. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 149(4), 919-930.
- Cichocka, A., Marchlewska, M., & de Zavala, A. G. (2016). Does self-love or self-hate predict conspiracy beliefs? Narcissism, self-esteem, and the endorsement of conspiracy theories. Social Psychological and Personality Science, 7(2), 157-166.
- Cichocka, A., Marchlewska, M., de Zavala, A. G., & Olechowski, M. (2016). 'They will not control us': Ingroup positivity and belief in intergroup conspiracies. *British Journal of Psychology, 107*(3), 556-576.
- Dagnall, N., Drinkwater, K., Parker, A., Denovan, A., & Parton, M. (2015).
 Conspiracy theory and cognitive style: A worldview. Frontiers in Psychology, 6, 206.
- Darwin, H., Neave, N., & Holmes, J. (2011). Belief in conspiracy theories. The role of paranormal belief, paranoid ideation and schizotypy. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 50(8), 1289-1293.
- Del Vicario, M., Bessi, A., Zollo, F., Petroni, F., Scala, A., & Caldarelli, G. (2016). The spreading of misinformation online. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 113(3), 554-559.
- Douglas, K. M., & Sutton, R. M. (2011). Does it take one to know one? Endorsement of conspiracy theories is influenced by personal willingness to conspire. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *50*(3), 544-552.

- Douglas, K. M., & Sutton, R. M. (2018). Why conspiracy theories matter: A social psychological analysis. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 29(1), 256-298
- Douglas, K. M., Sutton, R. M., Callan, M. J., Dawtry, R. J., & Harvey, A. J. (2016). Someone is pulling the strings: Hypersensitive agency detection and belief in conspiracy theories. *Thinking and Reasoning, 22*(1), 57-77.
- Douglas, K. M., Sutton, R. M., & Cichocka, A. (2017). The psychology of conspiracy theories. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *26*(6), 538-542.
- Goertzel, T. (1994). Belief in conspiracy theories. *Political Psychology*, *15*(4), 731-742.
- Goreis, A., & Voracek, M. (2019). A systematic review and meta-analysis of psychological research on conspiracy beliefs: Field characteristics, measurement instruments, and associations with personality traits. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 205.
- Green, R., & Douglas, K. M. (2018). Anxious attachment and belief in conspiracy theories. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *125*, 30-37.
- Heider, F., & Simmel, M. (1944). An experimental study of apparent behavior. *The American Journal of Psychology*, *57*(2), 243-259.
- Imhoff, R., & Bruder, M. (2014). Speaking (un-) truth to power: Conspiracy mentality as a generalised political attitude. *European Journal of Personality*, 28(1), 25-43.
- Johnson, A. H., & Barrett, J. (2003). The role of control in attributing intentional agency to inanimate objects. *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, *3*(3), 208-217.
- Jolley, D., & Douglas, K. M. (2014). The social consequences of conspiracism: Exposure to conspiracy theories decreases intentions to engage in politics and to reduce one's carbon footprint. *British Journal of Psychology*, 105(1), 35-56.
- Jolley, D., Meleady, R., & Douglas, K. M. (2020). Exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories promotes prejudice which spreads across groups. *British Journal of Psychology*, 111(1), 17-35.
- Klein, O. (2013). The lay historian: How ordinary people think about history. In R. Cabecinhas & L. Abadia (Eds.), *Narratives and social memory: Theoretical and methodological approaches* (pp. 25-45). Braga: University of Minho.
- Lamberty, P., & Imhoff, R. (2018). Powerful pharma and its marginalized alternatives? Effects of individual differences in conspiracy mentality on attitudes toward medical approaches. *Social Psychology*, 49(5), 255-270.
- Landau, M. J., Kay, A. C., & Whitson, J. A. (2015). Compensatory control and the appeal of a structured world. *Psychological Bulletin*, *141*(3), 694-722.
- Leman, P. J., & Cinnirella, M. (2007). A major event has a major cause: Evidence for the role of heuristics in reasoning about conspiracy theories. *Social Psychological Review*, 9(2), 18-28.
- Marchlewska, M., Cichocka, A., & Kossowska, M. (2018). Addicted to answers: Need for cognitive closure and the endorsement of conspiracy beliefs. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 48(2), 109-117.
- Oliver, J. E., & Wood, T. J. (2014). Conspiracy theories and the paranoid style(s) of mass opinion. *American Journal of Political Science*, *58*(4), 952-966.
- Raab, M. H., Ortlieb, S. A., Auer, N., Guthmann, K., & Carbon, C. C. (2013).
 Thirty shades of truth: Conspiracy theories as stories of individuation, not of pathological delusion. Frontiers in Psychology, 4, 406.
- Shermer, M. (2011). The believing brain: From ghosts and gods to politics and conspiracies—How we construct beliefs and reinforce them as truths. New York: Henry Holt.
- Silva, B. C., Vegetti, F., & Littvay, L. (2017). The elite is up to something: Exploring

- the relation between populism and belief in conspiracy theories. *Swiss Political Science Review*, *23*(4), 423-443.
- Simon, D., Snow, C. J., & Read, S. J. (2004). The redux of cognitive consistency theories: Evidence judgments by constraint satisfaction. *Journal of Personality* and Social Psychology, 86(6), 814-837.
- Ståhl, T., & van Prooijen, J. W. (2018). Epistemic rationality: Skepticism toward unfounded beliefs requires sufficient cognitive ability and motivation to be rational. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 122, 155-163.
- Sutton, R. M., & Douglas, K. M. (2014). Examining the monological nature of conspiracy theories. In J. W. van Prooijen & P. A. M. van Lange (Eds.), *Power,* politics, and paranoia: Why people are suspicious of the their leaders (pp. 254-272). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swami, V., Chamorro-Premuzic, T., & Furnham, A. (2010). Unanswered questions: A preliminary investigation of personality and individual difference predictors of 9/11 conspiracist beliefs. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 24(6), 749-761.
- Swami, V., Coles, R., Stieger, S., Pietschnig, J., Furnham, A., Rehim, S., & Voracek, M. (2011). Conspiracist ideation in Britain and Austria: Evidence of a monological belief system and associations between individual psychological differences and real-world and fictitious conspiracy theories. *British Journal of Psychology*, 102(3), 443-463.
- Swami, V., Voracek, M., Stieger, S., Tran, U. S., & Furnham, A. (2014). Analytic thinking reduces belief in conspiracy theories. *Cognition*, *133*(3), 572-585.
- Uscinski, J. E., & Parent, J. M. (2014). *American conspiracy theories*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- van Der Tempel, J., & Alcock, J. E. (2015). Relationships between conspiracy mentality, hyperactive agency detection, and schizotypy: Supernatural forces at work? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 82, 136-141.
- van Prooijen, J. W., & Acker, M. (2015). The influence of control on belief in conspiracy theories: Conceptual and applied extensions. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 29(5), 753-761.
- van Prooijen, J. W., & Douglas, K. M. (2018). Belief in conspiracy theories: Basic principles of an emerging research domain. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 48(7), 897-908.

- van Prooijen, J. W., & Jostmann, N. B. (2013). Belief in conspiracy theories: The influence of uncertainty and perceived morality. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 43(1), 109-115.
- van Prooijen, J. W., & van Dijk, E. (2014). When consequence size predicts belief in conspiracy theories: The moderating role of perspective taking. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *55*, 63-73.
- van Prooijen, J. W., & van Lange, P. A. M. (2014). The social dimension of belief in conspiracy theories. In J. W. van Prooijen & P. A. M. van Lange (Eds.), *Power, politics, and paranoia: Why people are suspicious of their leaders* (pp. 237-253). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- van Prooijen, J. W., & van Vugt, M. (2018). Conspiracy theories: Evolved functions and psychological mechanisms. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 13(6),* 770-788.
- van Prooijen, J. W., Douglas, K. M., & De Inocencio, C. (2018). Connecting the dots: Illusory pattern perception predicts belief in conspiracies and the supernatural. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 48(3), 320-335.
- Wallace, P. (1999). *The psychology of the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- West, H. G., & Sanders, T. (Eds.). (2003). *Transparency and conspiracy:*Ethnographies of suspicion in the New World Order. Durham. NC: Duke University Press.
- Whitson, J. A., & Galinsky, A. D. (2008). Lacking control increases illusory pattern perception. *Science*, *322*(5898), 115-117.
- Whitson, J. A., Galinsky, A. D., & Kay, A. (2015). The emotional roots of conspiratorial perceptions, system justification, and belief in the paranormal. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *56*, 89-95.
- Wood, M. J., & Douglas, K. M. (2015). Online communication as a window to conspiracist worldviews. *Frontiers in Psychology, 6*, 836.
- Wood, M. J., Douglas, K. M., & Sutton, R. M. (2012). Dead and alive: Beliefs in contradictory conspiracy theories. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 3(6), 767-773.
- Zhao, J. Y., Hahn, U., & Osherson, D. (2014). Perception and identification of random events. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 40(4), 1358-1371.

Generation Mechanism of Belief in Conspiracy Theories: Three Explanations from Social Cognitive Perspective

Mao Jiayan¹, Guo Yongyu¹, Yang Shenlong² (¹School of Psychology, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, 210097)

(²Institute of Social Psychology, School of Humanities and Social Science, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Xi'an, 710049)

Abstract Social psychology treats conspiracy theories as an ideological belief which is defined as people's tendency to interpret major social and political events as powerful groups or individuals who secretly and deliberately plan to achieve their intended purpose. Belief in conspiracy theories is not just about believing in a specific conspiracy theory, but a general belief in all kinds of conspiracy theories. The following two findings in previous studies are sufficient to prove this point: One is the strong correlation between beliefs about the conspiracy theories behind different events; The other is that people may simultaneously embrace contradictory conspiracy theories about the same event. These two findings also indicate that belief in conspiracy theories is an integral and coherent psychological structure, which can be included into the category of psychological research as an independent variable.

That the negative influence of conspiracy theories is greater than the positive influence has become the consensus of researchers. To make a reasonable intervention in belief in conspiracy theories, we must first clarify the mechanism it generates. Previous studies have attempted to explain why people choose to believe in conspiracy theories from different perspectives. The results of studies on the relationship between belief in conspiracy theories and the Big Five personality are often difficult to replicate, so it seems that belief in conspiracy theories cannot be simply described by the Big Five personality dimensions. From the perspective of motivation, cognitive motives of reducing cognitive uncertainty and understanding the external world, existential motives of avoiding external threats and enhancing the sense of control and security, social motives of maintaining the positive image of competence and morality of individuals and inner groups can induce individuals to generate belief in conspiracy theories.

Compared with other research perspectives, the perspective of social cognition seems to better reflect the internal psychological process of forming an ideological belief. This paper mainly introduces three explanations for the emergence of individual's belief in conspiracy theories from the perspective of social cognition. Illusory pattern perception leads to people's cognitive tendency to establish connections between unrelated events and even impose causal relationships to generate belief in conspiracy theories. Hypersensitive agency detection affects people to look for the agency in the environment, and even over-perceive and assume the agency, purpose and intention behind the event, thus generating belief in conspiracy theories. Projection prompts people to infer the thoughts and behaviors of others in the event based on their own understanding and knowledge, and project their self-perception of "I am willing to participate in this event" onto others, thus promoting the belief in conspiracy theories that "others really plotted this event".

Although these three factors have corresponding theoretical and empirical support and have certain explanatory power for the generation of belief in conspiracy theories, it is difficult to explain that any of them are independent of other psychological mechanisms and independently generate belief in conspiracy theories. In the future study, it is suggested to combine social cognition, motivation, personality and other research perspectives, attach importance to experimental design and vertical research, expand the group of subjects, broaden measurement methods, and carry out cross-perspective, interdisciplinary and cross-cultural in-depth and systematic research on the generation mechanism of belief in conspiracy theories.

Key words belief in conspiracy theories, illusory pattern perception, agency detection, projection