

In Search of an Imaginary Enemy:

Catholic Collective Narcissism and the Endorsement of *Gender Conspiracy Beliefs*

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Abstract

Gender studies have often been criticised for undermining family and religious values. In this paper we argue that these criticisms exhibit the characteristics of conspiracy theories. We define *gender conspiracy beliefs* as convictions that gender studies and gender-equality activists represent an ideology secretly designed to harm traditional values and social arrangements. In two studies conducted among Catholics in Poland (Study 1 $N=1019$; Study 2 $N=223$), we examined the prevalence of *gender conspiracy beliefs* and their psychological concomitants. We hypothesized that *gender conspiracy beliefs* should be associated with a defensive identification with one's religious group, captured by religious collective narcissism. In both studies, Catholic collective narcissism was demonstrated to be a robust predictor of *gender conspiracy beliefs*. We additionally demonstrated that Catholic collective narcissism predicted outgroup hostility and this effect was mediated by *gender conspiracy beliefs*. We discuss the implications for gender-based prejudice.

Keywords: conspiracy beliefs, collective narcissism, religiosity, outgroup hostility

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“The ideology of gender presents a threat worse than Nazism and Communism combined. Protect your children against gender”, said Dariusz Oko, a Polish priest and a professor at the Pontifical University of John Paul II, in a news channel interview (Graff, 2014; Graff & Korolczuk, 2017; Sierakowski, 2014). His words reflected a broader conviction represented by some of the religious officials that gender theory and gender studies (a transdisciplinary area of research that engages critically with gender realities, norms and identities, Brannon, 1999), represent an ideology (in Polish referred to simply as “gender”) that is a threat to the society. In an official 2013 letter of the Polish Episcopacy bishops noted that: “for months gender ideology has been introduced into various structures of social life (...) without the knowledge or agreement of the society” (Polish Episcopacy Conference, 2013; para. 6), and called for “resistance against pressures from small, yet loud and wealthy, groups who experiment on children and youth in the name of modern parenting” (para. 9).

These examples illustrate how some people see “gender ideology” as a secret plot of powerful others aiming at hurting the in-group (e.g., Catholic Church). We argue that such convictions function similarly to conspiracy beliefs, which can be defined as beliefs in secret plots by powerful and malevolent groups (e.g., Douglas & Sutton, 2008; Goertzel, 1994). According to what we propose terming a *gender conspiracy beliefs*, gender studies and gender-equality activists represent socially progressive forces that secretly promote an ideology designed to harm traditional values and social arrangements. In line with this reasoning, scientists and activists who emphasize that gender is not only a biological but also a psychological phenomenon are seen as enemies of human nature. Together with feminists and the LGBTQ movement, they are perceived as a group that strategically and purposefully seeks to deny the importance of the traditional differentiation of men and women. This

alleged denial is blamed for triggering conflict between sexes, promoting hostility to fatherhood and motherhood, finally leading to destruction of a family that is perceived by Catholics as one of the most important values (Graff, 2014; Graff & Korolczuk, 2017; Sierakowski, 2014).

Although we focus on *gender conspiracy beliefs* in Poland (a traditionally Catholic country), they are not limited to this particular context (Campoy, 2016; Kuhar, & Paternotte, 2017). For example, Barbara Rosenkranz, a current member of the Austrian parliament representing the far-right Austrian Freedom Party warned against a totalitarian conspiracy of gender activists that has the purpose of creating a new kind of human being – a “genderless person.” Rosenkranz (2008) claimed that such plans are pursued secretly by an “elite” (p. 14), blinded by an ideology which ignores the laws of nature and tradition. Its main goal is to turn people into “objects that can be used at will” (Rosenkranz, 2008; p. 72). Similar views were presented by Michel Schooyans, a Belgian priest, in his 2001 book entitled “The Hidden Face of the United Nation” as well as by representatives of the La Manif Pour Tous movement in France (Stille, 2014). This rhetoric was even praised by Pope Francis who in 2016 raised a notion encouraging Catholics to reject “the indoctrination of gender theory” (Pope Francis, 2016; para 14).

All of these authors and religious officials seemed to focus on a similar message characteristic for conspiracy theories: (a) warning people against the threats posed by gender theory and gender studies which allegedly aim to secretly destroy the Catholic Church and (b) promoting actions (e.g., Polish Episcopacy Conference, 2013) which should be taken in order to stop the conspiring enemies from executing their nefarious plan. The aim of the current research is to examine the prevalence and correlates of *gender conspiracy beliefs*.

Psychological and political research identified multiple factors that increase conspiracy beliefs (for a review see Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka, in press). This work

focused extensively on the role of psychological threats and frustrations of individual needs. For example, conspiracy beliefs have been linked to lack of personal control (Whitson & Galinsky, 2008), the need to reduce uncertainty (Marchlewska, Cichocka, & Kossowska, 2017; van Prooijen & Jostmann, 2013; Whitson, Galinsky, & Kay, 2015), powerlessness (Abalakina-Paap, Stephan, Craig, & Gregory, 1999; Jolley & Douglas, 2014) or threatened self-esteem (i.e., narcissism; Cichocka, Marchlewska, & Golec de Zavala, 2016). Other approaches emphasized the fact that conspiracy theories are usually seen as malevolent actions of other *groups*, and suggested that group level factors might play an important role in shaping conspiracy beliefs (e.g., Bilewicz & Sędek, 2015; Cichocka, Golec de Zavala, Marchlewska, Olechowski, 2015; Cichocka, Marchlewska, Golec de Zavala, & Olechowski, 2016; Kofta & Sędek, 2005; van Prooijen and & van Lange, 2014; Zonis & Joseph, 1994).

Given that gender conspiracy believers claim that their religious ingroup (i.e., the Catholic Church) is threatened by conspiring enemy groups (i.e., supporters of gender studies), we assumed that *gender conspiracy beliefs* should be positively related to religious group identification that makes ingroup members especially sensitive to outgroup threats. Such ingroup positivity is captured by the concept of collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson, & Jayawickreme, 2009; for a review see Cichocka, 2016)—an exaggerated evaluation of the ingroup accompanied by a conviction that others do not appreciate it enough. Prior studies demonstrated that collective narcissism was positively related to perceiving even ambiguous intergroup situations as threatening (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Such perceptions of threat drive the convictions that other groups have malevolent intentions and conspire against the ingroup. Golec de Zavala and Cichocka (2012) demonstrated that national collective narcissism predicted the endorsement of conspiracy stereotypes of Jews. In a similar vein, Cichocka, Marchlewska and colleagues (2016) showed that national collective narcissism was a robust predictor of a more general conviction that

other national groups are conspiring against one's national ingroup. None of these studies, however, explored the relationship between narcissistic identification with religious groups and conspiracy beliefs. Studies on narcissistic identification with religious groups and outgroup hostility seem relatively rare despite the fact that collective narcissism is one of the crucial factors predicting outgroup derogation (Cichocka, 2016). Perhaps narcissistic identification that refers to conservative denominations within Christianity and other monotheistic religions (e.g., Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Southern Baptists, Orthodox Judaism, Islam) would serve as a positive predictor of both exaggerated fears about the outgroups' bad intentions and hostility towards religious outgroups. In our project, we focus on Catholicism and propose that those Catholics who identify with their religious ingroup in a narcissistic manner could be particularly inclined to perceive threats to the Catholic Church and the values it represents. This may be associated with a belief that outgroup forces are conspiring against Catholics. The alleged propagators of a "gender ideology" seems to serve as a good candidate to be one of such forces. Thus, in this research we expected Catholic collective narcissism to predict the endorsement of gender conspiracy theories.

We also expected *gender conspiracy beliefs* and Catholic collective narcissism to be associated with hostile attitudes towards those who do not conform to the Catholic values. National collective narcissism tends to predict outgroup prejudice and aggression, especially in response to perceived threats to the ingroup (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013). Studies conducted in Poland demonstrated that the association between national collective narcissism and outgroup prejudice was at least partially driven by conspiracy beliefs: conspiracy stereotypes of Jews mediated the association between national collective narcissism and anti-Semitism (Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012). Other work also points to the link between conspiracy beliefs and aggressive outgroup behavior (Beller, 2017; Swami, 2012). For example, Bilewicz, Winiewski, Kofta and Wójcik (2013) found that individuals

who believed in conspiracy stereotypes about Jews supported discriminatory policies against them. According to Bilewicz and Sędek (2015) conspiracy beliefs serve as a “core mindset that defines the enemies” (p.13) and, as a consequence, evokes hostility and aggressive actions against them. Thus, we assumed that *gender conspiracy beliefs* should mediate the relationship between Catholic collective narcissism and hostility towards people who do not respect the Catholic values.

Overview of the current research

The aim of our research was to investigate the prevalence of *gender conspiracy beliefs* as well as intergroup factors associated with these beliefs. We predicted that *gender conspiracy beliefs* would be predicted by Catholic collective narcissism (rather than belief in God and religiosity per se). Additionally, we assumed that Catholic collective narcissism would be a positive predictor of hostility towards those who do not conform to Catholic values (gay men and lesbians in Study 1, and those who challenge these values more broadly in Study 2). Finally, we predicted that the relationship between Catholic collective narcissism and outgroup hostility will be accounted for by *gender conspiracy beliefs* (Study 1 and Study 2). We tested these predictions in two cross-sectional studies conducted in Poland.

Study 1

In Study 1 we sought to establish the basic relationship between Catholic collective narcissism and *gender conspiracy beliefs*. To this end, we analysed data from a nationally representative study, which included belief in God, Catholic collective narcissism, *gender conspiracy beliefs*, social distance towards gay men and lesbians and demographics (sex, age and years of education), among other variables. We assumed that belief in God will positively predict *gender conspiracy beliefs* (DV1). However, this relationship should be attenuated once we account for Catholic collective narcissism that should be a robust predictor of *gender conspiracy beliefs*.

Moreover, we aimed to investigate the association between Catholic collective narcissism and social distance toward gay men and lesbians (DV2)—a group considered to violate the norms of the Roman Catholic Church. As argued by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later to become Pope Benedict XVI, and Archbishop Alberto Bovone (1986) in their pastoral letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church, although homosexuality is not sinful in and of itself, “intrinsically disordered” homosexual acts are not “a morally acceptable option” (para. 3). The official doctrine finds its reflection in individual attitudes. Large-scale comparative studies revealed a positive relationship between respondents’ Catholic affiliation and their disapproval of homosexuality studies (e.g., Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Górska, van Zomeren, & Bilewicz, 2017). However, since the emancipation of sexual minorities is often seen as a threat to traditional Catholic values (Ayoub, 2014), and collective narcissists exhibit the high level of threat-sensitivity (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013), we proposed that Catholic collective narcissism should be more predictive of social distance toward gay men and lesbians than the belief in God. Furthermore, we expected this relationship to be accounted for by *gender conspiracy beliefs*. Research on prejudice toward gays and lesbians showed that heterosexuals who more strongly support traditional gender roles manifest greater hostility toward gay men and lesbians (e.g., Parrott, 2009; Parrott & Gallagher, 2008, Hirai, Winkel, & Poppan, 2014). As *gender conspiracy beliefs* imply the endorsement of traditional gender identities and point to sexual minorities as the agent plotting against the “natural” gender order, they might mediate the effect of Catholic collective narcissism on social distance toward gay men and lesbians.

Method

Participants and procedure.

Study 1 involved a nationwide representative sample of Polish adults. The sample consisted of 1019 respondents (529 women; 490 men) between the ages of 18 and 92 ($M_{age} =$

46.72, $SD = 17.04$). Sample was obtained from national identification database (PESEL) with the use of stratified random sampling by the Danae research company. Participants took part in computer-assisted face-to-face interviews (CAPI). Because we were interested in examining Catholic collective narcissism, we excluded from the analyses anyone who reported their religious identification as other than Catholic ($n=78$). Thus, the final sample consisted of 941 respondents.

Measures.

Catholic collective narcissism was measured with three items from the Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009) with respect to the religious in-group (i.e., the Catholic Church): 1) “The Catholic Church deserves special treatment.”, 2) “It really makes me angry when others criticize the Catholic Church.”, 3) “If the Catholic Church had a major say in the world, the world would be a much better place.” Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *completely disagree* to 6 = *completely agree*, $\alpha = .93$, $M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.55$.

Belief in God was measured with one item: “Regardless of participation in religious practices, you consider yourself as someone who...”. Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *definitely does not believe in God* to 7 = *definitely believes in God*, $M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.48$.

Gender conspiracy beliefs were measured with three items (Marchlewska, Górska, Cichocka, & Róžańska, 2014) measuring participant’s beliefs about “gender [ideology]”— a general term frequently used in the Polish context to capture gender studies, theory and activism: 1) “Gender [ideology] was created in order to destroy the Christian tradition”, 2) “Gender [ideology] tends to take control over public media”, 3) “Gender [ideology] is introduced in a secret way.” Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*, $\alpha = .94$, $M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.91$.

Social distance towards gay men and lesbians was measured with three items: 1) “Would you accept a gay person as your coworker?”, 2) “Would you accept a gay person as

your neighbor?”, 3) “Would you accept your family member’s relationship with a gay person?”. Participants responded on a scale from 1=*would completely accept* to 4=*would completely oppose*, $\alpha=.81$, $M=2.43$, $SD=0.86$.

Results and Discussion

Because Study 1 used a nationally representative sample, we first explored the agreement with the gender conspiracy items (Figure 1). Around 30% of participants in a representative sample of Poles agreed with statements arguing that gender studies are involved in a conspiracy.

--- Figure 1 ---

Fig. 1 Prevalence of *gender conspiracy beliefs* in Poland

Next, we explored the correlates of *gender conspiracy beliefs* (Table 1). *Gender conspiracy beliefs* were significantly positively correlated with Catholic collective narcissism, belief in God and social distance towards gay men and lesbians. Catholic collective narcissism was significantly positively correlated with belief in God and social distance.

--- Table 1 ---

We then performed a hierarchical multiple regression analysis to investigate whether the relationship between belief in God and *gender conspiracy beliefs* would decrease after we introduce Catholic collective narcissism (Table 2).

--- Table 2 ---

In Step 1, we introduced belief in God which was significantly positively associated with *gender conspiracy beliefs*. In Step 2, we introduced Catholic collective narcissism and found its positive effect on *gender conspiracy beliefs*. The relationship between religiosity and *gender conspiracy beliefs* was non-significant, indicating that belief in God alone (after we co-varied out narcissistic religious identification) was not significantly associated with

gender conspiracy beliefs. We found no significant effects of age, and only marginally significant effects of sex and education. Overall, Study 1 confirmed that narcissistic identification with religious ingroup (i.e., the Catholic Church) positively predicted a conviction that gender studies are just a cover for a conspiracy which secretly aims to destroy the Catholic tradition.

Finally, we performed a hierarchical multiple regression analysis to investigate the effects of belief in God, Catholic collective narcissism and *gender conspiracy beliefs* on social distance towards gay men and lesbians (Table 3).

--- Table 3 ---

In Step 1, we introduced belief in God which was significantly positively associated with social distance. We also found a significant negative effect of education and a significant positive effect of age. In line with the previous findings (e.g., Górska et al., 2017), those who were less educated and older showed greater distance towards gay men and lesbians.

In Step 2, we introduced Catholic collective narcissism and found its positive effect on social distance. The effects of belief in God, age and education, though weaker, remained significant.

In Step 3, we introduced *gender conspiracy beliefs* and found its positive effect on social distance. After introducing *gender conspiracy beliefs*, the effect of Catholic collective narcissism on hostile intentions was weaker, although still significant. Again, we observed significant effects of belief in God and education. Importantly, *gender conspiracy beliefs* variable was the strongest predictor of social distance towards gay men and lesbians.

To perform a full test of our hypothesis, we checked for an indirect effect of Catholic collective narcissism on social distance via *gender conspiracy beliefs* using Model 4 of PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) with 10,000 bootstrapped samples. The indirect effect was significant, with a bootstrap 95% bias-corrected confidence interval of 0.06 to 0.12 (Figure 2).

--- Figure 2 ---

Fig. 2 Indirect effect of Catholic collective narcissism on social distance toward gay men and lesbians via *gender conspiracy beliefs*

Entries are standardized coefficients. Dotted line indicates total effect (not controlling for the third variable).

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

Study 1 confirmed our basic prediction about the importance of Catholic collective narcissism (and not belief in God per se) in the endorsement of *gender conspiracy beliefs*. It also showed that the relationship between Catholic collective narcissism and social distance toward gay men and lesbians was accounted for by *gender conspiracy beliefs*. These results suggest that *gender conspiracy beliefs* might be an important factor predicting sexual prejudice.

Study 2

In Study 2, we also explored the destructive correlates of adopting *gender conspiracy beliefs* (DV1). This time, however, we decided to go beyond social distance and attitudes towards gay men and lesbians (DV2) and focused on hostility towards people who undermine Catholic values more broadly (DV3). We hypothesized that Catholic collective narcissism should be a positive predictor of hostile intentions towards those who undermine Catholic values and that this relationship would be accounted for by *gender conspiracy beliefs*.

One limitation of Study 1 was that we measured the crucial variables (i.e., Catholic collective narcissism and *gender conspiracy beliefs*) with the use of short (three-item) scales. Therefore, in Study 2 we aimed to examine whether the pattern of results obtained in Study 1 would conceptually replicate if we use better measurement tools. Additionally, in Study 2 we

measured religiosity by asking participants not only about belief in God, but also about their religious practices.

Method

Participants and procedure.

Study 2 was conducted among Polish adult Internet users who defined themselves as Catholics. The sample consisted of 223 respondents (127 women; 96 men) between the ages of 18 and 64 ($M_{age} = 31.76$, $SD = 11.28$). Data was collected on-line by one of the leading Polish online research panels.

Measures.

Catholic collective narcissism was measured using the full 5-item version of the Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013) with respect to the religious ingroup (i.e., the Catholic Church): 1) “The Catholic Church deserves special treatment.”, 2) “It really makes me angry when others criticize the Catholic Church.”, 3) “If the Catholic Church had a major say in the world, the world would be a much better place,” 4) “Not many people seem to fully understand the importance of the Catholic Church.”, 5) “I will never be satisfied until the Catholic Church gets the recognition it deserves.” Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *completely disagree* to 6 = *completely agree*, $\alpha = .89$, $M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.15$.

Religiosity was measured with two items: 1) “Regardless of participation in religious practices, you consider yourself as someone who...”; participants responded on a scale from 1 = *definitely does not believe in God* to 7 = *definitely believes in God*; and 2) “How often do you participate in religious practices such as: masses or religious meetings (excluding weddings or funerals)?”. Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *never* to 7 = *every day*, $r(221) = .58$, $p < .001$, $M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.17$.

Gender conspiracy beliefs were measured with eight items: 1) “Gender [ideology] was created in order to destroy the Christian tradition.”, 2) “Gender [ideology] tends to take

control over the public media.”, 3) “Gender [ideology] is introduced in a secret way.”, 4) “Gender [ideology] is a threat to Christian morality.”, 5) “Gender [ideology] is aimed especially against the Catholic Church.”, 6) “The purpose of gender [ideology] is to destroy the family.”, 7) “Opponents of gender [ideology] are treated with contempt.”, 8) “Gender [ideology] is an attack on heterosexuality.” Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*, $\alpha = .95$, $M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.59$.

Hostile intentions towards those who undermine Catholic values were measured with three items: 1) “Those who oppose the Catholic faith should be punished.”, 2) “I would not hesitate to fight against those who undermine the positive image of Catholicism.”, 3) “Those who do not understand the meaning of Catholic rules, should be forced to comply with them.” Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*, $\alpha = .87$, $M = 2.32$, $SD = 1.31$.

Results and Discussion

First, we computed correlations between the basic variables (Table 4). *Gender conspiracy beliefs* were significantly positively correlated with Catholic collective narcissism, religiosity and hostile intentions towards those who undermine Catholic values. Catholic collective narcissism was significantly positively correlated with religiosity and hostile intentions. We also found a significant positive correlation between religiosity and hostile intentions.

--- Table 4 ---

We then performed a hierarchical multiple regression analysis to investigate whether the effects of religiosity would weaken after we consider its overlap with Catholic collective narcissism (Table 5).

--- Table 5 ---

In Step 1, we introduced religiosity which was significantly positively associated with *gender conspiracy beliefs*. We also found a significant negative effect of sex indicating that women were less likely to believe in the *gender conspiracy* than men.

In Step 2, we introduced Catholic collective narcissism and found its positive effect on *gender conspiracy beliefs*. The relationship between religiosity and *gender conspiracy beliefs* was non-significant, indicating that religiosity (after we co-varied out narcissistic religious identification) was not significantly associated with *gender conspiracy beliefs*. The effect of sex remained significant.

Finally, we performed a hierarchical multiple regression analysis to investigate the effects of religiosity, Catholic collective narcissism and *gender conspiracy beliefs* on hostile intentions (Table 6).

--- Table 6 ---

In Step 1, we introduced religiosity which was significantly positively associated with hostile intentions. We also found a significant negative effect of sex indicating that women were less hostile than men.

In Step 2, we introduced Catholic collective narcissism and found its positive effect on hostile intentions. The relationship between religiosity and hostility was non-significant, indicating that religiosity (after we co-varied out narcissistic religious identification) was not significantly associated with hostile intentions. The effect of sex remained significant.

In Step 3, we introduced *gender conspiracy beliefs* and found its positive effect on hostile intentions. After introducing *gender conspiracy beliefs* the effect of Catholic collective narcissism on hostile intentions was weaker, although still significant. Moreover, Catholic collective narcissism was demonstrated to be the strongest predictor of hostility. Again, we observed a significant effect of sex.

To perform a full test of our hypothesis, we checked for an indirect effect of Catholic collective narcissism on hostile intentions via *gender conspiracy beliefs* using Model 4 of PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) with 10,000 bootstrapped samples. The indirect effect was significant, with a bootstrap 95% bias-corrected confidence interval of 0.08 to 0.26 (Figure 3).

--- Figure 3 ---

Fig. 3 Indirect effect of Catholic collective narcissism on hostile intentions toward those who undermine Catholic values via *gender conspiracy beliefs*

Entries are standardized coefficients. Dotted line indicates total effect (not controlling for the third variable).

*** $p < .001$

In Study 2 we replicated the results obtained in Study 1, suggesting that it is Catholic collective narcissism, rather than the religiosity per se, that positively predicts *gender conspiracy beliefs*. Study 2 additionally revealed that Catholic collective narcissism was a positive predictor of hostile intentions towards those who undermine Catholic values and that this relationship was partly accounted for by *gender conspiracy beliefs*. These conclusions are in line with previous studies (Cichocka, Marchlewska et al., 2016). In addition they indicate that not only national, but also religious type of collective narcissism is a positive predictor of outgroup conspiracies. They are also consistent with an idea that conspiracy beliefs may give a chance to identify enemies and further evoke negative attitudes towards them (Bilewicz & Sędek, 2015).

General Discussion

In two studies, we investigated the phenomenon of *gender conspiracy beliefs*. In recent years, a number of Catholic Church representatives and writers suggested that gender studies represent intentional and malevolent actions of the enemies of the church (e.g., Korolczuk, 2017; Sierakowski, 2014; Stille, 2014). We argue that such rhetoric is characteristic of a

conspiracy theory. Using a nationally representative sample, in Study 1 we established that about a third of Catholics in Poland endorsed *gender conspiracy beliefs*. These convictions were only weakly related to basic demographics, with no significant effects of participants' age or education, and mixed effects for sex (women were less likely to endorse these beliefs only in Study 2). Rather, our analyses indicated that *gender conspiracy beliefs* were associated with a specific form of religious identity: in both studies, Catholic collective narcissism emerged as a robust predictor of adopting *gender conspiracy beliefs*. Although belief in God and religiosity alone were positively related to *gender conspiracy beliefs*, these relationships were no longer significant when we controlled for the variance shared between belief in God (Study 1), religiosity (Study 2) and religious collective narcissism.

Thus, it seems that it is rather a form of defensive identification with a religious ingroup, and not religiosity per se, that makes Catholics more susceptible to endorse *gender conspiracy beliefs*. Previous research showed that national collective narcissism is associated with sensitivity to intergroup threats (similarly to individual narcissism that is associated with sensitivity to individual threats; Horvath & Morf, 2009; Marchlewska & Cichocka, 2017) and, thus, fosters a conviction that other groups are conspiring against the national ingroup (Cichocka, Marchlewska et al., 2016; Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012). Our research extended this work by showing that narcissistic identification with a religious ingroup can also predict beliefs in outgroup conspiracies. Nevertheless, our conclusions about a weak link between religiosity and *gender conspiracy beliefs* should be treated with caution as we used simplified indices of religiosity. Future research should investigate the relationships *gender conspiracy beliefs* have with different types of religiosity (for example, some approaches differentiate intrinsic religiosity which captures internalized religious faith from extrinsic religiosity which captures faith aimed at getting social support; Allport & Ross, 1967; see also revised scales e.g., Darvyri et al., 2014; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989).

Potentially fertile ground for future research would also be to check if the results would be similar after controlling for different types of collective narcissism (e.g., national collective narcissism; Golec de Zavala et al, 2009; Cichocka et al, 2016; Marchlewska, Cichocka, Panayiotou, Castellanos, & Batayneh, 2018). This seems important especially in Poland – a country in which the Roman Catholic Church continues to hold a very strong position and both of these forms of collective narcissism may be strongly related to each other. In line with this logic, conducting similar research in different cultural contexts (i.e., also in less catholic countries) seems also highly advisable.

Future research should also examine whether similar associations would be observed beyond the context of Catholicism. In fact, criticisms of “gender ideology” have also been voiced by representatives of other religions. For example, a Muslim cleric in France was quoted saying: “Under the cover of fighting against homophobia and for gender equality, they are spreading the ideology of gender theory and homosexual propaganda” (Stille, 2014). We expect that it is the defensiveness of religious identity, rather than a specific religious affiliation, that should foster *gender conspiracy beliefs*.

Importantly, in our studies we found that Catholic collective narcissism predicted social distance towards gay men and lesbians (Study 1) and hostile intentions towards those who undermine Catholic values (Study 2), and that these relationships were partly accounted for by *gender conspiracy beliefs*. These findings are in line with previous work linking both national collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012) and conspiracy beliefs (Beller, 2017; Bilewicz et al., 2013; Swami, 2012) to outgroup hostility. They suggest that gender conspiracy theories might have potentially undesirable societal consequences (see also Jolley & Douglas, 2014). Future research should further investigate the role *gender conspiracy beliefs* play in promoting prejudice towards those who challenge traditional gender relations. By identifying them as dangerous enemies, *gender conspiracy beliefs* may in fact

contribute to prejudice not only towards the LGBTQ community, but also towards those who seek to challenge gender-inequality (e.g., feminist activists or women and men who do not conform to traditional social norms; e.g., Nykiel, 2013). Furthermore, when it comes to methodological improvements, in Study 2 we referred to a general category (rather than a specified outgroup) by asking participants about their attitudes towards people who undermine Catholic values. Such an approach can lead to less precise conclusions and, thus, future work should measure outgroup attitudes using a scale that focuses on specific outgroups (e.g., feminists or gay men and lesbians, just as we did in Study 1).

Also, future research would do well to better establish causality of the observed relationships, by experimentally manipulating the levels of Catholic collective narcissism and gender conspiracy beliefs. According to our predictions reducing Catholic collective narcissism, for example by boosting ingroup security, should lead to disbelief in outgroup conspiracies. On the other hand, we cannot exclude the possibility, that reducing beliefs in gender conspiracy may also lower defensiveness and, as a consequence, result in lower scores on Catholic collective narcissism scale. Further empirical investigation is needed to test these assumptions.

Regardless of the direction of the relationship between these two variables, it would be useful to explore ways of attenuating Catholic collective narcissism as well as *gender conspiracy beliefs*. Several diverse lines of research point to a possible role of the personal control defined as an ability to influence the course of one's life (Cichocka et al., 2018). Feelings of low personal control have been linked with increased beliefs in God (e.g., Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008), endorsement of conspiracy beliefs (e.g., Whitson & Galinsky, 2008) as well as national collective narcissism (Cichocka et al., 2018). At the same time, both national collective narcissism (Cichocka et al., 2018) and conspiracy beliefs (van Prooijen & Acker, 2015) seem to decrease following inductions of feelings of personal

control. It is then at least plausible that we could reduce defensive religious identification as well as *gender conspiracy beliefs* by increasing feelings of personal control. We hope that future research tests these intriguing possibilities.

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Table 1

Correlations among Key Variables (Study 1)

Variables	1	2	3
1. <i>Gender conspiracy beliefs</i>	-		
2. Catholic collective narcissism	.51 <i>p</i> < .001	-	
3. Belief in God	.17 <i>p</i> < .001	.44 <i>p</i> < .001	
4. Social distance	.41 <i>p</i> < .001	.35 <i>p</i> < .001	.21 <i>p</i> < .001

Table 2

Predictors of Gender Conspiracy Beliefs (Study 1)

Variables	Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B(SE)</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>B(SE)</i>	β	<i>p</i>
Belief in God	0.20(0.05)	.15	<.001	-0.04(0.05)	-.03	.38
Age	0.01(0.01)	.06	.13	0.001(0.004)	.01	.75
Sex	-0.14(0.15)	-.04	.33	-0.25(0.13)	-.07	.05
Education	-0.04(0.02)	-.08	.06	-0.03(0.02)	-.06	.07
Catholic collective narcissism				0.65(0.05)	.52	<.001
	<i>F</i>	6.96	<.001	48.91		<.001
	<i>R</i> ²	.04		.27		

Note. In both studies, our regression models controlled for basic demographics, although the results are similar when these are not included in the models.

Table 3

Predictors of Social Distance Towards Gay Men and Lesbians (Study 1)

Variables	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
	<i>B(SE)</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>B(SE)</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>B(SE)</i>	β	<i>p</i>
Belief in God	0.10(0.02)	.18	<.001	0.05(0.02)	.08	.04	0.05(0.02)	.10	.01
Age	0.01(0.002)	.10	.01	0.004(0.002)	.08	.047	0.004(0.002)	.07	.05
Sex	-0.08(0.06)	-.05	.19	-0.11(0.06)	-.06	.08	-0.08(0.06)	-.05	.20
Education	-0.04(0.01)	-.17	<.001	-0.04(0.01)	-.17	<.001	-0.04(0.01)	-.15	<.001
Catholic collective narcissism				0.15(0.02)	.28	<.001	0.06(0.02)	.11	.01
<i>Gender conspiracy beliefs</i>							0.14(0.02)	.31	<.001
<i>F</i>	17.05		<.001	24.60		<.001	32.13		<.001
<i>R</i> ²		.10			.16			.23	

Table 4

Correlations among Key Variables (Study 2)

Variables	1	2	3
1. <i>Gender conspiracy beliefs</i>	-		
2. Catholic collective narcissism	.51		
	<i>p</i> < .001	-	
3. Religiosity	.29	.54	-
	<i>p</i> < .001	<i>p</i> < .001	
4. Hostile intentions	.47	.49	.22
	<i>p</i> < .001	<i>p</i> < .001	<i>p</i> = .001

Table 5

Predictors of Gender conspiracy beliefs (Study 2)

Variables	Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B(SE)</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>B(SE)</i>	β	<i>p</i>
Religiosity	0.42(0.09)	.31	<.001	0.04(0.10)	.03	.66
Age	-0.01(0.01)	-.04	.56	-0.01(0.01)	-.05	.44
Sex	-0.56(0.21)	-.17	.01	-0.50(0.19)	-.16	.01
Education	0.01(0.03)	.01	.87	0.03(0.03)	.06	.33
Catholic collective narcissism				0.68(0.10)	.50	<.001
	<i>F</i>	6.68	<.001	16.99		<.001
	<i>R</i> ²	.11		.28		

Table 6

Predictors of Hostile Intentions Towards Those Who Undermine Catholic Values (Study 2)

Variables	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
	<i>B(SE)</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>B(SE)</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>B(SE)</i>	β	<i>p</i>
Religiosity	0.29(0.07)	.26	<.001	-0.03(0.08)	-.02	.75	-0.04(0.08)	-.03	.65
Age	-0.01(0.01)	-.09	.16	-0.01(0.01)	-.10	.09	-0.01(0.01)	-.09	.12
Sex	-0.49(0.17)	-.18	.01	-0.44(0.16)	-.17	.01	-0.33(0.15)	-.12	.04
Education	-0.03(0.03)	-.07	.28	-0.01(0.03)	-.02	.68	-0.02(0.02)	-.04	.49
Catholic collective narcissism				0.57(0.08)	.50	<.001	0.42(0.09)	.37	<.001
<i>Gender conspiracy beliefs</i>							0.22(0.06)	.27	<.001
<i>F</i>	5.53		<.001	15.92		<.001	17.01		<.001
<i>R</i> ²		.09			.27			.32	