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**Invisible String: Deficiencies in Coping with Stress and Emotion Regulation
as Predictors of Conspiracy Beliefs**

[Niewidzialna nić: Deficyty w radzeniu sobie ze stresem i w regulacji emocji
jako predyktory wiary w teorie spiskowe]

Streszczenia w języku angielskim i polskim

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to examine how deficits in coping with stress and emotion regulation contribute to the endorsement of conspiracy beliefs. Across 13 studies conducted in various national contexts (Poland, the UK, and the US), this research integrates diverse psychological perspectives to explore these relationships. The work builds on the premise that conspiracy beliefs, often fueled by anxiety, stress, or uncertainty, may serve as a response to perceived threats. I addressed a critical gap in understanding the predictors of conspiracy beliefs, proposing that deficits in stress coping and emotion regulation play a key role in increasing susceptibility to such beliefs. These two interrelated processes are essential for well-being and social functioning. Because maladaptive coping strategies (e.g., avoidance) and emotion dysregulation are linked to negative outcomes like intrusive thoughts and threat-related attention biases, individuals with these deficits may be more likely to interpret the world as hostile. This, in turn, could make them more likely to adopt conspiracy explanations centered on malevolent actors and their clandestine actions. I also examined the role of national narcissism—a defensive form of national identity characterized by perceived in-group superiority and underappreciation, rooted in individual shortcomings. As individuals with heightened national narcissism may amplify external threats and adopt conspiratorial narratives as a defense, I hypothesized that national narcissism might explain the relationships between coping, emotion regulation, and conspiracy beliefs.

The findings revealed that deficiencies in coping — particularly avoidance — consistently predicted higher conspiracy beliefs, both in general contexts and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, priming avoidance coping strategies increased conspiracy beliefs. Religious coping showed mixed results: in some studies it was positively related to conspiracy beliefs, in others this relationship was not significant or religious coping correlated with greater compliance with pandemic safety measures. This duality highlights the complex nature of religious coping. Furthermore, emotion dysregulation robustly correlated with conspiracy beliefs across various political and cultural contexts, suggesting the universality of this link.

In the last two papers, national narcissism was predicted by deficiencies in coping (i.e., low self-sufficient coping) and emotion regulation. Notably, inducing self-sufficient coping strategies decreased conspiracy beliefs by attenuating national narcissism. This defensive identity also mediated the link between emotion regulation and conspiracy beliefs, reflecting its role as a compensatory strategy. I discuss the potential implications and limitations of my studies.

This research advances knowledge of how individuals' regulatory deficits translate into broader social phenomena. By linking individual difficulties to collective attitudes and behavioral tendencies, my findings inform interventions targeting maladaptive coping and emotion dysregulation, with potential applications in public health communication and education.

Keywords: conspiracy beliefs, conspiracy theories, coping with stress, avoidance, emotion dysregulation, negative emotions, national narcissism