

People Turn to Conspiracy Theories in a Subconscious Quest to Feel Like They ‘Matter’, Research Suggests

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, April 28, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- While all people are innately driven to find meaning in their lives, this subconscious desire pulls some people to conspiracy theories and dangerous belief systems.

After an extensive review of psychological research, renowned social psychologist Arie Kruglanski and journalist Dan Raviv show how people's need for 'significance' propels our actions, governs our feelings, and dominates our thoughts in their new book [The Quest for Significance](#).

"Experts on human motivation contend that all people share the same set of basic needs, and everything people do, try to attain, or avoid is in the service of satisfying one or more of those basic needs," they explain.

"The need for significance and mattering is one such pre-eminent basic need that all people have."

Drawing on both academic, peer-reviewed research and the personal experiences of the authors, including Kruglanski's childhood in Poland during the Holocaust, the authors explore how this need for meaning can motivate people towards harmful and even violent acts – including believing conspiracy theories. They also suggest that self-awareness is key to how people can avoid becoming susceptible.

The authors spotlight factors that make modern society 'fraught with uncertainty', from financial chaos to the Ukraine war, the rise of authoritarians, and global health crises.

"But it is not the uncertainty alone that has been so troubling to so many," they explain. "It is a loss of significance that the uncertainty connotes."

They explain that for some people, uncertainty suggests that worst case scenarios are possible or even likely – for example that financial instability will leave them homeless, or increased numbers of immigrants will mean no resources left for themselves.

"The loss of significance that people around the globe have been experiencing makes them vulnerable to a particular brand of narratives; ones that acknowledge their fears and anxieties and blame some agent or entity for nefarious plots and actions aimed at humiliating and

diminishing them,” they explain.

“An important aspect of those narratives has been a call to arms against the party or parties allegedly responsible for these evil machinations. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of conspiracy theories identifying an assortment of culprits as the enemy that must be violently confronted and whose satanic plans must be aggressively thwarted.”

The authors include examples such as the conspiracy theory by David Icke that an interdimensional race of reptilians has assumed human form and is plotting to take over the world, including 43 U.S. presidents and the British Royal Family – a theory which he has spread in multiple books and lectures.

“From a psychological perspective, the real question is what do these theories offer Icke’s audiences that motivates them to take the claims seriously? In fact, they offer quite a lot. First, to be privy to a truth so scandalous and shocking makes a person feel very special, one of a select few ‘in the know,’” they explain.

The science of psychology reveals that people’s judgments and beliefs are strongly guided by their motivations, and because conspiracy narratives make people feel significant and special and often offer hope for a better future, they tend to be taken seriously by ‘significance-deprived’ audiences exposed to them.

The authors point out that particularly when people’s sense of significance is lowered by negative life circumstances, they are susceptible to narratives that offer to raise their dignity and sense of mattering.

“Disseminated by social media at lightning speed, conspiracy narratives purport to identify the alleged culprits responsible for proliferating misery,” they explain. “In our private lives, and on the world stage, the challenge is to find ways that can enhance our significance as a win-win project, rather than through a bitter, competitive zero-sum game.”

The authors suggest the biggest threat to society is that ‘self-knowledge is typically in short supply’, and they urge people to understand their own drives for meaning, to better understand what motivates them or what damages their sense of significance.

They explain: “People are often blissfully unaware of why they do what they do, and what basic motives underlie their choices, decisions, and actions. Despite these misgivings, it may be better to face the truth about ourselves and navigate it, rather than bury our head in the proverbial sand.”

To increase one’s chances of finding happiness and success, the book suggests understanding one’s own needs – but also to listen to and observe family, work colleagues, and peers, because it is often easy to provide that person with significance, and then benefit from respect and

significance given in return.

Rigorous psychological research has previously documented how most people are oblivious to what causes even their most routine actions – let alone beliefs.

The authors suggest that to protect ourselves against harmful quests for significance, including conspiracy theories, we should learn what makes us tick – whether we are motivated by money, love, values or some other ambition.

“If you can somehow quantify how important significance is to you, how strongly you react to challenges to your dignity, how badly you feel when “put down” by others, and what arouses your envy, empathy, or admiration, then you might identify guidelines for navigating your life more successfully,” they explain.

“This part of “knowing thyself” may suggest to you which situations could be beneficial and which ones to avoid, which invitations to accept and which to turn down, which friends to choose or to eschew, and which goals to commit to or reject.”

Further Information

The Quest for Significance: Harnessing the Need that Makes the World Go Round, by Arie W. Kruglanski, Dan Raviv (Routledge, 2025)

ISBN: Paperback: 9781032508788 | eBook: 9781003410706

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003410706>

About the author

Arie W. Kruglanski is a globally esteemed authority on human motivation, goal systems, cognitive closure, and terrorism. A Distinguished University Professor at the University of Maryland, his many awards include the Association for Psychological Science William James Fellow Award honoring "his lifetime of significant intellectual contributions to the basic science of psychology" and American Psychological Association Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award.

Dan Raviv is a bestselling author and covered war, espionage, diplomacy, and politics for CBS News for 40 years.

Their video and audio podcasts, titled The Quest for Significance, are on [all major podcast platforms](#).

About Taylor & Francis Group:

Taylor & Francis supports diverse communities of experts, researchers and knowledge makers around the world to accelerate and maximize the impact of their work. We are a leader in our field, publish across all disciplines and have one of the largest Humanities and Social Sciences portfolios. Our expertise, built on an academic publishing heritage of over 200 years, advances trusted knowledge that fosters human progress.

Our 2,500+ people, based in a global network of offices in more than 15 countries, use their skills and the latest technology to curate, validate and share impactful advanced, emergent and applied knowledge. Under the Taylor & Francis, Routledge and F1000 imprints we publish 2,700 journals, 8000 new books each year and partner with more than 700 scholarly societies.

Taylor & Francis is proud to be a Global Certified Accessible™ publisher and our operations and all our print publications are certified CarbonNeutral®.

END

Rebecca Parker-Ellis

Taylor & Francis

+44 7818 911310

[email us here](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/807305249>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2025 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.