Signaling Virtuous Victimhood as Indicators of Dark Triad Personalities

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We investigate the consequences and predictors of emitting signals of victimhood and virtue. In our first three studies, we show that the virtuous victim signal can facilitate nonreciprocal resource transfer from others to the signaler. Next, we develop and validate a victim signaling scale that we combine with an established measure of virtue signaling to operationalize the virtuous victim construct. We show that individuals with Dark Triad traits—Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy—more frequently signal virtuous victimhood, controlling for demographic and socioeconomic variables that are commonly associated with victimization in Western societies. In Study 5, we show that a specific dimension of Machiavellianism—amoral manipulation—and a form of narcissism that reflects a person's belief in their superior prosociality predict more frequent virtuous victim signaling. Studies 3, 4, and 6 test our hypothesis that the frequency of emitting virtuous victim signal predicts a person's willingness to engage in and endorse ethically questionable behaviors, such as lying to earn a bonus, intention to purchase counterfeit products and moral judgments of counterfeiters, and making exaggerated claims about being harmed in an organizational context.

Keywords: Dark Triad, unethical behavior, victim-signaling, victimization, virtue-signaling

The cry that one is a victim of injustice, oppression, intolerance, or any of the myriad reasons why people believe they are prevented from getting what they want in life has echoed loudly through the ages. It remains so today. Accounts describing a person's experience of being victimized by individuals, groups, organizations, or society appear in newspapers, on the Internet, and in everyday conversations. The dictionary defines a victim as "one who suffers some injury, hardship, or loss, is badly treated or taken advantage of" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). An extensive literature on victimization has consistently shown that being a victim can be a highly aversive experience resulting in serious outcomes like posttraumatic stress disorder (Boudreaux, Kilpatrick, Resnick, Best, & Saunders, 1998), psychological distress, fear, and anxiety (Barling, 1996; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983), loss of esteem, heightened perceptions of vulnerability and diminished sense of power (Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Kachanoff, Taylor, Caouette, Khullar, & Wohl, 2019; Perloff, 1983), and an invalidation of one's sense of security, trust, and optimism (Fohring, 2018; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Victims can also incur social costs like being stigmatized and blamed for their predicament (Fohring, 2018; Hafer, 2000; Ryan, 1971; Van den Bos & Maas, 2009). These negative outcomes suggest that being a victim is generally not a desirable state. Yet in the current historical period, many observers have argued that in the United States and in other Western societies being a victim does not always carry these negative connotations or produce unwanted outcomes. In fact, it has been alleged that Western societies have so embraced a "culture of victimhood" (Bawer, 2012; Campbell & Manning, 2018; Sykes, 1992) that claiming one is a victim has become increasingly advantageous and even fashionable (Cole, 2007; Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe, & Rothschild, 2012).

What might explain why people would be willing to publicly claim victimhood and seek to be labeled by others as victims? One possibility is that sharing their experience helps them cope with the negative consequences of victimization and take proactive steps toward psychological healing. Many victims experience social isolation, which can intensify their sense of powerlessness (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2006). Communicating their victimization experiences publicly may connect them to others who have had similar experiences and who can provide them with social validation and support (Campbell & Manning, 2018). Victim claiming can also allow them to justify a demand for redress, regain a sense of power, and restore their diminished self-worth (Choi, Green, & Kapp, 2010; Robbins et al., 2006). In addition to its therapeutic effects, public communication of one's victimhood could inspire a collective or institutional response to address the systematic causes of these experiences at a societal level (Snow & Benford, 1992; Taylor & McKirnan, 1984).

Notwithstanding these benefits, we propose that claiming victim status, an act we refer to as *victim signaling*, also allows victims to pursue an environmental resource extraction strategy that helps them survive, flourish, and achieve their goals in situations that are

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responsive to their claims. By resource extraction we mean that resources are transferred from either individuals or larger institutions (e.g., the state, organization) to the person who signals victimhood. There are many resources that can be transferred to someone claiming victim status (Foa & Foa, 1980), and so we use the term *resource* broadly to refer to any material (e.g., money, jobs, access to education) and/or symbolic (e.g., respect, tolerance, compassion) assets that one party possesses and that another party wants to acquire.

We argue that contemporary Western democracies have become particularly hospitable environments for victim signalers to execute a strategy of nonreciprocal resource extraction because several features of these societies make victimhood potentially advantageous. First, the spreading of egalitarian values in the West leads many people to perceive any differential outcomes as evidence of overstratification; hence, they conclude that status differences between individuals and groups in society that are associated with these outcomes are illegitimate (Black, 2011). People who signal victimhood because they perceive themselves as being deprived of what others possess, or are treated in a way that others are not, can therefore find a receptive audience among many who detect their signal. Second, the alleviation of human suffering is treated as a paramount value in Western societies. This heightened sensitivity to suffering, coupled with the ease of bidirectional mass communication, such as on social media platforms, has increased the reach and effectiveness of recruiting third-party support for people signaling victimhood (Clark, 2016; Mackey, 2014). Examples can be seen in cases where an individual or a group who claims to be a victim elicits statements of concern and sympathy from politicians, celebrities, media pundits, social activists, and other influential people. Sometimes the victim signalers also receive material or economic support from these parties.

Based on these observations, we propose that victim signaling can be a mechanism through which a pattern of resource transference can be initiated by the signaler. We define *victim signaling* as a public and intentional expression of one's disadvantages, suffering, oppression, or personal limitations. We further suggest that victim signaling is maximally effective at initiating resource transfers when it is coupled with *virtue signaling*, defined as symbolic demonstrations that can lead observers to make favorable inferences about the signaler's moral character. We hypothesize that the presentation of a dual signal of *virtuous victimhood* can induce those who perceive the signal to offer more social and economic resources to the signaler than the presentation of only one of the signals. Moreover, we hypothesize that people willing and able to use deception and manipulation for attaining personal goals— people possessing "Dark Triad" traits (Paulhus & Williams, 2002)—will more frequently emit virtuous victim signals compared with people lacking Dark Triad traits.

Theoretical Background

Our hypotheses follow from the proposition that victim signaling may be used as a social influence tactic that can motivate recipients of the signal to voluntarily transfer resources to the signaler. This argument is not new. An emerging literature on *competitive victimhood* documents the prevalence of victim signaling by various social groups (Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012) and provides evidence for its functionality as a resource

extraction strategy (Graso, Aquino, & Ok, 2019; Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe et al., 2012). For instance, victim signaling justifies victim groups seeking retribution against alleged oppressors (Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe et al., 2012). Retribution often takes the form of demanding compensation through some kind of resource transfer from nonvictims to the alleged victim. Claiming victim status can also facilitate resource transfer by conferring *moral immunity* upon the claimant (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). Moral immunity shields the alleged victim from criticism about the means they might use to satisfy their demands. In other words, victim status can morally justify the use of deceit, intimidation, or even violence by alleged victims to achieve their goals. Relatedly, claiming victim status can lead observers to hold a person less blameworthy, excusing transgressions, such as the appropriation of private property or the infliction of pain upon others, that might otherwise bring condemnation or rebuke (Gray & Wegner, 2011). Finally, claiming victim status elevates the claimant's *psychological standing*, defined as a subjective sense of legitimacy or entitlement to speak up (Miller, 1999; Miller & Effron, 2010). A person who has the psychological standing can reject or ignore any objections by nonvictims to the unreasonableness of their demands (Ratner & Miller, 2001). In contrast to victim signalers, people who do not publicly disclose their misfortune or disadvantage are less likely to reap the benefits of retributive compensation, moral immunity, deflection of blame, or psychological standing and would therefore find it difficult to initiate resource transfers.

The effectiveness of victim signaling as a resource transfer strategy follows the basic principles of *signaling theory*. Signaling theory posits that the transmission of information from one individual (the sender) to another (the receiver) can influence the behavior of the receiver (Dunham, 2011). Signals can refer to any physical or behavioral trait of the sender, and are used by the senders to alter the behaviors of others to their own advantage (Gambetta, 2005; Krebs & Dawkins, 1984). Portraying one's self as a victim through frequent signaling of this status can therefore be one of many tactics people deploy in interpersonal relationships and in exchanges with larger entities to convince nonvictims to willingly provision alleged victim with resources.[1] Importantly, it is not necessary for the victim signal to accurately represent a person's dire circumstances, so it is possible that some signalers intentionally and repeatedly convey their victim status as a manipulative strategy with the explicit aim of altering the behavior of receivers to the signaler's advantage. To be perfectly clear, we are not suggesting that all or even most victim signals are inaccurate; many undoubtedly represent actual occurrences and depict the victim's experiences with fidelity. However, not *all* victim signals can be taken at face value. Every year, billions of dollars are lost from fraudulent claims made to insurance companies, governmental aid agencies, or charities by people who portray themselves falsely as victims (Coalition Against Insurance Fraud, 2017). People lie about many things (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996), so it is reasonable to assume that some will lie about being a victim if they believe it is personally advantageous to do so. In support of this assumption, two exploratory studies we

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[1] An example of this notion is examined in Armour & Zaber's (2020) working paper on student loans and claiming disability status after a recent policy change.

conducted with 300 U.S. adults recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and with a nationally representative sample of 1,509 Canadians recruited via a consumer survey panel found that 34% and 24% of respondents, respectively, reported that "at some point in their lives, they have pretended to be hurt or harmed, physically or psychologically, to increase the chances of getting something they wanted," and 79% of MTurk respondents and 72% Canadian respondents said they knew somebody else who had done so.[2]

Prior theory, research, and common experience support our proposition that victim signaling can motivate observers to provide an alleged victim with resources of various kinds. A less obvious question is who is more likely to frequently emit this signal. One answer is people who really are victims. As mentioned earlier, communicating victimhood can have personally beneficial outcomes and initiate societal efforts to address the underlying causes of victimization. However, because people lie, it is entirely possible that there is a subset of the population both adept at and comfortable with using deception and manipulation to attain personal goals who will routinely portray themselves as victims if they believe they can benefit from doing so. We test this possibility in our paper by examining whether more frequent victim signalers are also higher in Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy—a suite of personality traits known as the Dark Triad—while controlling for factors that may increase one's chances of experiencing various form of disadvantages or mistreatment in Western societies (e.g., ethnicity, gender, social status, sexual orientation, disabilities; Jennings, 2015). When testing this prediction, we are agnostic as to whether the signal is accurate or inaccurate. What we do suggest is that it can be functional.

Victim Signaling and the Dark Triad

Numerous studies show that deceptive tactics are commonly used by people who have Dark Triad traits (Jonason, Lyons, Baughman, & Vernon, 2014; Jones & Paulhus, 2017). According to Mealey (1995), Dark Personalities can flourish as social parasites who intentionally attempt to extract resources from their environments without providing any benefits. Similarly, Jones (2014) theorized that predatory social parasites can use a variety of mimicry and deception strategies to integrate themselves into different communities so that they can extract resources either all at once or over time. An example of the former would be when a con artist convinces someone to entrust them with their life savings in a fraudulent Ponzi scheme. An example of the latter would be an employee embezzling small sums of money from his or her company over a period of years.

Among the characteristics of people who have Dark Triad profiles (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) are self-promotion, emotional callousness, duplicity, and tendency to take advantage of others (Holtzman, 2011; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Despite their socially aversive features and antisocial associations, these traits can also be evolutionarily adaptive when accompanied by the ability to display superficial charm and highly developed impression management skills (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012). These latter qualities coupled with the absence of a guiding moral compass—illustrated by the obsession with power in Machiavellians, self-grandiosity in narcissists, general disregard for social norms in psychopaths, and callousness toward others' emo-

tions common to all three personality types—allow Dark Triad personalities to guiltlessly deploy a range of manipulative strategies for personal gain. In sum, there are sound empirical and theoretical reasons to suggest that people with Dark Triad profiles have the potential to initiate nonreciprocal resource extraction strategies. We posit that one of the tools they may use to do so is frequent victim signaling. Moreover, the emission of false or exaggerated victim signals to achieve their goals can be particularly attractive to people who possess Dark Triad traits because they will be unencumbered by the bite of conscience or concerns about the effects of their actions on others. Individuals with Dark Triad personalities may also be better at mimicking actual victimhood because they are practiced in the art of deception. Thus, we hypothesize that individuals with Dark Triad personalities are more willing to deploy victim signaling as part of their repertoire of resource extraction strategies across a wide range of situations compared with people who do not have these traits.

But even if those who possess Dark Triad traits are shown to emit victim signals more frequently, this signal alone is not a foolproof method for extracting resources from others. In environments where many people claim victim status, observers who want to alleviate human suffering or rectify an injustice have to be selective about where to allocate their limited resources. It is also conceivable that many people who portray themselves as victims will appear undeserving of assistance or attention. A person who is paralyzed in a car accident after having robbed a bank is unlikely to receive much public support. We therefore hypothesize that the most effective means for pursuing a strategy of nonreciprocal resource extraction by signaling victimhood is to present the additional signal of being virtuous.

Virtuous Victimhood

Virtue signaling is defined as "the conspicuous expression of moral values, done primarily with the intent of enhancing one's standing within a social group" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). We theorize that three benefits will be accrued from signaling virtue that amplify the effectiveness of a victim signal. First, by communicating one's superior moral character to the outside world, it can project an image of trustworthiness and allude to the signaler's benevolent intentions of reciprocity. Reciprocal altruism is the foundation for many cooperative forms of social exchange in large groups (Trivers, 1971), and it starts when one party willingly transfers resources to another with the expectation that their generosity will be matched in the future by the recipient, to the mutual benefit of all. A person who can convincingly present him or herself as virtuous should, on average, be able to induce more people to initiate the voluntary transfer of material or symbolic resources to him or her than someone who sends no signal or who signals that they lack virtue.

Second, although previous work shows that people are generally trustful (Gilbert, Krull, & Malone, 1990), research also finds that they are motivated to deliberate about and possibly reject the information communicated to them when it carries personal relevance, which presumably would be the case when they are asked

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[2] Full wording of the questions and demographic information about the samples can be found in the online supplemental materials available at: https://osf.io/uxsb5/.

to transfer their resources to a victim signaler (Hasson, Simmons, & Todorov, 2005; Sperber et al., 2010). The close association between honesty and morality (Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi, & Cherubini, 2011) suggests that portraying oneself as a moral person can provide supporting evidence for the credibility and legitimacy of one's victim signal. As a result, the vigilance and skepticism that observers might ordinarily apply when deciding to transfer their resources to a victim signaler, particularly one who is a stranger, can be overcome by signs of virtue.

Third, a virtue signal is also likely to increase observers' perceptions of the signaler's deservingness. A good person who has experienced misfortunes and disadvantages of various kinds is more likely to elicit distress and sympathy from observers, triggering a stronger response to compensate for the undeserved mistreatment (Callan, Dawtry, & Olson, 2012; Callan, Ellard, & Nicol, 2006). A bad person is unlikely to evoke these reactions. Or, following an alternative temporal path, someone who remains a good person despite experiencing bad things is more likely to spark a desire in observers to reward the person for their persistent virtue because it positively disconfirms expectations about the normative relationship between the value of a person and the value of their outcomes (Harvey & Callan, 2014; Lerner, 1980; Schaumberg & Mullen, 2017).

The preceding arguments lead us to propose that the ability to extract resources from others through the use of signaling is maximized when observers perceive a signaler as being a virtuous victim. Again, we do not doubt that a substantial portion of the victim signals emitted in everyday life convey legitimate victimization experiences of people who would be described by those who know them as virtuous. However, just as there are honorable people who experience misfortune, there are also those who might feign both suffering and virtue to get something they want. Even if emitting a false signal works only occasionally, the signaler can still benefit, particularly if they emit the signal to observers who are not well positioned to verify its accuracy or are unmotivated to do so. The success rate of false signaling depends on the signaler's ability to convincingly portray virtuous victimhood. We submit that it is in presenting convincing signals that individuals with Dark Triad personalities have an advantage because they are less inhibited from using manipulation in a morally flexible way (Jonason, Duineveld, & Middleton, 2015; Paulhus & Martin, 1988). This aspect of their personality gives them more opportunities to practice emitting the virtuous victim signal and learning through trial and error of how its effectiveness can be enhanced.

At this point, the astute reader might ask why Dark Triad personalities would not simply present themselves only as either virtuous or as victims, because signaling along one dimension would be less demanding. Assuming that some Dark Triad personalities have the requisite social acumen and intelligence to determine which deceptive strategies prove effective for advancing their goals in a given environment, we reason that they are more likely to prefer the virtuous victim signal over any other signaling combination because it capitalizes on the social benefits that accrue to both those who suffer and those perceived as having a desirable moral character. Our reasoning does not preclude the possibility that some Dark Triad personalities might emphasize only victimhood or virtue. Indeed, some of the negative connotations associated with being a victim such as powerlessness, loss of esteem and social stigma (Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Ryan, 1971) may

make portraying oneself as a victim a less preferred self-expression strategy for narcissistic individuals, who are characterized by their domineering interpersonal style and high need to establish superiority over others (Miller, Vize, Crowe, & Lynam, 2019). Despite our assumption that deception efforts using only one of the signals would yield lower payoffs over time than the dual signal of virtuous victimhood, the choice of which signal to employ is likely to be based on the signaler's calculation of costs and benefits in specific situations. Most signaling behaviors are costly, especially if they are deceptive. Therefore, a sophisticated approach that utilizes both the victim and virtue signals to achieve a desired outcome may be most reliably associated with the Dark Triad trait of Machiavellianism. One of the hallmarks of Machiavellianism is calculative and strategic interpersonal manipulation, distinguishing it from psychopathy which is characterized by impulsivity and social disinhibition (Jones & Paulhus, 2017; Schyns, Wisse, & Sanders, 2019). It is conceivable that the three Dark Triad traits comprising show different relationships to victim- and/or virtue-signal. Nevertheless, their overlapping features of manipulation and callousness toward the welfare of others (Jones & Figueredo, 2013), which makes it easier to exploit or harm them constitutes the basis for our theorizing that the three dimensions of the Dark Triad personalities will jointly predict the frequency of emitting the virtuous victimhood signals. We test this prediction in a series of studies and also show how those who frequently emit virtuous victim signals are more likely to exhibit behaviors and cognitions that are similar to those reported among people who have Dark Triad personalities.

Studies 1a–1c

In our first three studies (Study 1a, 1b, and 1c), we examined whether perceiving someone as a virtuous victim, as opposed to a nonvictim or a victim without virtue, will lead observers to transfer more of their resources to the signaler. In these and all subsequent studies, sample recruitment and study procedures were approved by the institutional ethics review board of the University of British Columbia, under the title "Personality and Behavior" with the following protocol number: H17-02770.

Study 1a

In Study 1a we used a hypothetical scenario where participants were asked to help a fictitious victim by providing material support. This study examines whether an implicit signal of virtue, evidenced by a person's engagement in an activity that suggests the possession of a socially desirable moral character would make people more willing to help a victim of a random act of violence than someone who sends an implicit signal of an absence of virtue or no obvious signal of either being virtuous or nonvirtuous. We predicted that the likelihood to help, as well as the amount of help offered, would be the highest for the virtuous victim and lowest for the nonvirtuous victim.

Method

Participants. We targeted a sample size of 80 participants per condition from Amazon Mechanical Turk for this study, advertised as a 5-min survey on "evaluating people based on their life stories"

in exchange for a small compensation. We chose 80 participants per condition, for a total sample size of 240, because a medium effect size ($F = .25$), assuming $\alpha = .05$ and power $= .95$, requires 233 participants, according to a power analysis. 245 respondents started the study. Based on predetermined exclusion criteria, we excluded five incomplete responses and five belonging to those who failed a critical comprehension check question at the end of the study, which asked whether it was true or false that the person they read about was paralyzed. After eliminating these respondents, 235 usable responses (49.8% female, 50.2% male; age range: 18–66, $M_{age} = 33.8$) were analyzed.

Procedure. All participants read a brief script about a 45-year-old man ("David"), who had been married for over 25 years and was recently paralyzed from the waist down after receiving a gunshot to his spinal cord. The conditions under which David was shot were manipulated and randomly assigned to participants. David was described as either having been shot while (a) volunteering at a charity softball name organized to raise funds for the mentally disabled youth in his community (virtuous victim condition), (b) walking in front of the grocery store at the mall (neutral victim condition), or (c) at a strip club that he frequently visits (nonvirtuous victim condition). In all conditions, we emphasized that David lacked knowledge about and was unassociated with the shooter. Exact wording of the manipulation can be found at https://osf.io/uxsb5/.

After the manipulation, participants rated the extent to which they thought David was victimized, the severity of his injury, and his morality. Perceptions of David's morality and victim status were asked on a nine-point scale (1 = *below an average person*, 9 = *above an average person*), while the severity of his injury was rated on a 0–100 slider scale (0 = *not severe at all*, 100 = *extremely severe*). Morality perceptions was measured by using the following three items: moral, virtuous, and ethical. After providing participants with the definition of a victim as "someone who suffers some injury, hardship, or loss; is badly treated or taken advantage of" (*Oxford English Dictionary*), we measured perceived victimhood using a single item that asked participants to rate how victimized the person they read about was. Our two dependent measures were participants' likelihood to donate to an online fundraising campaign to help David pay for his rehabilitation expenses, measured on a nine-point scale (1 = *very unlikely*, 9 = *very likely*), and how much they would donate if they had $100 leftover in their budget at the end of the month. There were no significant differences based on age or gender for any of the key dependent variables, so these will not be discussed further.

Results

Victim and virtue perceptions. The three items used to measure morality perceptions were averaged to form a composite scale ($\alpha = .98$). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with condition as the independent variable showed that there was a significant difference in morality perceptions between conditions, $F(2, 232) = 194.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .63$. Post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni adjustments indicate that participants assigned to the "virtuous victim" condition rated David as significantly more moral ($M = 7.53$, $SD = 1.32$) compared with those in the *neutral victim* ($M = 5.50$, $SD = .87$; $M_{diff} = 2.03$, $SE = .19$, $p < .001$) and *nonvirtuous victim* ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.33$; $M_{diff} = 3.77$, $SE = .19$,

$p < .001$) conditions. The difference between *neutral victim* and *nonvirtuous victim* conditions was also significant ($M_{diff} = 1.75$, $SE = .19$, $p < .001$). Another two one-way ANOVAs showed that although there was no significant difference between conditions with regard to the perceived severity of David's injury ($M_{virtuous} = 89.23$, $SD_{virtuous} = 10.09$; $M_{neutral} = 90.55$, $SD_{neutral} = 11.10$; $M_{nonvirtuous} = 87.52$, $SD_{nonvirtuous} = 13.54$), $F(2, 232) = 1.31$, $p = .27$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, those in the virtuous and neutral victim conditions rated David as more victimized than those in the nonvirtuous victim condition ($M_{virtuous} = 8.14$, $SD_{virtuous} = 1.33$; $M_{neutral} = 8.25$, $SD_{neutral} = 1.38$; $M_{nonvirtuous} = 7.14$, $SD_{nonvirtuous} = 1.79$), $F(2, 232) = 12.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, both pairwise comparisons $p < .001$. There was no difference between the neutral and virtuous victim conditions.

Likelihood to help. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of condition on the likelihood to donate to the victim's cause, $F(2, 232) = 23.97$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$. Planned contrast analyses showed that the likelihood to donate in the nonvirtuous condition ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 2.58$) was significantly lower compared with both virtuous ($M = 6.48$, $SD = 2.23$) and neutral ($M = 5.84$, $SD = 2.38$) victim conditions (both differences were significant at $p < .001$). The difference between virtuous and neutral victim conditions was marginally significant ($M_{diff} = .64$, $SE = .38$, $p = .09$). Our second dependent variable was the amount of money participants would donate if they had an extra $100 USD in their budget at the end of the month. A one-way ANOVA yielded a significant effect of condition on this variable, too, $F(2, 232) = 9.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. Planned contrasts again revealed that the average donation in the nonvirtuous victim condition ($M = 9.46$, $SD = 16.41$) was significantly lower compared with both the virtuous victim ($M = 23.89$, $SD = 25.57$, $M_{diff} = 14.43$, $SE = 3.65$, $p < .001$) and the neutral victim ($M = 23.38$, $SD = 24.55$, $M_{diff} = 13.92$, $SE = 3.66$, $p < .001$) conditions. There was no difference between the neutral and virtuous victim conditions.

Discussion

Study 1a showed that a tacit signal of an absence of virtue (a married man regularly patronizing a strip club) significantly reduced people's willingness to transfer resources to someone who suffered the same debilitating injury as a person who tacitly signals virtue or presents no signal of either the presence or absence of virtue. Although the willingness to help the virtuous victim was marginally higher than the likelihood to help a neutral victim, this difference did not affect intended donation amounts. Among the possible explanations for why virtuous victims did not receive significantly more aid are the hypothetical nature of the task, the severity of harm suffered by the target, or range restriction resulting from capping the maximum donation amount at $100. In Study 1b, we used a different design in which we manipulate both the victim and the virtue signals.

Study 1b

Study 1b investigates the effect of a person sending explicit signals of either victimhood or virtue when seeking assistance for an experienced hardship on an online crowdfunding platform. This study uses a 2 (victim signal: strong vs. weak) × 2 (virtue signal: present vs. absent) between-subjects design to examine if the

amplification of a relatively weak victim signal increases observers' willingness to transfer resources to the signaler. It then tests whether adding an explicit virtue signal to either the weak or strong victim signal might make the signal more effective. We predicted that people's willingness to help the victim signaler will be greater when it is emitted with an explicit virtue signal.

Method

Participants. Participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk for a study advertised as a "7-minute survey on evaluating other people" in exchange for a small compensation. An a priori power analysis with a small to medium interaction effect size ($F = .2$), $\alpha = .05$, and power $= .95$ indicated the necessary total sample size to be 327. Anticipating an approximately 20% exclusion rate based on the attention check questions, we oversampled and opened the study for 400 participants. Based on our predetermined exclusion criteria, we excluded 23 responses belonging to those who failed two critical comprehension check questions formatted in a yes-no format, which asked whether the person they read about wanted to be a hair stylist (correct answer: Yes) and was seeking donations to cover her medical expenses (correct answer: No). After eliminating these respondents, 377 usable responses (55% female, 44% male, 1% nonbinary; age range: 18–78, $M_{age} = 40.3$) were analyzed.

Procedure. On the first page, all participants read that the purpose of the study was to examine how people react to others' requests for different kinds of help and assistance and that they would be randomly assigned to evaluate one such request posted on an online crowdfunding platform collected by the researchers. We reproduced four versions of a GoFundMe[3] post while manipulating the strength of the victim signal and the presence of a virtue signal in the content. In all conditions, participants read that the person (Jessie, a 24-year-old woman) had to leave a certificate program she started at a local community college to become a hairstylist and was now seeking $6,000 in donations to cover her tuition expenses to continue her education to become a financially independent woman. We assumed that information that Jessie was in financial need would lead people to infer that she was experiencing some hardship in life, thereby presenting a *weak* but not an undetectable victim signal. In the *strong victim signal/no virtue signal* condition Jessie added details about her difficult life circumstances, such as her challenging upbringing by a single mother who was addicted to drugs, her abusive past relationship with a partner who had a severe drinking problem, and her past struggles with mental health issues. In the *weak victim signal/virtue signal* condition, Jessie described her volunteering experience at a local seniors' home, her efforts on social media to promote awareness about the opioid crisis, and her intentions to provide free haircuts to residents of a women's shelter once she gets her hairstylist diploma. In the *weak victim signal/no virtue signal* condition, none of this information was presented. Exact wording used in all four conditions can be found at https://osf.io/uxsb5/.

Next, participants indicated how willing they would be to make a donation to help Jessie on a scale from 1 to 7 (1 = *very unwilling*, 7 = *very willing*), followed by their perceptions of Jessie's deservingness of help. Deservingness perceptions were obtained by asking participants the extent to which they agree with the following statement "Jessie is someone who deserves to be helped,"

again on a scale from 1 to 7 (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Participants then rated Jessie's morality and victim status, each measured by a single item on a 1–7 scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). For perceived morality, they indicated their agreement with the following statement: "Jessie sounds like a moral person." For perceived victimhood, as in Study 1a, participants were provided with the same definition of a victim from the Oxford English Dictionary, and then asked whether they thought Jessie was a victim (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). To delve deeper into deservingness perceptions, we also included an open-ended question that asked participants to list the thoughts that went through their mind when they were reading and reacting to the post. We included two probes: "What part of Jessie's story made you willing/unwilling to help her? Why do you think she is deserving/undeserving of support?." Finally, participants responded to the two attention check questions about why Jessie was seeking donations and whether she wanted to be a hairstylist or not; and reported their gender and age. No significant differences were observed in the key dependent variables based on participants' gender or age, therefore these will not be discussed further.

Results

Victim and virtue perceptions. The means and standard deviations for all conditions are displayed in Table 1. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there was a significant difference in Jessie's perceived morality between conditions, $F(3, 373) = 16.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons showed that perceived morality was significantly higher in the two conditions where there was a virtue signal ($M_{StrongVictim\& Virtue} = 5.56$, $SD_{StrongVictim\& Virtue} = 1.11$; $M_{WeakVictim\& Virtue} = 5.88$, $SD_{WeakVictim\& Virtue} = 1.07$) compared with the other two conditions that did not have a virtue signal ($M_{StrongVictim\& NoVirtue} = 5.06$, $SD_{StrongVictim\& NoVirtue} = 1.43$; $M_{WeakVictim\& NoVirtue} = 4.73$, $SD_{WeakVictim\& NoVirtue} = 1.22$; all p's $< .05$). There was no difference between the "strong victim & virtue signal" and the "weak victim & virtue signal" conditions ($p = .44$), and between the "strong victim & no virtue signal" and "weak victim & no virtue signal" conditions ($p = .39$). Similarly, another ANOVA on perceived victimhood showed that there was a significant difference across the four conditions, $F(3, 373) = 26.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that those in the two conditions where the post included a strong victim signal rated Jessie as significantly more victimized ($M_{StrongVictim\&Virtue} = 4.99$, $SD_{StrongVictim\&Virtue} = 1.20$; $M_{StrongVictim\& NoVirtue} = 4.76$, $SD_{StrongVictim\&NoVirtue} = 1.24$) compared with the other two conditions with a weak victim signal ($M_{WeakVictim\&Virtue} = 3.35$, $SD_{WeakVictim\&Virtue} = 2.61$; $M_{WeakVictim\& NoVirtue} = 2.87$, $SD_{WeakVictim\&NoVirtue} = 2.43$, all p's $< .05$). Perceived victimhood ratings did not differ between the two conditions where there was a strong victim signal ($p > .99$), and between the other two with a weak a victim signal ($p = .60$). These results can be

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[3] GoFundMe is a popular online crowdfunding platform that allows individuals to raise money for a variety of life experiences, ranging from celebratory events like weddings or graduations, to challenging circumstances like accidents and illnesses (www.gofundme.com).

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations Across Conditions and One-Way ANOVA Results (Study 1b)

Measure	Strong Victim + Virtue signal	Strong Victim + No Virtue signal	Weak Victim + Virtue signal	Weak Victim + No Virtue signal	One-way ANOVA results
Perceived morality	5.56 (1.11)	5.06 (1.43)	5.88 (1.07)	4.73 (1.22)	$F(3, 373) = 16.83^{***}, \eta^2 = .12$
Perceived victimhood	4.99 (1.20)	4.76 (1.24)	3.35 (2.61)	2.87 (2.43)	$F(3, 373) = 26.46^{***}, \eta^2 = .18$
Deservingness	5.47 (1.34)	5.37 (1.32)	5.14 (1.34)	4.11 (1.60)	$F(3, 373) = 18.87^{***}, \eta^2 = .13$
Willingness to help	4.39 (1.88)	3.97 (1.94)	3.65 (1.93)	2.45 (1.66)	$F(3, 373) = 19.38^{***}, \eta^2 = .13$

Note. ANOVA = analysis of variance; $N = 377$. Values in cells show participants' mean scores on the respective scales, with standard deviations in parentheses.
*** $p < .001$.

interpreted as our manipulation of the contents of the four posts were successful.

Willingness to help. A two-way ANOVA on willingness to help showed a main effect of both the strength of the victim $F(1, 373) = 34.72, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$, and the presence of the virtue signals, $F(1, 373) = 17.86, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$. There was also a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 373) = 4.13, p = .043, \eta_p^2 = .01$. We examined the pattern of the interaction to see whether it was consistent with our theoretical prediction regarding the additional benefit accrued by signaling virtue along with victimhood. Results showed that when the victimhood signal was weak (i.e., Jessie only requested help without adding details about a difficult life), people were significantly more willing to help when she presented an explicit virtue signal ($M_{\text{WeakVictim\& Virtue}} = 3.65, SD_{\text{WeakVictim\& Virtue}} = 1.93$) than when she did not ($M_{\text{WeakVictim\& NoVirtue}} = 2.45, SD_{\text{WeakVictim\&NoVirtue}} = 1.66, M_{\text{diff}} = 1.20, SE = .27, p < .001, f = .23$). However, when the victim signal was amplified, adding a virtue signal did not result in a significant difference in the willingness to help ($M_{\text{StrongVictim\& Virtue}} = 4.39, SD_{\text{StrongVictim\& Virtue}} = 1.88; M_{\text{StrongVictim\& NoVirtue}} = 3.97, SD_{\text{StrongVictim\& NoVirtue}} = 1.94; M_{\text{diff}} = .42, SE = .27, p = .11, f = .08$), although the difference was in the expected direction. Moreover, as shown in Table 1, the willingness to help was highest in the strong victim/virtue signal condition and was significantly higher compared with the two conditions when there was only one of the signals present ($M_{\text{diff}} = 1.16, SE = .46, p = .012, f = .14$). These results suggest that virtue signaling may not be as effective when the victim signal is sufficiently strong, however it is beneficial when the signal is relatively weak.

As an alternative analysis, and to explore the role of morality and victimhood perceptions in predicting willingness to help, we conducted a regression analysis across all participants by using the two questions that asked about Jessie's perceived morality and victimization. A significant model emerged, $F(2, 374) = 64.52, p < .001$, adj $R^2 = .25$, in which both morality ($b = .72, SE = 0.7, 95\%$ CI [.58, .85] $t = 10.36, p < .001$) and victim ($b = .15, SE = 0.4, 95\%$ CI [.07, .23], $t = 3.68, p < .001$) perceptions were significant predictors, increasing willingness to help.

Deservingness perceptions. Similar to the results for willingness to help, a two-way ANOVA on deservingness perceptions revealed a main effect of both the strength of the victim, $F(1, 373) = 29.89, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$, and the presence of the virtue signals, $F(1, 373) = 15.38, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$. Again, there was a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 373) = 10.50, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$, indicating that the effect of the virtue signal on deservingness perceptions was higher when the victim signal was weak, com-

pared with when it was strong. Signaling virtue significantly increased deservingness perceptions when the victim signal was weak ($M_{\text{WeakVictim\& Virtue}} = 5.14, SD_{\text{WeakVictim\& Virtue}} = 1.34; M_{\text{WeakVictim\& NoVirtue}} = 4.11, SD_{\text{WeakVictim\& NoVirtue}} = 1.60, M_{\text{diff}} = 1.03, SE = .21, p < .001, f = .26$), but not when it was strong ($M_{\text{StrongVictim\& Virtue}} = 5.47, SD_{\text{StrongVictim\& Virtue}} = 1.34; M_{\text{StrongVictim\& NoVirtue}} = 5.37, SD_{\text{StrongVictim\& NoVirtue}} = 1.32; M_{\text{diff}} = .10, SE = .27, p > .05, f = .03$).

As additional evidence for the role of morality and victimhood perceptions in assessments of deservingness, we conducted another regression analysis across all participants, where deservingness perceptions was regressed on perceived morality and victimhood ratings, which showed that both morality ($b = .67, SE = 0.5, 95\%$ CI [.58, .76], $t = 14.29, p < .001$) and victimhood ($b = .16, SE = 0.3, 95\%$ CI [.10, .21], $t = 5.60 p < .001$) were significant and positive predictors.

To explore participants' thought process, we coded the open-ended responses given to the thought-listing question on deservingness perceptions and willingness to help based on whether they included a virtue-based reason (i.e., saying something about Jessie's moral character such as "She indicated a desire to help others once she graduates") or not. We performed this analysis only in the strong victim and virtue signal condition to examine if paying attention to the target's virtuousness increased deservingness of and willingness to help when both signals were present. The results show that those who included a virtue-based response (38% of all responses) among their answers were significantly more likely to help Jessie ($M_{\text{Virtue-response-present}} = 5.24, SD_{\text{Virtue-response-present}} = 1.62; M_{\text{Virtue-response-absent}} = 3.87, SD_{\text{Virtue-response-absent}} = 1.85, F(1, 99) = 14.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$) and thought she was more deserving of help ($M_{\text{Virtue-response-present}} = 6.08, SD_{\text{Virtue-response-present}} = 0.85; M_{\text{Virtue-response-absent}} = 5.10, SD_{\text{Virtue-response-absent}} = 1.45; F(1, 99) = 14.54, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$) than those who did not.

Discussion

Study 1b provided another test of our first hypothesis that emitting the dual signal of virtue and victimhood will be more effective at encouraging observers to transfer resources to the signaler in an online crowdfunding context than emitting either signal on its own. The stimuli and the context offer a highly realistic simulation of an instance that individuals may encounter virtuous victim signaling in their daily lives, thereby increasing the ecological validity of our findings.

Our findings show that in all conditions, perceived morality and victimhood of the target individually contributed to willingness to help and deservingness perceptions. Although deservingness perceptions and willingness to help were both directionally the highest in the strong victim/virtue signal condition, the effect of the virtue signal was higher when the victim signal was weak, compared with when it was strong. This result can be interpreted in light of existing research on moral typecasting (Gray & Wegner, 2009) and victim sanctification (Graso, Reynolds, & Grover, 2019), which suggest that being a victim can spontaneously increase perceptions of one's morality, thereby rendering the additive effect of virtue signal less pronounced. In our next study, we used a different design to conduct another test of our hypothesis. We also attempted to heighten the personal relevance of the stimuli by asking participants to think of someone they know rather than a fictitious character when deciding whether they would transfer resources to the afflicted party.

Study 1c

Study 1c uses a three-condition between-subjects experimental design, in which we manipulated the presence of a virtue signal (virtuous victim, neutral victim, immoral victim). In contrast to Studies 1a & 1b, where the signaler was a stranger, Study 1c sought to show that the effects we found would generalize to people who are personally known to the study participants. We also asked participants to indicate their likelihood to help this person not only financially, but also in noneconomic ways, such as giving them a ride to the airport early in the morning, or helping with daily chores if the person was sick. What was common to these forms of assistance is that they imposed a cost on the helper and had no obvious expectation of being reciprocated by the recipient. We again predicted that the combined virtuous victim signal would yield the highest helping intentions compared with signals that communicated victimhood without the virtue signal.

Method

Participants. We aimed to recruit 80 participants per condition from Amazon Mechanical Turk in line with Study 1a. We removed four incomplete responses from the final dataset, leaving 236 responses in total (50.8% female, 48.3% male, 0.9% other; age range: 19–69, $M_{age} = 36.0$).

Procedure. Study 1c uses a three-condition between-subjects (virtuous victim, neutral victim, immoral victim) experimental design. Depending on the experimental condition, participants first read a description of someone who would be considered a virtuous victim, an immoral victim, or simply a victim with no further explanations about morality. The virtuous victim was described as "someone you know who claims to have experienced disadvantages or difficulties in his or her life that make it hard for him or her to achieve their goals and maximize their capabilities, and who you also consider to be a highly moral person," whereas in the immoral victim condition, the last part of this description was changed to ". . . who you also consider to be an immoral person." In the neutral victim condition this last phrase was removed from the description (see https://osf.io/uxsb5/ for full version of the manipulation wording). Participants were asked to think of a person that they know who fits the description and write "three

examples of the kinds of visible signals that this person sends out to the world, which would lead others to reach these conclusions about the person's current life situation and the kind of person they are."

Next, all participants rated the morality and victimization of the person they wrote about. Perceived victimization was measured with the same single item used in Study 1a and 1b. Similar to Study 1a, morality perceptions were measured on a nine-point scale (1 = *below an average person*, 9 = *above an average person*) by using the same three items (moral, virtuous, ethical) averaged to form a perceived virtue composite variable. Participants were then presented with 10 miniscenarios adapted from Cohen and Hoberman (1983) and asked how likely they would be to offer help if the person they wrote about were in that situation. Some example items, all preceded by the clause "If the person you wrote about in the previous question" are: "needed some help in moving to a new house or apartment" or "needed help fixing an appliance or repairing their car" (see https://osf.io/uxsb5/ for the full version). All items used the same nine-point response scale (1 = *very unlikely*, 9 = *very likely*).

Results

Victim and virtue perceptions. We averaged participants' responses to the three morality-related items to create a composite perceived virtue score (α = .96). A univariate ANOVA showed that there was a significant difference in perceived virtue based on experimental condition, $F(2, 233) = 169.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .59$. Contrasts revealed that participants in the virtuous victim condition indeed perceived the person they wrote about to be more moral ($M = 7.50$, $SD = 1.17$) than either the neutral victim ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 1.67$) or the immoral victim ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.74$) conditions ($\Delta M_{virtuousvictim-neutralvictim} = 1.81$, $f = 0.48$; $\Delta M_{virtuousvictim-immoralvictim} = 4.60$, $f = 1.19$; all pairwise differences are significant at $p < .001$.) Victim perceptions, on the other hand, did not differ significantly across all conditions ($M_{virtuous} = 5.42$, $SD_{virtuous} = 2.34$, $M_{neutral} = 5.48$, $SD_{neutral} = 2.27$, $M_{immoral} = 5.01$, $SD_{immoral} = 2.44$, $F(2, 233) = .90$, $p = .41$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$), indicating that the different levels of likelihood to help observed between conditions cannot be explained by the magnitude of perceived victimhood.

Likelihood to help. We performed a factor analysis on the 10 helping items using principal axis factoring with Promax rotation and unrestricted factors (Costello & Osborne, 2005). Only one factor emerged, explaining 67.65% of the variance. Thus, we averaged these 10 items to form one composite support scale (α = .95). A univariate ANOVA on the support measure showed a significant main effect of condition, $F(2, 233) = 74.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .39$. Planned contrasts revealed that participants in the immoral victim condition were least likely to help the person they wrote about ($M_{immoral} = 3.88$, $SD_{immoral} = 2.15$), whereas those in the virtuous victim condition were most likely ($M_{virtuous} = 7.39$, $SD_{virtuous} = 1.26$), and the neutral victim condition ($M_{neutral} = 6.53$, $SD_{neutral} = 1.98$) was in between the two. All pairwise Bonferroni-adjusted comparisons ($\Delta M_{virtuousvictim-neutralvictim} = 0.86$, $f = 0.19$; $\Delta M_{virtuousvictim-immoralvictim} = 3.51$, $f = 0.76$; $\Delta M_{neutralvictim-immoralvictim} = 2.65$, $f = 0.59$) are significant at $p < .005$.

One of the items on the support scale was: "If this person created a website requesting donations of up to \$100 to help them through financial difficulties, how likely would you be to donate money?," which was followed by another question asking how much they would donate. To replicate the hypothesis test conducted in Study 1a on willingness to donate, we analyzed responses to these responses. We removed one outlier—a participant who said they would donate \$500 which is not only in conflict with question instructions but also + 3 SD above the mean—and one missing response. Results showed a significant effect of condition on the donation amount, $F(2, 231) = 26.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$. Planned contrasts revealed that the donation amount in the virtuous victim condition ($M = 41.27$, $SD = 36.56$) was significantly higher than both the neutral victim ($M = 29.51$, $SD = 35.74$, $M_{diff} = 11.76$, $SE = 4.83$, $p = .016$, $f = .16$) and immoral victim conditions ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 11.11$, $M_{diff} = 35.58$, $SE = 5.00$, $p < .001$, $f = .47$).[4]

Discussion

Study 1c tested whether virtuous victim signals motivate the provision of nontangible support in the form of willingness to do favors for a personally known target. The results support our hypothesis that someone who emits signals of being a virtuous victim is more likely to receive help from others in the form of noneconomic resources. These findings are consistent with our theory that signaling victimhood and virtue can be an effective way for people to initiate nonreciprocal resource transfers from observers. Presuming that people recognize its effectiveness as a tool of social influence, a reasonable question to ask is: Who might be more likely to use this tool to extract resources? In our next study, we examine characteristics that might motivate some people to emit the virtuous victim signal more frequently than others after first validating a victim signaling scale developed for this research.

Study 2a

Study 2a reports the development and validation process of a measure of victim signaling that we use in subsequent studies. The measure was validated using three different samples (total $N = 1526$). The measure was designed to assess expressions of victim claiming that referred to either a person's unique personal characteristics (e.g., disability status, sexual orientation) that could be reasons for them to experience being a victim of misfortune or to characteristics associated with group identities (e.g., gender, ethnicity, religious preferences) that are frequently mentioned in public discourse, the media, and academic writings as a cause of victimization (e.g., Dixon, Tropp, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2010; Glick et al., 2000; Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Jennings, 2015; Pratto & Shih, 2000). We were interested in measuring whether people who possess these characteristics actively signal their predicament to others, so we asked them to report on the frequency with which they communicated these signals publicly.

Method

Scale development and validation. We wrote 19 items that asked respondents to indicate how often they presented information about several kinds of victimhood on a scale from 1–5. The

scale numbers corresponded to the following frequency descriptors: 1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*, 5 = *always*. We conducted a principal-axis-factoring with oblique rotation (oblimin method) on all of the items by using two different samples:

Sample 1. In the absence of commonly accepted techniques to determine sample size for factor analyses (Boateng et al., 2018), we took Comrey and Lee's (1992) estimations that suggest a sample size of 500 to be "very good" and aimed to recruit 600 adult participants living in the United States and Canada from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. 635 individuals clicked on the posted link to participate in a 10-min study with the title "Personality and Behavior" in exchange for \$ 1.40 USD. We used an attention check question in the beginning of the survey, in which participants were asked how often they watch horror movies. Embedded in the question instructions were instructions to select the options 'Never and Often' at the same time (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). Thirty-five participants failed to respond to this question correctly according to the instructions and were suspended from proceeding to the actual study questions. Another six participants started the survey, but left it incomplete, leaving 594 usable responses (53% female 46.8% male, 0.2% nonbinary/undeclared; age range: 23–74, $M_{age} = 38.2$; 80% Caucasian/White, 7% Asian, 7% Black, 4% Hispanic/Latino/a, 2% other).

Sample 2. Five hundred forty undergraduate students (53% female, 44% male, 3% nonbinary or undeclared, 42% born in Canada, 23% born in China, 35% born in 54 other countries, including 13 undeclared) enrolled in different marketing courses at a university in Western Canada completed the victim-signaling instrument along with several other scales in a classroom setting by using their own devices.

Exploratory factor analysis. In both samples, inspection of the eigenvalues, scree plot, and factor loadings suggest that two factors underlie the 19 items, with Eigenvalues greater than 1.0. In Sample 1, extraction sums of squared loadings are 7.97 and 1.02, accounting for 41.9% and 5.3% of the variance, whereas in Sample 2 they are 7.52 and 0.64, accounting for 39.6% and 3.4% of the variance, respectively. We used the following criteria to determine whether an item loaded on a factor: (a) the item had to have a loading of .5 or greater on one factor and (b) it should not have a loading greater than .3 on the other factor. We retained 10 items that met these criteria in both of the samples. These items are shown in bold in Table 2.[5] The five items loading on the first factor share the property of victim signaling based on some kind of social identity (e.g., "Explained how I don't feel accepted in the society because of my

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[4] We also examined whether the different levels of willingness to help was an artifact of varying degrees of interpersonal affection felt toward the person, measured by an item asking the extent to which participants liked or disliked the person they wrote about on a scale from 1 (*dislike very much*) to 7 (*like very much*). Although there was a significant difference in the liking levels based on condition, $F(2, 233) = 70.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.38$, a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) controlling for liking and victimhood perceptions revealed that condition was still a significant predictor, $F(2, 231) = 9.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, supporting the independent role of perceived virtue in predicting willingness to help.

[5] The PAF results reported here are based on oblimin rotation; results are replicated when varimax rotation is used instead. Given our theoretical perspective that the two dimensions are the components of a higher order construct, and thus should be correlated, we report results based on oblimin rotation.

Table 2

Factor Loadings of Victim-Signaling Scale Items After Principal Axis Factoring With Oblimin Rotation (Study 2a)

Item	Sample 1 (MTurk, $N = 594$)		Sample 2 (Students, $N = 540$)	
	Factor 1[a]	Factor 2[b]	Factor 1[a]	Factor 2[b]
Discussed how my concerns and needs are not being heard by political leaders.	**.53**	*.05*	**−.69**	*−.09*
Said that my achievements are often being questioned.	.41	.34	*−.22*	.46
Discussed how I don't feel financially secure.	*−.14*	**.78**	*.11*	**.69**
Shared how I don't feel comfortable with my body.	*−.04*	**.62**	*.02*	**.59**
Brought up that I have fewer opportunities presented to me than other people.	.55	.30	−.39	.34
Stated how I am not physically able to pursue my day-to-day activities.	*.19*	.46	*−.24*	.38
Told others that I get paid less based on my identity.	.45	*.23*	−.58	*.13*
Pointed out how I am not able to pursue my goals and dreams because of external factors.	*.27*	**.51**	*−.08*	**.65**
Expressed that I don't have strong social support.	*.26*	.47	*−.18*	.53
Disclosed that I don't feel like I am in control of my future.	*.03*	**.74**	*.05*	**.72**
Disclosed that I struggle with mental health issues.	*.07*	**.55**	*−.12*	**.50**
Told others that I worry about my safety.	.42	*.24*	−.36	.31
Explained how I don't feel accepted in the society because of my identity.	**.76**	*.02*	−.54	*.25*
Mentioned that I don't feel like I get credit for my achievements.	.31	.42	*−.14*	.60
Spoke about how people who share my identity are criminalized by society.	**.83**	*−.12*	**−.77**	*−.08*
Expressed how people like me are underrepresented in the media and leadership.	**.81**	*−.07*	**−.61**	*.12*
Talked about how people who belong to my group are negatively stereotyped.	.74	*−.06*	−.46	*.18*
Made it known that I can't move freely within or outside of my country.	**.61**	*.13*	**−.63**	*−.02*
Pointed out how my rights were violated in some way.	.75	*.01*	−.49	*.23*

Note. Factor loadings < |.3| are in italics. Factor loadings of items retained in the final scale are in boldface.
[a] Factor 1 consists of identity-based victimization items. [b] Factor 2 consists of personal victimization items.

identity"), whereas the second factor of five items appeared to reflect confessions of personal disadvantages, challenge, or misfortune (e.g., "Pointed out how I am not able to pursue my goals and dreams because of external factors") that could signal that one is a victim. Items loading on each factor were averaged into scales that showed high internal consistency reliabilities in both samples: Cronbach's alpha for identity-based victimization was .82 in the first sample and .80 in the second sample, whereas for personal victimization, Cronbach's alphas were .80 and .78, respectively. The two subscales were moderately correlated in both samples, $r(592) = .56$ and $r(538) = .60$, suggesting that they may be subdimensions of a higher order factor. Next, we examined whether the two-factor structure was stable by performing a confirmatory factor analysis on the revised item set on a different sample.

Confirmatory factor analysis. Following the initial exploratory factor analysis and the deletion of nine items that showed low factor loadings on their hypothesized factors, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the revised 10-item scale with a different sample. We recruited 392 participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk (40% female, 59.6% male, 0.4% undeclared gender; age range: 19 – 71, $M_{age} = 35.0$) for the CFA.

To test whether a two-factor model for victim-signaling based on our theoretical categorization from the EFAs fits the data, we performed a CFA comparing the two-factor model to a one-factor model. We used Stata to evaluate the fit of the proposed model and examined the following fit statistics to compare the two models: chi-square, comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR). The one-factor model constrains the two latent variables to be equal. This one-factor model is nested within the two-factor model,

allowing a chi-squared difference test of relative model fit. The one-factor model achieved good fit for the CFI, with a value of .96. Values above .90 have been considered adequate, and values above .95 as good (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.07. A common threshold for this value in the literature is <.10 (Hair et al., 2006). The standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) value also indicated a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). In summary, a one-factor model of the scale provided good fit to the model specifications (CFI = .96, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = .05). We also compared the one factor model to a two-factor model; see Table 3 for model comparison details. A two-factor structure underlies the measure due to different forms of victimhood people can perceive. However, given that distinguishing between the two factors of victim signaling is unimportant for testing our theory, we combined the items underlying each factor to form a more parsimonious composite measure. Additionally, the high correlation between the two factors in this, $r(390) = .90, p < .001$, and other samples we have examined, as well as the acceptable fit statistics of the one-factor model, justifies combining the two factors.

Discussion

The results of the two exploratory and one confirmatory factor analyses conducted with a total of 1526 individuals show that the 10 items included in the final version of the scale form a reliable factor structure and are internally consistent. Furthermore, the moderate-to-high correlations observed between the two factors across the three samples suggest that the two subdimensions can be justifiably treated as a single dimension for theory-testing purposes.

Table 3
Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Goodness-of-Fit Indicators for the Victim-Signaling Scale

Model	χ^2	df	Δdf	χ^2_{diff}	CFI	RMSEA	RMSEA 95% CI
One-factor	128.99***	41			.957	.074	[.060, .089]
Two-factor	80.46***	34	7[a]	48.53***	.977	.059	[.042, .076]

Note. $N = 392$. CFI = comparative fit index; CI = confidence interval; RMSEA = root mean squared error of approximation.
[a] The critical value for chi-squared with seven degrees of freedom is 24.32.
*** $p < .001$.

Study 2b

Study 2b shows that people who belong to groups that are socially recognized as being part of the victim category (e.g., Haidt, 2016; Jennings, 2015) are more likely to signal victimhood than people who are not in this category, providing evidence for the construct validity of our victim signaling measure. We now turn to testing our main hypothesis about the use of virtuous victimhood signaling as resource transfer strategy by some individuals: Since our theory suggests that emitting the dual signal of virtuous victimhood will be the most effective strategy, we created a composite signaling score with measures of both victim and virtue signaling, and test (in this and all subsequent studies) whether this composite virtuous victim signal is more frequently deployed by people with Dark Triad personalities after controlling for the effect of the victim-proneness factors mentioned previously, as well as for one's internalized (vs. symbolic) moral identity that assesses the importance one places on being a moral person within their self-concept (vs. on communicating their morality to others).

Method

Participants. The sample for this study is the same MTurk sample we used to conduct the first exploratory factor analysis in Study 2a ($N = 594$).

Procedure. Participants completed an online package of questionnaires including our measure of victim signaling, Dark Triad, demographics, and Aquino and Reed's (2002) moral identity scale, a measure that will be used in later analyses.

Measures.

Victim-signaling. To measure victim-signaling, we used the revised version of our 10-item victim-signaling scale ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 0.69$, $\alpha = .86$). The two subscales, personal ($M = 2.05$, $SD = .81$, $\alpha = .80$) and identity-based victimization ($M = 1.68$, $SD = .75$, $\alpha = .82$), were positively correlated, $r(592) = .56$, $p < .001$. Because our theory does not differentiate between the personal and identity-based dimensions, in all of the subsequent analyses we used participants' average score on the full scale.

Virtue-signaling. We operationalized virtue-signaling by using an established measure of moral identity symbolization, which is a subdimension of the 10-item moral identity scale (Aquino & Reed, 2002). In this scale, participants are asked to read nine positive morality-related traits (e.g., fair, compassionate, honest) and imagine how someone who has these characteristics would think, feel, and act. They then indicate their agreement with 10 statements using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Five of these items belong to the symbolization factor, whereas the other five constitute the internalization

factor. The symbolization dimension, which we use as a virtue signaling measure in this and subsequent studies, taps into the public expressiveness of one's moral identity, by focusing on the extent to which these nine morality-related traits are reflected in respondents' symbolic actions (Example item: "I often buy products that communicate the fact that I have these characteristics"). Importantly, our virtuous victim construct focuses exclusively on the signaling behavior rather than a person's objective victimhood or virtuousness. Thus, in our analyses we seek to control for what could be objective markers of victim status by including demographic and socioeconomic variables. Similarly, to control for one's baseline virtue level (independently of how much s/he signals their virtuous character), we use the internalization dimension of moral identity scale, as doing so enables us to focus on the potentially inauthentic and strategic nature of the signal. The items belonging to the internalization dimension assess the extent to which the same nine moral traits are central to one's self-concept, with items such as: "Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am" or "I would be ashamed to be a person who has these characteristics" (reverse-coded).

Composite signaling score. Our theory postulates that the effects of victim signaling and virtue signaling are additive, rather than multiplicative. Accordingly, we created a composite virtuous victim signaling variable by averaging participants' scores on moral identity-symbolization dimension and victim-signaling scales after standardizing both. In this and all of the subsequent studies, we use this composite score as our virtuous victim signal measure.

Dark Triad. We used the brief Dirty Dozen scale (Jonason & Webster, 2010) as the measure of Dark Triad. This scale uses four items per subscale (Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy) and has yielded a large body of research (e.g., Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012; Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Cyrsel, 2012; Rauthmann, 2012). Participants are asked to indicate the extent to which the 12 statements they read apply to themselves, on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include: "I tend to exploit others toward my own end" (Machiavellianism), "I tend to expect special favors from others" (Narcissism), "I tend to be callous or insensitive" (Psychopathy). The internal consistencies and intercorrelations between the three subscales are reported in Table 4.

Demographics. Participants responded to a set of demographic questions, including those that may elicit objective and subjective perceptions of victim status, such as gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religiosity, education, disability status, income, and socioeconomic status. Descriptive statistics for all demographic questions are included at https://osf.io/uxsb5/.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Key Variables in Study 2b

Measure	M	SD	α	1	2	2a	2b	2c	3
1. Victim-signaling	1.86	.69	.86	—					
2. Dark Triad (total)	2.59	1.09	.90	.35***	—				
2a. Machiavellianism	2.22	1.26	.89	.35***	.91***	—			
2b. Narcissism	2.95	1.33	.82	.24***	.82***	.66***	—		
2c. Psychopathy	2.60	1.26	.79	.31***	.82***	.68***	.42***	—	
3. Moral identity symbolization	3.98	1.42	.90	.14***	−.07	−.07	.07	−.19***	—
4. Moral identity internalization	6.03	.99	.87	−.20***	−.45***	−.45***	−.19***	−.51***	.35***

Note. N = 594.

*** p < .001.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for the key variables are presented in Table 4 above. As predicted, victim-signaling was positively correlated with each of the Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism $r[592] = .35$, psychopathy $r[592] = .31$, narcissism $r[592] = .24$, all $ps < .001$), as well as the total Dark Triad score, $r(592) = .35$, $p < .001$. Victim signaling was also positively correlated with moral identity symbolization, which is our virtue signaling measure, $r(592) = .14$, $p < .001$, and negatively with internalization, $r(592) = −.20$, $p < .001$.

To answer whether Dark Triad predicts virtuous victim signaling,[6] we conducted a set of hierarchical OLS regression analyses by regressing participants' composite signaling scores on demographics including gender (0 = *male*, 1 = *female/nonbinary*), ethnicity (0 = *white*, 1 = *nonwhite*), sexual orientation (0 = *heterosexual*, 1 = *nonheterosexual*), physical and mental disability status (0 = *no disability*, 1 = *disability present*), perceived socio-economic status, income percentile, education, and religiosity and moral identity internalization (Model 1), and then added Dark Triad as another predictor. We used participants' aggregate Dark Triad scores in Model 2, and the three traits as separate predictors in Model 3, to examine both their combined and individual effects on virtuous victim signaling. An inspection of variance inflation factors (VIF) indicate that multicollinearity was not an issue in any of the models (all VIFs < 2.4).

As shown in Table 5, all models were significant (Model 1: $F[11, 582] = 6.47$, $p < .001$, Adj $R^2 = .09$; Model 2: $F[12, 581] = 9.54$, $p < .001$, Adj $R^2 = .15$; Model 3: $F[14, 579] = 8.50$, $p < .001$, Adj $R^2 = .15$), and the additional variance explained by Dark Triad traits was significant (Model 2: $\Delta F[1, 581] = 38.77$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .06$, Model 3: $\Delta F[3, 579] = 14.33$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .06$). Treated as a composite, the Dark Triad traits were significant predictors of virtuous victim signaling ($b = .19$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [.13, .25], $p < .001$), even after accounting for individual-level control variables (i.e., demographics and standardized scores on moral identity internalization; Model 2).[7] Analyzing the three Dark Triad traits separately, Model 3 shows that Machiavellianism is the strongest predictor ($b = .12$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [.04, .20], $p = .002$), followed by narcissism ($b = .06$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [.00, .12], $p = .049$). Psychopathy is not a significant predictor ($b = .01$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [−.06, .07], $p = .98$). Analyses using participants' victim-signaling score as the dependent variable (rather than the composite virtuous victim signaling score) show a reversal in the pattern observed for narcissism and psychopathy. While Ma-

chiavellianism is still a positive and significant predictor ($b = .19$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [.09, .28], $p < .001$), psychopathy becomes a marginally significant predictor ($b = .07$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [−.01, .15], $p = .08$) whereas narcissism becomes nonsignificant ($b = .04$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [−.03, .12], $p = .25$). The implications of this result are discussed in the next section.[8]

Discussion

The findings of this study support our hypothesis that virtuous victim signaling is more frequently displayed by Dark Triad personalities, even when controlling for factors that may make people vulnerable to being mistreated or disadvantaged in society (i.e., demographic and socioeconomic characteristics) as well as the importance they place on being a virtuous individual as part of their self-concept (as measured by the internalization dimension of moral identity). An examination of the three Dark Triad traits as separate constructs showed that Machiavellianism was the only one among them that predicted both victim and virtuous victim signaling. Psychopathy was marginally associated with victim signaling, but not with virtue signaling, whereas this pattern was reversed for narcissism. We make three inferences from these results: First, the absence of an association between narcissism and victim signaling may be due to the negative connotations associ-

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[6] Analyses using participants' victim-signaling score (rather than the composite virtuous victim signaling score) as the dependent variable show that Dark Triad is a significant positive predictor, $b = .30$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [.23, .38], $p < .001$. These analyses are included at https://osf.io/uxsb5/.

[7] Participants' scores on the aggregated Dark Triad measure was a significant and positive predictor for each one of the ten items comprising the victim signaling scale (b's ranging from .10 to .29), while controlling for demographics and moral identity internalization. We thank an anonymous reviewer suggesting that we conduct this additional analysis to show that the relationship between Dark Triad and the victim signaling scale is not an artifact of combining the individual scale items into a composite construct while diminishing the amount of variance any particular demographic factor might explain.

[8] As ancillary evidence, we conducted a cluster analysis to test the robustness of the relationship between virtuous victim signaling and Dark Triad. Participants were categorized into four segments based on their self-reported victim and virtue-signaling frequencies (High$_{victim}$High$_{virtue}$, High$_{victim}$Low$_{virtue}$, Low$_{victim}$High$_{virtue}$, Low$_{victim}$Low$_{virtue}$). We then compared the Dark Triad scores of the four segments, by using cluster membership as the independent variable. This analysis revealed that those in the High$_{victim}$High$_{virtue}$ cluster had significantly higher scores for each one of the Dark Triad traits individually and in aggregate (all $ps < .001$). See https://osf.io/uxsb5/ for more details on the procedure and the results.

Table 5
Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Composite Signaling Score, Study 2b

Predictor	Model 1 (Demographics + MI Int.)			Model 2 (Demographics + MI Int. + Dark Triad)			Model 3 (Demographics + MI Int. + DT traits)		
	b	SE	95% CI	b	SE	95% CI	b	SE	95% CI
Constant	−.13	.18	[−.47, .22]	−.56***	.18	[−.93, −.20]	−.51**	.19	[−.87, −.14]
Covariates									
Moral identity internalization	.04	.03	[−.02, .10]	.13***	.03	[.06, .19]	.12**	.04	[.05, .19]
Age	−.01**	.00	[−.01, −.00]	−.01*	.00	[−.01, .00]	−.01	.00	[−.01, .00]
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female and nonbinary)	.22**	.06	[.09, .34]	.24***	.06	[.12, .36]	.24***	.06	[.11, .36]
Ethnicity (0 = white, 1 = other)	.17*	.08	[.03, .32]	.20**	.07	[.06, .35]	.20**	.07	[.06, .35]
Socioeconomic status	−.01	.05	[−.10, .08]	−.03	.04	[−.11, .06]	−.03	.04	[−.12, .06]
Education	.03	.03	[−.02, .08]	.02	.02	[−.03, .07]	.02	.02	[−.03, .07]
Income percentile	.001	.00	[−.00, .00]	.001	.00	[−.00, .01]	.001	.001	[−.00, .01]
Religiosity	.03***	.01	[.02, .05]	.03**	.01	[.01, .05]	.03**	.01	[.01, .05]
Sexual orientation (0 = heterosexual, 1 = nonheterosexual)	.21*	.10	[.02, .40]	.19*	.09	[.01, .37]	.19*	.09	[.00, .37]
Mental disability (0 = absent, 1 = present)	.23**	.08	[.08, .38]	.18*	.08	[.03, .33]	.19*	.08	[.04, .34]
Physical disability (0 = absent, 1 = present)	.004	.09	[−.16, .18]	−.03	.08	[−.19, .13]	−.03	.08	[−.19, .14]
Key predictor(s)									
Model 2									
Total Dark Triad		—		.19***	.03	[.13, .25]		—	
Model 3									
Machiavellianism		—			—		.12**	.04	[.04, .19]
Narcissism		—			—		.06*	.03	[.00, .12]
Psychopathy		—			—		.01	.03	[−.06, .07]
	$F(11, 582) = 6.47$ Adj $R^2 = .09$			$F(12, 581) = 9.54$ Adj $R^2 = .15$ $\Delta R^2 = .06$			$F(14, 579) = 8.50$ Adj $R^2 = .15$ $\Delta R^2 = .06$		

Note. $N = 594$. All omnibus models are significant at $p < .001$. DT = Dark Triad; MI Int. = moral identity – internalization subscale.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

ated with being a victim discussed earlier, which may conflict with narcissistic individuals' grandiose self-views, whereas its strong relation with virtue signaling can be explained by the status-enhancing benefits of portraying oneself as a moral person (Bai, Ho, & Yan, 2020). In other words, being perceived as a moral person can fulfill narcissistic individuals' desires for social approval and admiration (Jonason et al., 2015; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Second, the enduring effect of Machiavellianism is consistent with our theorizing on the instrumental use of these signals. One of the hallmarks of Machiavellianism is calculative and strategic manipulation (Jonason et al., 2015), so the combined use of virtuous victimhood signals in a maximally beneficial way for the signaler fits well under a Machiavellian profile. Third, the strong negative correlation, $r(592) = -.51$, between psychopathy and moral identity internalization, which assesses the centrality of morality within one's self-concept, may render portraying oneself as a moral person a considerably costly strategy for individuals who are high on psychopathy, which may explain its lack of association with emitting the dual signal of virtuous victimhood.

Our theory assumes that the combination of victim and virtue signaling is the most effective for increasing third parties' willingness to help the signaler. Therefore, it is plausible to conjecture that adept Dark Triad personalities will use both signaling strategies simultaneously to facilitate the transfer of resources from others to themselves. We attempt to find further support for this possibility in our next studies, which examine whether virtuous victim signalers are more willing to accept the emission of false signals and to use deceptive tactics for personal gain.

Study 3

Study 3 had three aims. In line with previous research documenting the link between victimhood and entitlement (Zitek, Jordan, Monin, & Leach, 2010), we sought to assess the criterion-related validity of our victim-signaling scale. Examining relationships with variables that are theorized to be outcomes of the focal measure is a useful method for establishing criterion-related validity (Hinkin, Tracey, & Enz, 1997). For this purpose, we collected information on perceived entitlement, by using the psychological entitlement scale developed by Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, and Bushman (2004).

Second, in this study we also tested whether the virtuous victim signal is associated with the likelihood to employ a deceptive signal: the intentional purchase and use of counterfeit products. The intentional purchase of counterfeits can be construed as a form of instrumental deception because it can benefit the person who displays them by allowing them to gain whatever status-enhancing benefits buying the authentic product might accrue, but at a lower cost. Notably, these benefits require them to support an activity by the producer that is illegal in most countries and to knowingly deceive others about the authenticity of the product they display. We predicted that frequent virtuous victim signalers would not only be more willing to buy counterfeit products but would also make more favorable moral judgments about counterfeiters, consistent with a utilitarian approach to morality typically observed in individuals with Dark Triad personalities (Bartels & Pizarro, 2011; Djeriouat & Trémolière, 2014). Participants also completed the Counterfeit Proneness Scale developed by Sharma and Chan

(2011) to provide supporting evidence that the results are not due to the specific product category and stimuli we used in this study.

Furthermore, in this study we used another instrument to measure Dark Triad to crosscheck the relationship between virtuous victim signaling and Dark Triad, since the Dirty Dozen scale used in Study 2b has been criticized regarding its relatively weak convergent and incremental validity and the large content overlap between some of the items (see Maples, Lamkin, & Miller, 2014 for a review). In the current study, participants completed the 27-item Short Dark Triad (SD3) scale developed by Jones and Paulhus (2014).

Method

Participants. We aimed to recruit 300 adult participants living in the United States and Canada. Three hundred twenty-six individuals clicked on the survey link posted on Amazon Mechanical Turk to participate in a 10-min study in exchange for 1.40 USD, but 26 were filtered out for failing an attention check question in the beginning of the survey. The remaining 300 participants (43% female; 56.7% male, 0.3% other; age range: 18–69, $M_{age} = 34.8$; 69% Caucasian, 13% Black, 8% Hispanic/Latino/a, 7% Asian, 3% other) all completed the study, and their responses are used in the subsequent analyses.

Measures and procedures. Participants first completed the 10-item Moral Identity Scale, followed by the victim-signaling scale. Next was the question on gender. On the subsequent page, based on their answers to the gender question, participants were shown photos of three pairs of shoes. Those who indicated they were female were shown women's shoes, whereas those who indicated they were male were shown men's shoes. One participant who selected the "other/prefer not to say" option to the gender question was randomly assigned by the survey software to see men's shoes.

The three pairs of shoes participants saw were labeled as Authentic, Generic, and Counterfeit, with more detailed descriptions below the photos. All participants first saw the authentic shoe (priced at $129 dollars) and read that it was sold by a company who registered for a brand name and logo; and used superior-quality materials in producing the shoe. They were then shown the generic or counterfeit shoes in counterbalanced order. The generic and counterfeit shoes were identical in appearance (and were slightly different than the authentic shoes) and had the same price ($49 dollars). The descriptions below the photos pointed out to the different nature of the products and producers (i.e., the counterfeit shoe was produced by a company who infringes on the authentic brand and *imitates* the general appearance of the authentic brand, whereas the generic shoe was produced by a company who simply did not register for a brand name or trademark, and *resembles* the general appearance of the authentic brand). The generic shoe condition was included in the design to address a possible confound that participants' attitudes toward the counterfeit producer and their willingness to buy the counterfeit shoes may be due to the price difference between the more expensive authentic shoe and the cheaper counterfeit version. It is possible that consumers may hold more positive attitudes toward the counterfeit producer and product merely because it is a lower-cost option that is more accessible for most people.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Key Variables in Study 3

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	5a	5b	5c
1. Victim-signaling ($\alpha = .90$)	2.00	0.80	—							
2. Virtue-signaling ($\alpha = .88$)	4.24	1.29	.26***	—						
3. Moral identity internalization ($\alpha = .81$)	5.79	1.09	−.49***	.11	—					
4. Entitlement ($\alpha = .90$)	3.42	1.17	.39***	.28***	−.28***	—				
5. Dark Triad (total; $\alpha = .89$)	2.50	0.61	.52***	.18**	−.49***	.66***	—			
5a. Machiavellianism ($\alpha = .82$)	2.82	0.73	.43***	.10	−.37***	.54***	.86***	—		
5b. Narcissism ($\alpha = .75$)	2.57	0.68	.30***	.25***	−.33***	.61***	.79***	.48***	—	
5c. Psychopathy ($\alpha = .81$)	2.11	0.75	.58***	.11	−.55***	.52***	.89***	.68***	.54***	—
6. Counterfeit proneness ($\alpha = .87$)	2.76	1.28	.42***	.15**	−.44***	.43***	.52***	.41***	.40***	.50***

Note. $N = 300$.

** $p < .01$.   *** $p < .001$.

After participants observed all three pairs of shoes, they proceeded to indicate their willingness to purchase each of them and rated the perceived morality of the respective producers on 7-point Likert scales. They also completed an adapted version of the Counterfeit Proneness Scale (Sharma & Chan, 2011), which asks respondents to indicate their agreement (on a seven-point Likert scale, 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) with statements such as "I enjoy buying counterfeit products, regardless of the amount I save" or "Buying counterfeit products makes me feel good."

Next, participants completed the Entitlement Scale (Campbell et al., 2004) by indicating the extent to which they agree/disagree with nine items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), and the 27-item Dark Triad scale, which contains nine statements for each trait (Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy) on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; Jones & Paulhus, 2014). Finally, all participants answered the same list of demographic questions used in Study 2b.

Results

The descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among variables are shown in Table 6 below. Victim signaling was again positively correlated with the symbolization dimension of moral identity, $r(298) = .26$, $p < .001$ (which is our virtue signaling measure), and negatively correlated with the internalization dimension of moral identity, $r(298) = −.49$, $p < .001$. Consistent with past research (Zitek et al., 2010), victim-signaling was positively correlated with entitlement, $r(298) = .39$, $p < .001$. As in Study 2b, victim-signaling was also positively correlated with all three of the Dark Triad traits separately and in aggregate, $r(298) = .52$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, providing preliminary support for our hypothesis, both victim signaling and virtue signaling were positively correlated with participants' scores on the Counterfeit Proneness scale, $r(298) = .42$, $p < .001$ and $r(298) = .15$, $p = .007$, respectively.

Willingness to purchase counterfeit shoes. We conducted a repeated-measures ANOVA to test whether participants' reported willingness to purchase differed based on the shoe type, and whether the composite signaling score was a significant predictor for each type, while controlling for demographic variables and moral identity internalization (standardized). The willingness to purchase was highest for authentic shoes ($M_{authentic} = 4.44$, $SD = 1.77$), followed by generic shoes ($M_{generic} = 4.10$, $SD = 1.78$), and it was lowest for counterfeit shoes ($M_{counterfeit} = 2.61$, $SD = 1.86$).

Because Mauchly's Test of Sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated, $\chi^2(2) = 43.28$, $p < .001$, and the epsilon was greater than .75, a Huynh-Feldt correction was used (Girden, 1992). The effect of shoe type on willingness to purchase was marginally significant, $F(1.84, 525.37) = 3.11$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Central to our hypothesis, the composite signaling score was a significant predictor, $F(1, 286) = 19.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$, for the differential purchase intentions for the three types of shoes, along with moral identity internalization, $F(1, 286) = 15.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$.[9,10] Comparing the parameter estimates across different types of shoes, composite signaling score significantly increased purchase intentions for counterfeit shoes ($b = .69$, $SE = .14$, 95% CI [.42, .97], $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$), but not for generic shoes ($b = .19$, $SE = .16$, 95% CI [−.12, .50], $p = .23$, $\eta^2 = .01$).

As supplementary evidence for the relationship between virtuous victim signaling and Dark Triad, we conducted the same repeated-measures ANOVA by replacing participants' composite signaling score with their Dark Triad score, while controlling for the same set of demographics and moral identity internalization. The effect of shoe type on purchase intentions was significant, $F(1.84, 526.73) = 6.07$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .02$, and participants' Dark Triad scores was a significant predictor for the differential purchase intentions of the three shoe types, $F(1, 286) = 5.60$, $p = .019$, $\eta^2 = .02$. Examination of the parameter estimates across different types of shoes again showed that participants' Dark Triad scores significantly increased purchase intentions for counterfeit shoes ($b = .73$, $SE = .21$, 95% CI [.32, 1.13], $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$), but not for generic ($b = .13$, $SE = .23$, 95% CI [−.32, .57], $p = .58$, $\eta^2 = .001$) or authentic shoes ($b = .13$, $SE = .22$, 95% CI [−.32, .57], $p = .58$, $\eta^2 = .001$).[11]

[9] One participant who selected the "Other/Prefer not to say" option to the gender question was excluded from these analyses because gender was entered as a dummy-coded variable into the model.

[10] None of the demographic variables entered into the model (gender, age, ethnicity, education, socioeconomic status, income, sexual orientation, religiosity, physical or mental disability status) was a significant predictor and hence they are not discussed further in the analyses.

[11] We also performed seemingly unrelated regressions (SUR) on the set of purchase intention variables for each of the three types of shoes jointly to account for the potential correlations among them within each respondent. The results are provided at https://osf.io/uxsb5/.

Perceived morality of producers. Participants were asked to judge the morality of the three types of producers on three seven-point bipolar scales (1 = *very unethical/very immoral/very insincere*, 7 = *very ethical/very moral/very sincere*). Responses to these three questions were averaged into a composite scale,[12] constituting the perceived morality of different types of producers. Using this as the dependent measure, we conducted another repeated-measures ANOVA to test whether participants' composite signaling score (calculated as the sum of their standardized scores on victim signaling and moral identity symbolization scales) predicted the perceived morality of different types of producers, while controlling for demographics and moral identity internalization. The sphericity assumption was not violated, $\chi^2(2) = 2.63$, $p = .27$. The results show that there was a significant difference in the perceived morality ($M_{authentic} = 5.86$ $SD = 1.06$, $M_{generic} = 4.20$, $SD = 1.48$, $M_{counterfeit} = 2.26$, $SD = 1.50$, $F(2, 572) = 29.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$), and that the composite signaling score affected these perceptions differentially across the three types of producers, $F(1, 286) = 7.34$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Comparing its effect across different producers, the parameter estimates for the composite signaling score was a significant predictor only for the attitudes toward the counterfeit producer ($b = .45$, $SE = .10$, 95% CI [.24, .65], $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$), and not for the generic ($b = -.03$, $SE = .13$, 95% CI [−.29, .23], $p = .84$, $\eta^2 < .001$) or authentic shoe producers ($b = .14$, $SE = .09$, 95% CI [−.04, .31], $p = .12$, $\eta^2 = .008$). These results demonstrate that virtuous victim signaling tendencies affect perceptions of the morality of counterfeit producers, but not of authentic or generic producers. As indicated by the positive sign of the coefficient, high virtuous victim signalers perceive counterfeit producers to be more moral compared with those who are low signalers.

We then performed the same repeated-measures ANOVA test by using Dark Triad scores instead of the composite signaling score as a predictor in the model, in addition to demographics and moral identity internalization. Results again showed that participants' Dark Triad score was a positive predictor of the perceived morality of the counterfeit producers ($b = .61$, $SE = .15$, 95% CI [.32, .90], $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$), but not of the authentic or generic producers ($b = .09$, $SE = .13$, 95% CI [−.16, .35], $p = .46$, $\eta^2 = .002$ and $b = .32$, $SE = .19$, 95% CI [−.05, .69], $p = .09$, $\eta^2 = .001$, respectively).[13]

Discussion

Counterfeiting, described as the manufacturing and distribution of items that resemble authentic goods (Lai & Zaichkowsky, 1999), is illegal in many countries. Although it is commonly construed as a deceptive activity by the sellers (i.e., when the potential buyers are not aware of the forged nature of the item), some consumers may act as willing accomplices rather than victims of deception by knowingly purchasing the fake versions of the authentic goods, a phenomenon particularly prevalent in luxury brand markets (Bloch, Bush, & Campbell, 1993). Previous research links such intentional counterfeit purchases to the social motive of projecting a particular image, such as the desire to signal status and impress uninformed observers (Hoe, Hogg, & Hart, 2003). In this within-subjects study, we show that participants' virtuous victim signaling scores predict their willingness to purchase the counterfeit version of the authentic shoes, but not the

generic version. Notably, participants were well-informed about the nature of the shoes (genuine vs. counterfeit) and their price and appearance were the same, eliminating lack of awareness or limited purchase power as potential confounds. Although unexpected by our main hypothesis, the significant positive association observed between participants' composite signaling score and their purchase intention for authentic shoes may be due to virtuous victim signalers' high deservingness and entitlement perceptions, as entitlement was positively correlated with both the composite signaling score and the purchase intention for authentic shoes. Additionally, in line with Dark Triad personalities' moral flexibility, high virtuous victim signalers were also more supportive of this deceptive activity, as participants' composite signaling score was a significant positive predictor for the perceived morality of counterfeit producers, but not of the generic or authentic producers. Furthermore, supporting our proposition on the link between Dark Triad and virtuous victim signaling, when participants' composite signaling score was replaced with their Dark Triad scores, the models yielded similar results, such that Dark Triad was a significant positive predictor for both purchase intentions of the counterfeit product and perceived morality of the counterfeiters (but not for authentic and generic shoes or producers). In our next study, we investigate whether virtuous victim signalers are more likely to use deception for personal gain in a behavioral task.

Study 4

Study 4 aimed to test the predictive validity of the virtuous victim signaling construct and our theoretical argument that people who are high in virtue and victim signaling are more likely to resort to duplicity to acquire resources. Providing evidence for this would support our claim that virtuous victim signaling may be used as a manipulative resource extraction strategy, particularly by those with Dark Triad personalities. In this study, we used a behavioral measure of likelihood to cheat in a virtual game to win a bonus rather than measuring Dark Triad trait scores. This behavioral measure provides convergent validity for our hypothesis along with trait associations reported in other studies. As mentioned, existing literature indicates that duplicity is one of the characteristics of those with Dark Triad personalities, and the particular measure of duplicity used in the current study was adopted from a recent paper by Jones and Paulhus (2017), which showed that participants high in Dark Triad were more likely to cheat in this game. Furthermore, as an additional measure of deceptive tendencies and to provide a test of convergent validity, we also included the Honesty-Humility (H-H) dimension of the HEXACO Personality Index (Lee & Ashton, 2005), which has been shown to account for the empirical overlap between the constructs that represent the core of the Dark Triad (Book, Visser, & Volk, 2015).

Method

Participants. We aimed to recruit 300 participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk in exchange for a small compensation. Four

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[12] For all three types of producers, the Cronbach's alphas for the three-item scales were > .90.

[13] We repeated similar SUR analyses on the three attitudinal outcomes, as well. Please see https://osf.io/uxsb5/ for the results.

participants left the survey after the first few questions, leaving a final sample of 296 (47% female, 53% male; age range: 18–82, M_{age} = 37.5 years; 72% Caucasian, 9.5% Black, 9.5% Asian, 5.1% Hispanic/Latino/a, 3.9% other).

Measures and procedures. Participants first answered the 10-item moral identity scale and the 10-item victim-signaling scale. Next, they were informed that they were going to play a game which involved flipping a coin, and that if they guessed the result of the coin flip correctly, they would earn a $1.00 USD bonus. The game instructions shown on the following page were as follows:

> When you see the spinning coin, please select HEADS or TAILS to indicate your selection. The computer will then do a random flip and you will see the outcome of the coin-flip. Unfortunately, because of software incompatibilities with some systems, some participants told us that they see the coin flip game multiple times. If you see the coin flip game more than once, the software cannot record the result of the first flip. To address this issue, we added an option that says "Skip Question." If you have already done the coin flip once, click this button. Do not click HEADS or TAILS.

After confirming that they understood the instructions, participants saw a rotating coin and three buttons labeled "Heads," "Tails," and "Skip Question." The game was programmed so that all participants would see the coin flip for three times. The outcome of the coin flip was predetermined in the following way: On the first and the second flip, the outcome did not match participants' choice and all participants saw a message which says "Wrong Guess: You did not win $1." Only on the third flip, the outcome matched their choice and the message "Correct! You won $1" appeared. Note that based on the instructions, participants should click either Heads or Tails on the first round, and then the "Skip Question" button on the second and third rounds. However, the process explained above (i.e., the chance to reflip for a second and third time) allows deceptive participants to act dishonestly until they obtain the desired result.

This procedure was developed by Quoidbach and Chakroff (2011) to study dishonesty in a virtual environment and was recently used by Jones and Paulhus (2017) to investigate different facets of duplicity among Dark Triad personalities. In these two papers, the dependent variable was whether or not participants flipped the coin more than once to obtain the bonus. In our modified version, in addition to this, we also had a second dependent variable. After the third flip, participants were also asked to indicate whether they guessed the result of their *first* coin flip correctly. In reality, the honest answer to this question was "No" for all participants, however because the game instructions stated that if they saw the coin flip multiple times the result of the first flip could not be recorded (which would be used to determine whether or not they earn the bonus), this provided an opportunity for participants to confidently lie about the outcome should they choose to do so. Therefore, their answer to this question was our second dependent measure. After the study, all participants were paid the $1.00 bonus regardless of their responses.

Following the questions about the coin-flip game, participants answered the same demographic questions listed in Study 2b. They also responded to the 10 statements constituting the *Honesty-Humility* scale of the HEXACO Personality index (Ashton & Lee, 2005) on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 =

strongly agree). Example items from this scale are: "I want people to know that I am an important person of high status" for humility, and "If I knew I could never get caught, I would be willing to steal a million dollars" for honesty, both reverse-coded. We added this measure to provide a test of convergent validity since it could be viewed as a measure of general propensity for duplicity in social situations. Notably, it has also been shown to correlate with Dark Triad (Jones & Paulhus, 2017; Lee & Ashton, 2005).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations for study variables are shown in Table 7 below. Replicating the results from previous studies, victim signaling was positively correlated with virtue signaling, $r(294)$ = .17, p = .003, and negatively correlated with internalization dimension of moral identity, $r(294)$ = −.45, $p <$ .001. Victim signaling was also negatively correlated with Honesty-Humility, $r(294)$ = −.38, $p <$ .001, indicating that high victim signalers were less likely to endorse statements about acting honestly and showing humility.

Next, we tested whether people who flipped the coin more than once in the game were different from those who followed the instructions to flip only once in their victim and virtue signaling scores by performing three one-way ANOVAs for victim signaling, virtue signaling, and the composite signaling score (calculated as the sum of standardized scores in both virtue and victim signaling) as the dependent variables.

After the first coin flip, 196 participants (66%) selected the "Skip Question" button in line with the instructions, whereas 100 participants selected either "Heads" or "Tails" to reflip the coin. After the second flip, 216 (73%) selected "Skip Question," whereas 80 reflipped the coin for a third time. Results of the ANOVA displayed in Table 8 below show that those who chose to reflip the coin more than once had significantly higher scores in both victim, $F(1, 294)$ = 24.49, $p <$ .001, η^2 = .08 and virtue signaling, $F(1, 294)$ = 7.42, p = .007, η_p^2 = .03, as well as the composite score, $F(1, 294)$ = 25.78, $p <$ .001, η_p^2 = .08, in the second round, and in the third round ($F(1, 294)$ = 21.60, $p <$ .001, η^2 = .07, for victim signaling; $F(1, 294)$ = 7.43, p = .007, η_p^2 = .03, for virtue signaling; and $F(1, 294)$ = 23.81, $p <$ .001, η_p^2 = .08, for the composite signaling score).

At the end of the game, 22 participants (7%) falsely declared that after their first flip, they saw a message indicating that their guess was correct and they had won the $1 bonus. Again, the one-way ANOVA shows that those who were honest had significantly lower scores on the victim-signaling scale, $F(1, 294)$ =

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Key Variables in Study 4

Variable	M	SD	α	1	2	3
1. Victim-signaling	2.02	0.76	.88	—		
2. Virtue-signaling	4.44	1.14	.84	.17**	—	
3. Moral identity internalization	5.95	0.93	.81	−.45***	.11	—
4. HEXACO Honesty-Humility	3.56	0.64	.74	−.38***	.02	.48***

Note. N = 296.
** $p <$ .01.   *** $p <$ .001.

Table 8

Victim- and Virtue-Signaling Scores in the Coin-Flip Game

Flip	Victim-signaling	Virtue-signaling	Composite score
Second flip			
Skip question (*n* = 196)	1.87 (0.63)	4.32 (1.13)	−0.15 (0.68)
Reflip (*n* = 100)	2.32 (0.91)	4.69 (1.10)	.30 (0.83)
	p < .001	*p* = .007	*p* < .001
Third flip			
Skip question (*n* = 216)	1.90 (0.69)	4.34 (1.11)	−0.13 (0.72)
Reflip (*n* = 80)	2.35 (0.85)	4.74 (1.17)	.34 (0.79)
	p < .001	*p* = .007	*p* < .001
Game outcome			
Honest (*n* = 274)	1.94 (0.69)	4.39 (1.11)	−0.08 (.69)
Dishonest (*n* = 22)	3.02 (0.90)	5.15 (1.23)	0.97 (.97)
	p < .001	*p* = .002	*p* < .001

Note. $N = 296$. Values in cells show participants' mean scores on the respective scales, with standard deviations in parentheses.

47.29, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$, and on the virtue-signaling scale, $F(1, 294) = 9.53$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, as well as the composite score, $F(1, 294) = 43.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$.[14]

Next, we tested whether victim and virtue signaling together predicts the likelihood to act deceptively in the game when controlling for demographic variables and the internalization dimension of moral identity. In a hierarchical logistic regression model, we first entered all of the demographic variables, including gender (dummy-coded), age, education, income percentile, socioeconomic status, religiosity, ethnicity (dummy-coded), sexual orientation (dummy-coded), and physical and mental disability status (dummy-coded), and moral identity–internalization in Step 1, and added the composite signaling score in Step 2. Participants' scores on the moral identity-internalization was standardized prior to analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) and the composite signaling score constitutes the mean of standardized virtue-signaling and victim-signaling scores. The dependent variable was whether the participant flipped the coin for a second time or not ($0 = No Flip$, $1 = Flip$), where response scores of 1 indicate use of deception. As shown in Table 9, the overall model in the first step was not significant; none of the demographic variables entered to the model was a significant predictor. After adding the composite signaling score at the second step, the model became statistically significant, $\chi^2(12) = 40.14$, $p < .001$, explaining 18% of the variance (Nagelkerke R^2) and correctly specifying 71.6% of the cases. The composite signaling score ($b = .88$, Wald = 18.93, $p < .001$, $OR = 2.41$, 95% CI [1.62, 3.59]) and the mental disability status ($0 = absent$, $1 = present$; $b = -.85$, Wald = 5.09, $p = .024$, $OR = .43$, 95% CI [.20, 89]) were significant predictors.

We also conducted another hierarchical binomial logistic regression analysis to test whether virtuous victim-signaling predicted the likelihood to lie about the game outcome. The dependent variable was whether the participant was honest or dishonest about seeing the winning message at the end of the game ($0 = Honest$, $1 = Dishonest$). The same variables were entered into the model in the same order as above. At the final step, the model was again statistically significant $\chi^2(12) = 47.78$, $p < .001$, explaining 36% of the variance (Nagelkerke R^2) and correctly specifying 93% of cases. None of the demographic variables were significant predictors, however both moral identity internalization ($b = -.73$, Wald = 7.41, $p = .006$, $OR = .48$, 95% CI [.29, .82]) and the

composite signaling score ($b = 1.21$, Wald = 10.79, $p = .001$, $OR = 3.37$, 95% CI [1.63, 6.94]) were.

In addition to the behavioral measure obtained from the coin-flip game, we conducted another regression analysis to test if the virtuous victim signal predicted participants' scores on the HEXACO Honesty-Humility scale when controlling for demographic variables and moral identity internalization. This additional test provides confirmation that the results converge across different dependent variables that are conceptually similar. A linear regression including all of the demographic variables, moral identity internalization and composite signaling score showed that the model was significant, $F(12, 283) = 12.41$, $p < .001$, $Adj R^2 = .32$, and the composite signaling score was a significant predictor ($b = -.10$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [−.19, −.01], $p = .03$), indicating that frequent virtuous victim signalers score lower on the HEXACO Honesty-Humility scale. Full results, including multicollinearity diagnostics for the set of predictor variables used in this study's analyses are provided at https://osf.io/uxsb5/. As indicated by the VIF values (all VIFs < 2.4), multicollinearity was not an issue.

Discussion

This study provides supporting evidence for our theoretical argument by using two behavioral outcome measures and shows that virtuous victim signaling is positively associated with using deception to acquire resources. In the coin-flip game, virtuous victim signalers were more likely to flip the coin for a second time and also more likely to lie about the game outcome to earn an extra bonus.

Study 5

In this study we provide another test of our hypothesis that virtuous victim signal can be used as a social influence tool and that individuals with a manipulative orientation as well as those with a self-benefiting motive to portray themselves as morally

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[14] The results reported here are based on participants' raw scores on the victim-signaling scale, but the pattern and significance of the results hold after a log-transformation as well.

Table 9

Hierarchical Logistic Regression Results for Likelihood to Reflip the Coin

Variable	Step 1			Step 2		
	b	Wald χ^2	OR	B	Wald χ^2	OR
Demographics						
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	.29	1.07	1.34 [.77, 2.31]	.16	.30	1.17 [.67, 2.07]
Age	−.01	.22	1.00 [.97, 1.02]	.00	.13	1.00 [.98, 1.03]
Ethnicity (0 = White, 1 = Other)	.42	2.08	1.52 [.86, 2.70]	.32	1.07	1.37 [.75, 2.50]
Sexual orientation (0 = Heterosexual, 1 = Other)	−.52	.95	.60 [.21, 1.69]	−.66	1.37	.52 [.17, 1.56]
SES	−.15	.47	.87 [.57, 1.31]	−.17	.60	.85 [.56, 1.29]
Income percentile	.01	.90	1.01 [.99, 1.03]	.01	.29	1.01 [.99, 1.03]
Education	−.05	.19	.96 [.78, 1.17]	−.07	.44	.93 [.75, 1.15]
Religiosity	.03	.37	1.03 [.94, 1.13]	−.02	.22	.98 [.89, 1.08]
Mental disability (0 = Absent, 1 = Present)	−.60	2.85	.55 [.27, 1.10]	−.85	5.09*	.43 [.20, .89]
Physical disability (0 = Absent, 1 = Present)	.20	.30	1.22 [.60, 2.48]	.03	.01	1.03 [.50, 2.16]
Moral identity internalization[a]	−.38	7.66**	.69 [.53, .90]	−.23	2.56	.79 [.60, 1.05]
Composite signaling	—			.88	18.93***	2.41 [1.62, 3.60]
ΔR^2		.04			.09	
Nagelkerke R^2		.09			.18	
Δ−2LL		7.85			20.81***	
−2LL		359.31			338.50	
χ^2		19.33			40.14	

Note. N = 296, SES = socioeconomic status; LL = log-likelihood: OR = odds ratio. Values in brackets next to OR values indicate 95% confidence interval for Exp(B).

[a] In Step 2, after adding composite signaling score, moral identity–internalization was no longer a significant predictor; however, in addition to the composite signaling score (b = .88, Wald = 18.93, p < .001, OR = 2.41 [1.62, 3.59]), mental disability status emerged as a significant predictor (b = −.85, Wald = 5.09, p = .024, OR = .43 [.20, .89]).

* p < .05.   ** p < .01.   *** p < .001.

superior will more frequently emit this signal. In addition to using a different instrument for measuring Machiavellianism, we also explore the relationship between virtuous victim signaling and a type of narcissism known as communal narcissism (Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken, & Maio, 2012).

Method

Participants. Three hundred respondents from Amazon Mechanical Turk were recruited for this study named "Personality and Life Experiences" in exchange for a small compensation. Responses of 12 individuals who failed an instructional attention check question were removed from the subsequent analyses, leaving 288 respondents in our final sample (56.2% female, 43.8% male, age range: 19–88, M_{age} = 38.3, Race/ethnicity: 76% Caucasian, 10% African American, 7% Hispanic/Latino/a, 7% other).

Materials and procedure. Participants first completed the 10-item victim signaling scale and the moral identity scale. Below, we describe the three other measures that we used in this study.

Machiavellianism. The 16-item Machiavellian Personality Scale (MPS) developed by Dahling, Whitaker, and Levy (2009) conceptualizes Machiavellianism as having a four-factor structure, consisting of one's propensity to (a) engage in amoral manipulation, (b) seek control over others, (c) seek status for oneself, and (d) distrust others. Study 2b and Study 3 revealed that Machiavellianism was the strongest predictor for the frequency of emitting the virtuous victim signal, as measured by the Dirty Dozen (in Study 2b), and the Short Dark Triad (in Study 3). However, both of these scales have received criticism for their inability to distinguish Machiavellianism from psychopathy and for treating the construct as unidimensional contrary to evidence for its multidi-

mensionality (see Miller et al., 2019 for a review). Therefore, we wanted to test whether the relationship we observed in our previous studies replicates with a measure of Machiavellianism that reflects its multidimensional construct and involves observable behaviors as well as internal beliefs and cognitions. Among the four dimensions included in Dahling et al.'s conceptualization, we predicted that the amoral manipulation dimension, which they define as "the willingness to disregard standards of morality and see value in behaviors that benefit the self at the expense of others" (Dahling et al., 2009, p. 228), would be the strongest predictor for the frequency of virtuous victim signaling, since this definition overlaps with the strategic nature of the signal we have thus far argued for. An example item for this subdimension is "I believe that lying is necessary to maintain a competitive advantage over others." Based on their conceptualization, the other three dimensions are not theoretically related to using manipulation for self-benefit (i.e., distrust of others is characterized by having a cynical outlook on the motivations of others, desire for control assesses the intention to minimize the extent to which others have power, whereas desire for status is marked by a willingness to accumulate external indicators of success), and thus, are not expected to be associated with virtuous victim signaling frequency. Participants responded the items using a 5-point scale from 1 (*does not describe me at all*) to 5 (*describes me to a great extent*).

Communal narcissism. The classical definition of narcissism emphasizes an individual's highly inflated and unrealistically positive views of the self, and a motivation to assert their grandiose self-worth over others (Campbell & Foster, 2007; Morf, Horvath, & Torchetti, 2011). They are likely to make strategic choices that

enable them to 'shine on a stage' (Nevicka, De Hoogh, Van Vianen, Beersma, & McIlwain, 2011; Schyns et al., 2019). We previously argued that the positive association observed between virtue signaling and narcissism may stem from narcissistic individuals' desire to display their alleged high moral character and behaviors, with the secondary aim of asserting their moral superiority over others. If this is the case, we should observe an even stronger association between virtuous victim signaling and communal narcissism, a specific type of narcissism that shares the same core self-oriented motives of grandiosity, esteem, and entitlement as the traditional agentic conceptualization of narcissism, but is different from it via its manifestation in the communal domain (Gebauer et al., 2012). An example item is "I am the most caring person in my social surrounding." Participants responded to the 16-item communal narcissism scale on a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Fantasy proneness. Participants completed the Creative Experiences Questionnaire (CEQ; Merckelbach, Horselenberg, & Muris, 2011), a self-report measure of fantasy proneness. Some researchers argued that fantasy proneness is related with dissociation, and together, they can lead to confabulations or exaggerations that result in heightened trauma reporting (e.g., Geraerts, Smeets, Jelicic, van Heerden, & Merckelbach, 2005; Giesbrecht, Geraerts, & Merckelbach, 2007). Because our theory is based on the purposefully strategic use of virtuous victim signaling (rather than it being attributable to unintentional distortions in interpretation and memory), we included this measure to account for some individuals' tendency to interpret or remember situations in a way that would result in their emitting inaccurate or exaggerated victim signals. Thus, if our theorizing about the use of virtuous victim signaling as a manipulative social influence tool by some individuals is valid, we would expect Machiavellianism and narcissism to be significantly positive predictors of virtuous victim signaling even after controlling for fantasy proneness. The CEQ uses a dichotomous (yes/no) scale with 25 items. An example item is: "Sometimes I act as if I am somebody else and I completely identify myself with that role." For each participant, we calculated a fantasy proneness score by adding the number of *yes* responses.

Demographics. Lastly, participants completed the same set of demographic questions as described in Study 2b. See https://osf.io/uxsb5/ for the full list of questions and frequency distributions of responses.

Results

Table 10 displays the zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics for the key variables. Of particular interest to our hypothesis, virtuous victim signaling was significantly and positively associated with communal narcissism, $r(286) = .36, p < .001$, and with each of the dimensions of MPS, $r_{amoralmanip}(286) = .16, p = .006$; $r_{desireforstatus}(286) = .14, p = .021$; $r_{desireforcontrol}(286) = .15, p = .01$; $r_{distrust}(286) = .17, p = .004$. Virtuous victim signaling was also positively correlated with fantasy proneness, $r(286) = .31, p < .001$.

We conducted a regression analysis to examine the association between the four specific dimensions of Machiavellianism as measured by the MPS and communal narcissism, while controlling for fantasy proneness, moral identity internalization, and demographics. As in previous studies, we used dummy codes for gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental and physical disability status, whereas age, SES, income percentile, education, and religiosity were entered to the model as continuous variables. A two-step hierarchical regression was conducted, where participants' virtuous victim signaling score was the dependent variable. Demographic variables, moral identity internalization, and fantasy proneness were entered as predictors in the first step, while the four dimensions of MPS and communal narcissism were entered in the second step. An inspection of variance inflation factors (all VIFs < 3.05) indicated that multicollinearity was not an issue (see https://osf.io/uxsb5/). The results are presented in Table 11. As predicted, amoral manipulation ($b = .19, SE = .08, 95\%$ CI [.04, .34], $p = .013$) and communal narcissism ($b = .17, SE = .04, 95\%$ CI [.10, .25], $p < .001$) were both significant and positive predictors for virtuous victim signaling.

Discussion

This study provides further evidence for the possible use of virtuous victim signaling in an instrumental way by individuals who are prone to disregarding standards of morality for self-gain (amoral and manipulative Machiavellians) and by those with the self-oriented motive of establishing their superior morality (communal narcissists). Importantly, the positive associations between the frequency of virtuous victim signaling and these two traits holds even when individuals' inclination to fantasize is accounted for, further suggesting the strategic (rather than unintentional) use of the virtuous victim signal.

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Key Variables in Study 5

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	4a	4b	4c	4d
1. Virtuous victim signaling[a]	0.00	0.74	—							
2. Moral identity internalization ($\alpha = .83$)	6.10	0.92	.10	—						
3. Communal narcissism ($\alpha = .93$)	3.79	1.18	.36***	.14*	—					
4. MPS total ($\alpha = .90$)	2.39	0.75	.20**	−.38***	.22***	—				
4a. Amoral manipulation ($\alpha = .88$)	1.79	0.88	.16**	−.55***	.14*	.86***	—			
4b. Desire for control ($\alpha = .76$)	2.59	0.93	.15*	−.14*	.23***	.70***	.47***	—		
4c. Desire for status ($\alpha = .80$)	2.85	1.11	.14*	−.10	.28***	.77***	.55***	.50***	—	
4d. Distrust of others ($\alpha = .79$)	2.59	0.90	.17**	−.30***	.10	.82***	.60***	.41***	.45***	—
5. Fantasy proneness ($\alpha = .83$)	9.80	5.19	.31***	.01	.21***	.17**	.13*	.06	.15*	.17**

Note. MPS = Machiavellian Personality Scale; N = 288.
[a] Cronbach's alpha values for the victim signaling and virtue signaling measures are $\alpha = .85$ and $\alpha = .83$, respectively.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 11
Hierarchical Regression Analyses on Composite Signaling Score, Study 5

Variable	Model 1 (Demographics + MI Int. + Fantasy proneness)			Model 2 (Model 1 + MPS + Communal narcissism)		
	b	SE	95% CI	b	SE	95% CI
Constant	$-.79^*$	.35	[−1.48, −.10]	-2.31^{***}	.44	[−3.18, −1.45]
Individual-level control variables						
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	$.25^{**}$	.09	[.08, .43]	$.27^{**}$	.08	[.11, .43]
Age (years)	−.01	.00	[−.01, .00]	.00	.00	[−.01, .01]
Ethnicity (0 = white, 1 = other)	−.03	.10	[−.23, .17]	−.10	.10	[−.29, .10]
Sexual orientation (0 = heterosexual, 1 = other)	−.05	.13	[−.30, .19]	.04	.12	[−.20, .28]
Socioeconomic status	−.06	.06	[−.18, .07]	−.07	.06	[−.19, .05]
Income percentile	.002	.00	[−.00, .01]	.001	.00	[−.01, .01]
Education	.06	.03	[−.00, .12]	.06	.03	[−.00, .12]
Religiosity	$.04^*$	.02	[.01, .07]	.03	.02	[.00, .06]
Mental disability (0 = absent, 1 = present)	−.06	.10	[−.26, .14]	−.04	.10	[−.24, .16]
Physical disability (0 = absent, 1 = present)	.11	.12	[−.13, .35]	.03	.12	[−.20, .26]
Moral identity internalization	.03	.05	[−.06, .13]	$.11^*$	.06	[.00, .22]
Fantasy proneness	$.04^{***}$	.01	[.03, .06]	$.03^{***}$	.01	[.02, .05]
Key predictors						
Machiavellianism						
Amoral manipulation		—		$.19^*$	.08	[.04, .34]
Desire for control		—		.01	.05	[−.09, .12]
Desire for status		—		−.05	.05	[−.15, .04]
Distrust of others		—		.07	.06	[−.05, .18]
Communal narcissism		—		$.17^{***}$	.04	[.10, .25]
	$F(12, 275) = 4.48$			$F(17, 270) = 5.93$		
	Adj R^2 = .13			Adj R^2 = .23		
				ΔR^2 = .10		

Note. $N = 288$. CI = confidence interval; MI Int. = Moral Identity–Internalization dimension; MPS = Machiavellian Personality Scale.
$^* p < .05.$ $^{**} p < .01.$ $^{***} p < .001.$

Study 6

Study 6 tests the hypothesis that people who emit more frequent virtuous victim signals are more likely to exaggerate reports of mistreatment by a colleague to gain an advantage over them in a competitive context. Based on our theory, we hypothesized that Dark Triad traits would predict exaggerated reports of mistreatment through the frequency of signaling virtuous victimhood. By testing this prediction, we sought to provide evidence that people with Dark Triad traits are more likely not only to emit more virtuous victim signals across situations but also emit victim signals strategically in specific situations to advance their personal goals.

Method

Participants. We recruited 301 participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk in exchange for a small compensation. We excluded 23 participants for failing both of two attention checks (an item embedded within the victim signaling scale instructing participants to select *sometimes* and another item embedded within demographics instructing participants to select *strongly disagree*), leaving 278 responses for analysis (53% female, 46.4% male, 0.6% nonbinary; age range: 19 – 78, M_{age} = 39.5, 69% White/Caucasian, 31% other) for a correlational design.

Measures and procedures. Following consent, we asked participants to imagine a scenario where they were participating in a competitive internship at a company.[15] In the scenario, they are

treated in a way which could be interpreted as being discriminatory but is ambiguous. The wording of the scenario was:

> You are working on a report together with the other intern, the one you are competing with for the job. You keep noticing little things about the way that the other intern talks to you. You get the feeling that the other intern may have no respect for your suggestions at all. Also, you think that the other intern may be talking about you behind your back to others. To your face the other intern is friendly, but something feels off to you.

After imagining the scenario, participants engaged in a feedback performance evaluation of a team member, which included nine items about incivility, as adapted from Cortina, Magley, Williams, and Langhout (2001; example: *Made you feel uncomfortable*), and a question about grounds for discrimination ("Has the employee discriminated against you or treated you inappropriately based on your age, gender, sexual orientation, or other protected criteria? Please select all criteria that apply."). Participants could check any number of 15 options (examples: *Sexual Orientation*, *National Origin*, *Gender*). Since the internship was competitive, a bad performance evaluation of the competitor would decrease the

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[15] We also randomly assigned participants to conditions describing the company culture as more or less credulous toward complaints of discrimination or prejudice, seeking to manipulate the situational affordance of signaling virtuous victimhood. We found no effect of this manipulation on any outcome variables or significant interactions, so we do not discuss it further.

likelihood of the competitor getting the job. Four of the incivility items were not explicitly described as having occurred based on the objective information in the scenario description (*Put you down in front of coworkers*, *Made demeaning or derogatory remarks*, *Addressed you in unprofessional terms, Ignored or excluded you from professional functions*). We determined the selection of these four items prior to data analysis. Given the competitive context, it would be advantageous for participants to endorse more of these items, through casting a rival in a negative light. However, doing so would require them to interpret the scenario in a way that not only embellishes the objective information provided in the scenario, but also potentially contradicts it (e.g., "To your face the other intern is friendly") while benefiting the self.

Following the employee feedback task, participants answered the 10-item moral identity scale, the 10-item victim-signaling scale, the 20-item desire for control scale (Burger & Cooper, 1979) as a filler measure to fit the workplace context, the 12-item "Dirty Dozen" measure of Dark Triad traits (Jonason & Webster, 2010), and provided demographics (age, gender, and ethnicity). Ethnicity was a free-response text item which we coded as $1 = White$, $0 = Nonwhite$.

Results

We created the composite virtuous victimhood and Dark Triad ($\alpha = .90$) measures following the same procedures described in our previous studies. We formed an *exaggeration index* by summing the number of incivility items participants checked out of the four that we predetermined to use for this analysis[16] ($M = .58$, $SD = .87$). We also formed a *perceived discrimination* index by summing the number of items checked from the 15 demographic categories provided as potential grounds for discrimination ($M = .79$, $SD = 2.08$).

As presented in Table 12, virtuous victim signaling was positively correlated with both the exaggeration, $r(276) = .21$, $p < .001$ and the discrimination indices, $r(276) = .41$, $p < .001$, indicating that frequent virtuous victim signalers selected more items from both lists. As in our previous studies, virtuous victim signaling was also positively correlated with Dark Triad, $r(276) = .41$, $p < .001$.

We then performed two tests of mediation to check if Dark Triad predicts virtuous victim signaling, which, in turn, predicts participants' scores on the exaggeration and discrimination indices. Bootstrapping the standard errors with 5000 repeated samples, the models also included moral identity internalization, age, gender ($0 = male$, $1 = female and nonbinary$) and ethnicity ($0 = nonwhite$, $1 = white$) as covariates. The standardized estimate of the indirect effect was .08 ($SE = .04$, 95% CI [.02, .15], $p = .061$) for exaggeration index, and .16 ($SE = .04$, 95% CI [.11, .23], $p < .001$) for perceived discrimination index, indicating that the effect of Dark Triad scores on these variables was mediated by virtuous victim signaling.

Discussion

This study shows that frequent virtuous victim signalers may interpret ambiguous situations and act upon them in a way that may have potentially advantageous results for themselves in a

workplace context. Further, Study 6 replicates the general pattern of associations between virtuous victim signaling and the Dark Triad personality traits found in previous studies, suggesting that the relationship is robust and reliable.

General Discussion

Fortune and human imperfection assure that at some point in life everyone will experience suffering, disadvantage, or mistreatment. When this happens, there will be some who face their burdens in silence, treating it as a private matter they must work out for themselves, and there will others who make a public spectacle of their sufferings, label themselves as victims, and demand compensation for their pain. This latter response is what interests us in this series of studies. Much research documents the intrapsychic and social costs of being a victim (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009; Taylor, Wood, & Lichtman, 1983; Zur, 2013), yet the increasing presence of individuals and groups publicly claiming victim status has led many observers to conclude that Western societies have developed a culture of victimization that makes victim-claiming advantageous (Campbell & Manning, 2018).

As explained earlier, victim signaling can yield many positive personal and social outcomes, such as helping people heal and raising awareness about the conditions that lead to victimization. Our article focuses on a different set of questions associated with victim signaling, including an examination of its functionality as a social influence tactic, how its effectiveness can be maximized by combining it with a virtue signal, who is likely to emit this dual signal, and whether the frequency of signaling virtuous victimhood can predict certain behaviors and judgments. Our first three studies demonstrate how a perceived victim signal can lead others to transfer resources to a victim, but that the motivation to do so is amplified when the victim signal is paired with a virtue signal. Potential benefactors of putative victims reported greater willingness to transfer both monetary and nonmonetary resources (i.e., time and effort) to a target, whether a stranger (Study 1a & 1b) or a personally known other (Study 1c), if they were also perceived as being virtuous, compared with when they were perceived as being a nonvictim, merely a victim, or a nonvirtuous victim. This finding contributes to an emerging stream of research on competitive victimhood (see Graso et al., 2019; Noor et al., 2012; Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe et al., 2012) by suggesting that individuals or groups can gain an advantage in the "victim space" by emitting signals that convey not only need but also moral worth and deservingness. In a world with many potential victims, this dual signal can differentiate an individual or a victim group from others who might also be clamoring for its resources, making it a highly effective social influence tool.

Given the strategic value of this tool, another premise of our article is to direct attention to its potential use as a tactic for self-advancement and goal pursuit. We hypothesized that individuals with Dark Triad traits, particularly those with a Machiavellian profile, would be more likely to emit virtuous victim signals than those who do not have these traits. The functional value of this signal in an environment that is sensitive and responsive to the

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[16] The analyses using all nine of the incivility items (instead of the four that we predetermined to select) yields the same pattern of significant results in all of the subsequent analyses.

Table 12
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations (Study 6)

Measure	M	SD	1	2	3	4	4a	4b
1. Virtuous victim signaling[a]	0.00	0.77	—					
2. Exaggeration index (α = .46)	0.58	0.87	.21***	—				
3. Perceived discrimination index (α = .89)	0.79	2.08	.41***	.40***	—			
4. Dark Triad total (α = .90)	2.85	1.19	.41***	.24***	.40***	—		
4a. Machiavellianism (α = .83)	2.67	1.39	.31***	.21***	.33***	.91***	—	
4b. Narcissism (α = .86)	3.20	1.48	.44***	.16***	.30***	.84***	.65***	—
4c. Psychopathy (α = .79)	2.68	1.30	.29***	.26***	.40***	.83***	.68***	.48***

Note. N = 278.
[a] Cronbach's alpha values for the victim signaling and virtue signaling measures are α = .90 and α = .88, respectively.
*** p < .001.

pleas of victims makes it reasonable to surmise that some people will repeatedly emit this signal in an opportunistic manner to initiate nonreciprocal resource transfer. A contribution we make when testing our predictions about who is most likely to emit a virtuous victim signal is validating a reliable 10-item scale to measure victim-signaling behavior in everyday life. We combined this measure with an established measure of virtue signaling to operationalize the virtuous victim signal. In Study 2b, we show that people high in the Dark Triad traits emit the dual signal more frequently. Importantly, the predictive power of the Dark Triad was found even after controlling for a set of demographic and socioeconomic variables that are frequently reported in past studies in intergroup prejudice literature as increasing one's likelihood of experiencing various forms of disadvantage and mistreatment in Western societies (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, physical disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status). We also observed a positive correlation between the Dark Triad scores and the frequency of emitting the virtuous victim signal in Studies 3, 5, and 6. These results converge with the findings of past research on Dark Triad personalities that shows their willingness to use manipulative strategies to achieve their goals (Jonason & Webster, 2012; Nagler, Reiter, Furtner, & Rauthmann, 2014). Our studies contribute to the victimology literature by showing that certain personality traits reliably predict who is likely to emit victim signals that are coupled with signals of virtue. Although we are unable to conclude from our data whether these signals are valid or intentionally deceptive, what we can speculate based on our pattern of results is that some people may deploy these signals more frequently as a short- or long-term resource extraction strategy.

Beyond showing that the Dark Triad traits predict virtuous victim signaling, we also provide evidence of how these signals, as possible indicators of underlying Dark Triad traits, can predict a person's willingness to engage in and endorse ethically questionable behaviors. In Study 3, we showed that more frequent virtuous victim signalers are more willing to purchase counterfeit products and judge counterfeiters as less immoral compared with less frequent signalers, a pattern that was also observed when using participants' Dark Triad scores instead of their signaling score. In Study 4, we showed that frequent virtuous victim signalers were more likely to cheat and lie to earn extra monetary reward in the coin flip game, controlling for demographic variables that could predict virtuous victim signaling and a dimension of moral identity that pertains to its private, subjective aspect (in contrast to the one publicly portrayed through moral identity symbolization). Al-

though we did not measure the Dark Triad traits in Study 4, the paradigm we used was adopted from previous research (Jones & Paulhus, 2017) showing that cheating in the coin flip task was predicted by Dark Triad scores. That our results using the measure of virtuous victim signaling parallels those found when measuring the Dark Triad supports our theoretical claim that the former can be a manifestation of the underlying suite of traits the comprises the latter. In Study 5, rather than treating Dark Triad as a unidimensional construct, we used two alternative measures that focused on Machiavellianism and narcissism. In Study 2b, Machiavellianism was the strongest predictor for virtuous victim signaling among Dark Triad traits. Using a measure that captures the multidimensional nature of Machiavellianism, Study 5 showed that a dimension referred to as amoral manipulation was the most reliable predictor of virtuous victim signaling. Extending previous research showing that there is a kind of narcissism that reflects a belief in one's superior prosociality (Gebauer et al., 2012), we found that communal narcissism was a significant and positive predictor for the frequency of signaling virtuous victimhood, again while controlling for relevant demographics and moral identity internalization. This result converges with what our previous studies showed when measuring the traditional definition of agentic narcissism that reflects an egoistic appraisal of one's special talents and abilities. Finally, Study 6 showed that frequent virtuous victim signalers were more likely to make inflated claims to justify receiving restitution for an alleged and ambiguous norm violation in an organizational context. This study shows some of the practical consequences of virtuous victim signaling for authorities and institutions that have to respond to claims of harm made by people who might be inclined to frequently emit these signals.

Together, our studies present converging evidence that the virtuous victimhood signal is an effective mechanism for persuading others to part with their resources in a way that benefits the signaler and that people who tend to engage in amoral social manipulation to achieve their goals are more likely to emit them. To reiterate, we do not refute the claim that there are individuals who emit the virtuous victim signal because they experience legitimate harm and also conduct themselves in decent and laudable ways. We strongly caution against this interpretation of our findings and the uncritical categorization of people as being good or bad depending on whether or not they publicly communicate their suffering or misfortune. Our conclusion is simply that victim signals are effective tools of social influence and maximally effective when deployed with signals of virtue. We also provide

evidence supporting our proposition that for some people these signals can be deployed as a duplicitous tactic to acquire personal benefits they would otherwise not receive. Given the ubiquity of victimhood claims circulating through public discourse by word-of-mouth, news reports, social media, legal cases, and the like, an explanation for the multiple motives that drive people to claim this status has both theoretical and practical relevance.

Limitations and Future Research

Notwithstanding the empirical support for our theoretical arguments, our studies are not without their limitations. In our first three studies, we measured perceived victimhood with a single item. Participants were first provided with the definition of a *victim* taken from the Oxford English Dictionary and then asked to indicate the extent to which the person they read and/or wrote about would fit this definition. Although we preferred this approach for its brevity and comprehensibility across participants, using single-item measures may result in lower reliability because of a higher risk of random error (Churchill, 1979) and questionable construct validity (Ruekert & Churchill, 1984). Although we attempted to mitigate these concerns by providing participants with a concrete definition of the construct immediately before measuring it, this is still a limitation that should be noted, particularly since victimhood perceptions (as they pertain to one's self or others) are likely to be inherently subjective and multifaceted.

Similarly, in this set of studies, although we attempted to use different victimhood scenarios (i.e., a physical injury in a random act of mayhem in Study 1a, a difficult upbringing and domestic abuse in Study 1b, and participant-generated responses about a personally known victim in Study 1c), these manipulations capture only a small set of victimization experiences. There are myriad ways that one can be victimized, ranging from a physical injury after a natural disaster to harassment by a coworker, to facing oppression due to one's race/ethnicity. Importantly, from the observers' perspective, these situations may differ from one another along a variety of dimensions such as attributions of controllability, identifiability of a harmdoer, or perceived similarity with the victim. Furthermore, victimization can be a highly subjective experience that may not be understood or validated by third-parties (Aquino & Lamertz, 2004). Thus, although it is practically impossible to include all of the different contexts that one can be victimized, we acknowledge that stimulus sampling is an important constraint in these first three studies that examine observers' reactions, which may limit the generalizability of our findings to a wider range of victimhood experiences (Hughes & Huby, 2004; Judd, Westfall, & Kenny, 2012; Wells & Windschitl, 1999). To that extent, we envision that this limitation may present a fruitful avenue for future research. For instance, researchers could explore the boundary conditions for the effectiveness of the virtuous victim signal across different victimization scenarios that vary in their perceived severity, controllability, or similarity between the victim and the observers. In a related vein, future research can also delve deeper into observers' deservingness perceptions, and cognitive and affective responses when adjudicating the credibility and legitimacy of the virtuous victim signals across different cultures and sociopolitical climates.

Relatedly, all of our studies are conducted with participants recruited from North American countries. This can have particular

implications for our findings, presenting an interesting avenue for future research, because it is conceivable that culture plays an important role for the interpretation and thus, the strategic value of the virtuous victim signal. As we explained previously, the virtuous victim signal is effective only to the extent that the observers of the signal are sensitive and responsive toward the pleas of the signaler, and thus it may not be a preferred tool of influence for Dark Triad personalities in cultures where virtuous victim signaling is not likely to result in personal gain. Although not directly tested in our studies, the current cultural climate in many Western societies may provide a more hospitable environment for those who use this signal to flourish and pursue their goals. Graso et al. (2019) argue that the contemporary culture of harm-avoidance seen in Western societies sanctifies the role of the victim, and this heightened sensitivity can lead to victimization claims being accepted uncritically, creating a challenge for addressing these allegations impartially. As an illustration of this, consider the recent case of a Chipotle restaurant employee who was accused of racial discrimination by a customer who posted his account of the episode on social media. In response to public outrage about the incident, the employee was fired by management only to be later reinstated when further investigation of the alleged victim's social media account revealed his boasting of numerous "dine-and-dash" incidents he was involved in over the years (Taylor, 2018). Whether this type of public outrage following an allegation of victimhood would occur in other cultures is a question that warrants further investigation. For instance, previous research shows that collectivism is associated with a more repressive construal of suffering, in which individuals are more likely to see suffering as serving a positive social function (Sullivan, Landau, Kay, & Rothschild, 2012). Therefore, it is plausible that the perceived responsiveness toward, and thus the perceived value of, the virtuous victim signal may be different in more individualist (vs. collectivist) cultures, leading to varied levels of signal emittance for strategic purposes.

Although our studies together show a reliable association between the Dark Triad personalities and the frequency of emitting the virtuous victim signal, as well as the predictive power of the signal frequency for the inclination to engage in deceptive behaviors in a variety of domains, we do not have infallible evidence or knowledge about the individual life histories of participants as it relates to their victimhood perceptions. Moreover, many claims of victimhood rest on highly subjective experiences like emotional or mental states that are impossible to disconfirm (Aquino & Thau, 2009). Recognizing that our data cannot establish the accuracy or inaccuracy of victim claims, the applicability of our theory and findings across different types of victimhood experiences may not be generalizable.

In terms of generalizability, another caveat of the present research is the use of Amazon Mechanical Turk to recruit participants. With the exception of two studies (one of the samples in the scale validation study with undergraduate students and the exploratory study conducted with a nationally representative Canadian sample), all of our other studies were conducted with participants recruited from MTurk. Although our MTurk-based samples resemble the U.S. population with regard to age, gender, and ethnicity, and are certainly more diverse compared with undergraduate student samples, we acknowledge that there are likely other demographic variables on which MTurk samples may deviate from the

general population (i.e., disability status, income, sexual orientation, etc.). Furthermore, previous research identified several other concerns with using online samples such as respondents being "professional survey takers" (Chandler, Mueller, & Paolacci, 2014) and selective attrition (Zhou & Fishbach, 2016), which may affect the generalizability of our results to other populations, particularly among samples from marginalized groups.

Conclusion

The obligation to alleviate others' pain can be found in most of the world's moral systems. It also appears to be built into the structure of the mind by evolution, as evidenced by the human tendency to feel distress at signs of suffering. It is therefore not surprising that many people are motivated to help perceived victims of misfortune or disadvantage. But the downside of this proclivity is that it can also lead people to be easily persuaded that all victim signals are accurate signals, particularly when they perceive the alleged victim as being a "good person." When this occurs, well-meaning people might allocate their material and social resources to those who are neither victims nor virtuous, which necessarily diverts resources from those who are legitimately in need. Effective altruism requires the ability to differentiate between false and true victims. Credulous acceptance of all virtuous victim signals as genuine can also enable and reward fraudulent claims, particularly by those with antisocial personality traits. Our work raises this possibility and by doing so it advances our understanding of how the moral goals of those who seek to minimize human suffering can be most effectively pursued.

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