




Misinformation, Conspiracy Theories & Youth

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she/her



@tofology

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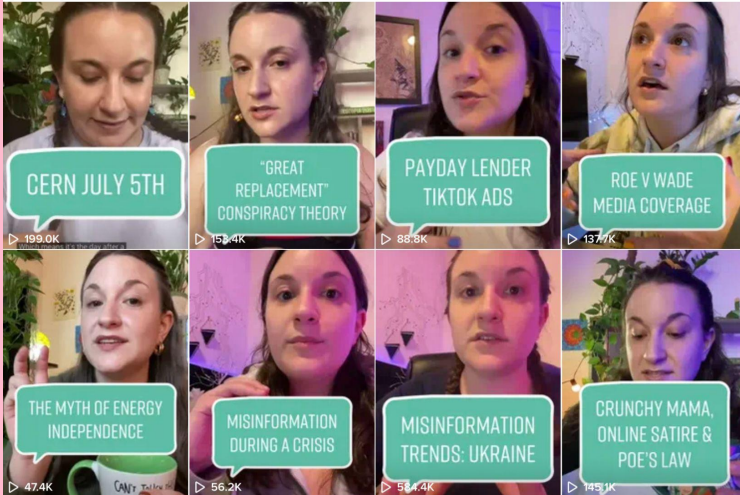
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Q&A

Conspiracy chart 2021 | Conspiracy chart 2020



About me!

Hi! My name is Abbie Richards, I am a misinformation researcher and a content creator.

Co-founder of EcoTok





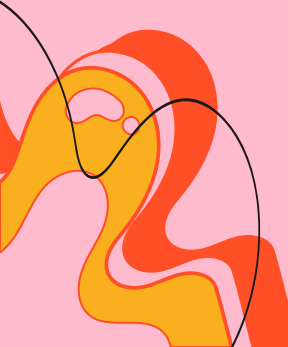
Definitions:

Misinformation vs Disinformation



What's a conspiracy theory?

A theory that explains an event or set of circumstances as the result of a secret plot by usually powerful actors





Conspiracy vs. Conspiracy Theory

- Conspiracy is a real type of crime
- Conspiracies have limited number of actors involved
- Difference in scale
 - Tobacco companies lied to public = conspiracy
 - Moon landing was fake = conspiracy theory

14 years old

Are conspiracy theories new?



Our brains are sense making machines

- Looking for patterns & connections to keep us alive
- Sense-making processes are cognitive attempts to establish straightforward, meaningful, and causal relationships between stimuli
- Without them, we couldn't experience our reality as predictable
- Without this we couldn't understand much of anything

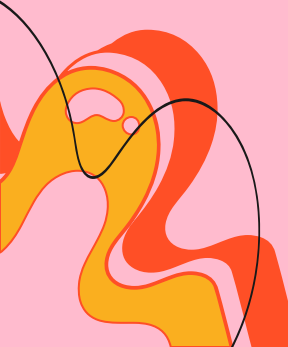




Pattern + Agency = Conspiracy Theory

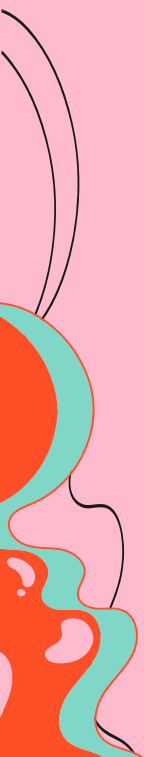
Pattern: specific causal relationships between physical stimuli, events, and actors

Agency: assumptions about intentionality or purpose



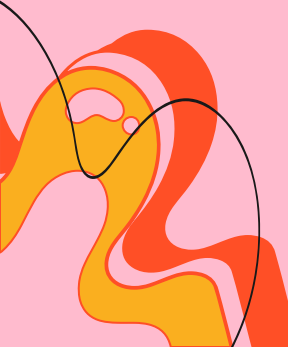
Now add: **STRESS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

- Stressful events activate your sense-making processes (very useful if you're being hunted by a bear, less helpful during a pandemic)
- Existential threat increases the extent to which people perceive patterns in random stimuli
 - Fun fact: If you feel like your sense of control is threatened, you're also more likely to see images in noisy pictures or see patterns that aren't there in random stock market information





Conspiracy theories and CRISIS

- Tend to emerge to explain crises which feel BIG
 - Our brains want an explanation that feels equally as BIG
 - e.g. Princess Diana dying in a car crash vs. being murdered
 - Give order to chaos, meaning to suffering
 - Sense of control
 - Certainty during times of uncertainty
 - Response to anxiety (but can also cause more anxiety)
- 

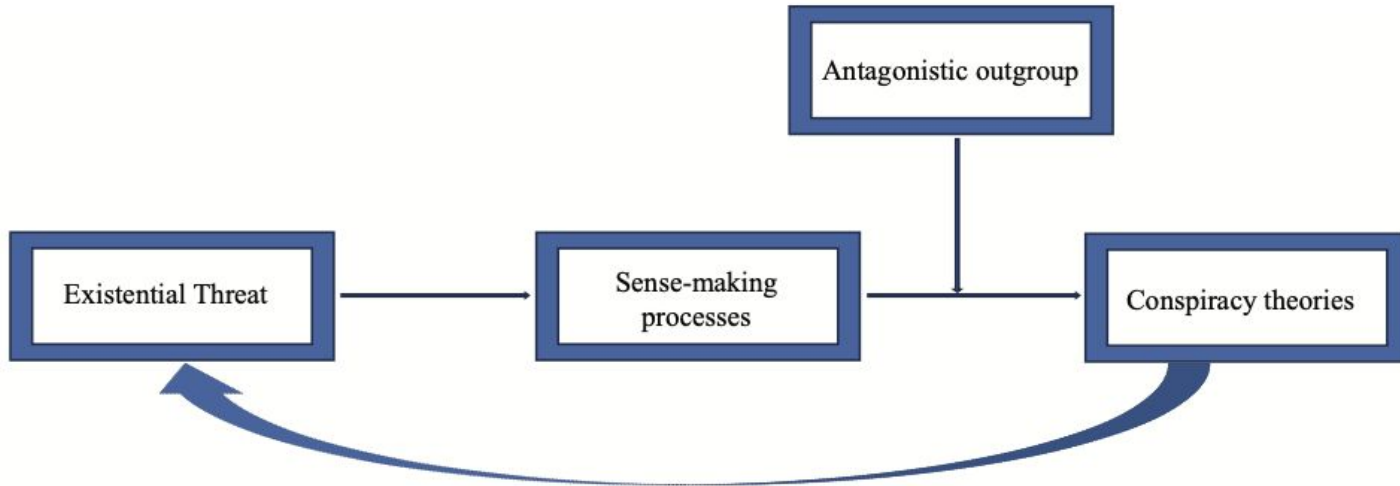


Figure 1. An existential threat model of conspiracy theories.

THE CONSPIRACY CHART 2021

DETACHED FROM REALITY

QAnon **DEEP STATE** **FLAT EARTH** **PROTOCOL OF THE ELIERS OF ZION** **ILLUMINATI** **REPTILIAN OVERLORDS** **HOLOCAUST DENIAL**

GREAT REPLACEMENT **SECRET SATANIC RITUALS** **GEORGE SOROS** **SANITY HOAX** **ADRENOCROME**

Hollow Earth **NEW WORLD ORDER** **"TRAINS AGENDA"** **"CULTURAL MARXISM"** **ROTHSCHILD CENTRAL BANK** **BILL GATES depopulation**

Flasid in the moon **PIZZAGATE** **GEORGE FLOYD CRISIS ACTOR** **JEWISH SPACE LIFELINES** **HOLLYWOOD IS TURNING YOU INTO A CAT** **NESARA**

WORLD RULED BY SUPREME SHADON ELITE PROMOTES HATRED AND VIOLENCE TOWARD MARGINALIZED GROUPS

THE ANTISEMITIC POINT OF NO RETURN

Tartaria *AntiFa did Jan 6th* **RFID tracking devices in bras** **VACCINES ARE WEAPONS** **PLANDEMIC** **Essential oils cure all illnesses**

Jet fuel doesn't melt steel beams **U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WAS STOLEN** **GLOBAL WARMING HOAX** **IVERMECTIN CURES COVID** **Moon landing FALES** **ANCIENT GIANT TREES** **Feral people in forests**

PHANTOM TIME **SOY BOYS** **5G is toxic** **Israeli Dinar scam** **CH VID is a bioweapon** **BIDEN IS A ROBOT** **CHEMTRAILS**

DANGEROUS TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS

REALITY DENIAL

Avril Lavigne replaced **Creta Thunberg is a time traveller** **STEVIE WONDER ISN'T BLIND** **ELVIS LIVES**

MICHAEL JACKSON STILL ALIVE **MATTRESS FIRM MONEY LAUNDERING SCHEME** **Credit @tofology** **CRYPTIDS** **KYLE RENEY IS SCIZOR** **TITANIC NEVER SANK**

Ted Cruz is the Zodiac Killer **Allien abductions** **PRINCE CHARLES VANISHED** **Typical case in Serbia**

UNEQUIVOCALLY FALSE BUT MOSTLY HARMLESS

LEAVING REALITY

JIMMY HOVA DISAPPEARANCE **WE LIVE IN A SIMULATION** **JFK REASSASSINATION**

Denver Int'l Airport **Chaparral Mason CIA BOSS** **AREA 51**

EPSTEIN DIDN'T KILL HIMSELF **UFOs**

WE HAVE QUESTIONS

SPECULATION LINE

COINTELPRO **Big Tobacco lied about cancer**

Watergate **Big Oil pushed Climate Denial** **NSA MASS SURVEILLANCE**

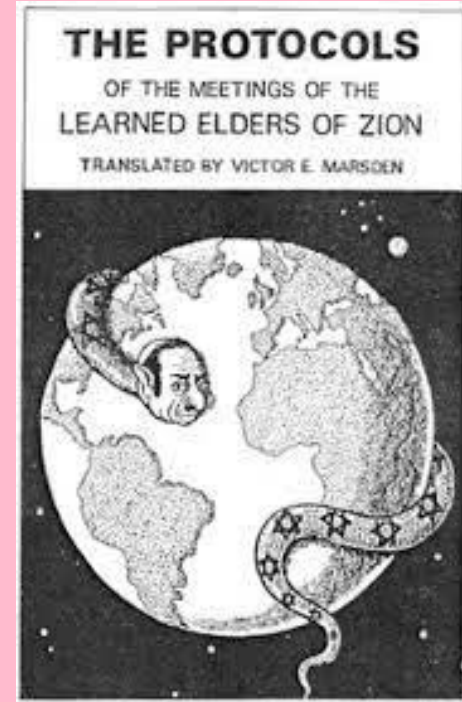
FBI SPIED ON MLK **Project Mockingbird** **THINGS THAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED**

THUNDERBOLT EXPERIMENT **Operation Partnership** **BATF/ARJ TESTIMONY** **#treasontray** **MKUltra**

Credit @tofology

GROUNDEN IN REALITY

Why are so many conspiracy theories antisemitic?





So what can we do?



Literacy

Media Literacy

- Understand world of 24/7 media
- Understand how images, messages, information we are exposed to everyday shapes us
- The ability to decode messages, assess influence of those messages, create media thoughtfully and conscientiously

Digital Literacy

- Subset of media literacy
- Ability to find, evaluate, and communicate information by utilizing digital platforms
- Teaching how to use digital tools
- Curriculum will be constantly outdated and evolving

Ecological Literacy

- We live in a polluted information environment
- Systems approach to understanding polluted information system
- Misinfo is not singular, it's networked
- We can't understand any group or any individual without placing them in their full ecological context



Prebunking

Like how a vaccine inoculates against virus, prebunking inoculates against manipulative, misinforming tactics.

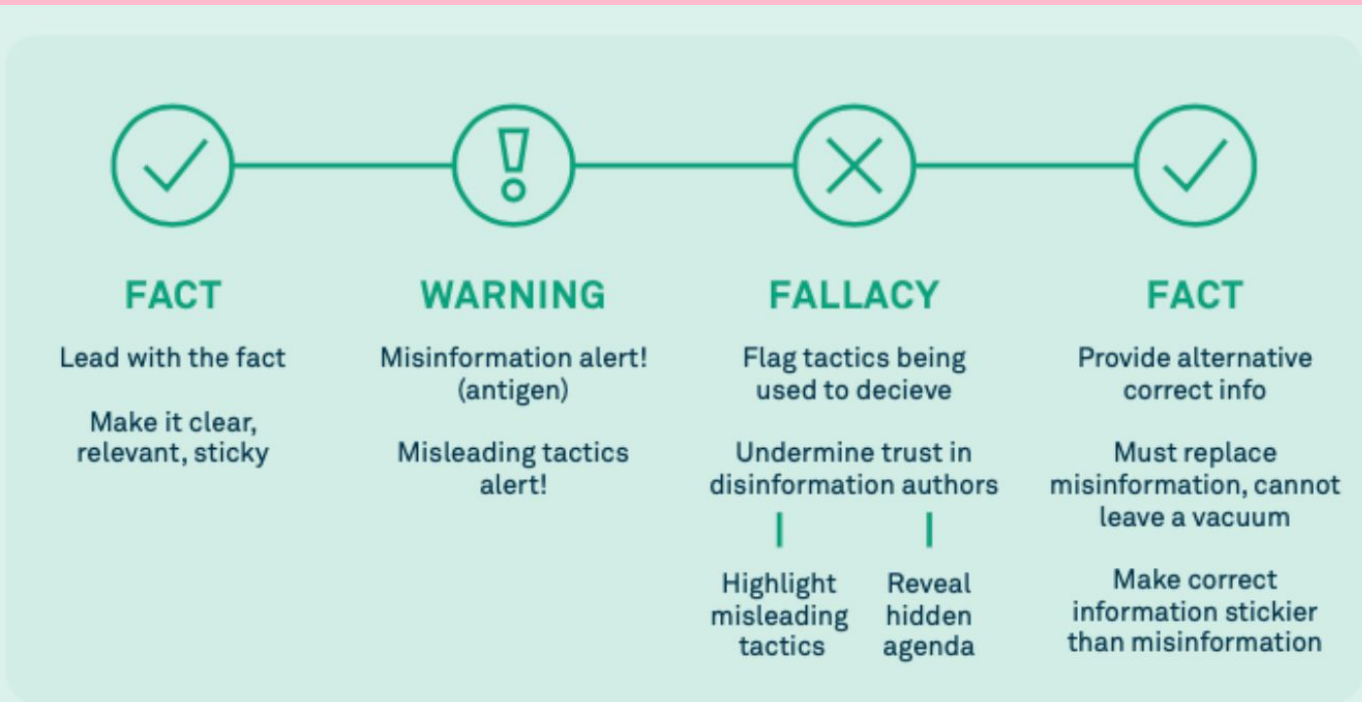
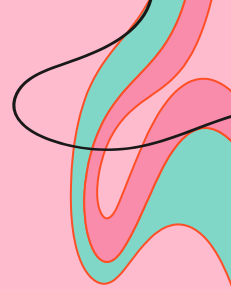


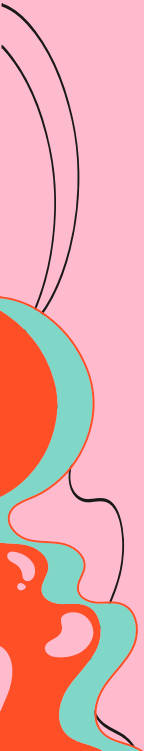
Figure 4. Inoculating against specific misinformation

Understanding manipulation tactics



Emotional resilience

- When/how do you feel a sense of significance?
- When do you feel it becomes shaky or threatened?
- How do you respond when your significance or identity feel threatened?
- Can you identify what your core values are?
 - Can you identify where they come from?
- How does uncertainty make you feel?
 - Can you identify that feeling in your body?
- How do you react when you're wrong?
 - Can you take accountability for your mistakes?
 - Do you know how to apologize?
 - Do you know how to accept apologies?



How can they make real change?





Questions?