

Knowers & Knowing

Conspiracy Theories
TOK L12

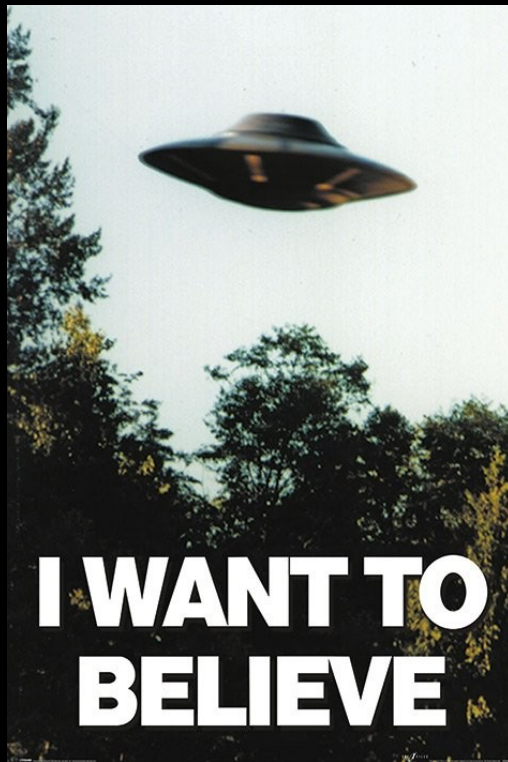


Conspiracy Theories: They Keep Secrets, Don't They?

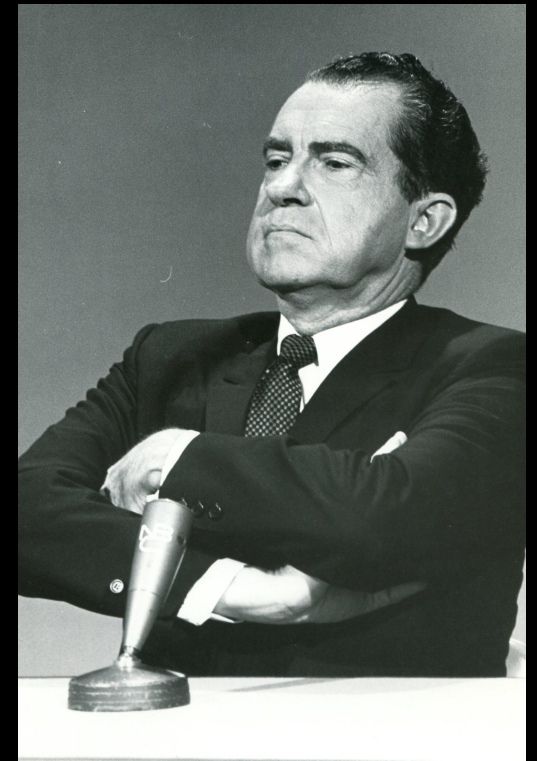


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Conspiracy Theories: Power for the Powerless



We should never disavow a healthy skepticism that challenges orthodox or establishment views. Secrets do breed distrust, and may trigger negative emotions such as disfranchisement, fear, and perceived injustice, potentially leading to responses that often displace common sense. The “Echo Chamber Effect” only fuels paranoia. Further, complex problems are not easily solved, and people tend to desire simple explanations. They want to believe in a hidden truth that is being kept from them; they tend to seek a scapegoat.



Conspiracy Theories: Common Elements

CONSPIR: The seven traits of conspiratorial thinking

There are seven traits of conspiratorial thinking²⁹, summarized (and more easily remembered) with the acronym **CONSPIR**:

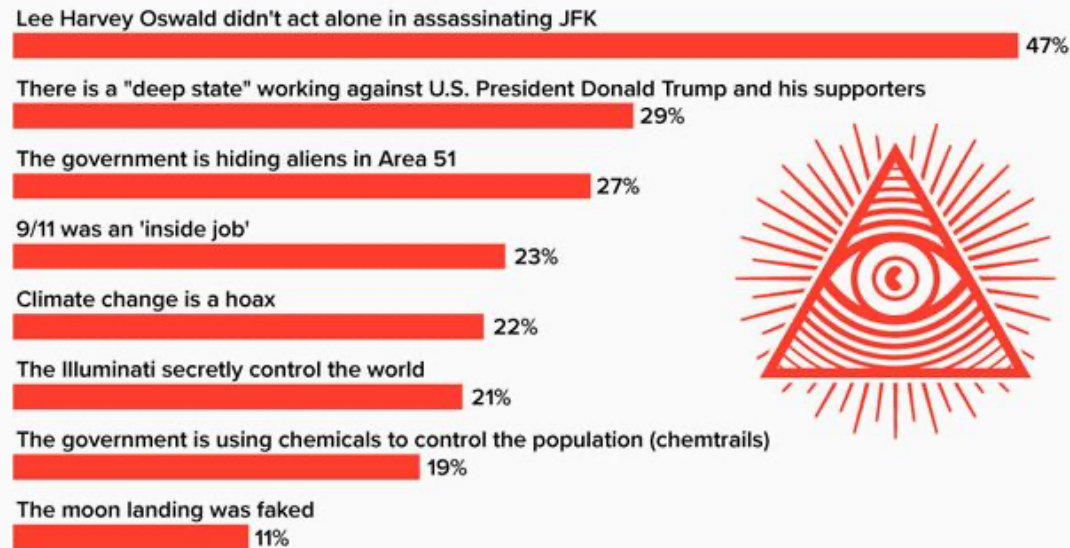


Source: The Conspiracy Theory Handbook

Conspiracy Theories: What Lies Behind Them?

Belief in conspiracy theories in the United States

% of U.S. adults that say they 'somewhat' or 'strongly' believe the following conspiracy theories



© StatistaCharts n=1,220 U.S. adults. Conducted 15-16 January 2019. Source: YouGov for Statista

HUFFPOST | statista



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump



An 'extremely credible source' has called my office and told me that @BarackObama's birth certificate is a fraud.

Reply Retweet Favorite

690
RETWEETS

115
FAVORITES



4:23 PM - 6 Aug 12 · Embed this Tweet



Dana Milbank
@Milbank

Remember this moment: Trump, in South Carolina, just called the coronavirus a "hoax."

4:54 PM · Feb 28, 2020 · TweetDeck

35.4K Retweets 162.7K Likes

#ThinkBeforeSharing

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Prebunking and debunking



BE WARNED: THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS SEEN A RISE IN HARMFUL AND MISLEADING CONSPIRACY THEORIES. IT MAY BE DIFFICULT TO RECOGNIZE THEM OR KNOW HOW BEST TO DEAL WITH THEM.

STOPPING THE SPREAD OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES IS CHALLENGING. THERE IS NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH. IT DEPENDS ON THE LEVEL OF EXPOSURE. PEOPLE WHO FIRMLY BELIEVE IN CONSPIRACY THEORIES ARE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO REACH.

Level 1: Low exposure to conspiracy theories



PREBUNKING -

Empowered people are more resilient:

- Warn people early on that conspiracy theories exist
- Encourage rational thinking, questioning and fact-checking
- Alert people about the arguments behind the most common COVID-19 conspiracy theories and the key traits of conspiratorial thinking - suspicion of official accounts, immunity to contrary evidence, reinterpreting random events as part of a broader pattern.

Level 2: High exposure to conspiracy theories



DEBUNKING -

Facts and logic matter

DO's:

- ✓ Focus on the facts you want to communicate, not the myth you want to debunk
- ✓ Choose your target - the author, source or logic behind the conspiracy theory
- ✓ Always state clearly that the information is wrong, before quoting a conspiracy theory
- ✓ Provide a fact-based alternative explanation
- ✓ If possible, use visual aids to back your argument

DON'Ts:

- ✗ Don't focus on the conspiracy theory first. Don't reinforce it
- ✗ Don't overwhelm with information

With thanks to Michael Butter, co-author of the COMPACT Guide to Conspiracy Theories, and John Cook and Stephan Lewandowsky, authors of *The Debunking Handbook* and *The Conspiracy Theory Handbook*.



KNOW HOW TO TAKE ACTION.
STOP THE SPREAD.



Conspiracy Theories: Use Your IB Tools

- Consider what is ambiguous or uncertain
- Think about why there are various possible interpretations
- Identify the evidence used to justify the theory
- Identify any assumptions or bias
- Consider the counter-argument or counter evidence
- Evaluate the different perspectives or points of view
- Think through the implications of the conclusion—if the theory is true, what follows?
- Arrive at your own judgment and justify your perspective

#ThinkBeforeSharing

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

How to talk to somebody who firmly believes in them



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MANY CONSPIRACY THEORISTS ARE DEEPLY CONVINCED OF THEIR BELIEFS. THEIR WHOLE LIFE AND WORLDVIEW ARE CENTRED AROUND THEM.

When talking to somebody who firmly believes in a conspiracy theory be aware that:

- ! Any argument challenging the conspiracy theory may be taken as proof that you are part of the conspiracy and reinforce the belief.
- ! They probably believe in more than one conspiracy theory
- ! They will probably argue hard to defend their beliefs

So, what can you do?

- ✓ Encourage open debate and questions.
- ✓ Ask detailed questions about their theory in order to trigger self-reflection.
- ✓ Enlist trusted former conspiracy theorists who once believed the same thing.
- ✓ Be cautious and use a variety of sources around the theme.
- ✓ Don't ridicule. Try to understand why they believe what they believe.
- ✓ Show empathy. Often the person may be truly fearful and distressed.
- ✓ Go step by step. Focus on simple facts and logic instead of covering every detail.
- ✓ Don't push. Too much pressure might backfire. Leave them time to process and try again.

With thanks to Michael Butter, co-author of the *COMPACT Guide to Conspiracy Theories*, and John Cook and Stephan Lewandowsky, authors of *The Debunking Handbook* and *The Conspiracy Theory Handbook*.



USE EMPATHY AND QUESTIONS.
STOP THE SPREAD.





WHERE WE GO ONE WE GO ALL

FOR DISCUSSION:

Conspiracy Theories: What's Your Favorite?

What is it?

How did it begin?

Why does it thrive?

How should we answer it?