



Conspirituality



A Case of Strange Bedfellows

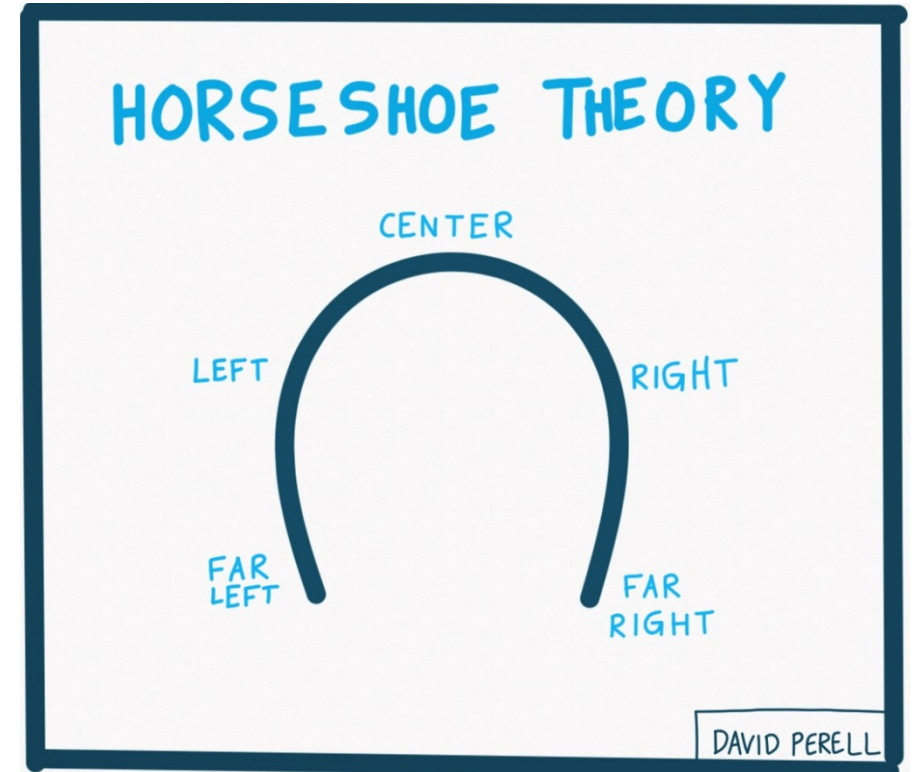
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Conspiracies + Spirituality

Core convictions:

- Conspiracy theory mindset: a secret group covertly controls, or is trying to control the political and social order. suspicious
- New Age spirituality: Belief in the imaginary, rejection of standard knowledge or institutions. “Humanity undergoing a paradigm shift in consciousness... astrology, psychics, “holistic”, everything is connected, healers, energy



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A Long history of **Conspiracies**

- Unsurprising result of past 50+ years of popular Western culture – mistrust of government and “elites” stoked by **fiction and fact**:
 - 1960’s: “don’t trust anyone over 30”, counterculture era – “turn on, tune in, drop out” rejection of current norms, protest movements, “the man”
 - Suspicion of traditional religion and motives, consideration of alternate spirituality such as yoga and zen
 - 1970’s – 2000’s: increased mistrust of government and corporations, Watergate cover-up, uncontrolled pollution, acid-rain, CIA activity in Central America, War on Drugs, prison-industrial complex, reality of trickle-down economics, 1981 Exxon memo
 - WikiLeaks, whistle-blowers

Spiritual alternatives replacing traditional science, authority, religion

- Continued evolution of attitudes towards authority
- Corporations recognized the power of manipulating consumers' fears and desires (such as the desire for status or fear of exclusion)
- Challenging Big Pharma with alternative “medicines”
- The mainstreaming of Organic and Natural
- Corporate, government and medical role in the Opioid Crisis, off-shoring of jobs, growing income disparity, acceptance of alternative medicine (homeopathy, naturopaths, TCM, chiropractors), empowerment lifestyle (gluten, GMO's, mindfulness), revelation of social media algorithms,
- Anti-academia/Anti-science: Questioning of value of post-secondary education (people with degrees working at McDonald's)

Result?

- You can't trust **authorities**
 - Government, experts, elites, academia
 - Corporations, Big Pharma, healthcare
- Let **nature** and spirit nurture and heal
 - Empower yourself, listen to your body, do your own research
 - You are what you eat – think “clean”, non-gmo
 - Alternatives to past nutrition, medicine
- Paradoxical mix of optimists (New Agers, aka far LEFT) and pessimists (far RIGHT conservatives) = people with a sense of impending doom AND a narcissistic belief that only they have the solution



3 Psychological Motives for accepting conspiracy theories:

1. Epistemological (Knowledge) motives:

- **Need for knowledge and certainty** – want to know why, want “the truth”
- Tend to have lower education levels as they haven’t had exposure to tools to differentiate between good/credible information sources

2. Existential motives:

- **Need to feel safe, secure, autonomous, powerful**
- Conspiracy theories explain why they aren’t safe, secure, why they are victims

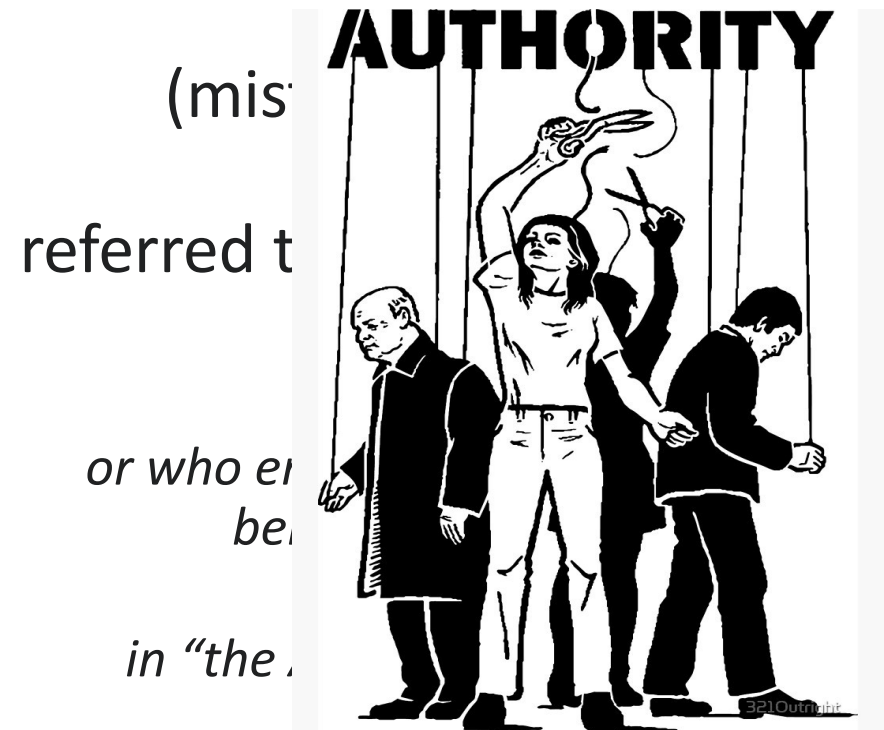
3. Social motives:

- Need to feel good about oneself and the group(s) they belong to
- **Need to feel special, unique, and have special knowledge or abilities**
- Narcissism. Over-inflated sense of value, superiority. And yet they feel unappreciated, vilified or oppressed. They are told they are not the sheep!

Characteristics of people who are at risk of Conspirituality thinking- 1

People who already are mistrustful of authority (persons in government, persons who are more experienced than them – often elites”)

- *People looking for validation. People who have never to follow rules (or laws or regulations)*
People who resent not
- *People who want to feel or be seen as in power for a working people with boot-straps (belief Individualists.*
- *Threatened by “new”, different, “progress” – Ex. a war on Christianity*



Characteristics of people who are at risk of Conspirituallity thinking- 2

People who already believe in imaginary beings or concepts (a higher consciousness, 5 dimensions, power of crystals, magical thinking, the supernatural, god or gods)

- *Again, people looking for respite from their looking for excitement and adventure*
People who already identify as religious or evangelical or in a persecuted group
- *As with other extremist movements, the conspirituallity portrays its followers as more enlightened society and prone to persecution due to their knowledge of "real truth"*



Why the current upsurge in **Conspirituallity**?

- **Conspirituallity** escalates when there is:
 - Increasing authority and/or restriction (conspiracy theories)
 - Challenge to values and beliefs (spirituality)
- Strong emotions win against logic – COVID-19 brought fear and confusion into the mix right from the beginning. Critical thinking ↓
- Government and Public Health action provided the authority and restriction (masking, isolation, vaccination)
- Physical distancing damaged social supports, increased reliance “virtual”, inadequate communications re. masking and vaccination

Future of Conspirituallity – why is it not going away?

- Increasingly mainstream
- Many alternative health promoters from local yoga studios, gyms, natural food stores, to YouTube channels and podcasters utilize multilevel marketing (not quite pyramid schemes) to provide income by selling supplements or courses and retreats (capitalizing)
 - Alternative/Natural health industry globally made ~ \$82.27 billion in 2020. Pharmaceutical industry (painkillers to chemo to insulin to antibiotics) makes \$1.42 trillion, or only about 17 times Alt/Nat health.
 - Note: Big Pharma makes a significant amount of alternative health products



The Power of social media “Influencers”

- **Oprah** (net worth \$2.5b): Rhonda (“The Secret”), Jenny Phil
- **Dr. Mehmet Oz** (\$110m): Cardiothoracic surgeon promotes homeopathy, involved in multiple weight-loss scams, faith healing, anti-choice, disputes role of CO₂ climate change, arsenic in apple pro-hydroxychloroquine, phones linked to breast cancer



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The Power of social media “Influencers”

- **Russel Brand** (\$20m): YouTube comedian instructs how to avoid COVID mandates and vaccine certificates, anti-vax, pro-Canadian truckers convoy
- **David “Avocado” Wolfe** (\$3m): raw foodist, anti-mask, colloidal silver for COVID Tx, anti-vax, vaccines cause autism, dietary supplements for cancer tx, “gravity is a toxin and water would levitate right off the Earth if the oceans weren't salty”, chem-trails, flat-earther, solar panels drain the sun's power



The Power of social media “Influencers”

- **Joe Rogan** (\$190m – Forbes): Libertarian YouTuber /podcaster. “Canada’s a communist country”, Trudeau its dictator with regard to COVID prevention measures (supports Bernie Sanders, LGBTQ rights, UBI?) Hosted Alex Jones (InfoWars), anti-vaccine/masks, Ivermectin for COVID
- **JP Sears** (\$3m): YouTuber initially parodied wellness coaches and lifestyle gurus - since 2020 has shifted to conservative political views. Produces anti-vax, anti-public health measures videos, Vitamin D for COVID Tx



Current Conspiracies with (astonishingly) broad appeal:

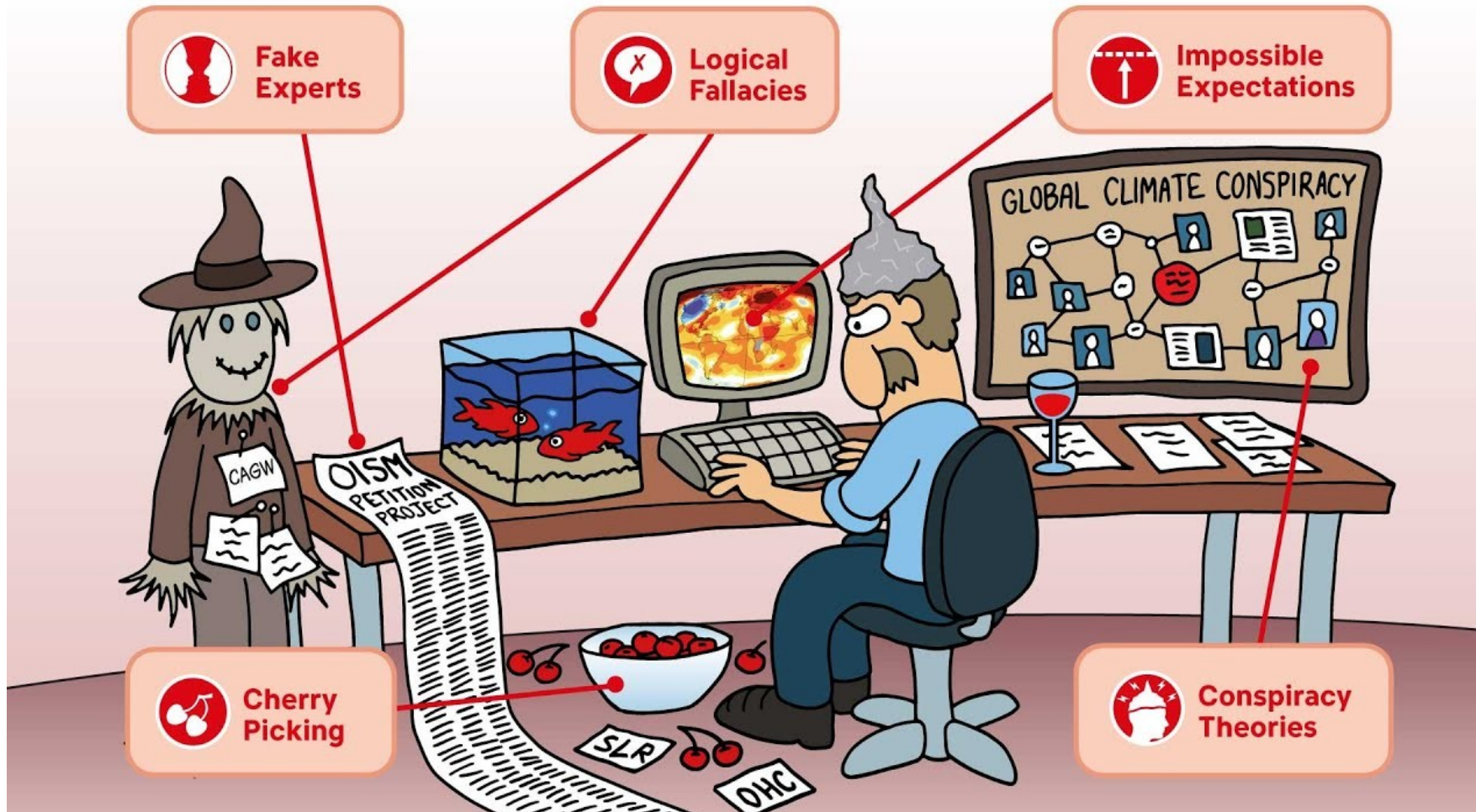
- COVID produced in lab, escaped/produced as a biological weapon by the Chinese.
- The U.S. produced COVID and released it in China
- GMOs to blame, vaccines are GMO
- COVID is a plot by Big Pharma to make \$\$\$
- 5G spreads COVID on its networks
- Bill Gates producing vaccines with microchips world (mind control, infertility).
- “Deep state” of America’s elite plotting to
- COVID doesn’t actually exist. Deaths are certificates manipulated
- QAnon: “a cabal (democrats, Hollywood actors, business tycoons, medical experts) of Satanic, child-trafficking, cannibalistic sexual abusers of children, believing Trump coming into office to secretly fight the pedophiles”



So... what have we got here?

- Western societies supporting **alternative thinking, freedom of expression, tolerance**
- **Ways of Knowing, Postmodernism, Post-truth** used to challenge any knowledge
- “Alternative facts” used to challenge to authority and government. **Feelings, intuition, beliefs** given same weight as data or scientific exploration. Celebrity, populist opinions equivalent (or preferred)
- Scientific process is dismissed as an **outdated paradigm**, fossilized thinking, a symptom of close-mindedness. Big words, **condescending**
- COVID → uncertainty and fear → **suspicion and emotionality**. Social isolation addressed through internet → allowed influencers and anonymity to fill **information void**

Uncle Cranky's 5 Techniques of Science Denial



Resources and References:

- **Journal of Contemporary Religion**
- **Conspirituality Podcast** – hosted by Derek Beres, Matthew Julian Walker. Former yoga teachers, cult survivors, episodes <https://conspirituality.buzzsprout.com/1875>
- **CBC Front Burner podcast “Wellness Culture’s Link to Denialism”** 04 Oct. 2021
<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/frontburner/wellness-culture-s-link-to-covid-denialism-1.6198414>
- **Speaking of Psychology: Why do people believe in conspiracy theories?** Karen Douglas, PhD
<https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/conspiracy-theories>
- **ParentsVoiceBC endorsing candidates** – Produced by Chris Walker, CBC September, 2022
- **Uncle Cranky’s 5 Techniques of Science Denialism** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNs2YMblqwU&ab_channel=JohnCook



Thoughts...

