

# Conspiracy Theories



## Do conspiracy theories exist?

Real conspiracies do exist!  
Volkswagen conspired to cheat emissions tests for diesel engines.  
The tobacco industry deceived the public about harmful effects of smoking.

## Fake conspiracies



Climate change is false  
September 11<sup>th</sup> was an inside job  
The earth is flat  
Moon landings are fake  
Aliens landed on earth  
Covid-19 was produced in a lab

## Why are they popular?

They justify people's feelings of powerlessness and enable people to transfer blame. They help to cope with threats. They can explain unlikely events – to make it more logical and reasonable. They help to disrupt mainstream politics.



## Social Media

Social media can inflate and provide a platform for a conspiracy culture. Misinformation spreads faster and further online. Information, fake accounts or 'bots' are not verified. Conspiracy theory fans share theories more than information to debunk or expose theories.

## Harmful Intent



Political manipulation, misuse of data and information can destroy trust in leadership, local services, institutions, including ones not linked to the theory – i.e., schools, community groups, charities.

Health

### Coronavirus doctor's diary: 'They say I have blood on my hands'

© 12 May 2020



Coronavirus pandemic



Within Bradford's Asian community a few individuals are spreading fake news that non-white patients will be left to die in hospital. Dr John Wright of Bradford Royal Infirmary hears from an anaesthetist who has been receiving abusive messages as a result.

The isolation of patients in the hospital from the community outside continues to spark small fires of uncertainty and false rumours. This is happening in cities across the country, and Bradford is no exception.

Sometimes it's claimed that the higher death rate among black, Asian and other ethnic minority patients is because they are being killed off by the very hospital staff meant to help them.

**@Faye Hussain**

**Dangerous Messages**



Blaming 5G

Bill Gates is to blame

The virus escaped from a Chinese lab

Covid created as a biological weapon

The US military imported Covid into China

Genetically Modified Organisms are somehow to blame

Covid doesn't exist

Covid is a plot by big Pharmaceuticals

Covid deaths are inflated

Covid is being manipulated by the 'deep' state



## A new wave of conspiracy theories

### Covid-19 and Extremists

## What theories are extremists spreading?

Disinformation

Propaganda

#### Extreme Right Wing

- Supporting the C-19 recovery effort
- Lockdown is a violation of liberty and spreads C-19
- Muslims are violating Lockdown
- Nearly 25K email addresses and passwords at the World Health Organisation and Gates Foundation were hacked - conspiracy theorists wanted to use these details to harass contacts

#### Islamist Extremists

- Islamit extremist groups celebrated C-19 impact
- Al-Qaeda said C-19 is divine punishment for the West and a mercy for Muslims
- Boko Haram said C-19 Lockdown is a ploy to stop Muslims practicing faith
- Lots of publicity supporting C-19 recovery effort

## How To 'CONSPIRE' Against Conspiracy Thinking & Checks

### Contradictory

- They believe in multiple ideas at the same time

### Objection

- They object to anything that does not fit into their theory

### Nefarious intent

- The purpose behind the event is insidious and dangerous

### Suspicious

- Even if the theory proves to be incorrect, they believe something is wrong

### Persecuted victims

- They see themselves as victims but ones brave enough to challenge ideas - victims and heros at the same time

### Involved

- Anyone who challenges their theory is involved in the conspiracy

### Redefined coincidence

- Nothing happens by accident. If something doesn't happen according to their expectations then it was a plan.

### Escalation of conspiracy thinking

- They want you to share the theory far and wide.

## Debunking or Exposing 'CONSPIRE'

If someone is displaying any of the CONSPIRE traits, ask for:

- FACTs and LOGIC-based ideas
- Information that is accurate
- Use logic to question the ideas if you feel confident
- Ask for the source so you can establish credibility and reliability
- Warning – if a site links to a 'fact-checker' remember that it could be subjective and taking you away from mainstream sources
- Or speak to a trusted adult about anything you come across and are not sure about