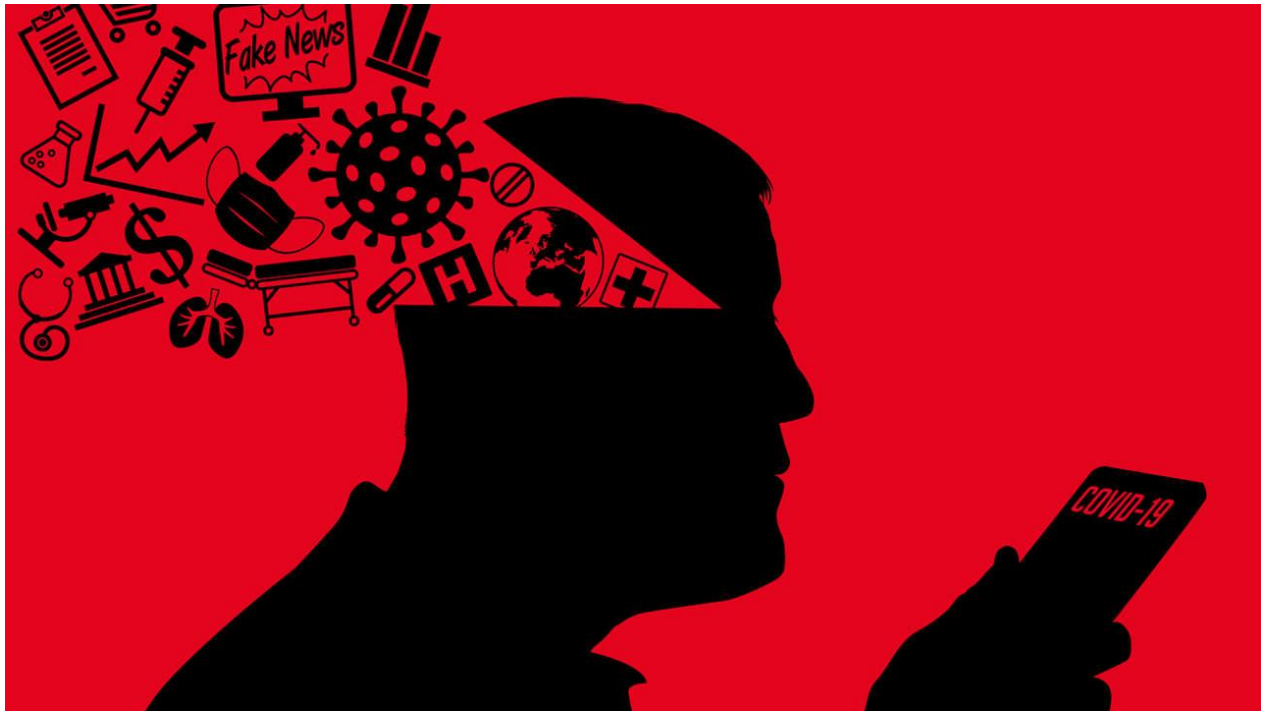


Conspiracy Theories: Counteracting Misinformation [C1]

Esistono personalità che rendono le persone più inclini a credere alle teorie cospirative?



When the internet arrived in the 1990s, [most](#) thought that it would democratise knowledge, making it widely available to all. Unfortunately, sensational wild ideas are usually more [compelling](#) than [dull](#) scientific facts. People are often anxious about new technologies, like 5G wireless internet access or new vaccines, and are [unwilling](#) to trust the large corporations that produce them. But that doesn't mean that science is bad. One person trying to address this problem is Dr. Sara Gorman, a New York-based public health specialist with a particular interest in the psychology of healthcare [decision-making](#) and the public perception of risk. She co-authored the book [Denying](#) to the [Grave](#): Why We Ignore the Facts that [Will](#) Save Us. Speak Up talked with Dr. Gorman. As she explained, people turn to conspiracy theories for many different reasons. **Dr. Sara Gorman (American accent): **Conspiracy theories are very attractive in certain situations and for certain personalities. So in terms of the situations that make conspiracy theories popular, it's when there's a lot of [uncertainty](#) in

the environment, and when things are really unexplained. There are certain personalities that make people more [likely](#) to [believe](#) conspiracy theories. So, actually people who have a high degree of narcissism are actually more [likely](#) to [believe](#) conspiracy theories. But also people who feel socially [isolated](#), who feel abandoned by society, and who feel that they're living in an insecure world are more attracted to conspiracy theories as well.

FEAR AND DOPAMINE

As Dr. Gorman explains, [most](#) of us [cling stubbornly](#) to our own [beliefs](#). Studies have shown that expressing a position we don't agree with can cause a reaction in the amygdala — the part of the brain associated with fear. Expressing an opinion we do agree with, on the other hand, may cause the [release](#) of dopamine — a neurotransmitter associated with the brain's [reward](#) centre. This is why hearing our [beliefs](#) challenged can make us feel so uncomfortable, [whereas](#) having them confirmed is deeply satisfying. Another problem is that human beings are social animals, adapted to collaborating in groups for [survival](#) and there is no better place than social media to reinforce anyone's preconceived ideas. **Dr. Sara Gorman:** Social media can be used for good and [ill](#), so it has both sides of the coin there. And I do think that it's been a problem, because I think it's easier for people to come into contact with these ideas, and it's easier for them to join groups of people who [believe](#) similar ideas. And group psychology is very powerful, and once you join a group it becomes an important part of your identity; it's difficult [to turn away](#) from those [beliefs](#) as a result.

LIFE ITSELF

This group psychology is what makes people particularly [distrustful](#) of new scientific theories. Science depends on us constantly updating information, and scientists are required to keep questioning their results and changing their theories. Life itself can be uncertain and it's easy to develop an [uneasy](#) feeling that [we're not being told](#) the whole truth by people in positions of authority. This uneasiness can even lead us to [endorse](#) two separate ideas that are incompatible about the same event. **Dr. Sara Gorman:** A lot of

people believe that Princess Diana was murdered and simultaneously believe that her death was faked and that she's still alive. The important thing to remember here is that the beliefs are coming from a place of uneasiness with the traditional narrative, and the feeling that something is not quite right. And it almost doesn't matter the content of what the alternative explanation is. It's just having other ways of explaining it that makes people feel better.

AN EXPERT IN EVERY TOPIC

Young people can be particularly vulnerable to misinformation, and Dr. Gorman warns that most research into the spreading of fake news has been conducted on Twitter and Facebook and not on the platforms that young people use, like TikTok. She is particularly concerned about how reproductive health misinformation might be reaching young people on social media and feels that schools could do more. **Dr. Sara Gorman:** In terms of education, we don't do a good job of teaching students about the uncertainty that's involved in the scientific process, and the fact that it takes a very long time to have a consensus, and that things can be sort of overturned and it doesn't mean that the first idea was a lie. So I think we need to teach young people how to sit with that uncertainty, and also just practical skills around how to follow scientific information, how to evaluate for yourself a little bit what you see there without having to be an expert in every topic.

HOW TO BE CRITICA(L)

Dr. Sara Gorman is also co-founder of Critica, a non-profit organisation committed to making rational decisions about health and security, whose motto is "Think Deeply, Think Well". Members of the Critica team are experts in medicine, sociology, psychology, public health and neuroscience. They strongly believe that everyone, everywhere is capable of making rational decisions about health and safety as long as they have enough information in a format they can understand. Their website is full of fascinating articles which simply present the known facts about a lot of important topics related to health. Critica also develops and tests new methods of counteracting

misinformation about health and science. They [advocate](#) an [approach](#) called 'motivational interviewing'. This means really talking to people about their feelings, doubts and fears as well as about the goals that they have around their health. By listening and developing a common ground, Critics [believe](#) it can be possible to move someone towards being able to change their attitudes and behaviours. www.criticascience.org Conspiracy Theories: Counteracting Misinformation

Glossary

- **Grave** = tomba
- **uneasy** = sgradevole, scomodo
- **endorse** = appoggiare, sostenere
- **counteracting** = contrastare
- **isolated** = isolata
- **reward** = ricompensa
- **topic** = tema
- **committed** = impegnarsi
- **compelling** = convincenti
- **unwilling** = riluttanti
- **likely** = incline
- **whereas** = mentre
- **lie** = menzogna
- **Denying** = negare
- **stubbornly** = ostinatamente
- **release** = rilascio
- **ill** = male
- **decision-making** = processo decisionale
- **uncertainty** = incertezza
- **cling** = aggrapparsi
- **non-profit** = senza scopo di lucro
- **approach** = approccio
- **most** = i più, la maggioranza
- **survival** = sopravvivenza
- **distrustful** = diffidente
- **we're not being told** = non ci dicono
- **dull** = noiosi
- **beliefs** = credenze
- **to turn away** = abbandonare
- **warns** = mettere in guardia
- **to sit with** = accettare
- **overturned** = ribaltare
- **advocate** = promuovere