Session 5 - Cultural perspectives

30228 - Sociology of conspiracy theories - summer-term 2023

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Recap

- Who are the conspiracy theorists?

- Which difficulties do we encounter when measuring conspiracy beliefs?

how much do you agree with the following statements:

	1 Not at all	2	3	4	5 Very strongly
COVID was a human made virus	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
COVID originated as a test run to control the "masses"	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I followed government issued COVID regulations (wore a mask, quarantaine)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Covid-19 was intentionally human made	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Covid-19 vaxxines are meant to harm my health	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There's a conspiracy behind the Covid pandemic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

On a scale from 1-10, how likely do you find that... (1 lowest, 10 highest)

	1 Not at all	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Very strongly
The restrictions were imposed to control the life of people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Something else other than the vaccine has been injected into you	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The government was lying against the effectiveness of wearing masks	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Covid-19 has been made up by someone	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Governments are intentionally inflating the death rates	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vaccines were used to control birth-rates because the world is too crowded	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

To which degree do you think the following claims are true or false, when thinking of the coronavirus? (1 very likely false - 5 very likely true)

- The vaccine against coronavirus was already developed but is held back by large pharmaceutical corporations.

- The vaccine against coronavirus was already developed but is held back by the government.

- The vaccine against coronavirus is in development and there are test-vaccines that cannot be used before being thoroughly tested.

- The coronavirus is a bioweapon that was intentionally devised to hurt humans.

- The coronavirus is a natural infectious disease that has spread across the world and caused a pandemic.

- The coronavirus was spread by accident in the context of a secret U.S.-military experiment.

- The coronavirus can be spread through products that were produced in China.

- Bill Gates wants to forcibly vaccinate the population in order to earn a lot of money.

- The new 5G cell-phone transmitters are responsible for the spread of the coronavirus.

Kittel, Bernhard; Kritzinger, Sylvia; Boomgaarden, Hajo; Prainsack, Barbara; Eberl, Jakob-Moritz; Kalleitner, Fabian; Lebernegg, Noëlle S.; Partheymüller, Julia; Plescia, Carolina; Schiestl, David W.; Schlogl, Lukas, 2020, "Austrian Corona Panel Project (OA edition)", https://doi.org/10.11587/P5YJ0O, AUSSDA.

Dangerous machinery

Husting, G., & Orr, M. (2007). Dangerous Machinery: "Conspiracy Theorist" as a Transpersonal Strategy of Exclusion. Symbolic Interaction, 30(2), 127–150. https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2007.30.2.127

Key arguments

- Frame altering and „going meta"

- Dangerous <u>Machinery</u>

    "'Conspiracy theory/ist' is an apparatus that, when invoked, sets in motion a frame shift that exposes both the speaker's claims and the speaker's competence to attack." (Husting and Orr, 2007, p. 128)

    "Conspiracy theory/ist reframes the ongoing definition of the situation, allowing an interactant to 'claim the higher ground, or to displace attention from one issue to another, or to prevail in a battle over meanings of a key term'" (Husting and Orr, 2007, p. 129)

- Attention focus: claim → claimant

Power, language, symbolic interaction

- Management of dissent

- Politics of fear

- *"As a mythos of consensus has turned into a mythos of fear, we would expect to find new interactional mechanisms to shield authority and legitimacy from challenge or accountability in a society characterized by political, economic, and cultural inequalities."* (Husting and Orr, 2007, p. 130)

Findings: mainstream news

- Politics

- Sports

- American character

- Race, Nation, Ethnicity

Findings: academic literature

- Pathologizing Conspiracy Discourse

- Unwarranted Conspiracy Theories

- Cultural Studies and Conspiracy Theorizing in an Age of Anxiety

Application

Debate

Debate

Should the label conspiracy theory/ist be used in science?

- Group A: pro using the label, Group B: against using the label.
- Both groups: try to anticipate arguments from the other groups. Draw on this sessions reading and previous class discussions. Use empirical examples to bolster your arguments.
- Debate:
  - 17 min preparation (brainstorm, strategy | arguments + data)
  - 3 min per team opening statement.
  - 5 min break (prepare rebuttal)
  - 5 min per team rebuttal.
  - 3 min per team closing statement

What have we learnt?