

The Other Kind of Deception: Why some People Believe Conspiracy Theories

Often when we talk about conspiracy theories we tend to focus either on people who are deceived by conspiracy theories (gullible conspiracy theorists) or those who seek to deceive others via conspiracy theories (deceptive conspiracy theorists). But what should we make of conspirators being deceptive? Looking at recent work on the genealogy of conspiracy theories, as well as the role of actual conspiracies in generating conspiracy theories to cover-up said conspiracies (notably the tobacco consortiums and the petroleum extraction industry, as well as the governments of the US and the UK in the lead up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003) we can analyse what role gullibility might play in belief in conspiracy theories. I will argue about how we should consider this “other” kind of deception, and thus whether gullibility is a factor solely to do with belief in conspiracy theories, or whether it also plays a role in denying the role of conspiracies as causes of belief in conspiracy theories. That is, how should we understand gullibility on both the part of gullible conspiracy theorists and those who gullibly deny particular conspiracy theories?