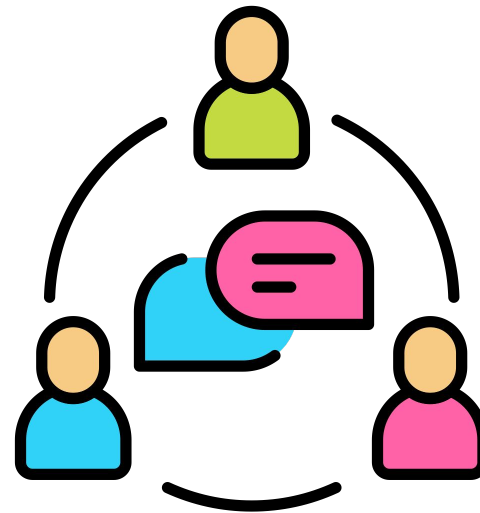# 1.3

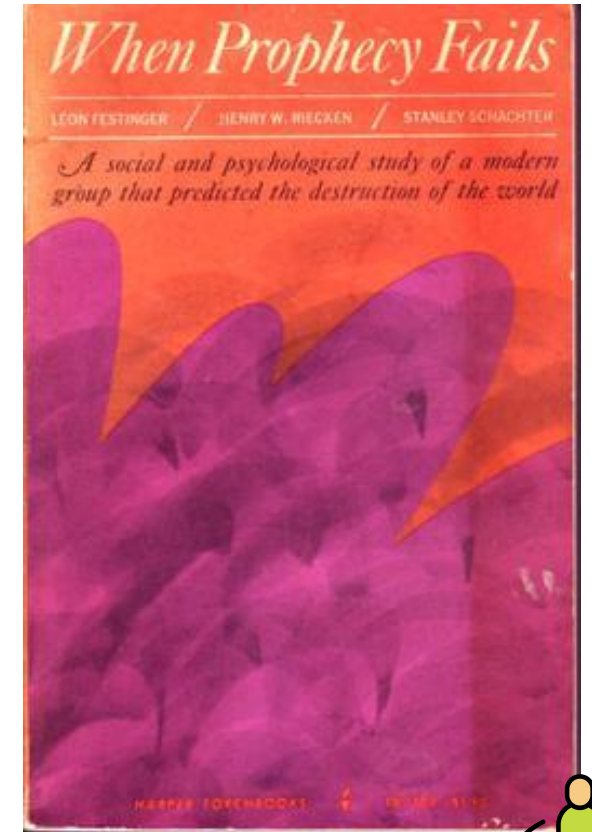# Definitions and Examples of Conspiracy Theories
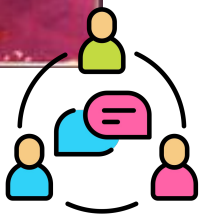
Note

- Interactive symbol: tasks for groups

Conspiracy Theories

• In 1956, Leon Festinger and colleagues published When Prophecy Fails, describing their field research on a small occult group in Chicago believing in an approaching apocalypse brought about by a flood before dawn on December 21, 1954. The researchers were particularly interested in how the group would deal with prophecy disconfirmation. Build groups. Search online to find out more about the results of the case study. Work out some aspects of how conspiracy theories work and how such beliefs affect individuals and groups. How would you define conspiracy theories?

When Prophecy Fails

LEON FESTINGER / HENRY W. RIECKEN / STANLEY SCHACHTER

A social and psychological study of a modern group that predicted the destruction of the world

Source
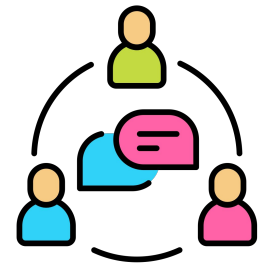https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/When_Prophecy_Fails

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Conspiracy Theories

- **Definitions**
  - Stories about obscure plots by powerful elites to serve their malevolent interests, while the unaware and naive population is at their mercy (Douglas et al., 2017)
  - Conspiracy myths challenge official accounts and narratives about events (Harambam, 2021)
  - A symptom of complexity: People adhere to easy explanations for contingent social processes involving mighty puppet masters to reduce the complexity of a world by which they are overwhelmed (Törnberg, 2018)

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Conspiracy Theories

- In your group: What contemporary examples of conspiracy theories come to your mind?

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Conspiracy Theories

- **Examples**
  - Pizzagate, Italygate, Plandemic, Voter Fraud Conspiracies, Deep state, Great Replacement, Great Reset (all links)
  - Podesta emails (malinformation) also fuelled the Pizzagate conspiracy myth as a phenomenon of motivated reasoning (Tappin & Gadsby, 2019)
  - "Pallywood" conspiracy theory about allegedly staged Palestinian suffering

Some of the most viral posts targeting war-afflicted Gazans have used the term "Pallywood", a derogatory label blending "Palestine" with "Hollywood."
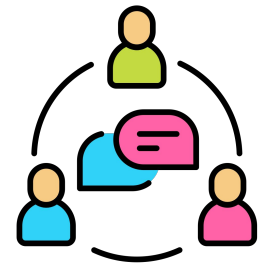
"This trend initially emerged in the early days of the war, with a video revealing the behind-the-scenes of a film set and alleging it portrayed Palestinians fabricating injuries," Yotam Frost, from the Israeli disinformation watchdog FakeReporter, told AFP.

Source: AFP Fact Check (link)

Conspiracy Theories

- **Examples**
  - Pizzagate, Italygate, Plandemic, Voter Fraud Conspiracies, Deep state, Great Replacement, Great Reset (all links)
  - Podesta emails (malinformation) also fuelled the Pizzagate conspiracy myth as a phenomenon of motivated reasoning (Tappin & Gadsby, 2019)
  - "Pallywood" conspiracy theory about allegedly staged Palestinian suffering

  - In your group: Consider the successful examples above. What are common features?

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Literature

Douglas, K. M., Sutton, R. M., & Cichocka, A. (2017). The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 26(6), 538–542. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417718261

Harambam, J. (2021). Conspiracy Theories. Misinformed publics or wittingly believing false information? In H. Tumber & S. Waisbord (Ed.): The Routledge Companion to Media Disinformation and Populism. NY: Routledge

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Törnberg, P. (2018). Echo chambers and viral misinformation: Modeling fake news as complex contagion. PLoS ONE, 13(9), e0203958. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0203958

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