

THE NEVER ENDING STORY

*The Cultural Evolution
of Narratives*



Part VIII...

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*The Cultural Evolution
of Narratives*



By

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~~TOP SECRET~~

[REDACTED]

Conspiracy

[REDACTED]

Theory

[REDACTED]

What are conspiracy theories?

A belief that either a group of individuals or an organisation is deliberately and secretly performing illegal or harmful acts, or covering-up illegal or harmful acts



What are conspiracy theories?



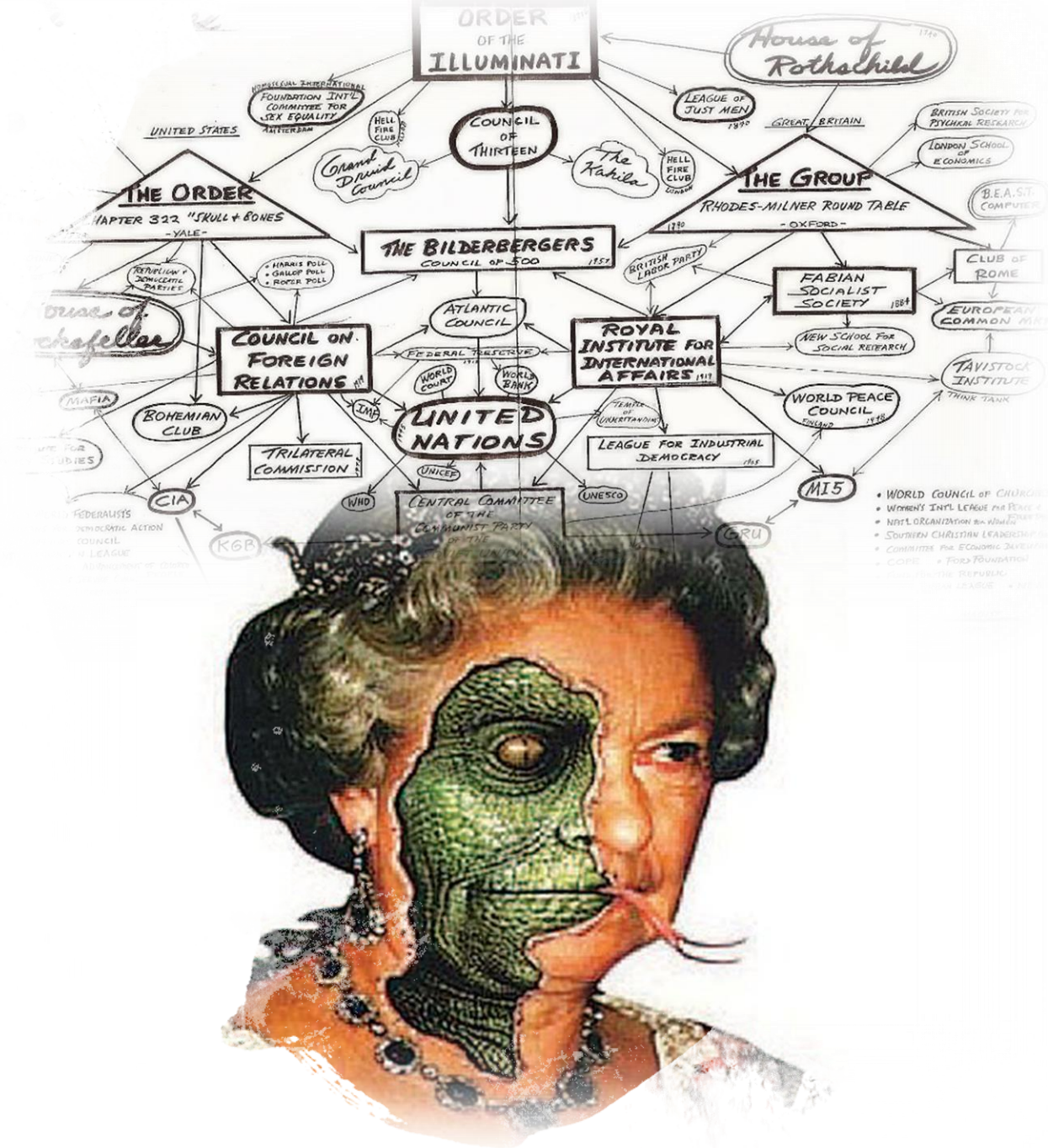
Bob Blaskiewicz 🙌 ❤️ 👽
@rjblaskiewicz

Replying to [@rjblaskiewicz](#) and [@EricRWeinstein](#)

Claims of conspiracy that rely on already disproved claims or fail to produce compelling evidence but nonetheless persist, those become conspiracy theories.

4:40 PM · Aug 19, 2019 · [Twitter Web App](#)

Can cover all aspects of culture and society



Serious consequences

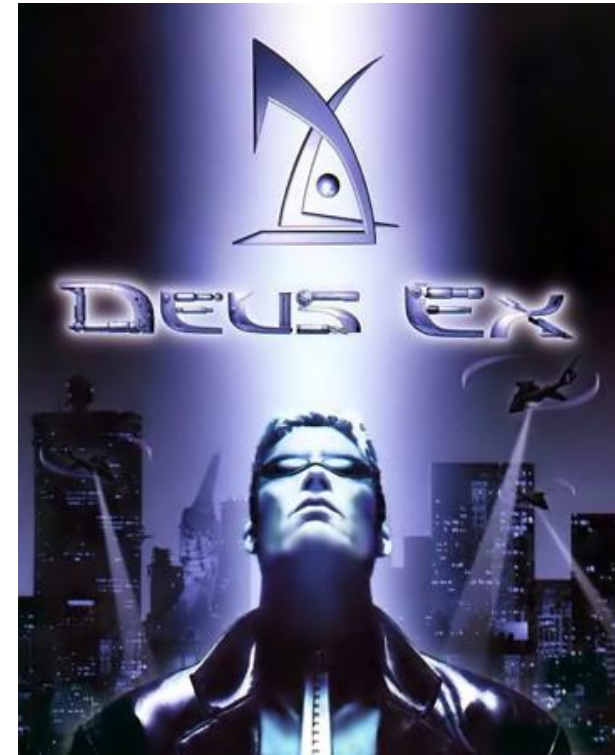
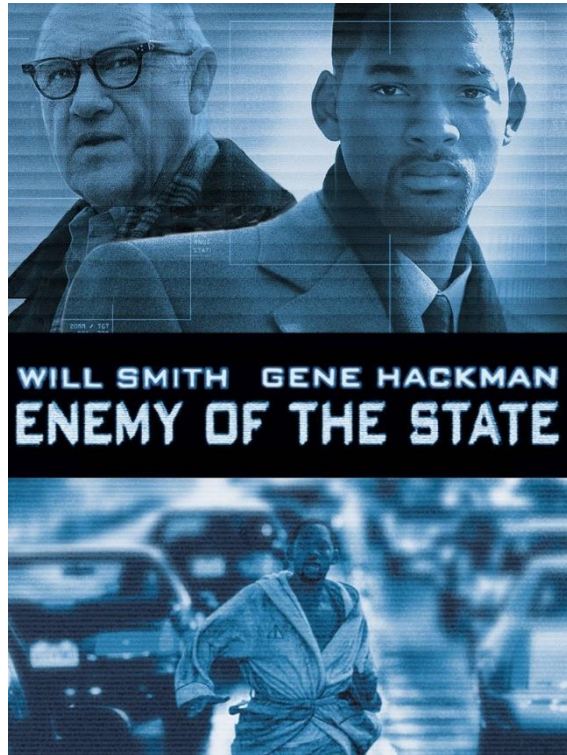
- Misbeliefs surrounding the origins, causes and treatment of HIV/AIDS
 - AIDS created by the CIA, treatment is cover for medical experimentation
 - Associated with nonadherence to medication and reduced use of contraception
 - 330,000 unnecessary deaths in South Africa in 1990s

Serious consequences

- Roll in radicalisation and extremism (Bartlett & Miller 2010)
 - Far right and Far left
 - Al-Qaeda and other radical Islamist groups
 - Often central to ideology and propaganda
 - “Radicalising multiplier” feeds back into ideologies and internal dynamics of extremist groups

Popular Media

Stories with appeal beyond just those who believe in them

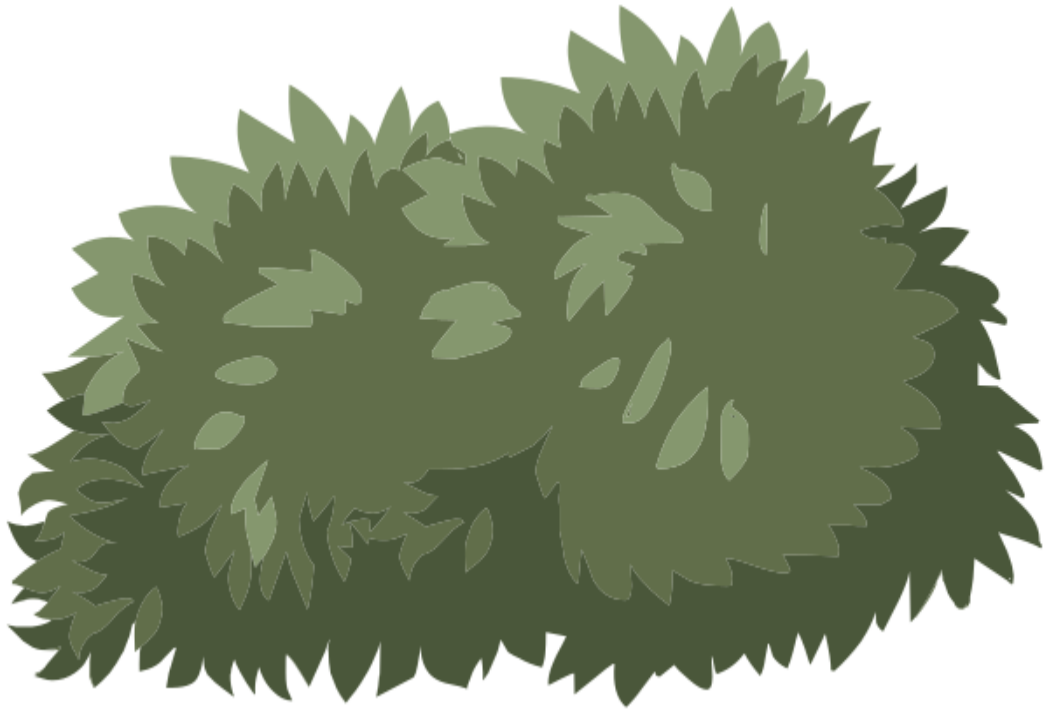
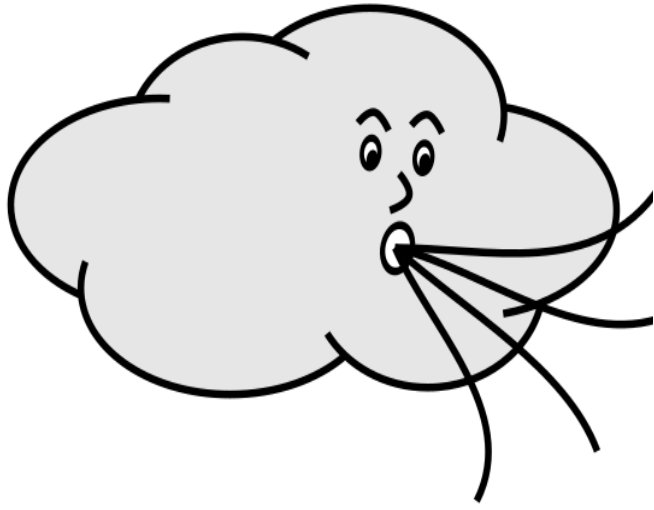


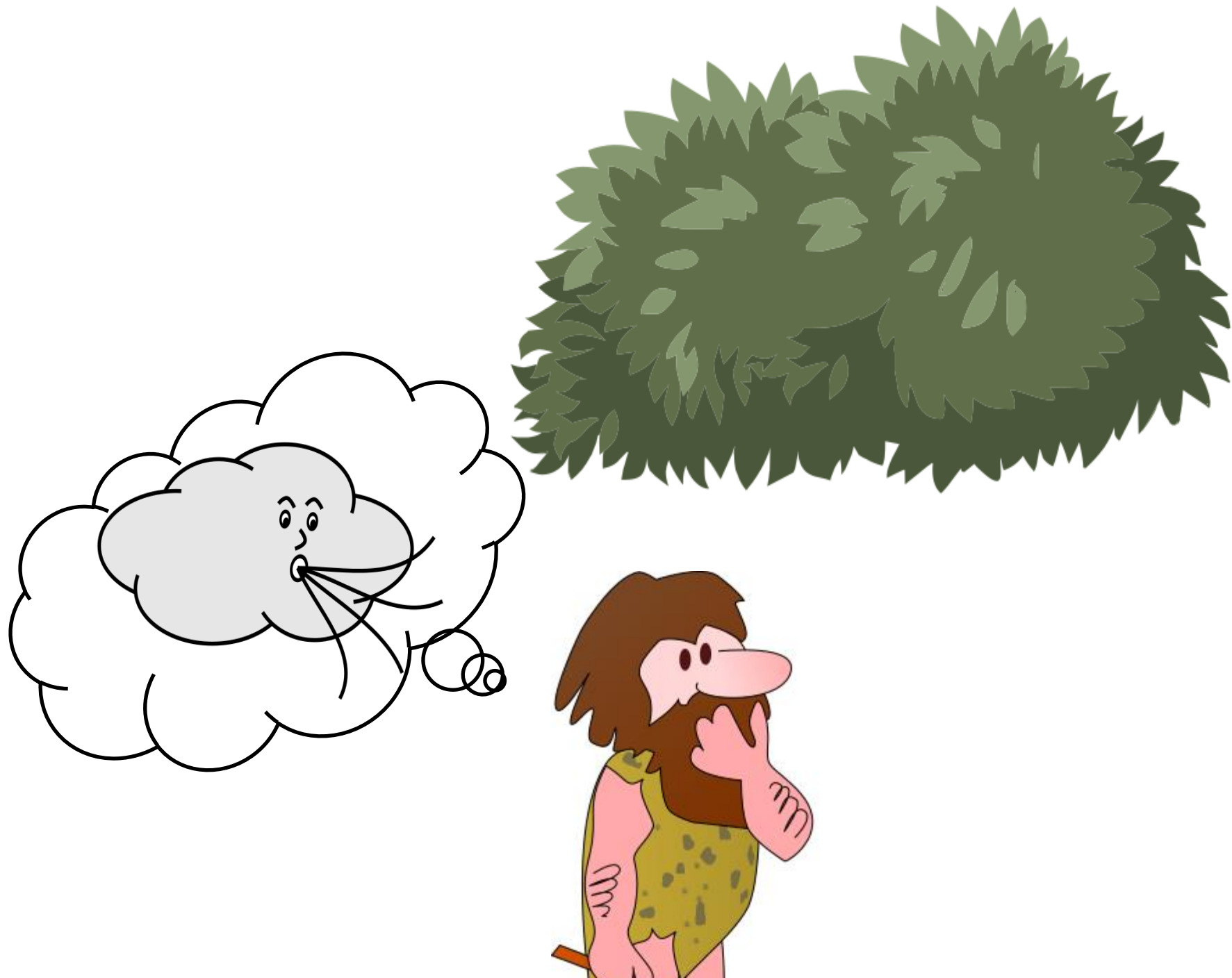
What is the appeal?
Why do people believe?
Why do people find them
entertaining?

Hyperactive Agent-Detection Device (HADD)

- Evolved predisposition to perceive intentional agency where there is none (Guthrie, 1993)
- False negatives are much less costly than false positives







Hyperactive Agent-Detection Device (HADD)

- Adaptive for survival
- False negatives are much less costly than false positives

Hyperactive Agent-Detection Device (HADD)

- Leap to larger, contemporary scale
- Intentional agent behind natural disasters, diseases and accidents
- Life is not random or accidental but determined by intentional agents
- Conspiracy theory belief predicted by tendency to attribute agency where it is unlikely to exist (Douglas et al, 2016)

HADD and Conspiracy Theories

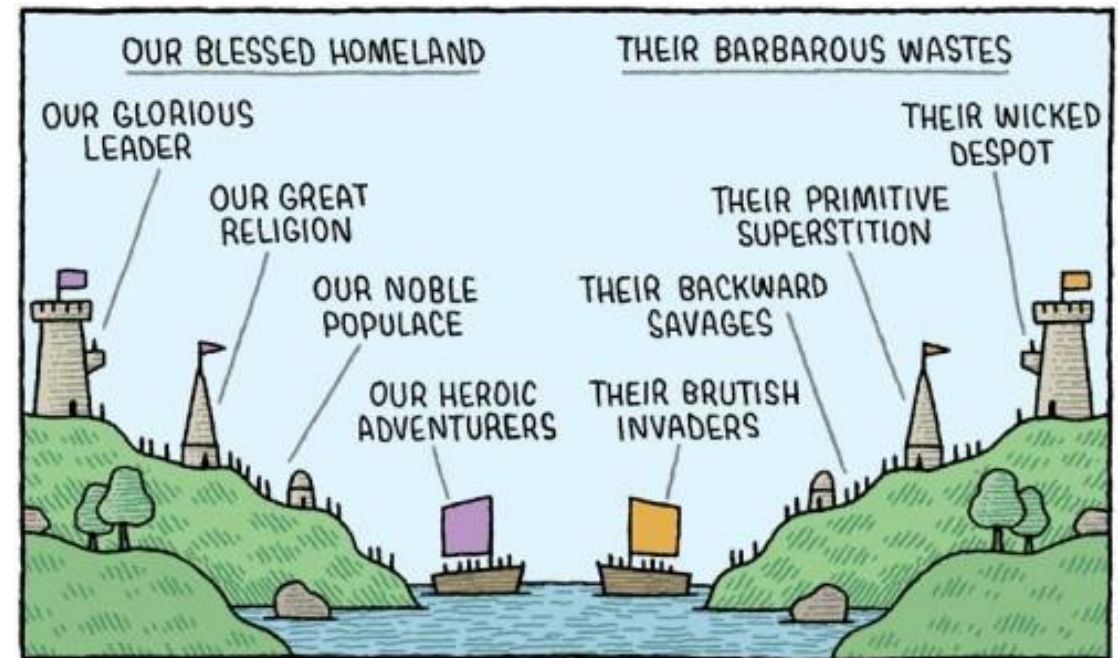


HADD and Conspiracy Theories

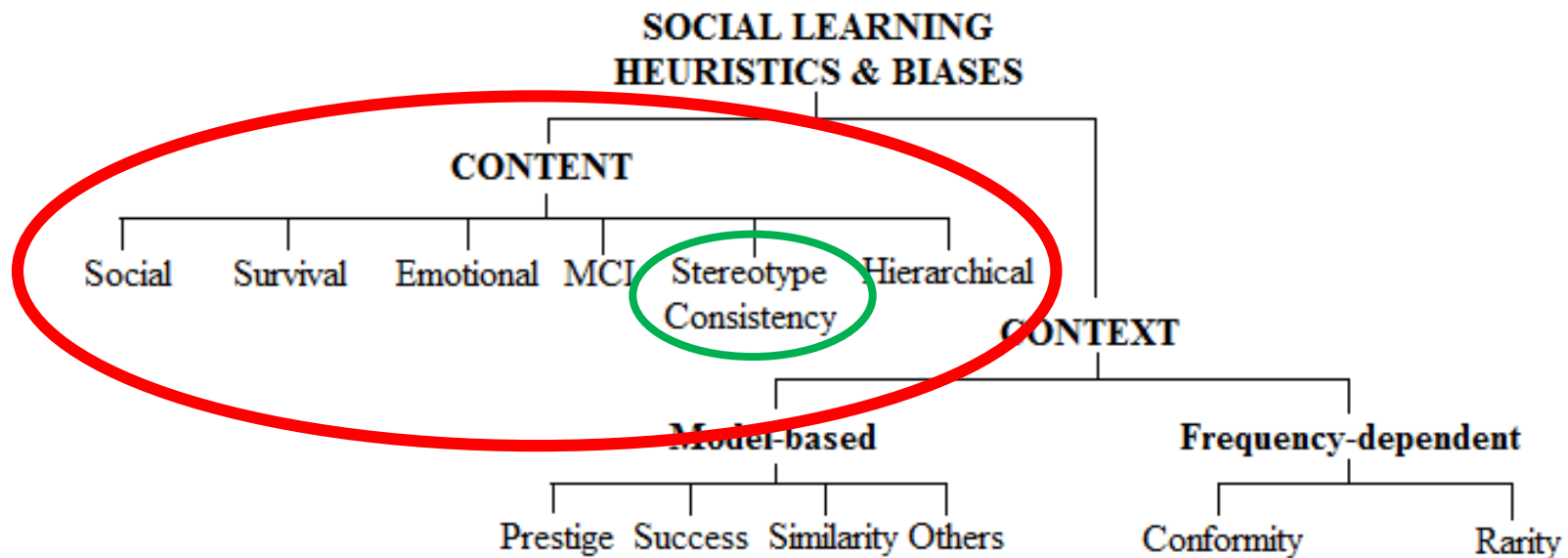
- Not full picture
- Explains seeing agency behind events
- But who are the agents?

Ingroup Favouritism/Outgroup Negativity

- Not everyone is your group
- Robust finding in psychology lit
- Role in prejudice (Allport 1954)
- Outgroups considered more stereotypical (Park & Rothbart 1982)

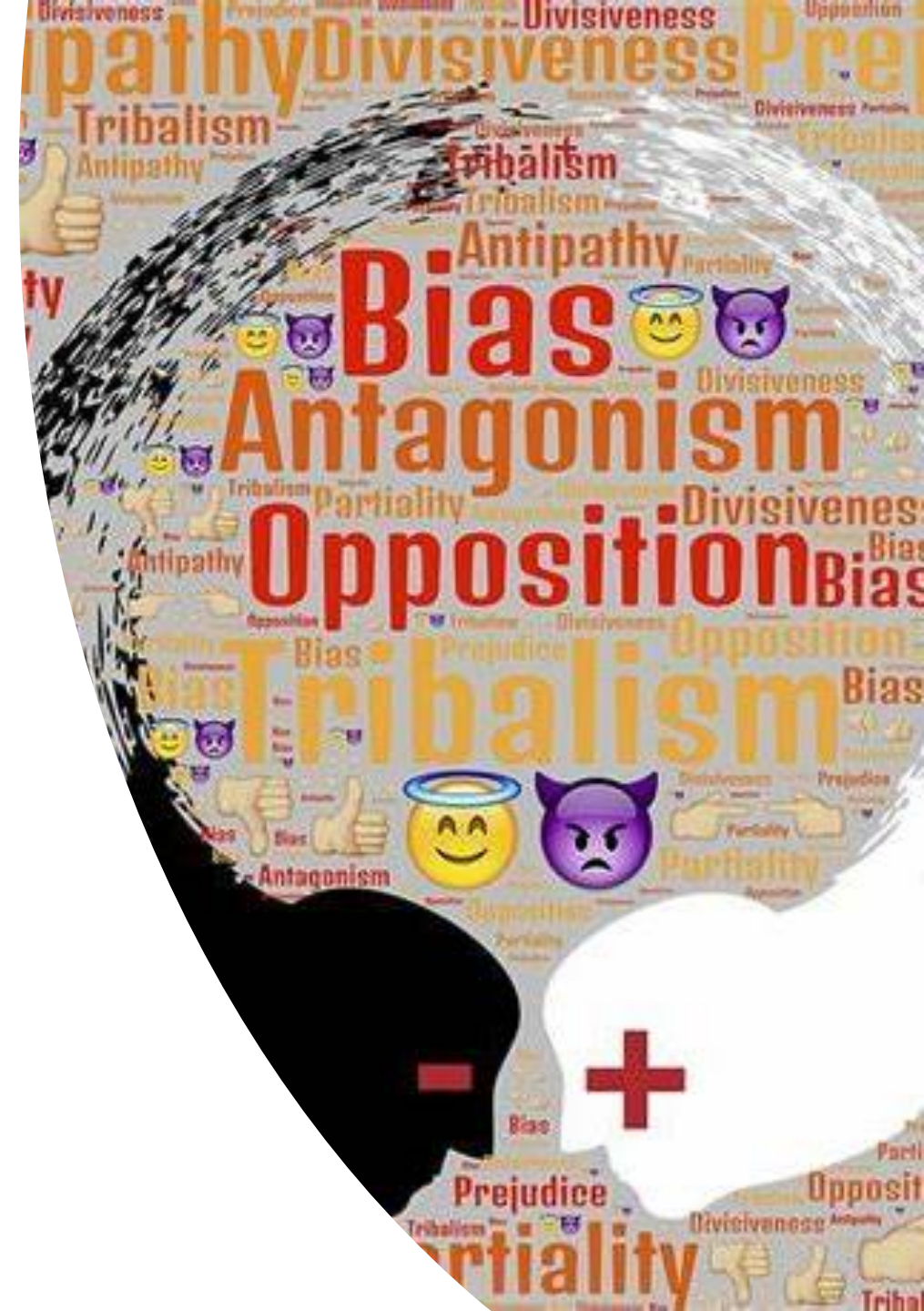


Stereotype consistency bias...



Ingroup Favouritism/ Outgroup Negativity

- Development of prejudice
- From (at least) age 5 children prefer ingroup
- Even if group identity is minimal and arbitrary (shirt colour)



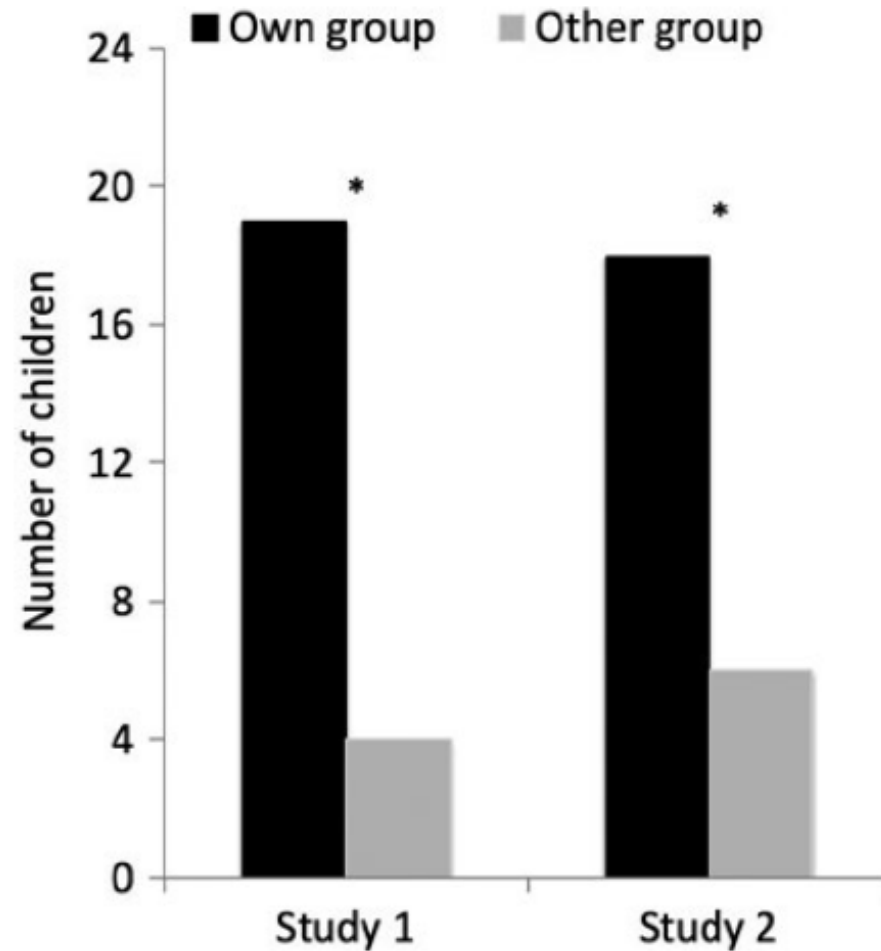
Ingroup Bias: Over at al 2018

- Investigated if children seek out information that supports and extends their initial intergroup biases
- Arbitrary groups – coloured scarves
- Stories
 1. Positive ingroup/negative outgroup
 2. Negative ingroup/positive outgroup
- Which story would they like to hear?



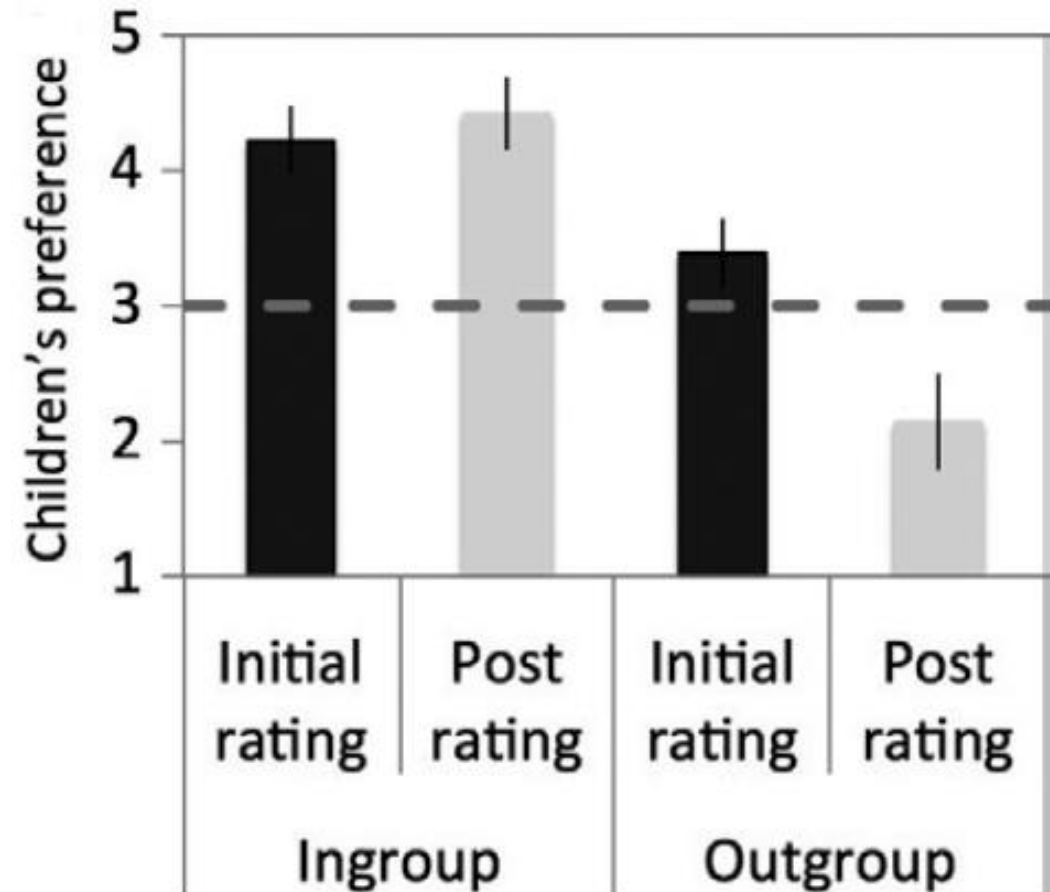
Ingroup Bias: Over at al 2018

- Study 1 – Preference for positive ingroup story
- Study 2 – Preference for positive ingroup/negative outgroup



Ingroup Bias: Over at al 2018

- Influence on group preference
- Negative effect on outgroup preference



Outgroup Negativity: Allport & Postman 1947

- First participant shown picture
- Describes it to second
- Transmission chains
 - Black participants
 - White participants



Outgroup Negativity: Allport & Postman 1947

- Chains of white participants
 - Black man became aggressor
- Chains of black participants
 - Roles remained the same



Outgroup threats

Negativity/Threat Bias

+

Ingroup/Outgroup Biases

Powerful combination of biases

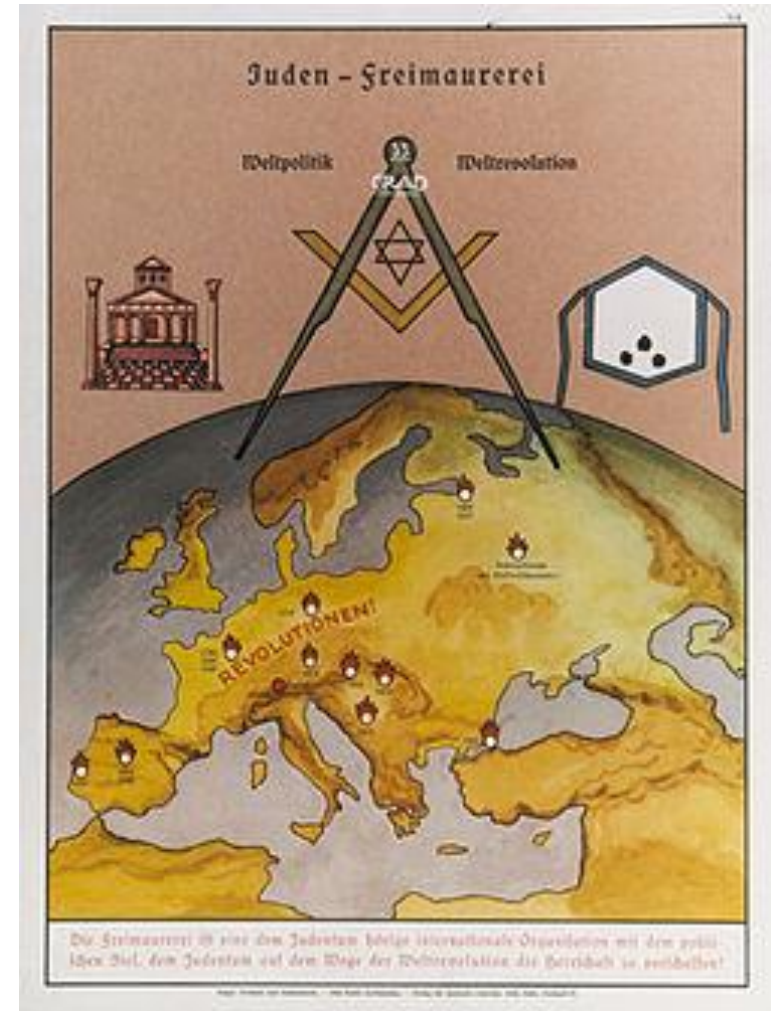
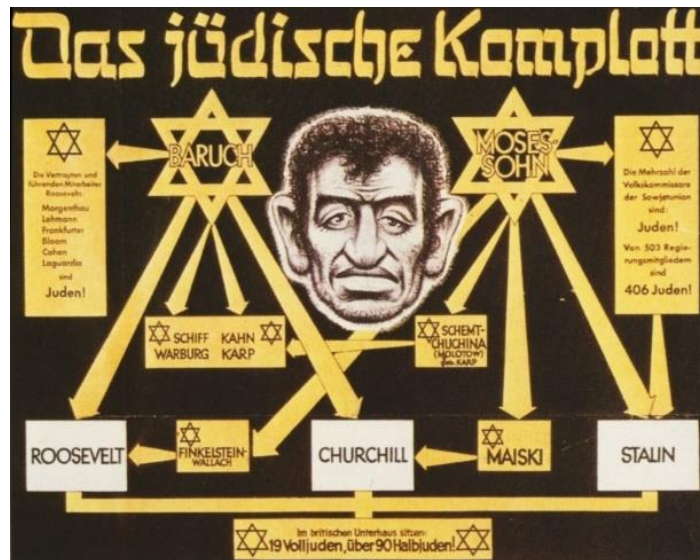
Ritual child murder: Ellis 1983

- Used to demonise outgroups for centuries
- Jewish people in Medieval Europe
- Witches 16th – 17th century Europe
- Hippies in 1960s
- Satanic Panic 1980s



International Outgroup Conspiracy

- Alliance between minority outgroup and international organisation
- International Jewish Conspiracy
- Linked to banking, Masons etc



Conclusions

- Conspiracy theories have a strong appeal
- Potentially serious consequences
- Evolved HADD = Seeing agency behind events
- Ingroup/outgroup bias = influences identity of agents
- Combination of biases makes them highly appealing

