

American Psychological Association (APA) Spreads Misinformation with New Children’s Book on Misinformation

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The American Psychological Association (APA), which infamously conspired with the CIA to justify torture during the Bush-era “war on terror”, published a new children’s book [last month](#) to “pre-bunk” children from conspiracy theories.

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American Psychological Association Bolstered C.I.A. Torture Program, Report Says



The APA's new Magination Press kid's book titled *True or False? The Science of Perception, Misinformation, and Disinformation*, mis/disinforms its young readers on several topics, including racism, gender, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here Are 9 Dystopian Lessons Being Taught to Children in APA's New Book of "Science"

Lesson #1. Trust the Experts

"During the COVID-19 pandemic," the book says there was "**seemingly** conflicting information from scientists". This is a patently false message. Statements from the experts were not "seemingly conflicting" but [completely contradictory](#), on several big issues, including masks, [vaccines](#), and [the virus's origin](#).

— Real World Impact

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people had a hard time knowing who to believe and what information to trust. This confusion was made worse by seemingly conflicting information from scientists and doctors in the early days of the crisis. Messages changed as scientists began to learn more about the disease and how best to control its spread.

Some people understood this was just how science works: early research may indicate one thing, but

Instead of teaching kids to exercise critical thinking, when it comes to COVID-19, the book tells kids the experts did nothing wrong: “[T]his was just how science works”! The book then blames the spreading of false information and death on “friends and family”.

“Since people were very worried, they talked to friends and family about the virus a lot. This meant false information was spread quickly.”

...of its spread.

Some people understood **this was just how science works:** early research may indicate one thing, but further studies result in different conclusions. But other people started to wonder if the experts weren't so expert after all.

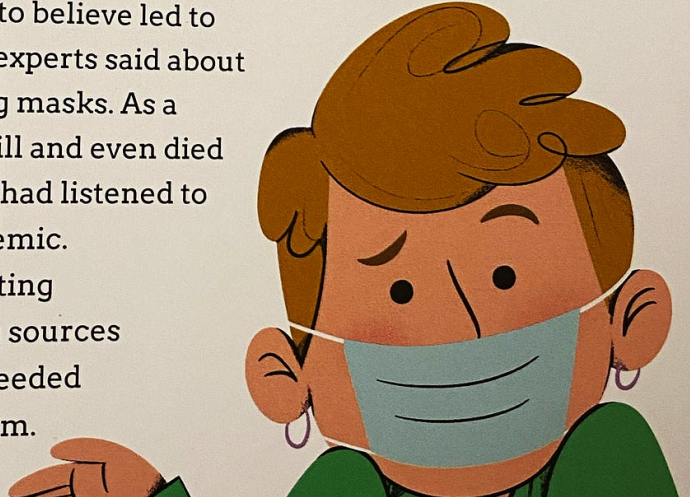
Some people became more willing to believe false information from those who seemed more confident than scientists. **Since people were very worried, they talked to friends and family about the virus a lot. This meant false information was spread quickly.**

The confusion about who to believe led to many people ignoring what experts said about avoiding crowds and wearing masks. As a result, more people became ill and even died than would have if everyone had listened to this advice early in the pandemic.

You've read about how getting information from conflicting sources interfered with developing needed solutions for a serious problem.

But restricting sources

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Lesson #2. Don't Ask Questions

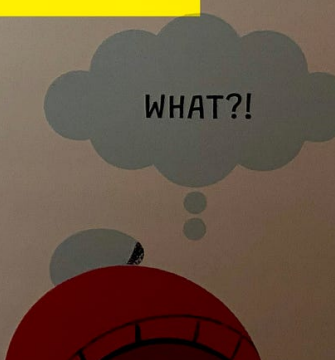
Asking a question is a crucial step in the scientific process. For example, [Khan Academy](#), [Museum of Natural History](#), and [Encyclopedia Britannica](#), all include asking questions at the top of their flowcharts and summaries of the scientific method. However, the APA's science book doesn't include asking a question anywhere in its chart of the scientific method. Instead, the "science" book teaches kids to "beware" of questions.

"[D]isinformation can be spread just by asking a question...Especially if the person asking...can't even answer their own question!"

— I'm Just Asking

It's not always necessary to **lie** to spread disinformation. In fact, disinformation can be spread just by asking a question. When a question hints at something, but doesn't state it, **beware!** Does that question use a bit of truth to suggest something that isn't true? It might be disinformation. Especially if the person asking doesn't have facts to support what they're implying. Or if they can't even answer their own question!

Disinformation spread through questions can be used to challenge scientific evidence when there is no proof that the data are wrong. One example is climate change. Scientists had evidence that overall, Earth's



WHAT?!

The book's example of such "disinformation" is a girl humbly asking a logical question: "I'm not a scientist but why would we have all this snow if global warming was real?" The book draws another kid reacting to the girl as if it's crazy to ask basic questions, "WHAT?!"

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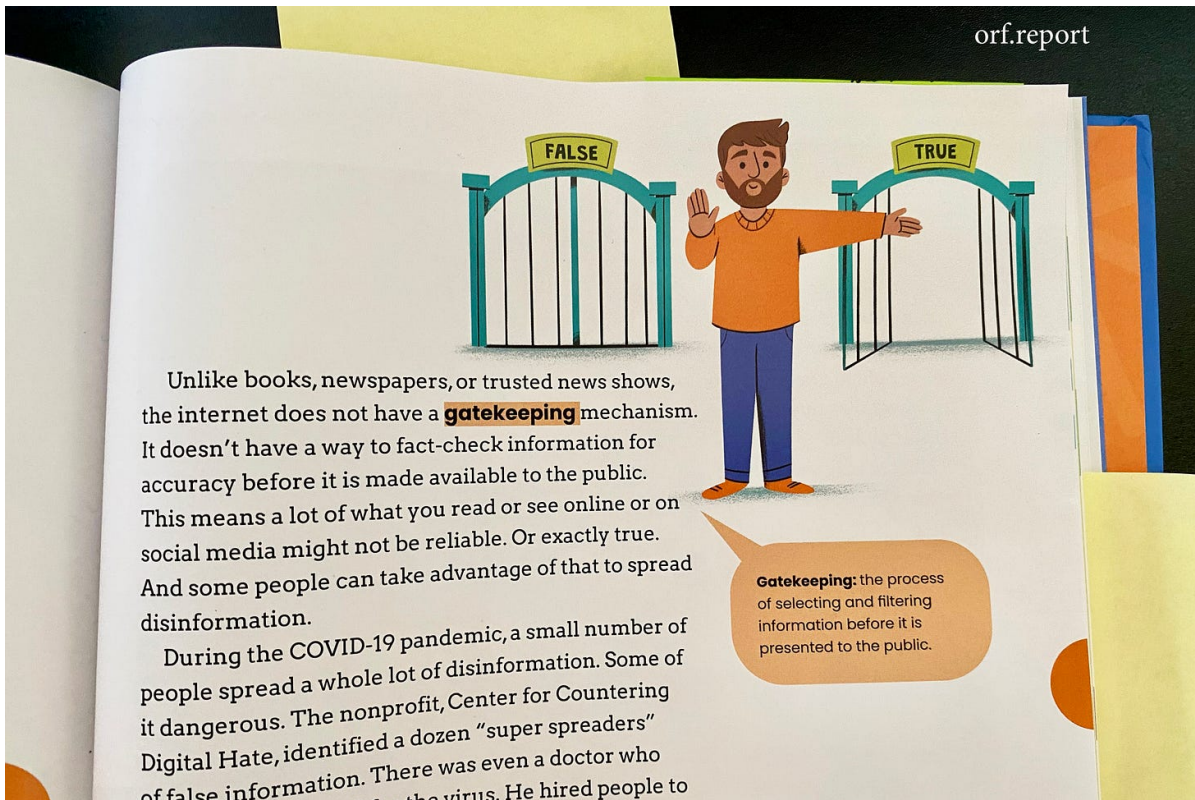
WHAT?!

I'm not a scientist,
but why would we have
all this snow if global
warming is real?



Lesson #3. Corporate Media Is Good & Trusted!

Another lesson teaches kids that corporate media gatekeeping is good and "trusted". See the friendly gatekeeper man? Only true information passes through the media gatekeeper gates!



"Unlike books, newspapers, or trusted news shows, the internet does not have a gatekeeping mechanism. It doesn't have a way to fact-check information for accuracy before it is made available to the public. This means a lot of what you read or see online or on social media might not be reliable. Or exactly true. And some people can take advantage of that to spread disinformation."

Notice there's no mention of how people at the "newspapers and trusted news shows" can also take advantage of "gatekeeping" to spread disinformation.

Lesson #4 Only White People Can be Racist!

The book misleadingly suggests only "minority groups" and "people of color" can be negatively stereotyped and victims of racism, omitting the obvious fact that white people can be negatively stereotyped and victims of racism too.



— Emotion and Prejudice

We know that upsetting emotions change how we think about things, but what about people? Could negative feelings towards groups of people influence our perceptions of them?

Stereotypes are assumptions and feelings we have about groups of people. While stereotypes may include positive feelings (like assuming someone who wears glasses is brainy) many are linked to negative feelings and beliefs. This can include negative feelings about minority groups and racism towards people of color.

Lesson #5 “Some People Say” = Research

The book conflates “research” with “some people say”. Underneath the headline, “CHECK OUT THE RESEARCH,” the book shares no research but says Black lives are at risk in American workplaces because “Some Black people say...code-switching is necessary...simply to survive and keep safe...”

— CHECK OUT THE RESEARCH —

Have you heard of **code switching**? The term was first used to describe someone switching from speaking one language to another, depending on the listener. Later, it was used to describe how people from one social group changed styles of talking and slang to fit in with another group. More recently, code switching is used to describe when someone switches other outward signs of identity and culture, like self-expression, appearance, and behavior. Some Black people say that for them, code switching is necessary to thrive in workplaces or school, or simply to survive and keep safe in a world of traditionally White-dominated spaces.

TRUE OR FALSE?

Lesson #6. No Biological Difference Between Boys & Girls

The APA book's example of logical fallacy misleadingly suggests there's no athletic difference between boys and girls. Likewise, when asking young readers why boys might play more team sports than girls, the book only mentions cultural reasons, not biology, which according to the scientific literature (published by [APA](#)) also plays a strong factor.

When the Argument Doesn't Add up

Think about this statement: "More boys play team sports than girls. Therefore, boys are born more athletic." This is an example of a **logical fallacy**. It's a fancy way of saying the conclusion doesn't follow from the argument. A logical fallacy happens when someone presents an idea and says it leads to a conclusion, when it really doesn't. It's illogical. Can you think of any reasons why boys might play more team sports than girls? There are many. Like what others might expect. Or if teams are available for both boys and girls.

Logical fallacy: an argument drawing on incomplete evidence to reach a conclusion that sounds sensible but isn't logical.

Lesson #7. Russia Russia Russia!

The "science" book also touches on foreign and domestic politics. Russia is the only country mentioned to spread disinformation, which gives kids the false impression that Russia's the *only* country that spreads disinformation.

— Real World Impact

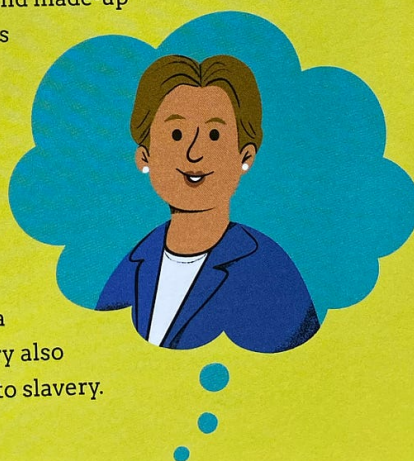
In 2021, Russia attacked Ukraine. The Russian government made fake videos to justify this invasion. They seemed to show Ukrainian soldiers had attacked Russians first. Fortunately, the United States learned about this plan. Before the Russian president could spread disinformation, the United States warned the world about these videos and how they had been made. This prebunking prevented Russia's president from convincing the world his attack on Ukraine had been justified.

Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, is presented as only a victim of disinformation, and never a [purveyor](#) of disinformation herself.

Social Media Influence: Forces for Good and...Not So Good

People like to talk about other people. That's probably been true since humans began to speak! You've already learned that as rumors spread, details drop out and others are added. The truth can get lost in the process. And the internet and social media can make this happen at supersonic speed! Sometimes stories change in ways that don't matter that much. But when misinformation and disinformation are added, rumors can hurt. Sometimes they can be dangerous, or even deadly.

Many things that go viral are fun or just silly. But sometimes viral rumors lead to conspiracy theories. Take an example from 2016. Former first lady Hillary Clinton was running for president. A casual comment made by people who did not think she should be president started a false rumor online. And it was mean. Her political enemies spread the story and made-up details. At the same time other countries were trying to disrupt the American election. Those countries spread even more extreme lies about Mrs. Clinton. Eventually, all this disinformation led to a bizarre conspiracy theory about her. The untrue rumor said Mrs. Clinton was kidnapping children and holding them in the basement of a pizza shop in Washington, D.C. The false story also said she planned to sell the children into slavery.



In reality, Hillary Clinton spread disinformation about Trump/Russia collusion, falsely accusing her political opponent of both treason and “stealing” the 2016 election.

Lesson #8. Only Wackos Criticize Government

At the end, the book directs kids to a government-funded online game: *Bad News*. (Its creator [Tilt Studio](#) works with the [US State Dept's Global Engagement Center \(GEC\)](#), NATO, the EU, and the UK government.)

EXPLORE FURTHER

Practice prebunking! Check out the online game at <https://www.getbadnews.com/en> and get some hands-on practice spotting misinformation and disinformation.

The game was designed as a tool to show tricks used to spread falsehoods. Research shows it actually helps!

You are wrong!



According to the *Bad News* game, the first step to becoming a “disinformation and fake news tycoon” is making a public complaint about the government.

Hi there! Good to see you.

My job is to guide you in your quest to becoming a disinformation and fake news tycoon.

You're probably frustrated about something, right? Aren't we all. You can get started by using Twitter to vent.



MY PROFILE

Average Citizen | Hello world!

This government is a complete and utter failure. #Resign! Losers!

[Tweet this](#)

[Not this one](#)

Lesson #9 Conspiracies Aren't Real!

APA's book also directs children to the YouTube channel of John Cook, the creator of another "disinformation" game, *Cranky Uncle*, which like *Bad News*, is designed to dismiss anyone questioning the government as a crazy kook.

EXPLORE FURTHER

John Cook is a psychologist who calls himself Cranky Uncle. He writes about disinformation that is often used to deny climate science. You can watch his videos at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hARJcK6FizA> to learn more.

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Cook's 2nd most viewed video smears "conspiracy theorists" for believing COVID-19 originated in a lab—a belief now supported by "the experts" and an overwhelming amount of [evidence](#).



Plandemic and the seven traits of conspiratorial thinking



John Cook
2.99K subscribers

Subscribe

419

150

Share



33,162 views May 12, 2020

This video was written by John Cook (George Mason University), Stephan Lewandowsky (University of Bristol), Ullrich Ecker (University of Western Australia), and Sander van Der Linden (Cambridge University).

[Click here to watch the video](#)

The APA's book dedicates five pages to villainizing "conspiracy theories" and suggests that merely learning about conspiracy theories "makes people think...that truth doesn't matter".

CHECK OUT THE RESEARCH

People sometimes believe conspiracy theories to feel in control in a frightening situation. But it can work both ways. Believing a conspiracy theory can also lead people to feel threatened. And it might make them feel overwhelmed and powerless.

Daniel Jolley and Karen Douglas told research subjects that climate change was a government hoax (a false conspiracy theory). They found that, after being exposed to this idea, participants were less likely to say they would try to reduce carbon use (like driving their car or flying on airplanes) than people who had not heard the conspiracy theory. In this and related studies, the researchers found that hearing conspiracy theories made people feel overwhelmed. The problem seemed too big and they felt anything they did wouldn't matter.

Not only that, but after hearing a conspiracy theory about one topic, people were less likely to trust any official information, even if it had nothing to do with the first conspiracy theory. Could it be that learning about conspiracy theories makes people think they can't trust people in charge? Or even that the truth doesn't matter?

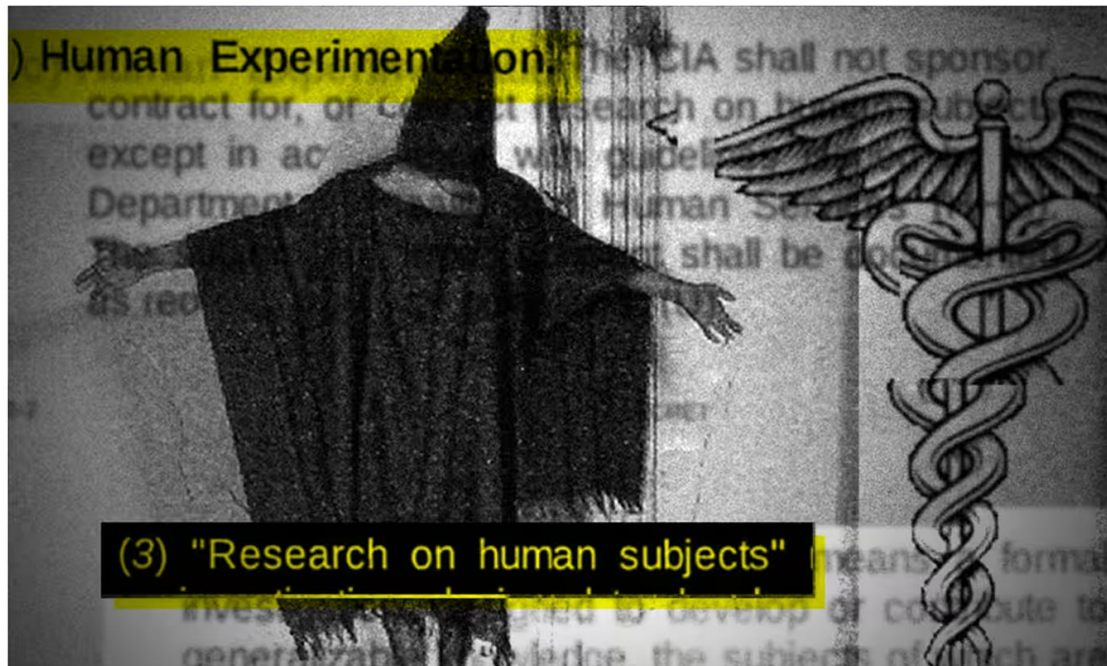


But of course some conspiracy theories are true. For example, after many denials, APA later apologized for secretly collaborating with the CIA on torture.

US torture doctors could face charges after report alleges post-9/11 'collusion'

Leading group of psychologists faces a reckoning following repeated denials that its members were complicit in Bush administration-era torture

- [APA ethics independent review: medical professionals and torture](#)



Maybe if my new report is shared enough, APA will one day have to address all the misinformation it's spreading into the minds of children.

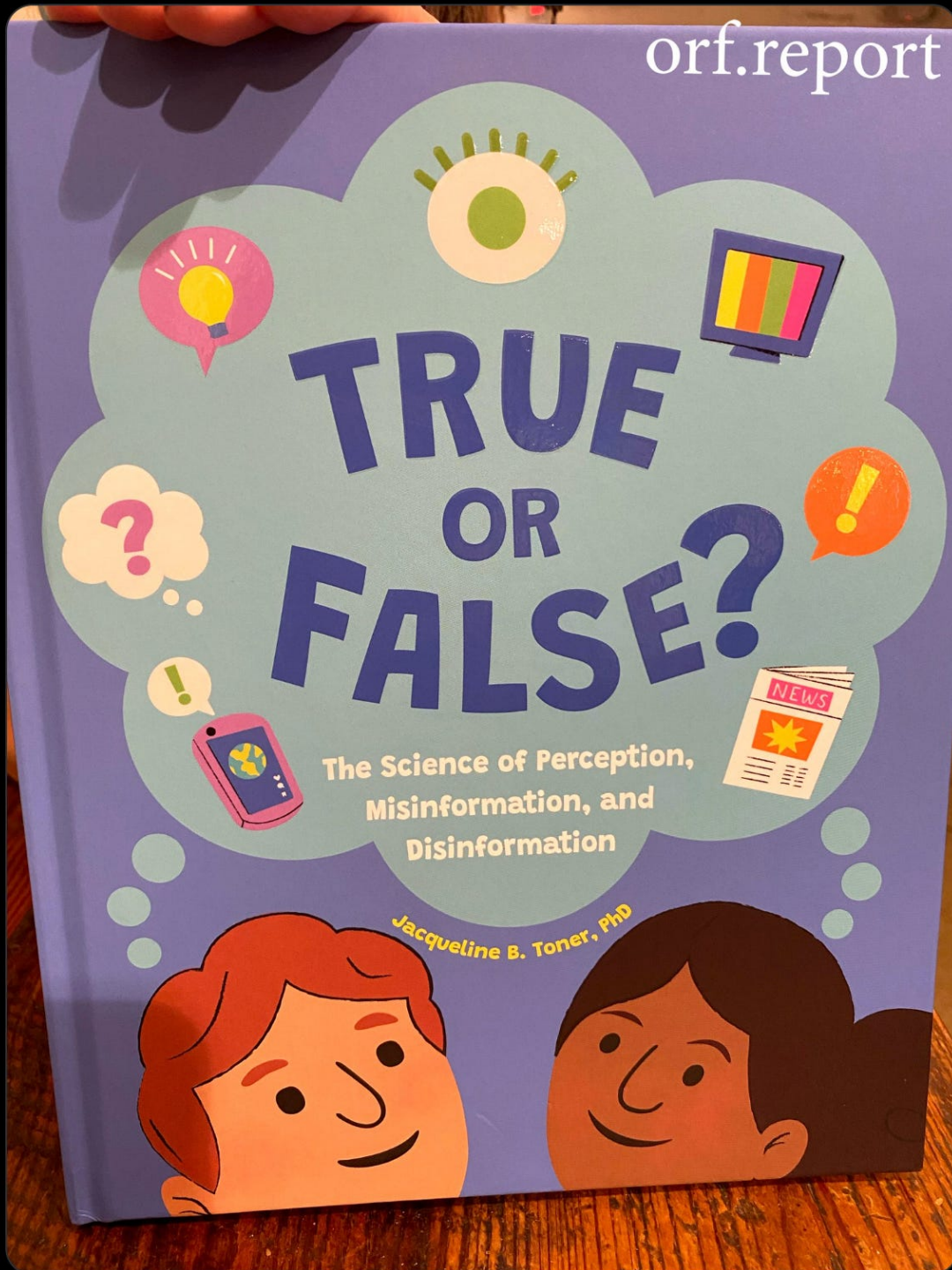


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NEW: The American Psychological Association (APA) is mis/disinforming kids with its new kid's book, on mis/disinformation. 📖 /1

True or False? The Science of Perception, Misinformation, and Disinformation



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