In this paper I will be inquiring into the reason for people believing in conspiracy

theories. I will be exploring and comparing the positions of Van Prooijen and Acker that

there is a direct relationship between control over your life and belief in conspiracies,

and also from Shermer, Oliver, and Wood that instincts and the human evolution have

inclined our species to become paranoid and buy into conspiracies. In this day and age humans are so distracted and caught up in our digital society that we’ve alienated ourselves from our natural state and each other. And perhaps the belief in conspiracies is a symptom of this of this alienation. I myself feel alienated from my natural state, which is

what motivated me to explore conspiracy theories.

University of Miami political scientists Joseph Uscinski and Joseph Parent in their 2014 book *American Conspiracy Theories* define conspiracies by four basic characteristics: (1) a group (2) acting in secret (3) to alter institutions, usurp power, hide truth, or gain utility (4) at the expense of the common good.”

Though conspiracies are threatening in their own way, they allow individuals to establish

order, self-worth, superiority, and a way to blame personal failures on others. Many of

these causes and effects of the conspiratorial way thinking are related to narcissism.

I am researching the subject of conspiracism because I had initially thought that there

seemed to be an unlimited amount of conspiracies and phenomenons that come out of

nowhere and had no explanation to their origin. Upon closer examination however, I’ve

learned that most conspiracies are linked and associated with deaths, assassinations,

threats to public health, global warming, alien invasions, major disasters, wars, big

events or quests for control by malevolent organizations and due to this I want to reveal

the truth about how conspiracism controls our lives and how it has always been a part of

our species. Viren Swami, a psychology professor who studies conspiracy theories at

the University of Westminster in England says; “The best predictor of belief in

conspiracy theory is the belief in other conspiracy theories”. Psychologists say that is

because a conspiracy theory isn’t as much of a response to a single event as it is an

expression of an overarching worldview.

Most data on conspiracy theories are based on the psychological analysis of why

believe in conspiracism. So I will be comparing whether instinct or control are the

largest determinant in conspiracism and answer why humans believe or disbelieve in

conspiracy theories. So why do they?

Humans interpret changes to our environmental control over their lives as either “secret

intervention” (*someone is out to get me)*, or uncontrollable phenomena (*shit happens)*.

Conspiracy theories often grow during times of uncertainty and fear, and past research suggests that if people feel they don’t have control over a situation, they will instead try to make sense of it and find out what happened. And as Van Prooijen said: “The sense-making leads them to connect the dots that aren’t necessarily connected in reality” and vice versa, giving people a sense of control can make them less suspicious over government operations. The human race

is also very instinctive and our instincts have helped us survive and rise to the top of the

food chain. However the more isolated and alienated we are we may have in a sense replace our instincts for a more paranoid outlook on life, an outlook where we have learned to mistrust our supervisors and government officials. We witness traumatic or life changing events that take control of over our lives away from us and leave us wondering what we have witnessed. So we fall into paranoia, and the main effect that follows with paranoia is having a self centered

outlook on life. Conspiracism is believing that phenomenal events follow us and that we are in a sense “special”. One idea brought up by Oliver and Wood, is the “paranoid lifestyle” theory.

Which essentially is that since humans are are surrounded by media input and

confusing messaging we can’t interpret the intentions of those who are attempting to

convince us of their message. This is also well explained by Karen Douglas, a professor

of social psychology at the University of Kent. And as stated; “People are constantly

bombarded with information from so many different sources and it isn’t easy to work out

what is true and what is false, and which sources are credible and which are not.”

Conspiracy theories also seem to be more compelling to humans with low self esteem

or worth, especially with regard to their sense of importance in the world.

Swami has also discussed that, “Our access to high-quality information has not,

unfortunately, ushered in an age in which disagreements of this sort can easily be

solved with a quick Google search. In fact, the Internet has made things worse.

Confirmation bias - the tendency to pay more attention to evidence that supports what

you already believe - is a well documented and common human failing. People have

been writing about it for centuries. In recent years, though, researchers have found that

confirmation bias is not easy to overcome. You can’t drown it in facts.”

Swami has expressed in a way that the internet and other media have helped feed

paranoia. And not only does more exposure to these alternate ways of viewing these

narratives helps enclose belief in conspiracies . And the internet's tendency towards

forming “cliques” or tribalistic ways help reinforce misguided or misunderstood beliefs.

Conspiracists often form together into communities, this is because they seek validation

for their views rather than criticism. These people who believe in conspiracism find

conspiracies comforting because they add a sense of order, an outlet to blame failure

on others, and reinforces the feeling that they are “special”.

“It can be comforting to do your own research even if that research is flawed. It feels

good to be the wise old goat in a flock of sheep.”- Swami

Another reason why they form these groups is the need to establish an identity that is

separate and superior to those who ignore or reject them. And it is clear what happens

when a large group of individuals band together with a similar trait or idealism. They

gossip, and gossip is important for a functioning society because it helps deter, weed

out, and even punish “posers”, “cheaters”, and who may even be part of the conspiracy that

that is trying to infiltrate their group.

Humans as a collective species have evolved our animalistic instincts that helped us

survive over the ages, and instead combined our instincts with paranoia. This paranoia

has has induced traits such as: Dispositions for suspicion, anxiety, feeling out of control,

self-worth, bias insecurities, self-aggrandizement, jealousy, self-victimization, sensitivity

towards fearful events, disillusionment with authority or caregivers, living a relatively

independent lifestyle, gossiping, derogating critics, forming highly agreeable groups, not

accepting blame, and not feeling genuine empathy towards other victims.

Past research I have done reinforces my findings and data now because several

different professors have such as Van Prooijen and Wood having very similar findings

as Thomas Swan. And most of the articles I have read all dance around the same

conclusion that removing or reinforcing control over people's lives will either increase

that individual's belief on conspiracism or it will reinstall trust in the unknown or of our

elders and leaders. supervisors.

Knowing these implications allows me to understand why humans believe in

Conspiracies sm and why they what makes them believe in them. I can either take these findings and start forming a step by step process of sorts that will help me form my own fake conspiracy theory and allow me to create a perfect fake theory that gains people's attention or develop a worldview based in reality.

So in conclusion I have found that the reason why humans believe or disbelieve is

conspiracy theories is because we have evolved in this digital age using our instincts and paranoia has lifestyle that grown on us do due to the massive bombardment of unknown intentions that we sense all around us. Because of and do due to this uncertainty we are interpreting changes to our life control system as phenomenons, and secret interventions. These factors form a self centered mindset that clouds our judgment and makes us humans feel victimized. and adds a need to seek what we may think is truth but may really be just paranoid interpretation of what we you want to believe or disbelieve.