

**The way misinformation I used in America is dangerous and  
must be stopped.**

The Lies that are Flushing America Down the Toilet

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Challenge IV

Do you think war should be started based on lies? What about claiming a serious health condition is something to be encouraged? How do you feel about our government pushing for permanently altering children behind their parents' backs? What happens when you can't even trust what you see with your own eyes?

These things have happened and are happening. These are a few of the most damaging examples of misinformation in America. This kind of manipulation is destroying American society and should be stopped immediately.

Dictionary.com defines misinformation as “false information that is spread, regardless of whether there is intent to mislead” (“Definition of Misinformation,” n.d.). This is different from disinformation, which is defined by Dictionary.com as “deliberately misleading or biased information” (“Definition of Disinformation,” n.d.). What differs between these two terms is that misinformation is simply incorrect information, while disinformation is misinformation that is spread on purpose. Some examples of misinformation that are presented also qualify as disinformation, and those examples are even more telling of the danger misinformation presents.

Misinformation is not a new concept. Fake news has been around just as long as real news, and it's been destructive for as long as it's existed. A story from Politico.com describes a tragic event that took place in Trent, Italy, on Easter Sunday, 1475. A child had gone missing, and a preacher claimed that Jews had murdered him and drank his blood. This led to the arrest of the entire Jewish community, fifteen of whom were burned at the stake. The article states, “Recognizing a false story, the papacy intervened and attempted to stop both the story and the murders.” (Soll, 2016) Sadly, the anti-Semitic support was too great, and it overtook the truth.

Another historical example of misinformation happened on October 30, 1938, when, according to an article written by Barbara Starmans, a fake alien attack was broadcast in homes all across America. This broadcast was actually an adaptation of the book *War of the Worlds* by HG Wells, and it was not intended to be taken seriously. However, the show caused widespread panic, especially among those unfamiliar with the novel (Starmans, 2018). This is just a glimpse of the kind of damage misinformation can inflict when improperly utilized.

Misinformation has been used repeatedly by the American government. In fact, the CIA had constructed a manual in 1944 on how to use misinformation and manipulation to sabotage societies and destroy hostile governments called the Simple Sabotage Field Manual. The article *The Art of Simple Sabotage* from the CIA website describes different techniques to take down the enemy from within. The article lists these five tips from the manual:

1. *Telephone*: At the office, hotel, or local telephone switchboards, delay putting calls through, give out wrong numbers, cut people off “accidentally,” or forget to disconnect them so that the line cannot be used again.
2. *Movie Theater Patrons*: To ruin everyone’s time at the movies (without a cell phone, that is) bring in a paper bag filled with two or three dozen large moths. Open the bag and set it in an empty section of the theater. “The moths will fly out and climb into the projector beam, so that the film will be obscured by fluttering shadows.”
3. *Managers and Supervisors*: To lower morale and production, think of the worst boss you’ve had and act like that. Be pleasant to inefficient workers; give them undeserved promotions. Discriminate against efficient workers; complain unjustly about their work. When possible, refer all matters to committees for “further study and consideration.” Attempt to make the committees as large and bureaucratic as possible.
4. *Employees*: Be forgetful. Clumsy. Work slowly. Think of ways to increase the number of movements needed to do your job: use a light hammer instead of a heavy one; try to make a small wrench do instead of a big one.
5. *Transportation*: Make train or air travel as inconvenient as possible. One particularly effective trick: issue two tickets for the same seat on a train in order to set up an “interesting” argument.

(*The Art of Simple Sabotage – CIA*, n.d.) This shows it's not just the extreme tactics that are effective. Even the smallest things can build much larger problems. Misinformation is a powerful tool when aimed and used properly, and the American government knows this and takes full advantage of it.

While misinformation can be used as a tool to achieve victory in war, it can also lead to devastating consequences. In the case of Colin Powell, his misinformation led to an unnecessary war. In February of 2003, the United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, delivered a presentation to the U.N. making a case for war with Iraq. A U.N. resolution required Iraq to rid itself of all weapons of mass destruction. Iraq complied, but Powell claimed to have evidence that they still had weapons of mass destruction, saying, "These are not assertions. What we're giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence. I will cite some examples, and these are from human sources." (*CNN.com – Transcript of Powell's U.N. Presentation – Feb. 6, 2003, 2003*)

Powell never named these human sources and therefore did not have evidence to warrant starting a war. In fact, there was a lot of evidence showing Iraq had complied with the resolution. Because of his testimony, there was an eight-year war that resulted in roughly two trillion dollars' worth of damage, as well as 4,431 casualties and almost 32,000 injured, according to Kyle Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald, 2023). Clearly, misinformation can wreak a lot of havoc when mishandled or unchecked.

Not only can misinformation lead to war, but it can also seriously impact public welfare. Take for example, the coronavirus, or Covid-19, a vile virus that went viral when it came on the scene. The media instantly took the opportunity to report news about Covid, and this caused fear

and panic. The media made it seem like Covid-19 was the worst medical crisis America had ever experienced, but this idea reeks of misinformation. Covid does not compare to the epidemic of obesity in this country.

While the coronavirus has killed a total of 1,128,404 people in America since its beginning, according to the CDC (CDC, 2020), obesity impacts over 100 million adults and children in the U.S. and causes about 1 in 5 deaths in the U.S. each year as reported by Katelyn Newman in her article Obesity in America (Newman, 2019). Another point from the CDC is that people with obesity are at an increased risk of many diseases, health issues, and “All-causes of death.” (*Effects of Overweight and Obesity*, 2022) Clearly, we should be more concerned as a society about obesity than catching Covid.

As the Covid crisis went on, many major platforms, such as YouTube and TikTok, put misinformation policies in place to restrict what was allowed to be said about Covid. When TikTok’s policy about combating misinformation was in place, it stated, “We believe that trust forms the foundation of our community, and we strive to keep TikTok a safe and authentic space where genuine interactions and content can thrive. We do this by countering misinformation and disinformation, and tackling deceptive behavior that may cause harm to our community and society at large” ([mark.cheong@bytedance.com](mailto:mark.cheong@bytedance.com), 2023). However, regarding obesity, there has never been such a policy. In fact, there are many hashtags celebrating obesity, for example #fatacceptance, #profat, and #glorifyobesity. Why is this allowed since obesity is such a health problem in America?

When YouTube had a Covid-19 medical misinformation policy, it stated, “YouTube doesn’t allow content that spreads medical misinformation that contradicts local health

authorities' (LHA) or the World Health Organization's (WHO) medical information about COVID-19" (*COVID-19 Medical Misinformation Policy – YouTube Help*, n.d.). However, YouTube has never had such a policy about obesity despite the fact that the WHO itself has presented staggering information regarding the dangers of obesity. From the WHO website, "Obesity has reached epidemic proportions globally, with at least 2.8 million people dying each year as a result of being overweight or obese" (World Health Organization: WHO, 2021). Why hasn't YouTube ever instated a policy about obesity or any other health concern despite the WHO cautioning society about greater health risks than Covid? If I made a YouTube video about Covid called "Protect Covid From Healthy Privilege!" with hashtags such #covidacceptance and #spreadthelove, my channel would be annihilated. Clearly, these policies were not put in place for our safety. By trying to prevent misinformation, are they actually facilitating it?

One of the current hot topics of today is transgenderism. Merriam-webster.com defines transgenderism as, "Of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity differs from the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth" (*Definition of TRANSGENDERISM*, 2023). A gender identity that is different from biological gender is based on the mind rather than the body. How one feels about their gender cannot affect their actual gender. The condition of gender dysphoria is the mental condition that leads to transgenderism. It is a condition where a person feels distress because they feel there is a mismatch between their biological sex and gender identity (Website, 2023). The idea that one can change their gender is biologically impossible. One cannot change one's chromosomes. It is possible to change the appearance of one's body to reflect the opposite sex, but this does not change the functionality. It is not human nature. If it were possible to actually change genders, then the human would actually be able to reproduce after transitioning.

Gender dysphoria can lead to other mental health issues, such as depression and suicidal thoughts. Many who embrace the transgender ideology would suggest that social, hormonal, and surgical alterations would alleviate the mental anguish that comes along with gender dysphoria. An article written by Columbia University claims, “Research demonstrates that gender-affirming care – a medical and psychosocial health care designed to affirm individuals’ gender identities – greatly improves the mental health and overall well-being of gender diverse, transgender, and nonbinary children and adolescents” (*Gender-affirming Care Saves Lives*, 2022). However, there was no proof throughout this article that backed the claims.

On the contrary, there is evidence that would suggest that transitioning does not improve one’s mental state but can sometimes actually make it worse. For instance, an article by Jarrett Stepman asserts that the increase in youth suicide is connected with easier access to transition treatments, stating, “This increase in suicide rates in states where it is easier for minors to access puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones increased at almost the same time, And to the same degree, as those interventions became available” (Stepman & Stepman, 2022). A long-term study conducted in Sweden concluded that, “Persons with transsexualism, after sex reassignment, have considerably higher risks for mortality, suicidal behavior, and psychiatric morbidity than the general population” (Dhejne et al., 2011).

The danger of embracing the belief that changing one’s gender would improve one’s quality of life and one’s mental state is that it is now affecting our children. With such conflicting information about how to handle gender dysphoria, it might be best to take a step back to observe more carefully the effects transitioning has on people. However, the current administration in our American government supports transitioning and has been putting

legislation in place to “protect” trans youth under the designation of gender-affirming or reproductive care. In fact, mere days ago in Washington state, this type of legislation passed the House. A news release from the website Senate Democrats states, “Washington has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to the LGBTQ community by passing legislation to ensure access to gender-affirming care, ban conversion therapy, and require schools to adopt policies that protect transgender children from bullying” (Ehut, 2023). If our government is already pushing for gender-affirming procedures without fully comprehending the long-term consequences, especially in the cases of prepubescent children, the harm to future generations could be catastrophic.

The future of misinformation could cause a whole new level of impact with the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is already being used regularly in the entertainment industry in the form of deepfakes. Lutz Finger describes deepfakes as “a way to manipulate images” and goes on to say that the technology that is used to make deepfakes is now AI and is also used for de-aging and to read human emotions. The evolution of technology has increased the scope of abuse for AI. It has gone from fake Amazon reviews, bot conversations, and fake email to realistic image forgery. It went from not being able to trust what you were reading to not being able to trust what you are seeing. To combat this misinformation, tech companies are developing deepfake detection tools. Finger mentions, “Microsoft is creating new anti-deep-fake technology to fight misinformation (Microsoft Video Authenticator).” The problem is that “We are nowhere close to distinguishing real content from fake,” and, “the best deepfake detector is still only 65% accurate” (Finger, 2022).



It is clear that as time goes on, the ways of misinforming people become more and more advanced. How will we maintain even a fragment of truth in this swamp of deceptions? America is at risk of falling into a dystopia, with misinformation being at the center. The people of America are divided, and with no way to know what to believe, how are we supposed to find common ground? Misinformation must be stopped before it can bring about the destruction of American society.

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