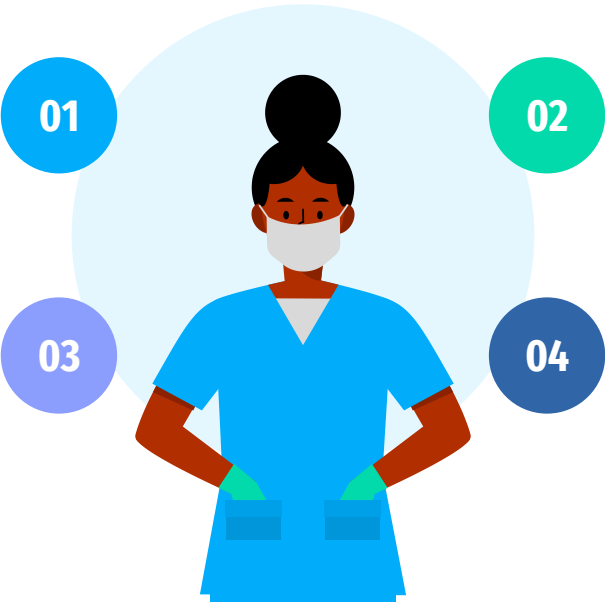


# Youth and the digital pandemic

An exploration of youth demographics and misinformation

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## Goals from the presentation



- 01 Where misinformation comes from
- 02 Youth demographics and social media
- 03 Why antivaxxers believe what they believe
- 04 How to communicate with vaccine hesitancy

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## An introduction to my advocacy



- In 2019, I spoke in front of the United States Senate committee of Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (H.E.L.P) about growing up in an anti vaccine household.
- Over the course of 2019, I advocated for vaccinations throughout national pediatric conferences and even worldwide when I went to the global vaccination summit in Belgium.
- For my work I was featured in TIME magazine as a next generation leader, received multiple awards, and appeared on hundred of news interviews related to my advocacy

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**Part 1: where  
misinformation  
comes from**

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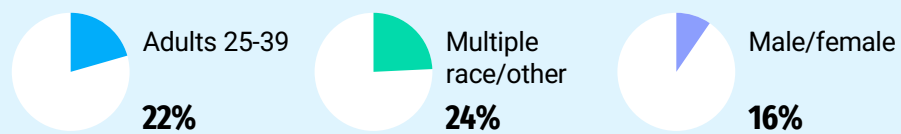
## Starting from statistics who is impacted by misinformation?



### Misinformation (n)

“False or inaccurate information, especially that which is deliberately intended to deceive.”

According to a report from HHS.gov published in May of 2021, the amount of hesitant...



\*These are the highest hesitancy demographics found in this study. There was no difference between genders, “COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy: Demographic Factors, Geographic Patterns, and Changes Over Time” HHS.gov

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## Who is spreading it?

According to NPR, just 12 people are responsible for a bulk (65%) of the misinformation online. Coined the “disinformation dozen,” they include the following.

Joseph Mercola, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Ty and Charlene Bollinger, Sherri Tenpenny, Rizza Islam, Rashid Buttar, Erin Elizabeth, Sayer Ji, Kelly Brogan, Christiane Northrup, Ben Tapper, and Kevin Jenkins.

Many sell supplements and other health alternatives to traditional medicine, and some, like Robert F. Kennedy Jr, are infamous for their anti vaccine misinformation.

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## **Anecdotally, this is all true**

My mother became an anti-vaxxer soon after I was born, so she was in her early thirties, and her 'research' was heavily influenced by some of the largest names in the anti-vaxx community.

Conversations between the two of us also often came back to claims that vaccines caused autism, and an overall distrust in medicine. MLM's and alternative medicines were common at home

She even paid for 'classes' from prolific anti-vaxx speakers, who offered to educate members of the seminars about vaccinations and vaccine 'science.'

So, it was all a giant scam. And people like here were buying all of it

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## **Part 2: Youth demographics and social media**

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**Social media was fundamental to my advocacy**

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**Social media was fundamental to my advocacy**

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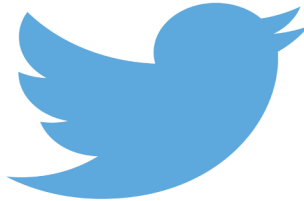
**But it was also the source of the problem...**

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**But it was also the source of the problem...**



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*"On average, daily screen use went up [within the past two years] among tweens (ages 8 to 12) to five hours and 33 minutes from four hours and 44 minutes, and to eight hours and 39 minutes from seven hours and 22 minutes for teens (ages 13 to 18)." -New York Times*

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Frances Haugen

Facebook, like many other social platforms, chooses to prioritize profit over mental health *and* physical health, and provides a platform to some of the *worst* voices.

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“About 32% of teen girls said that when they felt bad about their bodies, Instagram made them feel worse, Facebook's researchers found”

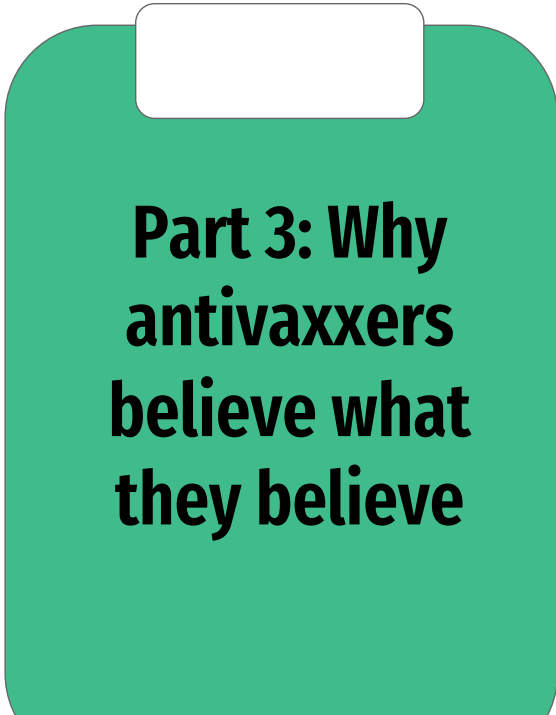
“The algorithms reward engagement. In other words, when a post receives comments, “likes” and other interactions, it is spread more widely and is featured more prominently in feeds, instead of just featuring posts in chronological order. The engagement-based formula helps sensational content, such as posts that feature rage, hate or misinformation, travel far and wide, she said.” -NPR

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Misinformation can lead to decreases in vaccine rates that drop the population of immunized individuals below 95%, preventing us from reaching the ‘critical threshold’ of a 95% immunized population...

“Vaccine hesitancy and (fake) news: Quasi-experimental evidence from Italy,”  
NCBI.NLM.NIH

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**Part 3: Why  
antivaxxers  
believe what  
they believe**

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- 1: Disenfranchisement
- 2: Targeted misinformation campaigns
- 3: Distrust in the government
- 4: Medical distrust/bad experiences

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*Basically, this means you have*

# The **Grieving** And the **Afraid**

19



20

**APA Speaking of Psychology: Why people believe in conspiracy theories,  
with Karen Douglas, PhD**

“...of course, this is all complicated by the fact that sometimes conspiracies do exist and sometimes people may have deep-seated, valid reasons to distrust authority. So, for example, public opinion polls have found that Black Americans are less likely to say they'll take the COVID vaccine and more wary of its safety because they have a long history of being abused and mistreated by the medical establishment.”

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How does this affect teens?

*Well, who makes all the medical decisions for  
the teenagers?*

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States that allow philosophical and religious exemptions from vaccines for public schools have some of the lowest vaccination rates in the country. States that withdraw those exemptions see those rates immediately rise, because the **mother** (or other guardian) can also be exposed to misinformation and make a decision for their kids to not get them immunized.

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**Part 4: How to  
communicate  
through  
vaccine  
hesitancy**

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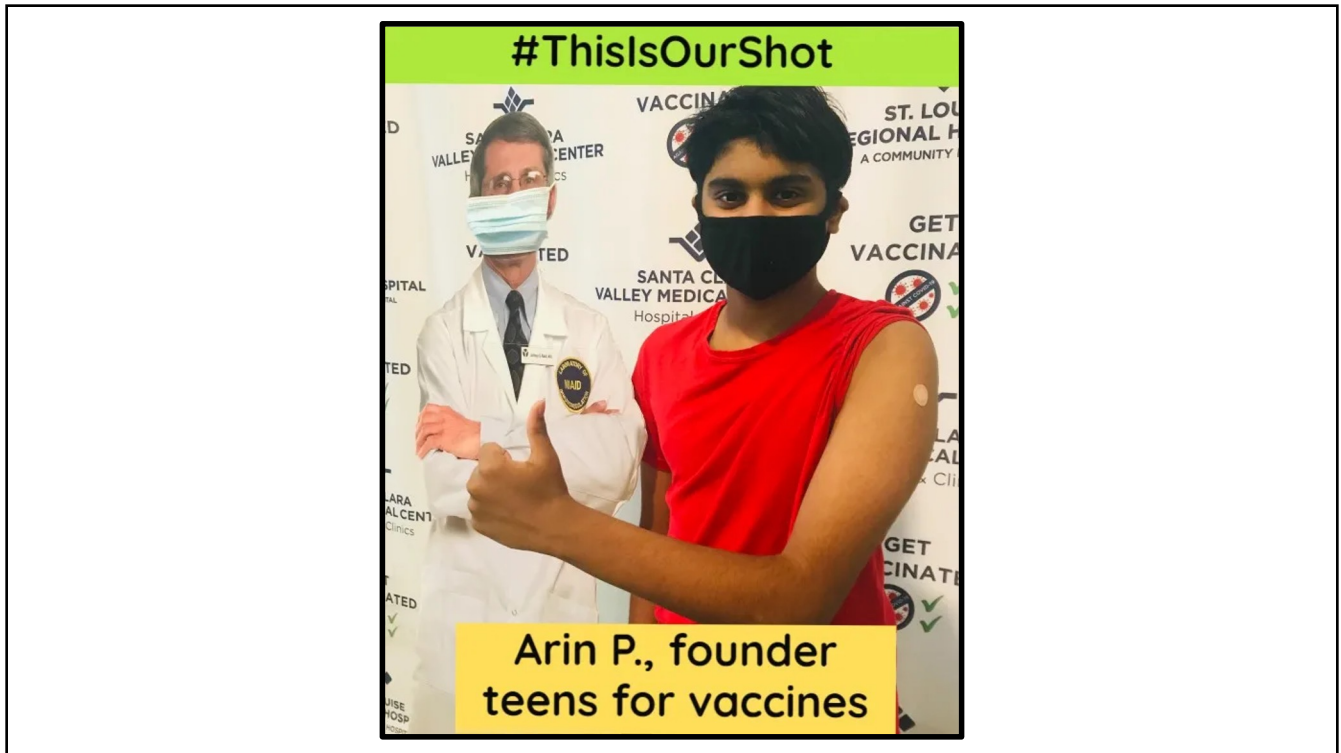
**APA Speaking of Psychology: Why people believe in conspiracy theories,  
with Karen Douglas, PhD**

“I don't know the solution to this, apart from the fact that people who are attempting to fight the misinformation will need to be sensitive to these concerns and perhaps be more targeted in their efforts to debunk misinformation, being sensitive to these historical events as well. So, it can't necessarily be a one size fits all approach to misinformation, just can't be because everybody's circumstances are different, and we know that different communities feel differently about vaccines and various other things as well, for very good reasons. So, that, of course, is a huge challenge for anybody trying to deal with potential misinformation about vaccines and other things, but also, yeah, particularly with COVID, a reluctance to take the vaccine.”

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We **all** need to more involved in tackling the internet culture, which promotes algorithmic amoral engagement. We **all** need to support laws that withdraw philosophical and religious exemptions to vaccines, because it is *nobody's* right to put *other children* at risk of a preventable disease. And we **all** need to get involved on a personal level to help educate and equip young people with the right information, because you **never know** what kind of impact you will have...

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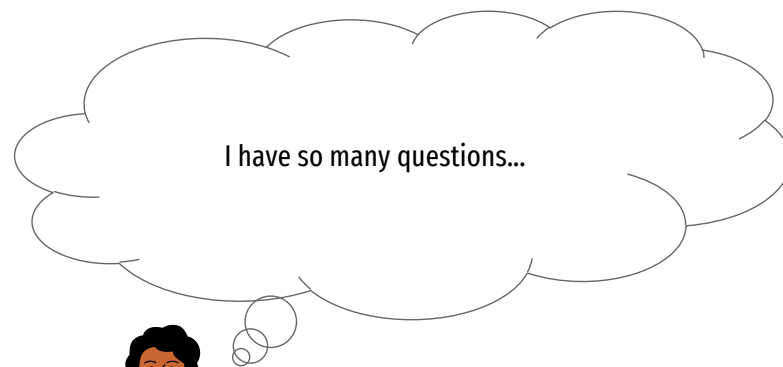
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**THE END**  
(Thank you for listening!)

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