

## Research Assessment #8

**Date:** 1/20/2021

**Subject:** "The Psychology of Fake News" by Tiana Lambrozo

### MLA Citation:

Lombrozo, Tania. "The Psychology Of Fake News." *NPR*, NPR, 27 Mar. 2018, [www.npr.org/sections/13.7/2018/03/27/597263367/the-psychology-of-fake-news](http://www.npr.org/sections/13.7/2018/03/27/597263367/the-psychology-of-fake-news).

### Assessment:

For this week's assessment, I decided to look into one of the largest factors in the social and political division of the United States in recent years, "Fake News". I had gotten the idea to look into this from an NPR story I had recently heard my new Political Science professor mention in where it outlined the biggest psychological impacts of the spreading of false information. I came across an article by Tania Lombrozo, a professor of psychology and cognitive sciences at the University of California, Berkeley in which we conducted an email interview with Steven Sloman, a professor of cognitive, linguistic, and psychological sciences at Brown University, who is also one of sixteen authors of the paper "The Science Behind Fake News" in which they define and outline the primary factors of what causes fake news to be so prevalent and infective to large groups of people. I wanted to get a look at the actual study they had conducted but I could not find a version of it that I could access.

In the beginning of the article, Lombrozo defines fake news as "fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent" (Lombrozo 2). Lombrozo then proceeds to include the questions she had asked Steven Sloman and his responses. The first question she asked was what prompted the group of scientists to come together to write this paper. Sloman responded that with the aftermath of the 2016 election and the emergence of "alternative facts" they felt it was imperative that the grounds of public opinion should remain based on proven facts rather than false accusations and blatant falsehoods. So they worked together to produce a paper that outlines the effects of fake news and what people should do to avoid those effects. In her second question, Lombrozo equates early war propaganda to fake news in both function and purpose, which is a comparison I had not previously thought of but I fully agree with it. The purpose of wartime propaganda was to convince citizens of a governmental agenda that did not tend to always be 100% truthful or honest. The current administration used false news to do just that. Propaganda uses clear visuals and catchy subtitles while false news uses topics and ideas that catch the reader's eyes and cause them to not question its legitimacy as a source. Sloman further expands on this idea by explaining how technology has given misinformation the ability to spread like wildfire. He says how that with the easy access

to technology came the bombardment of information at all times. This constant intake has caused people to no longer think of how valid or invalid a source actually is. This causes people to spread false information from one person to another without as much as a thought.

The next question asked by Lombrozo is what actual portions of psychology are contributing to the understanding of fake news. Sloman responded that some of the biggest questions to ask when studying the topic are, does labeling false information change its impact, what personalities are most susceptible to taking false information as truth, and what about fake news makes it more appealing than factual news? He mentions the work of Gordon Pennycook and David Rand's work on how different personality types respond to being shown false information. They used the Cognitive Reflection Test or CRT to divide people into different groups by who they believed had the necessary abilities to distinguish fake news from real news. The main trait they found that was useful was the ability for individuals to read and then reflect on the information they received and truly assess if in its entirety was truthful or seemed fully realistic.

The final question asked by Lobronzo was how detrimental fake news was to our society and how we as observers of information can better distinguish the lies from the truth. Sloman says that with how alternative facts are being used currently, to push a false narrative that strengthens a specific agenda, is very dangerous. He writes that it should be the number one priority of any governing body to produce truthful and honest information so that their citizens are well informed and understand the true state of their country and the world. He also writes that it should be in the front of everyone's minds to question everything they read and never take it at face value so that they can develop their own ideas and beliefs.