

Free Britney and other true conspiracies

By Bronwyn Williams

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If it looks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, we have at least to consider the possibility that we have a small aquatic bird of the family anatidae on our hands. - Douglas Adams



Consider the following two pictures of Abbie Richard's infamous 'conspiracy pyramid':



THE CONSPIRACY CHART

DETACHED FROM REALITY



Credit to ABBIE RICHARDS

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The first is the original 2020 edition, the second is the 2021 updated version.

At first glance, they appear the same, but take a closer look at the green and red lines and notice how 'Free Britney' is no longer 'leaving reality' - because, well, it turns out a judge agreed that Britney did, indeed, need freeing from her father's conservatorship. Likewise, believing that 'celebrities moisturise with children's foreskins' no longer makes you 'a danger to yourself and others', because, well, as gross as it is, some of them *do* (and they are happy to talk about it too!

There are other differences between the two, which I will leave you to spot on your own, but the point is, that *sometimes* reality is weirder we suspect. And sometimes even outlandish 'conspiracy theories' end up being true (look up MK Ultra sometime if you are not familiar with the incredible true-life drama).

This begs the question, what 'beyond the pale' ideas on the 2021 edition of the pyramid could end up dropping down into the realm of possibility - or even becoming confirmed fact? Based on Abbie Richard's demonstratively fallible research skills (let's be honest, foreskin facials and other young-blood anti-ageing regimens have been well-documented in trend decks - including my own - for the better part of a decade!) the odds are they will.

This brings us to another item on the original 2020 pyramid, the more eagle-eyed of you may have spotted in the yellow row 'Covid-19 made in a lab'.

Back in 2020, to even admit that human error from the scientific community may have had an (accidental) hand in unleashing the plague that upended all our lives was a 'cancelable' offence on social media, and enough to make you a laughing stock in polite company. Fast forward a year, however, and the 'lab leak' hypothesis is not only back on the table, but it has also become the primary suspect for some lead investigators. How this shift from deranged-conspiracy-too-

dangerous-to address to plausible-theory-at-least-worth-investigating-before-dismissing occurred is covered in great detail (and with great pace and style) in *Viral: The Search for the Origin of Covid-19* by Alina Chan and Matt Ridley.

The book is a great reminder not to let what we do not want to be true blind us to possibility. As hard as it is, we need to be humble enough to update our assumptions in the light of new evidence and to resist the temptation to hide evidence that clashes with our worldview and financial objectives.

The lesson for public and private sector leaders is, again, a lesson in trust and credibility: if you want to be trusted, you need to be brave enough to be *radically honest*. A noble lie caught out can cause irreversible harm to your reputation.

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