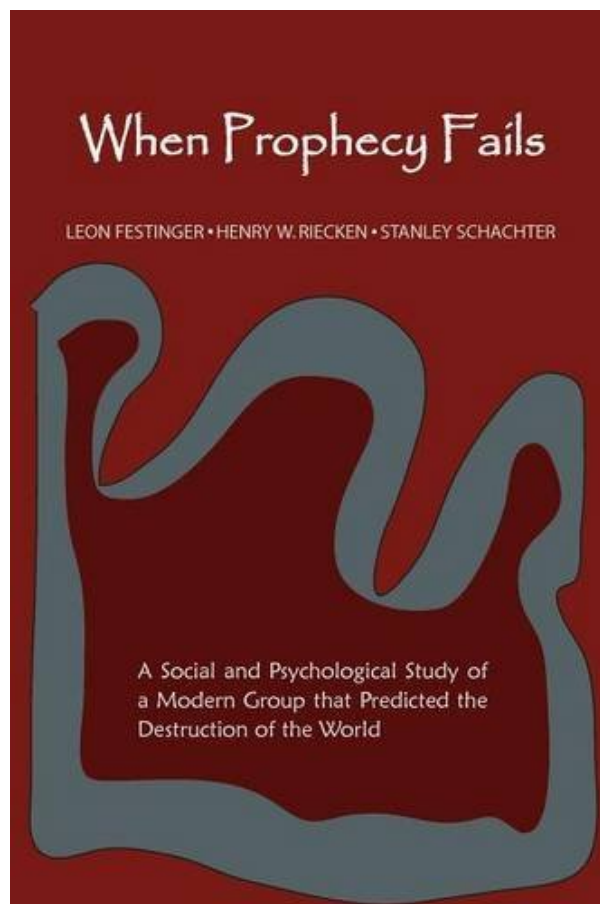


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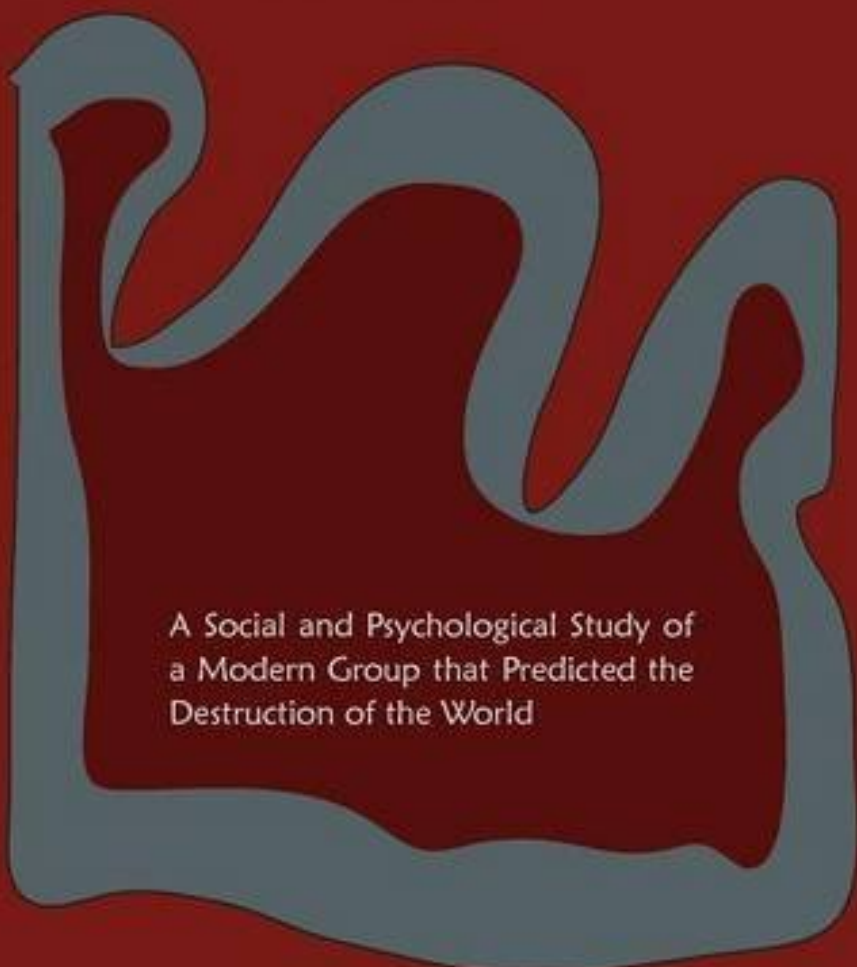


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When Prophecy Fails

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A Social and Psychological Study of
a Modern Group that Predicted the
Destruction of the World

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About the Author

ELLIOT ARONSON is one of the most distinguished social psychologists in the world. His books include *The Social Animal* and *The Jigsaw Classroom*. Chosen by his peers as one of the 100 most influential psychologists of the twentieth century, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and is the only psychologist to have won all three of the American Psychological Association's top awards for writing, teaching, and research. He lives in Santa Cruz, California.

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2009 reprint of 1956 First edition. When Prophecy Fails [1956] is a classic text in social psychology authored by Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken, and Stanley Schachter. It chronicles the experience of a UFO cult that believed the end of the world was at hand. In effect, it is a social and psychological study of a modern group that predicted the destruction of the world, and the adjustments made when the prediction failed to materialize. "The authors have done something as laudable as it is unusual for social psychologists. They espied a fleeting social movement important to a line of research they were interested in and took after it. They recruited a team of observers, joined the movement, and watched it from within under great difficulties until its crisis came and went. Their report is of interest as much for the method as for the substance."-Everett C. Hughes, The American Journal of Sociology.

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Landmark Example of Participant-Observation Research and Much Much More...

By Jayson

When Prophecy Fails is as relevant today as it was decades ago when a little doomsday cult predicted a flood that never came. I'm a professor in a social scientific-minded communication department. It seems that no matter what class I teach, I'm always using this book as an example. From a theoretical and research perspective, it's a great field study designed to test Festinger's ideas about cognitive dissonance. It also stands as a rigorous and meticulous example of the method of data collection via participant-observation. Readers will also appreciate the beginning material chronicling known failed predictions throughout history.

And the writing style is lucidly accessible and the detailed characterizations of the people involved and action unfolding are compelling enough for even the casual reader. I've always been a fan of Leon Festinger's work, but no matter one's personalgivings about dissonance theory, it is tough not to appreciate the laborious

efforts of this tireless and dedicated research team in producing this study. I admire those who are able to foresee real-world applications of their ideas in advance so as to be able to properly test them as the real-world events unfold. Festinger et al. were brilliant in this regard. A must-read for anyone interested in solid research methodologies and applied learning.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Flying Saucer Cult and Cognitive Dissonance

By St. Corbinians's Bear

A fascinating inside look at a 1950s flying saucer cult in Chicago. The world faced cataclysm, but the faithful would be taken to safety aboard a flying saucer at midnight. What happens after the prophecy fails is explained by Leon Festinger's theory of "cognitive dissonance." Other doomsday cults, such as the 1840s Millerites, have faced the same disappointment. Festinger says the "cognitive dissonance" caused by the "disconfirming event" may be resolved by one of a handful of means, but usually there is a burst of proselytization. In other words, the cult bounces back stronger than ever until subsequent disconfirming events (failed prophecies) force people to face reality.

"Cognitive dissonance" is a useful lens to view movements and even examine the stresses in one's own life when one finds oneself holding two contradictory "cognitions."

It is hard to understand how intelligent people could act like the subjects in *When Prophecy Fails*. Ultimately, the book is a tragedy about people's need to believe.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Detailed study of strange group

By Thomas Laperriere

A bit long in the telling and more analysis might have been helpful. I learned some important things about how people hold unreasonable beliefs and why they become hard to back away from. The role of group support. Those who were alone when disconfirming events happened doubted but those in company accepted the group rationalization. Interesting stuff!!

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