

# THERE IS NO TRUTH, ONLY POST-TRUTH



**A**LISSA MCCULLOCH reports on the truth behind the 'new' post-truth movement and how librarians can continue to combat it.

The term 'post-truth' is a bit of a misnomer. It implies we were previously living in some kind of factual paradise, a truth utopia, that was suddenly destroyed in 2016 by Brexit and the election of Donald Trump. But librarians have been fighting the good information literacy fight for decades. We know the term 'post-truth' is fake news, but who's listening to us?

It can be difficult for librarians to make our voices heard above the din of misinformation. After all, there's a lot we can't do. We can't intervene in someone's Facebook feed. We can't wrench a hyper-partisan book from their hands (especially if they've borrowed it from the library). We can't compel publishers or the press to report more facts and less fiction. Importantly, we can't improve someone's personal circumstances, which may well have led them to speak, act or vote a certain way out of sheer desperation.

There are, however, a few things we can remind ourselves and our patrons. Firstly, that there is no single source of truth. All sources, from the ABC through the local paper down to a dodgy Facebook post, have their own perspectives and biases. Some sources have higher standards of journalistic integrity and try harder

to report news and information fairly and accurately. But no single source can ever provide the full picture (this includes librarians ourselves – we all bring our own unique perspectives and biases to the table.)

Secondly, we should ideally be reading multiple sources to get a better understanding of the full picture. Each individual source will consider a topic from a particular angle. By investigating the same topic from multiple sources, it becomes easier to separate fact from opinion and to identify common threads.

Finally, don't believe everything you read. It's never been easier to share inflammatory or questionable content on social media, often driven by an instinctual need to 'get the word out'. Pause for a moment before you share something. Is what you're about to share actually true? Can you verify it?

Some days, we may wish we had better news for the communities we serve. After all, information literacy is hard work, and staying well-informed about constant bad news can be exhausting. But we owe it to our patrons to help shoulder some of that burden. With any luck, perhaps they'll start listening to us. 🌟

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