



CALLING BULLSHIT

GARY LOM speaks out on the importance of libraries and librarians in calling out bullshit when they see it.

We've all done it: presented information in a particular way to convince someone of something, to get our point across, to be clear.

I'm doing it right now.

But the slippage between rhetorical device and outright lie can be a difficult thing to identify these days. We live, work and play in an information world where online activity is monetised, tailored, tracked. A world where confirmation bias is the default state for search or feed results. And where big data and the spread of data visualisation means the techniques we used to identify old fashioned bullshit may not help with the deluge of new bullshit.

As an educator I really liked Mark Galeotti's December 2016 *New York Times* response to Russian information warfare (nyti.ms/2n3ByiG):

'Instead of trying to combat each leak directly, the United States government should teach the public to tell when they are being manipulated. Via schools and nongovernmental organizations and public service campaigns, Americans should be taught the basic skills necessary to be savvy media consumers, from how to fact-check news articles to how pictures can lie.'

I can't help thinking something is missing from that statement.

Libraries.

In 12 years of working for TAFE and a couple of decades of Library experience I have guided thousands of students and library clients through basic evaluative techniques – either as part of a specific unit or workshop covering the concepts of information literacy, or in individual help for someone seeking information. It's one of the key things we all do and have always done in libraries.

But just as evaluative techniques are central to the concept of information literacy, so too is lifelong learning. We all need to keep up with the changes – for the benefit of our own life pathways as well as for our clients. Just when we think we have a handle on psychological biases, and how we're being manipulated by marketers, politicians and cultural gurus, another method or approach to influence our opinions and behaviour sneaks under the radar, and catches us all off guard again. It's a never ending battle against bullshit.

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Do you really feel confident in your skills as an information literacy expert? Does your library adequately take the lead in the fight against bullshit? In this always connected, algorithm-heavy, post-truth world the role of library and information professionals seems more crucial than ever before. We need to show real leadership, and arm ourselves, and our communities, with the skills needed to remain vigilant and make informed choices about how they use technology and consume media, entertainment and information. As a LIS educator I call on you to take the time to educate yourself, share it – and never stop! 🌱

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Gary is so passionate about this topic that he plans to work with ALIA in 2018 to offer some PD on privacy for libraries (April), and 'Calling Bullshit!' (August). You will be able to register for these and other ALIA run PD courses at (alia.org.au/training).