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How Do We Address Misinformation?: Applying Philosophy to the Problem

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IDEAS THAT MATTER

2023-2024 Myth & Science

Lesson: How Do We Address Misinformation?: Applying Philosophy to the Problem

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Overview and Purpose

Who do we want to be? What values are most important to us? How can we manifest those values in our daily life, specifically in our online presence?

The end goal of this standalone lesson is to have students understand and reflect on why they are susceptible to misinformation and develop personalized practices to combat it. The intention is not to arrive at a perfect plan to avoid falling prey to it (that will never be possible). Rather, this lesson begins from the assumption that recognition (both of one's own imperfections as well as the markers of false information) will lead to self-awareness and growth — not perfection.

To build up to the end goal, students will first get to know one another and reflect on their own identities in order to better understand their own biases. Students will then research the differences between mis- & dis- information and fake news. They will turn to learning about a general list of values and specific rules tied to them, and then they will practice applying the values and rules to a specific case involving misinformation. Lastly, students will write a brief reflection describing their experiences and growth, reflecting on how they might develop best practices to help recognize and combat their own susceptibility to mis- & dis- information and fake news.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

    a. reflect on their core identities and how they might result in bias.

    b. reflect on their core identities and how they might increase susceptibility to mis- and dis- information and fake news.

    c. identify key questions related to Myth and Science and outline

strategies or methods to tackle them. Students should be able to identify applicable intellectual and practical skills articulated in GLOBE.

d. apply discipline-specific theories and evidence to answer questions about Myth and Science. Students should be able to identify applicable broad or specialized knowledge areas, as articulated in GLOBE.

Annotated Bibliography

This annotated bibliography includes both scholarly and non scholarly sources, as well as library guides, YouTube videos, and academic and layman writings. Some are required for the lesson; others are included to prompt further research. Sections have been added for the ethical theory resources and the library guides.

Auyer, Jonathan. "Rules of professional values handout." Aug 2021, PHL 105: Technology and Values, Monroe Community College. Class handout.

> *This is the main resource for the rules of professional values. It contains a list of general values, ethical theories from which those values were derived, and a list of specific rules gleaned from the values. It was created for a class on technology and ethics, but the content should be relevant to a wider audience.*

Fisher, Max. "'Belonging Is Stronger Than Facts': The Age of Misinformation." The Interpreter, The New York Times, May 13, 2021 https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/07/world/asia/misinformation-disinformation-fake-news.html. Accessed June 7, 2023.

> *Fisher talks about how our need for belonging to our tribe can override our reason and critical thinking, leading to the perpetuation of online misinformation. The ideas in this article can help students see how their beliefs and identities might make them more susceptible to mis- & dis-information and fake news.*

Midgette, Lauren. "The Cultural Tree: Getting to Know Yourself and Your Students." The Center for Professional Education of Teachers, Columbia University, Feb 22, 2023, https://cpet.tc.columbia.edu/news-press/the-cultural-tree-getting-to-know-yourself-and-your-students. Accessed on June 7, 2023.

> *This source is one a few detailing the culturally responsive practice called "the culture tree" and to use it in a classroom setting.*

"Overview of Culturally Responsive Practices: 5. The Culture Tree." High Impact Instructional Strategies for Health Education, Colorado Department of Education, https://sitesed.cde.state.co.us/mod/book/view.php?id=8030&chapterid=8125. Accessed on June 7, 2023.

> *This source is one a few detailing the culturally responsive practice called "the culture tree" and to use it in a classroom setting.*

Raicu, Irina, "Reducing the Spread of Misinformation Online," Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University, Aug 7, 2019. https://www.scu.edu/ethics/internet-ethics-blog/reducing-the-spread-of-misinformation-online/ Accessed on June 7, 2023.

> *This source, along with one "Ethics and Virtue", come from Santa Clara University's Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. The Center is a treasure trove of information on applying ethics to, among other things, technology. This source talks about methods we might use to reduce the spread of misinformation.*

"The Culture Tree: Intro to the 3 Levels of Culture." The Global You, MyWorldAbroad.com, https://myworldabroad.com/book/section-2251-3. Accessed on June 7, 2023.

> *This source is one a few detailing the culturally responsive practice called "the culture tree" and to use it in a classroom setting.*

"The psychology of misinformation: A three part series." Aug 27, 2020. First Draft. https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/the-psychology-of-misinformation/. Accessed on June 9, 2023

> *This source is part of a three-part series on misinformation. I have included the citation and link for the main page; from there, one can access the three parts on misinformation: "Why we're vulnerable," "Why corrections are so hard," and "How to prevent it."*

Velasquez, Manuel, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, S.J., and Michael J. Meyer, "Ethics and Virtue", Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University, Jan 1, 1988. https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/ethics-and-virtue/ Accessed on June 7, 2023.

> *This source, along with one by Irina Raicu, comes from Santa Clara*

University's Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. The Center is a treasure trove of information on applying ethics to, among other things, technology. This source asks the reader to think about how "virtue ethics" asks us to develop our character and how that might be applied in our everyday life.

Wadle, Claire. *First Draft's Essential Guide to: Understanding Information Disorder.* Oct 2019. First Draft .[https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Information_Disorder_Digital_ AW.pdf?x32994](https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Information_Disorder_Digital_AW.pdf?x32994). Accessed on June 9, 2023

This is an exceptionally detailed source on the nature of misinformation and disinformation. Many of the quotes, images, and charts used in the PowerPoint come from this source.

Ethical Theory Sources:

This is an accessible list of resources on the various ethical theories mentioned in the "Rules of Professional Values Handout." The instructor can choose to use or not use these at their discretion.

"Alternative Paradigms: Care Ethics and Feminine Ethics." University of Amsterdam Communication Science Microlectures, YouTube, Oct 5, 2017, https://youtu.be/4iaCpAFypq8.

"Aristotle & Virtue Theory: Crash Course Philosophy #38." Crash Course Philosophy, *PBS Digital Studios*, YouTube, Dec 15, 2016, https://youtu.be/PrvtOWEXDIQ.

"Big Thinker: John Rawls." The Ethics Centre, Mar 23, 2021, https://ethics.org.au/big-thinker-john-rawls/. Accessed on June 7, 2023.

D'Olimpio, Laura. "Ethics Explainer: Ethics of Care." The Ethics Centre, May 16, 2019, https://ethics.org.au/ethics-explainer-ethics-of-care/. Accessed on June 7, 2023.

"Ethics Explainer: Consequentialism." The Ethics Centre, Feb 15, 2016, https://ethics.org.au/ethics-explainer-consequentialism/. Accessed on June 7, 2023.

"Ethics Explainer: Deontology." The Ethics Centre, Feb 18, 2016,

https://ethics.org.au/ethics-explainer-deontology/ . Accessed on June 7, 2023.

"Ethics Explainer: Virtue Ethics." The Ethics Centre, Feb 16 2016, https://ethics.org.au/ethics-explainer-virtue-ethics/. Accessed on June 7, 2023.

"Kant & Categorical Imperatives: Crash Course Philosophy #35." Crash Course Philosophy, *PBS Digital Studios*, YouTube, Nov 14, 2016, https://youtu.be/8bIys6JoEDw.

"Utilitarianism: Crash Course Philosophy #36." Crash Course Philosophy, *PBS Digital Studios*, YouTube, Nov 21, 2016,https://youtu.be/-a739VjqdSI.

"What Is Justice?: Crash Course Philosophy #40." Crash Course Philosophy, *PBS Digital Studios*, YouTube, Dec 19, 2016,https://youtu.be/H0CTHVCkm90.

Library Guides

This is a list of library guides on misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, and fake news. Each one offers something different, and I have drawn on their information to help create the lesson plan and the PowerPoint.

"Fake News, Bias, and Perspective: How to Sort Fact From Fiction, Gold Workshop: What is fake news?" SUNY Geneseo https://library.geneseo.edu/FakeNewsGold. Accessed June 7, 2023.

""Fake News," Misinformation, & Disinformation." Temple University Libraries, May 25, 2023,https://guides.temple.edu/fakenews. Accessed June 7, 2023.

"Decoding Fake News: Decoding Fake News." SUNY Geneseo, https://library.geneseo.edu/newsliteracy. Accessed June 7, 2023.

"Misinformation, Disinformation, and Malinformation." Research Essentials: Misinformation, Disinformation, and Malinformation, Iona University, May 25, 2023, https://guides.iona.edu/researchessentials/disinformation. Accessed June 7, 2023.

Lesson Plan (see accompanying lecture slides)

Readiness Activity: The Culture Tree

Students will get to know one another by engaging in a culturally responsive practice involving the Culture Tree. Students will first be given a few minutes to answer some of the following Reflective Questions drawn from the Culture Tree. As the instructor you can choose to have students focus on all or some of these questions.

1. Take a minute to identify your own culture whether that is based on ethnicity, race, faith, politics, sexuality, etc.

2. Surface Culture: What are the most visible elements of your culture? What are your social media habits?

3. Core Culture: What is your notion of fairness vs unfairness, good vs bad? What is your notion of dignity and respect?

Activity Instructions:

1. The instructor will break students into groups of an even number of students (6 or 8 is best).

2. Half the students stand in a small inner circle, backs facing each other; the other half will form a larger, outer circle. Each student in the outer circle will face a student in the inner circle.

3. Students in the inner circle will have 1 minute to share their answers to the Culture Tree Reflective Questions.

4. After the 1 minute is up, students in the outer circle will share their answers to the Culture Tree Reflective Questions.

5. After the 1 minute is up, the outer circle will rotate clockwise and students will repeat steps 3-5 until the allotted time is up.

Introduce New Material: Mis- & Dis-information and Fake News

The core content of this lesson revolves around mis- & dis- information and fake news.

1. Using the lesson PowerPoint, the instructor will present and define the terms misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, and fake news.

2. At the end of this section, students will think back to the Culture Tree activity

   a. What is your cultural "tribe"?

   b. How might your identities make you susceptible to misinformation?

Introduce New Material: Rules of Professional Values

The core of this lesson is to have students learn about a set of general values and the specific rules that stem from them. Each value has been connected to a corresponding normative ethical theory (e.g., Integrity and Aristotle's "Golden Mean") which will give students context of how philosophy can ground both the values and the specific rules.

1. The instructor will pass out the "Rules of Professional Values Handout."

2. Students will read along as the instructor presents the Rules of Professional Values PowerPoint.

3. Students will reflect on:

   a. how these values can help guide your online interactions.

   b. how these values can help address the issue of misinformation.

Integrative & Applied Learning Activity: Case Study

This activity revolves around investigating the rules of professional values and then applying those rules to a specific case involving misinformation.

1. The Instructor will pass out the "Case Study Handout."

2. While the Instructor is reading the case study, students will be actively listening and taking notes on the handout.

3. The entire class will discuss and answer case study steps 1-2.

4. Students will then divide into small groups of 4-6.

5. In their groups, students will discuss and answer case study steps 3-5.

6. Complete the activity by reconvening the groups and going through steps 3-5 as a class.

7. Optional: Complete the activity via a "fishbowl" activity:

   a. Pair groups together.

   b. Pick one group to be in the fishbowl. Only students in the fishbowl are allowed to talk. The inner circle will have 5 minutes to provide their answer to step 5 (their recommendation to resolve the moral dilemma).

   c. Instruct the outer circle to remain quiet, observe and take notes on the answers and process of the inner circle's discussion.

   d. After 5 minutes, move the outer circle into the fishbowl and repeat

(2)-(3).

e. After both groups have rotated through the fishbowl, invite both groups to debrief. Students can use their observations from the outer circle to respond to objections, express agreement, or voice dissent. They can also highlight the strengths of the discussion and make suggestions for ways to engage each other more meaningfully.

Closing Activity: Reflective Writing

Students will complete a reflective writing activity in which they describe their experiences and how they can apply what they have learned from the lesson toward the creation of individualized best practices that address the issue of misinformation.

Instructors can decide the format and length of the assignment.

The assignment can be completed in class or given as homework to be submitted by the end of the day. If you choose the latter, students should submit the assignment the sooner the better — while they have the material and the experiences fresh in their minds.