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How do we teach authority in a culture where everyone's an expert?

Renee L. Berry

Georgia Southern University, rberry@georgiasouthern.edu

Lauren McMillan

Georgia Southern University, lmcmillan@georgiasouthern.edu

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How do we teach authority in a culture where everyone's an expert?

Renée Berry, Writing & Linguistics
Lauren McMillan, Lane Library
Georgia Southern University, Armstrong Campus

How did we get here?





<https://informedopinions.org/amplify-women/becomenominate-an-expert/>

The personal is all that matters

In a recent (3 August 2018) article in *The Washington Post*, a follower of the online conspiracy group QAnon expressed a more and more common cultural view of authority:

“His method of political analysis, he said, is akin to the way he reads the Bible. ‘I don’t listen to what churches and priests interpret. I go to the most direct translation and read directly Jesus’ words and what Jesus did.’”

(Stanley-Becker)

What do students have to say?

- “I know who to trust by feeling.” “by logic”
- “Trust no one except family....I tend to trust everyone until they give me a reason not to.”
- “Trustworthiness is an important element of morality and character”
- “Just common sense, if it sounds reasonable”
- “I see truth by majority in a way.”
- “Asking questions to other people or Google.”
- “I only ‘know’ if something is true if I see it with my own eyes.” -Zachary
- “I have to see it with my own eyes or hear it from the original source to think it’s true. Fact is something that has clear evidence or proof, opinions are like assumptions. And we all know what ass-u-me means.”
-Sunshine

Cultural shift: Authority = expert/expertise to ?

Back to our QAnon guy. He's [frustrated] "with how authority over information and verification is allocated. He resents what he perceives to be the self-righteous assumption of expertise made by members of the media and academia." (Stanley-Becker). He goes on to further assert that "QAnon marks the emergence of long-hidden communities of people who want to decide for themselves what the truth is... 'they want to live their lives, but they happen to be extremely bright or creative or intuitive or unbelievable researchers who are just living humble lives. Now there's an Internet, and they can plug into a community.' QAnon...is about circumventing the media's standards of verification and 'speaking directly to the people'." (Stanley-Becker)

Students' Views: Abuse of Authority?

- “The concept of authority as being equated to expertise is flawed.”
- “A lot [sic] of people take advantage of the fact that they have authority.”
- “[Authority] is largely abused.”
- “I feel authority has more to do with your ‘control’ of things rather than a view of things. Anyone can think and believe what they want, but cannot necessarily tell people they can and cannot do something.” -Zachary
- “Authority happens naturally in life. Authority figures are needed. In history, authority can lead to corruption when one abuses their given powers.” -Tanner
- “The victor writes history so any authority is going to have some bias.” -David
- “Authority can be used, and has been used, to corrupt the masses into believing something because of either corruption amongst the authority or just as a way to deceive people.” -Spencer
- “The line between authority figure and tyrant can be thin at times.” -Antonio
- “Authority needs to be refreshed OFTEN.” -Sunshine

A close-up photograph of a person's lower legs and feet. They are wearing light blue denim jeans with the hems rolled up and a pair of light pink suede sneakers with white soles. The person is standing on a weathered, mossy tree stump. The background is a lush green forest with sunlight filtering through the trees.

What *outcomes* do we want from students in how they determine authority? (orange)

How do we get students to recognize and analyze *opinion* versus *authority*? (yellow)

Do we need to teach authority differently with the *Framework* than we did with the *Standards*?

(green)

Standard 3:

The information literate student articulates and applies initial criteria for evaluating both the information and its sources.

Outcomes Include:

- *Examines and compares information from various sources in order to evaluate reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, and point of view or bias*
- *Analyzes the structure and logic of supporting arguments or methods*
- *Recognizes prejudice, deception, or manipulation*
- *Recognizes the cultural, physical, or other context within which the information was created and understands the impact of context on interpreting the information*

VS.

Frame 1:

Authority Is Constructed and Contextual:

- *Information resources reflect their creators' expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help to determine the level of authority required.*

Student reflections:

When asked how they distinguished between fact and opinion, students talked about:

- Cross-referencing information
- Finding heavily researched information
- Doing tons of research
- Finding lots of facts
- Knowing their sources backgrounds, their sponsors and sources
- Finding credible sources

But also:

- “We tend to just automatically think that everything we hear is true because people are too lazy to search for the correct info.” -Sierra

Resources

“Authority Matters.” <https://georgiasouthern.libguides.com/c.php?g=877098>

“Beware of Online ‘Filter Bubbles’:

https://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles?language=en

“Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.” <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>

“Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education.”

<http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=Home&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=33553>

“Media Bias Chart.” <https://www.adfontesmedia.com/>

Stanley-Becker, Isaac. “QAnon: Meet a real-life believer in the online, pro-Trump conspiracy theory that’s bursting into view.” *The Washington Post* 3 August 2018.