

# FAKE NEWS AND CIVIC EDUCATION

## ENGAGING THE NEXT GENERATION OF VOTERS, READERS, AND MEDIA-MAKERS

### EVENT CO-SPONSORS

The American Assembly

The Academy of Political Science

With additional support from Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Theory and Empirics (INCITE)

### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Robert Y. Shapiro | President of The Academy of Political Science

### PANELISTS

Ioana Literat | Assistant Professor of Communication, Media, and Learning Technologies Design at Teachers College, Columbia University

Lalitha Vasudevan | Professor of Technology and Education Director, Media and Social Change Lab at Teachers College, Columbia University

Detra Price-Dennis | Assistant Professor in Elementary Inclusive Education at Teachers College, Columbia University

Haeny Yoon | Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at Teachers College, Columbia University

Discussant: Todd Gitlin | Professor of Journalism and Sociology and Chair of the Ph.D. program in Communications at Columbia University

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## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN 2020 | ELECTION SERIES

The nearly yearlong Challenges and Opportunities in 2020 election series is a forum for academics, journalists, and others to comment on the issues at stake in the 2020 presidential election, and related topics front and center in American politics and society. The series promotes interdisciplinary conversations that explore undercurrents and themes affecting the upcoming election and the integrity of—and trust in—our democratic institutions.

## ABOUT THE EVENT CO-SPONSORS

THE AMERICAN ASSEMBLY fosters public conversations that lead to more just, equitable, and democratic societies. It does so by bringing research to bear on public problems, by creating new resources for public understanding, and by strengthening the forms of trust and deliberation that make democracy work. For more information, visit: [www.americanassembly.org](http://www.americanassembly.org).

THE ACADEMY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, founded in 1880, promotes nonpartisan, scholarly analysis of political, social, and economic issues by sponsoring conferences and producing publications. Published continually since 1886, the Academy's journal, *Political Science Quarterly*, is edited for both specialists and informed readers with a keen interest in public and international affairs. For more information, visit: [www.psqonline.org](http://www.psqonline.org).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ROBERT Y. SHAPIRO

*President, Academy of Political Science*

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# Lamboozled! | A News Literacy Game for Adolescents

IOANA LITERAT

THE MEDIA AND SOCIAL CHANGE LAB (MASCLab) is a hub at Teachers College interested in the intersection between media and social change. They engage in research, design pedagogical opportunities and courses, host curricular events, and produce media content.

## MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

- According to Common Sense Media, 31 percent among U.S. youth (aged 10-18) said they shared a news story and later learned it was fake. Fifty-six percent said they cannot reliably tell fake news stories from real ones.
- U.S. youth have low trust in journalists and feel disconnected from the news. They do not feel that news is relevant to them.
- Challenges to advancing media literacy education include a lack of resources, trained staff, and time to incorporate it into the curriculum. While the charged nature of the political climate is a challenge, it also makes implementation more necessary than ever.

## LAMBOOZLED!: A NEWS LITERACY GAME FOR ADOLESCENTS

- The MASCLab project, Lamboozled!, is a game-based approach to news literacy. This tactic is youth-centered, participatory, and interactive. The potential for learning through play is great.
- The game simulates complex scenarios while offering immediate feedback. It promotes youth engagement. Lamboozled! is not based on an abstract set of rules. Rather, it presents journalistic best practices in the context of a game.
- Lamboozled! implements iterative participatory design approach to engage the target audience (youth). In addition to being consumers, youth have become co-producers through a series of participatory game design workshops.

## A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF LAMBOOZLED!

- The game is set in the fictional sheep town of Green Meadows. Players use evidence cards to help the sheep citizens figure out what is true and what is not.
- The game teaches players about media literacy while avoiding politics and the charged nature of today's landscape. Players discuss sheep news headlines, rather than current political news stories.

## NEXT STEPS FOR LAMBOOZLED!

- Phase I involves creating the card game version. This keeps costs down and allows it to be readily implementable in a variety of contexts.
- The card game will test if it is enjoyable and playable through a series of evaluations gathering data from students, teachers, and librarians.
- Phase II is the development of a digital version. The digital version enables such enhancements as customization, the integration of real-world news, and single versus multiplayer modes.



[www.lamboozled.com](http://www.lamboozled.com)

# Podcasting and Translating Research | Stemming the Tide of Misinformation about Issues that Impact Civic Engagement

LALITHA VASUDEVAN

AFTER THE 2016 ELECTION, students became interested in what they could do in response to national divisiveness. The graduate students at MASCLab wanted to produce new ways to think about a variety of issues.

## TRANSLATING RESEARCH

- Teachers College as an institution collects lots of data. However, a lot of this research may not get taken up, used in policy, or implemented in practice.
- The goals of translating research are to increase awareness, find new audiences, impact everyday actions, and engage the citizenry—citizenship is important in terms of expanding how we think about civic engagement.

## MEDIA AND SOCIAL CHANGE PODCAST

- Podcasting is the media practice route that the lab galvanized to translate research. The [podcast](#) series is now in its third season.
- As an example: Season 2 Episode 5 was inspired by Dr. Sandra Markus's dissertation on craftivism, including its history and its prevalence at the 2017 Women's March. Her research explored how social media was instrumental in launching this form of activism. The episode featured an interview with Dr. Markus and audio from the march itself.
- After the first season, the MASCLab decided to host an event so that podcast listeners could do more than just listen. Podfest consisted of curated interactive "podspaces". The event allowed the podcast listeners to come and physically interact with the content and engage in practices related to the featured research. Related to Dr. Markus's research, attendees created their own quilt squares, thus engaging in craftivism themselves.

## PODCASTING FOR GUN VIOLENCE REFORM

- How can the MASCLab take this broad concept of using podcasting to translate research, and then apply it in the media space surrounding gun violence reform?
- Dr. Sonali Rajan at Teachers College studies the impact of gun violence exposure and adverse childhood experiences. In conversation with her, it became clear that information and research are circulated from a lot of different sources. These range from academic institutions, including the Columbia Journalism School, to organizations such as the NRA and gun advocacy groups.
- How can you really interrupt conversations about gun control? The MASCLab came up with the [\(Re\)Search for Solutions](#) podcast.

## (RE)SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

- There are multitudes of tragic stories related to gun violence, but stories of unlikely responses to gun violence also need to be shared.
- This podcast highlights people who are thinking differently about understanding and studying gun violence. For example, Megan Ranney, using #thisisourlane, shows there are lots of ways to disrupt gun violence discourse. Dr. Charles Branas found a 20 percent reduction in gun violence in vacant lots in Philadelphia that had been "greened". The podcast features different narratives and helps expand people's personal connections to gun violence.
- A podcast isn't just something to put out there. (Re)Search for Solutions hopes to promote interaction, extend exposure, and create community partnerships.

# Media Literacy and Younger Children | Curricular Perspectives

DETRA PRICE-DENNIS AND HAENY YOON

THERE IS A RENEWED INTEREST in engaging the younger generation of civic participants. How can this be achieved through curriculum? How are children already working to forward agendas?

## DETRA PRICE-DENNIS | “HOW DO WE KNOW BLACK LIVES DON’T MATTER?”

- Despite the prevalence of images and news stories related to Black Lives Matter, there was an absence of these conversations in schools.
- If the assumption is that black lives matter, why do you have to say it? If the assumption is that they do not, who is saying that? These are topics to explore through curriculum.
- Fourth and fifth grade students began researching topics that were of interest to them—such as gender inequality, discrimination, and Black Lives Matter. Based on research, students created flip boards of curated information from articles, blogs, and news posts.
- How do students make sense of what they were reading and how do they communicate their findings to others?

**Stop Motion Animation:** This genre works well with younger children. For example, when creating a stop motion animation on gender binaries, students used aspects like characters and background scenery to disrupt common notions of gender.

**Infographics:** As students prepared to share their findings, fake news was conflicting with real metrics. As media-makers, thinkers, and learners, the students needed to do extensive fact checking and editing before sharing their infographics. They did not want to be part of the problem of perpetuating fake news.

- It is imperative for teachers to think about curriculum as a continuum where students can be both consumers and producers—this axis intersects with a continuum of social consciousness (basic awareness) and critical consciousness.
- Students have an interest in sociopolitical conversations and are interested in contributing to them. School curriculums should support this.

## HAENY YOON | “WE WANT RECESS!”: FOREFRONTING CHILDREN’S AGENDAS IN CIVIC ACTION

- How are children already political beings? Are children politically active because they really want to be, or are they simply utilized as props to push an agenda?
- Children can forward agendas just with their presence. How do we create conditions for political and social change while simultaneously allowing children to retain their own activities, including play and schoolwork?
- In a second grade classroom after the 2016 election, children did not understand how Donald Trump could have won when, “all 25 kids picked Hillary Clinton.” These same students were observed worrying that Trump would take away pizza Fridays. This gave insight into how these students were interpreting the political tide of the moment, as well as presidential scope of power.
- It is important to pay attention to what kids say through play, informal conversation, and in writing.

## MARCH FOR MORE RECESS

- Dissatisfied with only 15 minutes of recess, elementary school children wrote letters to their principal, posted flyers, petitioned, and marched to increase their recess period to 45 minutes. These are the same tactics adult activists employ.
- Although their actions ultimately did not lead to a longer recess period, their civic efficacy strengthened all the same.
- Children are inherently political. How do we help them make sense that they are political beings?

# Fake News Then and Now

TODD GITLIN

FAKE NEWS is not a new phenomenon. Misinformation has always been present in media, is certainly prevalent today, and will continue to worsen in the future if action is not taken.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF FAKE NEWS

- Misinformation was referred to as “rumor” in the Bible and ancient Greek writings. Today’s fake news is far from a new issue.
- The first newspaper published by the English settlers in Boston in 1690 cautioned that people would try to use the platform to spread misinformation.
- Fake news was as vital, compelling, and omnipresent in the early years of the republic as it is today, but simply took place in lower-circulation media.
- Political parties published the dominant newspapers of the nineteenth century. They had a significant stake in spreading falsehoods about opponents, and magnifying the interests of their own candidates.
- In the election of 1828 the mainstream papers focused on very different issues.
  - The papers supporting Andrew Jackson claimed that John Quincy Adams procured a young American woman for the czar of Russia for dalliance.
  - The papers supporting John Quincy Adams stated that Jackson’s wife was a bigamist.
- Considering the consequences of Jackson’s genocidal acts against Native Americans once elected President, his views of Native Americans were not an issue during the campaign. The media instead focused on Jackson’s wife.
- Political actors exploit people’s gullibility. This is a bedrock danger in politics. Unfortunately, the benefit from getting away with fake news is considerable.

## FAKE NEWS IN CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

- Today’s media landscape is essentially all about self-contained echo chambers.
- A major player is Fox News—it is the center around which smaller entities, such as Breitbart, revolve.
- Many people are not aware of the origin story of Fox News. Rupert Murdoch was able to build the Fox News empire by being an efficient media oligarch working in a political setting. The station was started by taking advantage of Democratic lapses and has grown exponentially from there.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND FAKE NEWS

- NBC News recently reported that Facebook named Jennifer Williams to run its editorial video strategy operations, including political advertising. Williams is a 13 year veteran of Fox News where she was a senior producer of Fox & Friends—a program that has repeatedly spread false reports but rarely issues on-air corrections.
- The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) bans false and misleading advertising, though this does not apply to Facebook. Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (1996) does not consider social media organizations to be publishers. Instead, the FTC views social media sites as platforms or carriers.
- Facebook has approximately two billion users; however, Mark Zuckerberg has repeatedly declared that it is not in the business of checking posts’ accuracy.
- We are facing a major problem of historic dimensions that will continue to worsen unless action is taken to remove the protection that Section 230 offers to social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.