

## LC-DC Podcast Episode 9: Combatting Misinformation

### Transcript

00:00:11 Ryan

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the LC-DC podcast, advice for students from students, brought to you by the Douglas College Learning Center. I'm your host, Ryan, and today I'm joined by my very special co-host, Lisa. Lisa has been an employee of the Douglas College Library since 2006, working in a few different roles, including one of the people helping you out at the checkout desk. So you may have met her before.

00:00:39 Ryan

Her current job is providing administrative support to the library and learning center to ensure everything is running as smoothly as possible. She also gets to be involved in planning library and learning center events and outreach activities for students and college employees like book talks, film screenings, and workshops. Welcome to the LC-DC podcast, Lisa.

00:01:00 Lisa

Thank you.

00:01:01 Ryan

Lisa, what's your favorite thing about March?

00:01:04 Lisa

I'm a big springtime person. There's birds migrating. There's plants coming up. It's wonderful out there right now. I saw a downy woodpecker and a brown creeper just out yesterday on a walk.

00:01:18 Ryan

Wow, I'll have to Google those names after to find out just exactly what those birds are, but that sounds really cool.

00:01:23 Lisa

Cute little guys.

00:01:24 Ryan

Cute little guys. That's all we need to know. And yeah, that's definitely one of the things I love about springtime is the birds coming back out. And yeah, and I don't know about you, but one of the things I love about spring is getting to spend more time outdoors and away from screens.

00:01:41 Lisa

Absolutely.

00:01:42 Ryan

Yeah. And also, one of the things I like about March is this misinformation March campaign that we started at the library and the learning center. So that is our topic for today is misinformation. And we'll get into it in just a minute.

00:02:00 Ryan

Before we do, I'd just like to respectfully acknowledge that our campuses are located on the unceded, traditional, and ancestral lands of the Coast Salish peoples, including the territories of the Katzie, Kwantlen, Kwikwetlem, Musqueam, Qayqayt, Squamish, Tsawwassen, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

00:02:18 Ryan

Okay, getting into our topic of misinformation. Lisa, what is misinformation and its ugly cousin, disinformation?

00:02:28 Lisa

So misinformation is basically a generic kind of umbrella term for false or inaccurate information. And the distinction between misinformation and disinformation is that misinformation is shared without the intention of misleading, usually by someone who just

doesn't realize that it's not accurate information. Whereas disinformation is deliberate. It's usually something that's like purposely intended to mislead people.

00:02:51 Lisa

Another term that gets thrown around a lot is fake news, and that too is sort of a deliberate endeavor. Misinformation and disinformation are not new by any stretch of the imagination, but they are just an increasing concern and issue because of tools like the internet and social media and now generative AI that make them spread fast and wide.

00:03:12 Ryan

Yeah. There's a lot out there, isn't there, right? We used to throw that term fake news around a lot, and now maybe it's become more formalized into misinformation. But why is it so important? Why is misinformation important?

00:03:30 Lisa

I think most people would agree that we all encounter misinformation and disinformation, like as we're just trying to navigate our daily lives, especially online. And all of that bad or low quality information makes it harder to find good quality, factual, evidence-based information, which is what we need access to so that we can actually make safe and healthy and informed decisions about our own personal lives as well as when we're making like a collective decision or participating in civic life, voting in elections, that kind of thing.

00:04:02 Ryan

Yeah, definitely. How does misinformation affect us?

00:04:07 Lisa

So it can lead to pretty significant harms on a collective societal level as well as to us as individuals. And I would say the most sort of classic and ongoing example that illustrates that is anti-vaccination rhetoric. So much of that is rooted in a totally debunked and fraudulent study that linked autism and the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine. And we all kind of saw the impact of that, of vaccine skepticism and hesitancy that came from so much of that anti-vaccine misinformation that had been going on for a number of years already.

00:04:43 Lisa

What it did to us during COVID, it caused a lot of polarization between people who were anti-vax and pro-vax. And then there was a 2023 report released by the Canadian, or sorry, the Council of Canadian Academies, that found that in Canada, vaccine hesitancy caused an additional 2,800 avoidable deaths from COVID between March and November of 2021. And that kind of continues as people are not getting vaccinated for measles.

00:05:11 Lisa

And we now are in a period of losing, in Canada, our measles elimination status, which had been in place since 1998. So that's maybe a good example that shows how misinformation can impact us both individually, like coming across misleading or false information that makes us make a decision for ourselves, but it can also spread more widely than that. It can impact people who didn't make the same decision based on misinformation as we did.

00:05:39 Ryan

Yeah, those are two great examples because I do remember the whole conspiracy around vaccines causing autism and that persisted for years.

00:05:51 Lisa

It still persists.

00:05:52 Ryan

It still persists, yeah. And if there's anyone out there who's wondering, vaccines do not cause autism. And yeah, the COVID pandemic was another situation where misinformation seemed to be spreading like wildfire. And it did polarize individuals and people and groups. It affected my own family and friends and I knew people that stopped talking to each other, family that stopped talking to each other over this issue because they believed so strongly one way or the other. I'm curious, Lisa, has misinformation affected you personally?

00:06:30 Lisa

I can't actually think of a time where I've been like directly or like tangibly affected by it. But I can remember a scenario that happened just this past December in Abbotsford where I grew up. There was quite serious flooding just this past December. And I had seen a post

on Facebook that shared an evacuation order from the city of Abbotsford or possibly the city of Chilliwack, I actually don't remember, for a large part of Sumas Prairie.

00:06:56 Lisa

And that stressed me out because it's just an area that I know people in and I care about. Looking more closely at it, I realized it was actually an evacuation order dated from 2021 when there was an even larger and more serious flood. And so that didn't obviously directly affect me, but it really bothered me that someone had taken advantage of this like serious situation to clearly to just get engagement and get clicks. They were spreading something that was from a previous event. It had nothing to do with what was happening then.

00:07:27 Lisa

And I'm sure that happens all the time. I'm sure people have had experiences like that when they're in sort of an emergency situation. That just happened to be one that felt a little bit personal to me and it just happened to bother me because it was something that I really understood the area of. So I guess outside of having some very direct personal effect of misinformation or disinformation, I'm aware of how much time I have to spend every day trying to assess and evaluate information to make sure that I'm not believing something that I shouldn't. And I find that really depressing.

00:08:00 Ryan

Yeah, it is a little depressing and definitely adds to our workload, just as individuals trying to go about our day-to-day lives, right, is seeing something on the internet and having to second guess it all the time, right, which is becoming more and more prevalent, more and more of an issue. So I guess, is there anything we can do as individuals to help recognize misinformation when we see it?

00:08:29 Lisa

I would say it's hard to give a succinct answer to that. And it already was hard to give a succinct answer to that before generative AI in the last like three years and deep fake image and video technology became so ubiquitous. And now I actually don't know if I can truly say that we can, you know, recognize misinformation and disinformation. So my answer to this is that we each have to do our best to evaluate and investigate the information we encounter, which is a lot of work.

00:09:00 Lisa

But I think it's important if we think about it as sort of a responsibility to ourselves and to each other to take that work on. I read an article recently by Anna Merlin, who's kind of a tech and society sort of current affairs writer, published in Mother Jones magazine discussing how deep fakes are being used to spread disinformation. And the article asks if the confusion about what is and is not real is the actual worst consequence of the disinformation.

00:09:34 Lisa

And it basically comes to this sort of disturbing conclusion that I already kind of alluded to, that we may eventually are already are finding ourselves unable to differentiate reality from fiction. But what I liked in this article was there was a quote from a disinformation researcher who, in regards to solutions to combating disinformation, his comment was that resilience is built when societies lower the spread capacity of bad information and raise the verification capacity of ordinary people without outsourcing everything to heroic fact checkers. And to me, that just sort of speaks to, yeah, we all have to take a little bit of initiative and effort on our own.

00:10:14 Ryan

Yeah, that's a positive thought. And I like that hopefulness that we will increase our resiliency around misinformation as a result of the spread and it getting worse. And we'll link to the, was it Anna Merlin article.

00:10:33 Lisa

I can give you a link to that.

00:10:34 Ryan

Yeah, we'll link to that in the show notes. So be sure to check those out if you're interested in reading it. I'm thinking maybe is the first step to recognizing misinformation just being more skeptical about what we see online?

00:10:51 Lisa

Yeah, although there's also, I think, somewhat of a danger of becoming too skeptical, which I think people are also seeing as so many deep fake type things that really make it

hard for us to understand the difference between, there's almost sort of a not believing anything and that's also dangerous.

00:11:13 Ryan

True, that's I guess going too far.

00:11:14 Lisa

There's a happy medium.

00:11:15 Ryan

Happy medium. We don't want to go too far and just not believe anything. That could have other negative consequences that we want to avoid. Yeah, so is there any ways we can prevent or mitigate the negative effects of misinformation?

00:11:35 Lisa

Yeah, we need to each be developing our own information literacy, news literacy, digital literacy, and also now AI literacy skills. I personally think that the two most impactful things that we can each do is to choose where we get our information from carefully. So that does speak to, you know, being skeptical.

00:11:57 Lisa

That also isn't to say that I don't think you can get information from social media, from TikTok or Instagram or Reddit or whatever, but just to be discerning in who you follow and watch, to assess those people or those accounts to find out if they have, a background experience in what they're talking about or expertise in what they're talking about, even just like paying attention to whether they cite sources or whether, what those sources are and whether they're correcting themselves if they ever make a mistake.

00:12:28 Lisa

Like those are all signs of somebody who's actually trying to give you quality information. And then the second thing is to just like not share anything unless you feel very certain about the accuracy of it. So I kind of think that if you're not sharing something that you're not sure about, you're potentially meaningfully reducing the spread of false information, even if you don't know it for sure. Having said that, I also wish it was just that easy because in reality, being online, being on social media, it isn't just about what you actively and

purposely share. It's also about what you interact with. So I think it's also about being careful what you interact with on social media.

00:13:08 Ryan

Yeah, but I think what you said is a great starting point, right? Is being careful about who you watch, who you follow, because that's where it all starts, right? That's where our interaction comes from. And on social media, we get a lot of I'd call them hucksters, right? They're just trying to get our attention and keep our attention, and they don't necessarily have our best interests in mind. It's more about their own bottom line. So I think that's a great place to start. And on the topic of preventing misinformation, are there any helpful tools or resources that you'd recommend to help us avoid misinformation?

00:13:51 Lisa

Yeah, so with the help of some of the librarians here at Douglas, we've got a guide, a misinformation and disinformation guide that's available on the library website. You can, we'll probably link to that in the show notes too, I imagine, but you can also visit the library website, go to our information guides page. You'll find it there. And on there we've collected a lot of resources that you can use to help you in your journey to combat misinformation, with tips on how to evaluate information, like there are a lot of those sort of mnemonic acronyms that are meant to help you remember what to look for as you're coming across information.

00:14:29 Lisa

There is one that is kind of my favorite called the SIFT method. It stands for stop, investigate the source, find better coverage, and trace claims and quotes back to the original source. It's kind of the same thing as lateral reading, if that's something you've heard of. Basically means being on a website or on a social media account instead of just looking at that site for more information to go to other sources to find more information and get a better and more full understanding. I personally like it because it makes me feel like a little investigative reporter and it gives me this kind of agency of like, I'm not going to let myself be taken in. I'm going to get to the truth here.

00:15:12 Ryan

Yeah, that's a fun way of looking at it. Thinking of ourselves as Dick Tracy, private investigator types, right? That's an outdated reference for our audience, I think.

00:15:22 Lisa

Oh, they can Google it. Just find a good source.

00:15:24 Ryan

Yeah, exactly. And corroborate, right? Use the SIFT method.

00:15:27 Lisa

I also have done some research or there's research that I came across from a misinformation expert named Sander Vander Linden that's done research into like an immunization theory for misinformation and you know much like the taking a weakened strain of a virus into you helps you build up immunity against the virus. The idea is that getting a low dose of misinformation gives you a bit of a chance to build up a psychological barrier against it.

00:16:00 Lisa

And I don't know if I'm kind of extrapolating a little bit from the results of their studies, but my suggestion that I kind of based on that is to, especially if you have an online presence, a social media presence, to follow fact checkers, to follow journalists, and to sign up for newsletters from media outlets that are doing a lot of work into misinformation and what I think is getting kind of coined now as digital deceptions.

00:16:27 Lisa

I can recommend places like 404 Media and Indicator Media or a newsletter that comes from an organization called News Guard. And that gives you a chance to see what's happening out there, potentially before you become, before you encounter the information in the wild, so then you're better able to spot it.

00:16:51 Ryan

That's great. We'll also share all this in the show notes. I'm a big fan of 404 Media, so I'm glad to hear it's Lisa approved.

00:16:58 Lisa

I love it. They're great.

00:16:59 Ryan

They're great. Yeah. Lots of fun stories in there. And I like that idea, the theory about building a psychological barrier to misinformation by exposing yourself to it in small doses. I think there's something to that. I think, if we've been fooled by misinformation and we recognize our mistakes, then that's probably, we're probably going to try and prevent ourselves from being fooled again, I'm guessing. Yeah, so maybe that situation with you and the evacuation order, maybe that sort of strengthened your resilience against misinformation.

00:17:37 Lisa

It definitely made me feel more like I'm going to really look hard at dates on things.

00:17:44 Ryan

Definitely. I've made similar mistakes as well. I think we've all been there. Yeah, and of course, misinformation is very, has very negative effects for post-secondary institutions like Douglas College, where we value truth and quality information and quality sources. So I'm curious to find out more about what post-secondary institutions like Douglas are doing to combat misinformation.

00:18:12 Lisa

I mean, we have a guide that we've put together here in the library. There are tons of guides available from institutions, Canada, the US, Europe, that have resources and guides on misinformation and how to detect it and avoid it. And I'm sure they're also, developing guidance for understanding AI and the role it plays in the sphere of unreliable and misleading or bad information. I would seriously just recommend people do a web search for, you know, university or college guide disinformation, and you'll probably find tons of resources.

00:18:47 Lisa

And because the topic is so wide-ranging, each institution is likely to have some uniquely helpful content because none of us can be completely comprehensive. Some post-secondary schools I know have developed micro-credentials or modules on the topic to help their students navigate that. There is a really great one available through the University of Calgary, and we have it linked on our guide. It's called Building Resilience to

Misinformation. I believe at the University of Calgary, instructors can just embed that in their courses.

00:19:22 Lisa

And so there are tools like that are being developed. There's also obviously research that happens in universities and research institutes to help better understand misinformation and disinformation. There is a research project at Simon Fraser University called the Disinformation Project, which is doing a lot of work looking into disinformation in a Canadian context, which is good because so much of the research that has happened does focus on the US and Europe.

00:19:54 Lisa

It's kind of great to have somebody here doing that in Canada, because every area does have their unique elements to it. And then I guess the other thing you could say post-secondary institutions are doing is just helping students develop critical thinking skills, because no matter what kind of information you're coming across, you need good critical thinking skills to evaluate and assess information.

00:20:17 Ryan

Yeah, absolutely. Hopefully students are getting a chance to practice those critical thinking skills, those very valuable transferable skills here at Douglas in their courses and in their research assignments and projects and everything. And Lisa, I'm also going to shout out on the topic of what post-secondary institutions are doing, I'm just going to shout out Misinformation March. So tell us all about Misinformation March.

00:20:43 Lisa

So it's just like an awareness event that takes place over the whole month of March. It is dedicated to sharing about the dangers of mis- and disinformation, how to recognize it, and how to combat it. So at Douglas, we've just set up displays at both campus libraries with topics that change weekly, and we've developed some quizzes, interactive little things to do to try to illustrate some of the topics and methods for information evaluation that we share about in the display.

00:21:13 Lisa

The idea is really just to generate conversations and questions in a place here at the library where I hope people know that they can come to ask questions and get guidance on how to find information they can trust. And then also the idea was to bring it outside of the classroom and especially the library classroom because, of course, post-secondary library is somewhere you're going to come to learn about how to do research for your courses. But it's also a place where you can come and ask questions and get good information for the type of information you just come across in your day-to-day life.

00:21:48 Ryan

Yeah, absolutely. Good opportunity to shout out our librarians doing their Ask Away online help and the research desk, which you can find at both Coquitlam and New Westminster Libraries. And yeah, if you haven't already, definitely stop by the library, what do we call it, a foyer?

00:22:11 Lisa

The foyer, yes.

00:22:12 Ryan

Yeah, stop by the foyer. You'll see a display there until the end of March, with lots of great stuff about misinformation and some fun activities. So be sure to stop by. Where did the idea for Misinformation March come from?

00:22:28 Lisa

So I attended a webinar, I guess, two years ago, and two librarians from St. College, or sorry, St. Clair College in Windsor, Ontario, had started their own, just their original idea. You know, there's a lot of months or weeks that are set aside to sort of promote awareness of certain topics, and they wanted to do one on misinformation. And it was their tagline that I stole just a minute ago, that the misinformation march is about learning about the dangers of mis and disinformation, how to recognize it and how to combat it, so I have to give that to them.

00:23:02 Lisa

I was just inspired to do something similar here after hearing their work. And this is the second year we've done it at Douglas. And I think the reason why it resonated with me, I've

kind of been trying to interrogate that, is I've just always found misinformation and particularly disinformation really interesting, I think for the same reason that many people, including me, are interested in true crime. It's criminal, it's devious, it's malicious. And I'm fascinated by the motivations of the people involved. And I just like, I crave understanding and insight into why and what's going on around me so that I am not going to be fooled.

00:23:42 Ryan

Yeah, it's interesting, isn't it? And I love that curiosity. What goes on in the mind of someone who just shares some disinformation willingly to try and manipulate or fool a bunch of people? Yeah.

00:23:53 Lisa

I mean, usually it's monetary, but...

00:23:55 Ryan

Usually. Yeah. there's always something, right? Yeah. Well, even though misinformation March will be over, misinformation is not going to end after this month. So Lisa, what else can we do to combat misinformation?

00:24:14 Lisa

So I think this might seem like an extreme thing to say, but I am at this point where I think my answer to this is, don't give up. The amount of misinformation and disinformation that we come across every day is exponentially growing. It's massive, especially with the flood of deep fake videos and images. So I think it's probably super tempting to like just give up and stop paying attention to anything because the energy that it takes to make sure that you're finding something trustworthy and reliable and credible is just like it's a lot of energy that it takes.

00:24:49 Lisa

So just really keeping up the momentum of doing everything you can to source reliable information and evaluate what you find and be critical and thoughtful as you engage with it, because everything that we care about is touched by misinformation. So if you care about the environment, you are battling against misinformation. If you care about your health and wellness or your friends and family's health and wellness, you are battling misinformation. If you care about a political cause or a group of people or all groups of people who might be

facing discrimination, you are battling misinformation. So I just really want to underscore, don't give up. It is an urgent situation.

00:25:29 Ryan

It's a very hopeful and positive, encouraging message. And that's so true that misinformation really does affect almost everything, doesn't it? Another way I think that we can reduce misinformation is just get away from our screens. And hopefully the weather will enable us to get outside a little bit and cut down on scrolling. We're in the middle of our analog week. How's that going for you, Lisa?

00:25:55 Lisa

I wish I could say it was going better, but I did find it hard to stay off my screens this week.

00:26:01 Ryan

It's so much harder than it seems, isn't it? It's so much harder. But like you said, don't give up, right?

00:26:08 Lisa

That's right. You know, sometimes it just depends on, you know, if I tried this again in another week, maybe I'd be in a different frame of mind.

00:26:15 Ryan

Exactly. Yeah. All right, folks, that's it for today's show. Thanks for listening. Remember, the Douglas College Learning Center provides free one-on-one peer tutoring to Douglas students. You can book an appointment or find out more information at our website, [library.douglascollege.com/forward/slash/learning-center](http://library.douglascollege.com/forward/slash/learning-center). If you like this episode, please give us a five-star rating review or share it with others who could use this advice. I promise it's not misinformation or disinformation.

00:26:43 Ryan

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