Teaching tension
The link between objectivity and social construction

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1. INTRODUCING THE TENSION
   constructionist vs. anti-constructionist stances on the ACRL Framework

2.REFRAMING TRUTH
   as a guiding norm for information evaluation

3. OBJECTION: POST-TRUTH
   distracts from encouraging better practices of justificatory responsibility

4. LATERAL + VERTICAL INTERPRETATION
   context and construction as essential tools stabilizing meaning and evaluating information

5. EXAMPLES FROM CLASS
   malapropisms as an entry point for lateral interpretation
citation as relationality, respect, and reciprocity

tension
AUTHORITY IS CONSTRUCTED AND CONTEXTUAL

Credibility is partially determined by the needs of the information user and the information creator’s standing within a context (ACRL, 2016).

Note:
For the sake of brevity, I will use the term 'construction' to denote both social construction and context.
Construction

The idea that our concepts, language, practices, and many of the objects we use could have been otherwise. Constructionist theorists place varying degrees of emphasis on this contingency (Hacking, 1999; Haslinger, 2012; Mallon, 2016).

Contextualism

The notion that various factors, such as history, social practices, linguistic conventions, and material conditions impact a community of interpreters in their communication and interpretation. Statements can have different meanings depending on the context (Hacking, 1999; Haslinger, 2012; Recanati, 2004).
two
stances

1. ANTI-CONSTRUCTIONISM
   • Construction undermines the ability to determine authority and/or accuracy
   • There are important ways in which things are correct or incorrect
   • Construction = post-truth

2. CONSTRUCTIONISM
   • Affirms the FRAMEWORK (with qualifications)
   • Questions and/or denies the legitimacy of stable 'correct' or 'incorrect' concepts and categories (e.g., LCC and LCSH)
   • Concepts and categories seem real because they are entrenched, often through the use of power
both anti-con + con agree that:

category and construction destabilize concepts and categories, ultimately undermining notions of "truth."
anti-con sees construction as illegitimate and untenable

con sees construction as legitimate and necessary
two questions

a. is construction worth the loss of truth as a goal?

b. are anti-con and con mutually exclusive?
my answer to both questions is, "no."
CONSTRUCTION AND CONTEXT
- Are dependent on concepts like truth, warrant, accuracy, and correctness
- Can be leveraged to strengthen information evaluation practices
- Are necessary for meaningful interpretation of information, including assertions
reframing truth
what is truth?

1. SIDESTEP ABSTRACT AND/ OR METAPHYSICAL TRUTH

2. TRUTH AS A PROPERTY
   What is the property that makes ______ true? (Wrenn, 2015)

3. TRUTH-EVALUABLE INFORMATION
   What is the property that makes information true?

4. FOCUSING ON TESTIMONY
   Evaluating second-hand information is a big part of academic research.
1. **DECLARATIVE ACT**
   Assertions, in this context, are semiotic declarations, often expressed in the form of linguistic statements. Assertions are actions. We do things with assertions (e.g., we claim).

2. **COMMITMENT**
   When one asserts, one commits to a position, sincerely or insincerely, even if that position is modified and/or negotiated.

3. **TRUTH EVALUABLE**
   Assertions are evaluable using truth-related concepts (e.g., accuracy). They can be true or false, in some sense.

WE CAN EVALUATE ASSERTIONS AS BEING MORE-OR-LESS CORRECT

Therefore, assertions are constrained by norms of our social practices, which includes coordination between agents and our causal interactions with our shared world.
OVERVIEW

Implicit or explicit rules, guidelines, and/or responsibilities that are internal to and govern what counts as a warranted assertion. (Brandom, 1989; Lackey, 2007; McKinnon, 2015)

EXAMPLES OF PROPOSED NORMS

1. One must know something in order to assert it. (Williamson, 2000).
2. One must reasonably believe something in order to assert it. (Lackey, 2007).
3. One must have supportive reasons for something in order to assert it. These supportive reasons vary depending on context. (McKinnon, 2015).
“JUSTIFICATORY RESPONSIBILITY”
(Brandom, 1989, p. 641)

1. "Commitment": putting an assertion within a context of prior assertions and licensing it for use in future assertions (Brandom, 2001, p.190). Committing to the idea that an assertion (i) entails further assertions and (ii) is entailed by prior assertions.

2. "Entitlement": Using one's commitments to provide justifications in a manner that fits social practices, including triangulating our beliefs and perceptions with our community and shared world (Brandom, 2001, p.190).

3. Interest in fulfilling norms of trust and reliability. Distrust and skepticism is contingent of an "overall framework of trust" (Shapin, 1994, p.19).

*We place our assertion in a justificatory framework, in "the logical space of reasons", of justifying and being able to justify what one says." (Sellars, 1997/1953, p.76).
TRUTH, FOR OUR PRACTICAL PURPOSES, IS THE PROPERTY THAT MAKES ASSERTIONS/TESTIMONY WARRANTED.

FULFILLMENT OF JUSTIFICATORY RESPONSIBILITY, INCLUDING TRUSTWORTHINESS, IS A STARTING POINT FOR A PARTICULAR INFORMATIONAL GOAL (I.E., ASSESSING VERACITY)
post-truth
Post-truth and/or post-truth-like ideas are raised by both constructionism and anti-constructionism.

- **Constructionism:** one cannot justifiably apply concepts related to true/false and correct/incorrect. This is a post-truth realization.
- **Anti-constructionism:** Ideas related to constructionism and contextualism entail post-truth thinking.

Doesn't post-truth present a challenge to your notion of warrant? Isn't post-truth an example of assertions made without concern for warrant or the norms that determine warrant?

Do norms matter if they can be flaunted, such as in the case of post-truth?
"Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping political debate or public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" ("post-truth," 2018).
APPARENT CONDITIONS OF POST-TRUTH

(i) The proliferation of false information
(ii) The attitude that truth is, at best, a convenient coincidence that can be superseded by ideological, instrumental, and/or emotional concerns
(iii) The attitude that acting on certain beliefs, specifically false ones, can be a good in and of itself.
LOW HANGING FRUIT: TRUMP

(i) The proliferation of false information:
Misleading and inaccurate tweets of videos

(ii) The attitude that truth is, at best, a convenient coincidence that can be superseded by ideological, instrumental, and/or emotional concerns:
Inaccuracy was deemed less important than 'imminent threat.'

(iii) The attitude that acting on certain beliefs, specifically false ones, can be a good in and of itself:
There was something good about these misleading tweets--it was apparently a matter of national significance.
(i) The example shows a concern for truthfulness. Trump was challenged and, in his own way, attempted to justify his views.

(ii) Instrumental falsehoods are usually put forward and/or believed for a reason (e.g., another perceived justification or truth). Post-truth seems to offhandedly allow for widespread delusion. This is a strong and unwarranted claim.

* Post-truth seems to be, at best, a convenient yet overly reductive shorthand to describe assertions we disagree with (that are often legitimately problematic!).

Can be used by anyone against any view, e.g., Trump's appropriation of "fake news."
(A) Assertions made for convenience or comfort are still conditioned by an interest in 'getting things right.'

(B) Assertions made "by virtue of the absurd" seem, in most cases, to be less valuable than warranted assertions (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, p.60). All things being equal, having warrant is a type of good in making assertions that nullifies the value of absurd.
POST-TRUTH:

1. LACKS PLAUSIBILITY
   It is difficult to figure out how one can be sincerely post-truth, Given the conceptual/linguistic value of truth + value of warranted assertions over falsehoods. There is still a widespread concern with getting things right.

2. LACKS COHERENCE + PLAUSIBILITY
   Viciously circular. It implies that there is no concern for truth by being concerned with truth.

3. MISTAKES TRUTH WITH PASSING AS TRUTH
   Saying that there is "no truth," "too many truths," or that interpreters don't care about truth, confuses the endorsement of cognitively primed assertions with warranted assertions.

4. CONVENIENT, BUT A RED HERRING
   Post-truth paints the majority of people as operating without a concern for truth—that their emotions override any type of practice that has truth-orientation. It distracts from trying to encourage better practices of justificatory responsibility.
leveraging the space of reasons
LATERAL (e.g., taking bearings)
Determining the warrant and meaning of an assertion through its context. For textual documents, this includes:
- Reviewing secondary sources cited/footnoted in the original text. Is the original source's interpretation accurate? Do the secondary sources provide more meaning?
- Reading commentary, analysis, and criticism of the original text
- Evaluating the historico-political context of the original text and its author(s).

VERTICAL (e.g., close reading)
Determining the warrant and meaning of assertions more or less on its own terms. For textual documents, this includes:
- Looking up definitions of complex terms, jargon, and non-English words (e.g., Latin)
- Assessing the internal consistency and coherence of the text. Are there contradictory facts or arguments? Are there leaps in the logic of the text (e.g., non sequitur)?
- Identifying clear indications of meaning (e.g., a thesis statement, arguments, or beliefs)
- Working out the structure of the text

examples from class
In general, students were not citing sources, let alone citing according to a given style.

I consulted with students, elders, and Indigenous professors, and relevant literature to emphasize the relational nature of citation, rather than focusing primarily on academic integrity.

As a result, we framed citation in terms of Indigenous scholar and educator Evelyn Steinhauer’s criteria for research: "Respect, Reciprocity and Relationality (as cited in Wilson, 2008, p.58).

Result: instructors said citation was more prevalent as a practice among students. This did not markedly improve the alignment with citation style standards.
MALAPROPISMS + COMMUNICATION

At a BBQ, a friend tells you, "I'm going to get a hutdog."

"hut" + "dog"

WE NEED TO APPEAL TO SALIENT CONTEXTUAL INGREDIENTS TO MAKE SENSE OF THIS STATEMENT
conclusions

1. TRUTH, CONTEXT + CONSTRUCTION ARE MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE. con/anti-con debate leads to theoretical paralysis. I have proposed an adjustment to remedy this that seems to fit our practices.

2. TRUTH/WARRANT ARE THE BASIS FOR SOCIAL PRACTICES, INCLUDING INFORMATION EVALUATION.

3. IT SEEMS TO BE THE CASE THAT MOST PEOPLE FEEL COMFORTABLE MAKING USE OF WARRANT AND FRAMING THEIR VIEWS IN TERMS OF JUSTIFICATION. even making the case for post-truth or constructionist ideas, one makes a case within a context that follows norms related to warrant.

4. WE NEED TO MAKE EFFORTS TO MAKE OUR NORMS OF ASSERTION EXPLICIT THROUGH CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF OUR SOCIAL PRACTICES AND PEDAGOGY. ONCE THIS IS DONE WE CAN REVISE THEM ITERATIVELY. NO NECESSARY END TO THIS PROCESS OF INQUIRY.
Questions?
Thanks
References


