

Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry
Department of Psychiatry, McGill University
www.mcgill.ca/tcpsych



Advanced Study Institute

The Fragility of Truth:
*Social Epistemology in a Time of
Polarization and Pandemic*

June 30, 2022

Online

Register for the conference at:
www.mcgill.ca/tcpsych/training/advanced

The Fragility of Truth: Social Epistemology in a Time of Polarization and Pandemic

The COVID pandemic, political polarization, and the climate crisis have revealed that large segments of the population do not trust the best available knowledge and expertise in making vital decisions regarding their health, the governance of society, and the fate of the planet. What guides information-seeking, trust in authority, and decision-making in each of these domains? Finding reliable information to make decisions presents enormous challenges in a world in which the internet increases access to information, accelerates the viral spread of images and ideas, and creates loops that amplify extreme positions. Many people seem to be captured by an array of increasingly bizarre conspiracy theories and ill-informed interpretations of events. Are we facing a new level of self-destructive irrationality in human behaviour, or has the age of pandemics and the digital niche simply revealed the fragility of human knowledge-seeking? Is conflict over meaning along tribal lines intrinsic to human thought and sociality?

How do people make sense of complex events and chart a course in a sea of information, misinformation and deliberate disinformation? How have social media changed the dynamics of information seeking, certainty and authority? What role do scientific and technocratic communication play in these dynamics?

This Advanced Study Institute will bring together an interdisciplinary group of scholars from psychiatry, psychology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy and public health to consider the challenges posed by the new information ecology. Presentations will address: (1) theories of social epistemology, rationality and irrationality, science and pseudoscience; (2) case studies of the dynamics of misinformation; (3) pathologies of information seeking and belief, paranoia, delusion and radicalization; and (4) strategies for healthy knowledge ecologies and pluralistic civil society.

conference program

All sessions will be held online

Thursday, June 30, 2022

9:00-9:30

Welcome & Introduction:

The Fragility of Truth in the Age of Viral Disinformation

Laurence J. Kirmayer, *McGill University*

9:30-10:00

The Fractal Model of Society, the Internet, and the Central Role of Science in Democracy

Harry Collins, *Cardiff University*

10:00-10:30

Are Conspiracy Beliefs Pathological?

Lisa Bortolotti, *University of Buckingham*

10:30-11:00 Break

11:00-11:30

Conformity and Rebellion in Troubled Times: What if Alternative Truths are Protective?

Cécile Rousseau, *McGill University*

11:30-12:00

Evolution, Cognitive Biases and Information Ecology

Thomas Hills, *Warwick University*

12:00-12:30 **Panel Discussion**

Pathologies of Reason and the Epistemic Virtues of Science

12:30-2:00 Lunch

2:00-2:30

Logics of Care Amidst Fear and COVID-19 in Middle America

Emily Mendenhall, *Georgetown University*

2:30-3:00

Seeking wisdom in an Uncertain and Polarized World

Igor Grossman, *University of Waterloo*

3:00-3:30

Navigating the Post-Truth World: How Can Education (or "Information Literacy"), Policy and Technology Help People Find Better Information?

Kimiz Dalkir, *McGill University*

3:30-4:00

Radical Civility as the Antidote to Polarization

Robert Danisch, *University of Waterloo*

4:00-5:00

Panel Discussion

Epistemic Communities, Embodied Knowing and the Politics of Pluralism

The ASI Conference will be preceded (June 28 & 29) by a 2-day workshop for researchers working in this area. Enrolment in the workshop is limited.

Register for the workshop or the online conference at:
www.mcgill.ca/tcpsych/training/advanced



Papers presented at the 2022 ASI will appear in a special issue of *Transcultural Psychiatry*
<http://tps.sagepub.com>