

## Controversial Conversations: Teaching in a Post-Truth World

Kate Richmond, PhD

We live in an increasingly politically charged and polarized environment. Students are exposed to extreme viewpoints and often only hear opinions that resonate within the echo chamber of their already formed beliefs. Simultaneously, they are more inclined to engage with people with opposing views through anonymous forums (e.g., social media, etc.) and less likely to develop the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills necessary for critical engagement with one another. Communication scholars have referred to this as a “post-truth” world.

As teachers, we must help our students develop tools to navigate the complex world we live in. In this talk, I’ll discuss lessons learned from writing a Psychology of Women & Gender textbook. Specifically, I will focus on how best to help students develop the skills needed to discuss complicated, often politically-charged, issues without relying on reductionist answers. This includes incorporating an intersectional perspective, developing both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, and strengthening critical thinking skills around information literacy. Helping students refine these tools within the context of the diverse and fast-paced lived experiences of both themselves and others will also assist them to be more critically engaged with their communities.

I will highlight concrete examples of controversial topics that can be approached from various sides and demonstrate how, even when available data is analyzed, not all issues have easy answers. For example, one strategy is to present controversial practices (e.g., single-sex education, sex work) and ask students to determine if they are empowering or oppressing for girls and women. Rather than providing an answer, students must review data from multiple

perspectives and examine competing values. Techniques such as these, as well as others, allow students to learn how to better understand how to look at data to evaluate truth claims as well as the link between knowledge and power.