

## Your Truth and Lived Experience Do Not Outweigh the Facts

In an era of complete relativism, it is easy to see why there are so many adherents to the idea that if we fervently believe something, it is "our truth". Speaking out about important issues is a powerful tool and nobody's voice should ever be muzzled but using the term "your/my/their truth" undermines the power of truth itself. Experiences we have lived through and the emotions felt or opinions we strongly and fervently hold based upon those experiences are still only personal viewpoints.

Every human is entitled to a set of beliefs and opinions, but not a separate set of unassailable truths. A lived experience has no factual authority and entitling it as a personal truth prevents others from being able to question your opinion, criticize it, offer different perspectives, or challenge it in any way. By insulating your opinion behind the veil of "your truth" you have effectively prohibited anyone from engaging you in healthy debate or real conversation.

Truth is defined as a verified or indisputable fact, the state or character of being true, honesty or integrity. It is not open to subjective interpretation. The actual truth exists, regardless of what you believe about it. Applying an assumed motivation or intention to someone else's actions that you believe to exist does not necessarily make that true. It makes it a lens through which we view the facts.

Consider the possibility that if truth is relative to each person, even a Holocaust Denier can claim their fervent belief as their truth and their lived experience. If facts and truth itself do not matter as much as perceived truth and lived experiences, then disinformation is a tremendous threat to credible news reporting. A recent study showed how susceptible our brains are to conspiracies. Over 126,000 rumors and falsehoods were retweeted by more than a million humans. Propaganda and misinformation have an incredible reach. Our brains are wired for it and entire professions depend on advertising and propaganda. Which would we rather hear? The unvarnished truth or an interpretation of what the facts mean? The interpretation feeds our need for dogma and prevents us from having to actually critically think and give consideration to humans outside ourselves.

How is it possible that we, as intelligently designed beings, are so unable to discern fact from opinion? Why would our interpretation of the facts hold so much weight over anyone else's? How can we shift this focus? Start by being aware when you speak the words "my truth" or "my lived experience". When a fellow student, professor or colleague does, simply ask questions to learn their perspective. If you do not understand their perspective, ask more questions. You do not need to agree on anything, but the facts involved. Agreement on these then allows both people in the discussion to decide their own interpretation of the events based on their own backgrounds and varied life experiences and known surrounding events and it opens

the door for healthy debate and conversation. We Aggies are known for our respect and compassion worldwide. We can start by remembering to exhibit these to one other here in Aggieland as we re-engage with civility and kindness. No one person's truth is more important than anyone else's because each of us has a unique perspective that should be equally respected. But the facts deserve true credibility when we speak fundamental truth, regardless of each other's feelings.

Be kind. Understand Everyone brings a unique perspective. Value truth.

Proud Aggie