

Healing community divisions, online and off

A workshop with Dr. Gillian "Gus" Andrews
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Our communities are divided. Poll after poll shows splits in what we think about issues affecting our communities. The media are divided, broadcasting mind-bogglingly different versions of the facts. Our online discussions are angry and hateful, even leading family members to block each other out.

What's worse, we're learning that shady characters far from our communities are using our differences of opinion to turn us against each other and sway elections. Online forums encourage readers to "investigate" conspiracy theories at a pizza parlor in Washington, DC, or commit violent acts against places of worship. Voters are targeted by Facebook messages frightening them into staying home on election days.

What can we do to defend ourselves against this dangerous disinformation? How can we foster understanding, tolerance, and productive discussions in our communities?

A little-known educational technique from the 1930s may be just what we need to mend our public discussions. Born in a historical moment when populist demagogues spread propaganda, riling up communities around the world, these techniques from the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA) may hold the key to building community understanding.

In this workshop, Dr. Andrews will lead participants through IPA-inspired, educator-tested exercises that will engage them thoughtfully with their family and community history. They will explore how this history shapes their attitudes towards messages from media online and off, and towards discussions with their neighbors. They will learn how these media messages may be crafted to play on their emotions and beliefs, and identify examples of messages which may be trying to take advantage of them and fan the flames of disagreements in their communities.

These in-person workshops can be conducted in sessions as brief as 90 minutes, or extended for full-day sessions as desired. If you'd like to bring Dr. Andrews to your community to lead these workshops in the summer of 2020, get in touch!

