Re-Imagining Digital and New Media Literacies in Social Work Education: A Critical Framework for Overcoming #FakeNews, Divisiveness, and Injustice

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Abstract: *Social unrest and division within the United States has become more visible and magnified since the 2016 election of former President Trump. This unrest has been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic and white supremist attacks across the country. Throughout this era, information has been perpetuated through systemic and cultural networks promoting pseudoscience, #fakenews, misinformation, and explicit marginalization of racial, gender, ethnic, and cultural minorities. During this time, social work practitioners and educators have struggled to counter misinformation in classrooms and practice contexts. This paper proposes a newly re-imagined framework for addressing misinformation and civil discourse in social work education through the adoption and infusion of digital and new media literacies from within a critical theory driven epistemological framework. Recommendations are provided for incorporating tools, skills, and competencies throughout the curriculum in a more meaningful way that will help the profession combat misinformation, promote civil discourse, and utilize best practices in a digitally augmented society. Only then will the social work profession be able to meet the current and future challenges and opportunities that will undoubtedly accompany the expansion of digital technologies throughout our society.*

Keywords: *Digital literacies, critical thinking, new media literacies, misinformation, disinformation*

In the 2004 book *Post-truth Era*, Ralph Keyes argues that deception is a major part of modern life. Lies and dishonesty have been gamified by those who compete for news coverage and Keyes further contends that dishonesty may be acceptable in certain situations. Reality TV, satirical and opinion news programs, conspiracy theories, as well as the rise of social media may be contributing factors to a post-truth era (Sismondo, 2017). Propaganda, fake news, and misinformation have historically been sown throughout the world, but never with such speed and quantity as we see today (boyd, 2018; Rushkoff et al., 2018). Since the 2016 election of President Trump, disinformation campaigns and social unrest have risen across U.S. society. The Covid-19 pandemic further amplified this division along with attacks by white supremists and the explicit marginalization of racial, gender, ethnic, and cultural minorities (Mar Fariña et al., 2021). During this time, social work practitioners have struggled to learn and use new technologies that serve the needs of clients, while educators, students, and practitioners struggle to create spaces for civil discourse and progressive change (Banks et al., 2020; Bhatt & Mackenzie, 2019; Mishna, Milne et al., 2021). As a result of these challenges, social work has been limited in its role for social change in society. In a post-truth era, how are social workers supposed to address

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these problems? Where do we begin? What is truth, how is it constructed, and who creates it? What are the specific competencies social workers need to empower, intervene, and advocate for positive social change amidst a sea of misinformation?

Disinformation and misinformation are two sides of the same coin that present fake news, alternative facts, or other misleading information. The main difference between the two terms is that disinformation is misleading information that is created and shared with the specific intent to deceive or mislead for the purposes of causing harm, political or personal gain, whereas misinformation is often shared without such intent (Buchanan, 2020). The challenges of misinformation and disinformation cannot be blamed solely on the ultra-right or on digital and mainstream media. Most of us who have grown up and attended school in the U.S. were presented with histories, narratives, and subjects as "Truth" or "Facts" that should be accepted without question. Consider that many young people are still taught that Christopher Columbus "discovered" America or that early European settlers and indigenous peoples embraced each other during the first Thanksgiving. Additionally, most Americans were taught that the Civil War was not primarily about slavery and that Abraham Lincoln was a hero to Blacks (Bohan et al., 2020; Heimlich, 2011). While there may be some truths in these narratives of history, there are also inaccuracies, false narratives, and misinformation (Angell, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989; Gray et al., 2013).

The presence and perpetuation of disinformation is found not only in our written, collective history as a nation, but in what is often omitted from that history or in the framing of historical events, which may be as damning to the literacy of our society as what is written. Consider the framing of colonialization as a land rush or the establishment of a free nation, rather than the stealing of land and the enslavement and genocide of people (Angell, 2019). Why do most historical texts still call the Tulsa Race Massacre, one of the most egregious examples of white supremacy in U.S. history, the Tulsa Race Riots? While we provide only a few examples for the sake of brevity here, there are numerous examples of such disinformation that far pre-date the election of President Donald Trump and the digital age. These symbolize a greater issue in our society that Foucault (1980) refers to as the "archaeology of knowledge and genealogy of power" (p. 129) or how societal elites utilize power to create, frame, and disseminate knowledge to the people as a means of social control, while rejecting the legitimacy of counter narratives and critical accounts of historical events, figures, and practices (Reisch, 2019). In today's digitally mediated environment, we must discern information, intentions, motivations, and the epistemology of ignorance (Bhatt & MacKenzie, 2019) to move forward in a way that deconstructs systems of power or oppression in order to benefit everyone more equitably.

The protection of the status quo through the continued perpetuation of disinformation is not isolated to historical documents and texts but is also found in existing policies. Currently, more than 20 states have passed or introduced laws banning public institutions from teaching perspectives or theories deemed as threatening to the whitewashed narratives of history or that make any reference to a specific group of people as racist or otherwise oppressive (Ray & Gibbons, 2021). These policies enhance the existing divide among Americans and generate confusion for social work students about what is considered legitimate knowledge or facts and greater complexities for social work educators trying to

dispel disinformation and helping students discern misinformation, disinformation, and critical perspectives.

It is also important to note that social work education is culpable in spreading misinformation through the whitewashing and colonizing of its own professional narrative. Social work students are often taught about the progressiveness of major reform movements and social work pioneers such as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond. While there are undoubtedly truths embedded in these narratives, educators and scholars often neglect important details about the history of social work that leave students with a limited and misinformed perspective. Social work educators and scholars regularly omit the segregated nature of settlement houses and historical professional organizations. Most students do not realize the importance and necessity of professional associations such as the Association of Black Social Workers or the Association of Latino/a Social Workers. Students are seldom taught about the role the profession played in the removal of indigenous children from their homes or WWII internment camps (Brady et al., 2019; Mullaly & Dupré, 2018; Reisch, 2019). If social work education is to truly reimagine itself and better prepare students to practice in a digitally mediated world of rampant misinformation, we must not only inculcate digital and new media literacies across competencies and curriculums (Young et al., 2018), but also imbue a critical perspective that encourages the appraisal and analysis of all forms of information.

The main objective of this paper is to propose a new epistemological framework for the social work profession that combats disinformation, divisiveness, injustice as well as build capacity among social workers in attaining digital competencies. This framework infuses contemporary critical theories and perspectives with digital and new media literacies to provide social workers, educators, and others with the analytical tools and skills necessary to face the challenges of the modern era and shape the future in a more positive direction. Through this framework we posit four interrelated questions grounded in critical theory to help re-imagine social work education and how digital and new media literacies can be embedded throughout the curriculum to prepare social workers for a future profession that will undoubtedly be digitally mediated, complex, and offer new opportunities for change.

Theoretical Framework

Philosophy of Science

The area of inquiry known as Philosophy of Science analyzes the underlying values related to ontology, epistemology, human nature, and social change across diverse social science disciplines including social work (Fay, 1996; Guba, 1990; Kuhn, 1996). It provides a path that implicitly guides how scholars think about legitimate knowledge within the social environment (ontology), how knowledge should be created and appraised (epistemology), and the nature of social justice and change (Fay, 1996). When applied to social work, the Philosophy of Science provides educators, practitioners, and students with a critical lens to underlying assumptions and values related to human nature, society, and the process of creating and appraising knowledge.

One of the most relevant perspectives in the Philosophy of Science was provided by Guba (1990), who discussed three major worldviews for understanding the formation and legitimization of knowledge and the nature of social change. Guba described a postpositivist worldview through objectivity and a belief that knowledge should be produced through the traditional scientific method. Postpositivism embraces social control and assumes that existing societal structures and systems are functioning to promote the greater good for the most people. Many scholars have connected postpositivist values to ideologies and practices related to neoliberalism, which embraces maintaining the status quo and social order of societies through controlling economic and political systems (Brady et al., 2014; Kuhn, 1996).

Additionally, Guba's (1990) framework identified social constructivism and critical paradigms as alternative worldviews to postpositivism. The social constructivist worldview emphasizes that truth and knowledge are bound by the subjectivity of lived experiences and, as a result, alternative truths and understandings are necessary to avoid hegemony and promote incremental levels of social change. Finally, within Guba's critical worldview, there is an assumption that the status quo found in societal structures and dominant cultures is problematic, hegemonic, and in need of transformation. Therefore, it is imperative for social work scholars, professionals, and consumers of knowledge to have the critical thinking and analytic skills necessary to effectively discern the quality, legitimacy, and importance of knowledge, while also considering the legitimacy of alternative positions and perspectives. These skills and knowledge are essential to bringing about transformative and/or innovation within social work and society (Guba, 1990). Within Guba's critical paradigm is a mutual respect for both structurally oriented critical theories, often rooted in the works of Marx, Weber, Gideons, Mullaly, and others, along with social constructivist critical theories rooted in the works of Nietzsche, Gramsci, Foucault, and Habermas. In this paper, we position our framework for applying digital and new media literacies within the social constructivist critical perspectives to emphasize the subjective and dynamic nature of information in the digital age, while working diligently to avoid hegemony with regards to any utopian vision of society or all encompassing "Truth." We seek to build the capacity of social work educators and students to be equipped with the digital and new media literacy tools needed to properly assess and appraise all forms of information through both a rational and critical lens.

Critical Theory

While Philosophy of Science frameworks do not preference some theories over others, it is a useful tool for understanding how to select an appropriate theory and practice tool(s) for a specific context, aim, and assumption (Brady et al., 2014). Given the current paper's focus on critically analyzing how social workers, students, and educators come to understand, use, interact with, and create knowledge in an increasingly digital and virtual society, the authors selected critical theory as the most useful tool for critiquing existing practices and pedagogies for teaching digital and new media literacies. Critical theory is especially important given recent state-level policies banning the use and teaching of critical viewpoints and theories such as, Marxism, Critical Race Theory, and anti-colonialist perspectives (Constance-Huggins, 2019; Sawyer & Brady, 2020).

Origins and Evolution. Critical theory derives from Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives about power, oppression, injustice, and social change (Fook, 2002). It provides an integral lens for critiquing inequality and questioning the legitimacy of maintaining the status quo (Dominelli, 2010; Fenton, 2014; Fook, 2002). Critical theory seeks to accomplish this through deconstructing hegemonic structures and systems to identify the underlying values and power that upholds social control (Constance-Huggins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989). Rather than maintaining the existing social order through incremental changes, critical theory seeks transformative and innovative changes in communities, social structures, and systems by providing individuals with the tools to deconstruct societal systems of knowledge and truth, to critically analyse and appraise existing information, and to understand how to generate authentic, trustworthy knowledge (Dominelli, 2010; Fook, 2002; Gray et al., 2013; Habermas, 1984).

First Generation Critical Theory. The origins of critical theory are often attributed to philosophers of the Frankfurt School that include Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Fromm, and Habermas (Fook, 2002). Although most major work in critical theory is accredited to the Frankfort School, two distinct branches of critical theory (first and second generation) are rooted in the seminal work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche (Fook, 2002; Marx & Engels, 1848/1967). First generation critical theory is more structural in nature and thus emphasizes and builds upon constructs and perspectives from Karl Marx. The most salient of these Marxian perspectives includes an understanding of false consciousness and consciousness raising, along with accepting that society's ruling classes benefit from maintaining hegemony and social order by oppressing and marginalizing groups with fewer resources and power (Marx & Engels, 1848/1967; Mullaly & Dupré, 2018). First generation critical theorists often focused transformative change strategies on radically altering existing societal structures and systems and replacing them with more socially just ones that benefit society's most marginalized groups (Fook, 2002). While many critical social work scholars and educators still embrace this focus on structural transformation, others find fault with many of its tenets (Fook, 2002; Levin, 1995).

Second Generation Critical Theory. Critics of first-generation critical theory see it as overly hegemonic and simply replacing one hegemonic system for social order with another (Mullaly & Dupré, 2018). Second generation critical theorists believe it is problematic to assume marginalized groups are more socially just and less oppressive than the existing government or privileged class, thus creating a more subjective oriented branch of critical theory during the postmodern era. Postmodernism is loosely defined as a framework in which absolute truths and widely accepted assumptions of society, science, history, arts, and culture are critically questioned and alternative perspectives are given more legitimacy in many dimensions of society (Crenshaw, 1989; Fay, 1996). This branch of critical theory was established by the work of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and later advanced by postmodern thinkers such as Habermas, Freire, Agger, Derrida, and Foucault (Agger, 1992; Foucault, 1980; Habermas, 1984). Given their belief in questioning what is seen as objective reality, postmodernists deconstruct (unpack) language and knowledge by asking what systems of power affect interpretation or meaning. As one of the major postmodern thinkers, Derrida argued for the need to deconstruct the ways

subjective Western values or hegemony underpin the knowledge base of society (Levin, 1995).

Applying Second Generation Critical Theory. Given the emphasis of second-generation critical theorists on reducing hegemony and power differentials as well as decolonizing teaching and research methods to innovate and transform society, the authors identify it as the most applicable lens for analyzing challenges to learning and using digital and new media tools and literacies in social work practice and its curriculum. It is through a second-generation perspective that this paper identifies contemporary challenges in social work to accessing, utilizing, and interrogating digital information, utilizing best practices in virtual spaces, and understanding how to incorporate digital and new media literacies into professional practice and social work education.

The following questions are rooted in a critical analysis of power, knowledge creation, social change, and applies the philosophy of science lens to understand the competing values and assumptions of how social work embraces and/or hinders digital and new media literacies. We infuse digital and new media literacies into this framework to re-imagine the future of social work education, inform professional practice, and conceptualize how digital and new media literacies can promote broad, innovative, and positive impacts on our global society.

1. What constitutes legitimate knowledge in a digitally mediated society?
2. Who are considered legitimate creators of digital information?
3. How do educators prepare social workers to practice within a digitally mediated and technology driven society?
4. How do social workers leverage digital technologies to create innovative change that makes broader impacts in society?

The immense and rapid flow of information through our global society, aided by digital spaces and technology, necessitates these critical questions. These provide social workers and educators with a framework for building their capacity to implement and infuse digital and new media literacies throughout curriculums and practice to prepare students to serve clients, communities, and society more effectively both now and in the future.

Digital and New Media Literacies

Digital and new media literacies (DNML) is a term that evolved with technology and encompasses the technical knowledge, social, cultural, and emotional skills necessary to participate in the modern digitally mediated era. This era is characterized by the ubiquitous use of smartphone technology and Internet devices in the home, work, and public spaces which have dramatic impacts on human beings and society (Hedberg, 2011; Jenkins et al., 2006; Rheingold, 2012; Twenge, 2017). The term digital literacies is often used as a generic synonym encapsulating media literacy or the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms (Hobbs, 1998). Digital competence is possessing the skills and knowledge to understand and utilize information communication technologies (Perron et al., 2010; Young, 2015). Digital and media literacies are well

researched in the disciplines of education, media studies, and communications (Belshaw, 2011; Hobbs, 2011; Laar et al., 2017; Rheingold, 2012) but are still emerging in the field of social work (Lens, 2002; Young, 2015; Young et al., 2018; Young & Glennon, 2021; Young & Ronquillo, 2021). Belshaw (2011) contends the multitude of definitions presents difficulties for effectively employing digital literacies yet the process of developing a definition is just as important as its outcome and relies on contextual factors. We agree that context is important, but the challenge remains that technology and human behavior are in constant flux and we need to recognize that despite the continual change, digital literacies need to incorporate the participatory aspects of new media along with critical thinking, socio-cultural awareness, and participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2006; Young, 2015). Digital and new media literacies build upon the traditional definition of media literacy that uses critical thinking while also incorporating social and cultural competencies needed to participate in and understand the digital world. Additionally, DNML recognize the importance of participatory culture, technical knowledge and skill, critical perspectives, communication, collaboration, creativity, ethics, and the evolution of new media technologies along with their impact on individuals, institutions, and communities online and in the real world (Young & Glennon, 2021; Young & Ronquillo, 2021). By recognizing the convergence of these societal intersections, social workers can leverage DNML to better understand, intervene, empower, and create social innovations which contribute to social justice and positive social change (Young & Glennon, 2021; Young & Ronquillo, 2021).

The question of what constitutes legitimate knowledge in a digitally mediated society is central to the premise of digital and new media literacies and also asks how all sources of knowledge are portrayed and represented in classrooms, across media sources, and throughout societal institutions (Bhatt & MacKenzie, 2019). The underlying skill here is one of judgement and critical appraisal of the information searched for and consumed online. We live in a world dominated by algorithms that promote information and influence decision making from online shopping to news consumption on social media (Noble, 2018). Indeed, what you "like" is altering the world you see online and impacting real-life interactions. Artificial intelligence, big data, and algorithms are both a solution to and a problem of what constitutes knowledge and information. The challenge with these tools relates to algorithmic bias, misinformation, and privacy (Boyd & Crawford, 2011; Eubanks, 2018; Gillingham & Graham, 2017; Learned-Miller et al., 2020; Noble, 2018). These tools have inherent limitations that can promulgate ignorance and sustain oppression or exploitation (Eubanks, 2018; Bhatt & MacKenzie, 2019). Therefore, social workers need to be aware of such limitations if they are going to shape future use or critique information conveyed via these mechanisms.

A Philosophy of Science and Critical Theory lens may suggest multiple ways of knowing but ultimately what constitutes legitimate knowledge must be scrutinized to ensure information is not constructed by powerful elites as a means to marginalize the voices of individuals facing oppression or as a method to whitewash history or current events (Constance-Huggins, 2019). One challenge to this idea is that misinformation and identity politics infused with biased algorithms can constantly propagate misinformation and the weaponization of memes (Noble, 2018; Rushkoff et al., 2018). Internet users may

succumb to the fallacies of conspiracy theories or discover information that aligns with their core beliefs or fears. For some, they may disagree with the information they encounter yet the sheer volume and veracity of it makes for an overwhelming argument dissuading users against their better judgement. This is why we see issues like Pizza Gate (Kennedy, 2017) and Q-Anon becoming as popular as some major religions in the United States (Russonello, 2021). In practice, exit counsellors and clinicians work with individuals that succumb to the online misinformation (Smith, 2020) and social workers contend with fake news, misinformation, and disinformation as data and technology transcend large swaths of the population. Naturally, this leads us to discuss the second question regarding who are considered legitimate creators of digital information.

These two questions align well within a digital and new media literacies perspective to help someone discern the truth of information. A Facebook user may come across content that appears to lack authority or credibility, but they are unsure as to its truthfulness. Examining who or what entity created the information in question can help one determine whether it is verifiable or false. There are several skills and techniques that can be used to analyze information. One popular technique is Mike Caulfield's (2019) SIFT method that involves four moves including: *stop* and ask what the reputation is of the source; *investigate* the source more closely; *find* better coverage of the issue from more reputable sources; and *trace* the claims, quotes, or media to the original context. Caulfield's method incorporates some of the new media literacies skills identified by Jenkins et al. (2006) such as transmedia navigation, which is the ability to follow the flow of stories and news across multiple platforms. New media literacies (NML) represent a framework of social skills and cultural competencies needed to navigate our digitally mediated world (Young, 2015; Young & Ronquillo, 2021). Another NML skill is networking, or the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information. Paramount to the SIFT method is the NML skill of judgement, which is the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources (Jenkins et al., 2006).

The CRAAP method (currency, reliability, authority, accuracy, and purpose) is another approach first developed within the library sciences to help students apply critical thinking to discern or judge the credibility of information online (Blakeslee, 2004). Although this method is useful, it fails to recognize the constant stream of misinformation across a variety of websites and social media. For example, when utilizing the CRAAP method a user could conclude a source has relevant authority but yet that authoritative source is still sharing fake news or misinformation. This presents unique challenges for the user to discern between factual news or data and misinformation when that information is presented elsewhere online (Fielding, 2019). Just because a source seems like it can be trusted does not mean it has accurate information. Remixing, integrating, and utilizing specific techniques from the broader digital literacies' paradigm can provide social workers with the digital competency necessary to critique and construct knowledge, empower, advocate, and transform the profession, and impact the broader society (Young & Glennon, 2021; Young & Ronquillo, 2021). However, more needs to be done to prepare social workers to encounter disinformation, intervene in an appropriate way, and reimagine social work education and professional development.

How do educators prepare social workers to practice within a digital and technology driven society? The concise answer is we must incorporate digital competencies into social work education. Many scholars and educators have been arguing for this increased attention to information communication technologies and the need for digital competencies for more than two decades (Mishna, Sanders et al., 2021; Perron et al., 2010; Young, 2015; Young & Glennon, 2021; Young & Ronquillo, 2021). The 2015 Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2015) addresses the ethical and appropriate use of technology, the Grand Challenges for Social Work discuss harnessing technology for social good (American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare, 2016), and the literature on technology in social work education has increased sharply with books, articles, and conference presentations devoted to the subject. However, not enough has been done to integrate specific knowledge and skills into social work education, therefore digital and new media literacies must be the foundation upon which digital competence is built.

Digital and new media literacies (DNML), as described previously, encompasses the technical knowledge, social, cultural, and emotional skills necessary to participate in the modern digitally mediated era (Young, 2015; Young & Ronquillo, 2021). Developing DNML and related competencies ought to be integrated throughout social work education from clinical practice to research and policy to community and organizational practice to advocacy and activism (Brady et al., 2015; Young & Glennon, 2021). We need the skills of DNML embedded at every corner of social work practice, even when no technology is present. It is likely most social work practitioners will have a client with challenges stemming from the influence of digital technology: whether it is a relationship that ended because of social media, cyberbullying, telehealth, searching for research online, contributing to a cause via social media, or promoting an organization's programs and services. Technology initially crept into social work practice (Mishna et al., 2012) but now it is transforming practice in every sphere.

Social work education can prepare future professionals with digital competencies by infusing DNML throughout the curriculum. This can include using social media to instruct on human behavior and the social environment (Baker & Hitchcock, 2017), using Twitter in macro practice and policy classes (Hitchcock & Young, 2016; Teixeira & Hash, 2017), examining the benefits and challenges of big data, data visualization, and data science in research (Cariceo et al., 2018; Perron et al., 2020), and using a variety of technologies for students to develop their digital competence (Gilster et al., 2020; McInroy, 2021; Young & Ronquillo, 2021; Young et al., 2018). By infusing digital literacies within social work education, we equip students with the necessary critical theoretical perspective to unpack the sources of information, the credentials and motivations of knowledge creators or influencers, and who benefits from information as well as who may be harmed as a result of the narrative being promoted. In reality, most information transmitted through any source is seldom completely accurate or entirely false, nor can individual epistemological values and views be discounted for how people decipher information (Foucault, 1980; Habermas, 1984). Such skills are not meant to discredit one ideology over another (e.g., discrediting right-wing conservatism in favor of leftist progressiveness), but encourages social workers to critique and appraise all forms of information. Embedding digital and

new media literacies throughout the curriculum does not need to supplant but rather complements other methods of instruction used to enhance students' knowledge and skills. Given that social work is filled with its own legacy of supporting and even promoting oppression and marginalization, it is important for practitioners to scrutinize their own knowledge base and institutions (Mullaly & Dupré, 2018; Reisch, 2019; Sawyer & Brady, 2020). In this way, reimagining social work education will directly impact future social work practice.

The fourth question related to reimagining social work education asks how social workers leverage digital technologies to create innovative change and make broader impacts on society. Leveraging digital technologies and social media begins with social work education and continues through one's career with professional development opportunities and lifelong learning. For example, the use of professional collaboration networks, which allow social workers to engage in participatory spaces such as Twitter, can help one to continue learning through a distributed network, participate in informal mentoring, and acquire specific skills (Sage et al., 2020). In the classroom we need better integration of technology – specifically digital and new media literacies – to encourage, motivate, and help students learn and apply their new digital competencies in the field (Hitchcock et al., 2019; Mishna, Sanders et al., 2021; Young et al., 2018; Young & Ronquillo, 2021). This includes the use of technology, and at times specifically not using technology, to apply digital and new media literacies (DNML) skills such as Play for students to experiment with their surroundings as a means of problem solving (Jenkins et al., 2006; Young, 2015; Young & Ronquillo, 2021). Playing card and board games with different sets of rules and transitioning students in and out of game play can help them understand the importance of Negotiation as a new media literacy skill, which is the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives while grasping and following alternative norms (Young & Ronquillo, 2021). Engaging students in a process of learning that connects them to their interests while being academically oriented and maintaining a shared purpose allows the educator to use DNML, technology, and social work knowledge to help students think critically, collaborate effectively, and ultimately accomplish the task at hand (Young, 2020). Once students understand there is a method of using social media and digital technologies that benefit them and their clients, we will witness a new transformation in the social work profession.

Within macro practice contexts, social work students and practitioners must learn how to critically select and effectively apply digital and virtual tools in complex practice environments, while also understanding how to utilize traditional best practices in virtual and digitally mediated environments. For example, ascertaining the credentials and qualifications of the persons or institutions behind Twitter profiles teaches social workers and students ways to access accurate information about current events, best practices, and professional networks. Although Twitter can be a tool for practitioners and students seeking legitimate perspectives on current events and best practices, social media in general poses challenges that might make it less useful due to the widespread use of fake profiles, specific community guidelines, and the influence of algorithms that mediate user engagement. Nevertheless, some social media platforms have value and benefits to many social workers. Mobile phone chat applications and Geographic Information System (GIS)

software are other promising tools that may help community organizers and activists stay abreast of social unrest and rapidly mobilize others; however, these applications may not be the ideal choice for organizers seeking to build community or local capacity (Brady et al., 2015). The subtle yet important differences between different types of digital technology and associated tools – along with the ongoing challenge of appraising the accuracy, trustworthiness, and credibility of information – makes it imperative for current and future generations of social workers to be equipped with the DNML necessary to navigate the ever changing digitally mediated practice context. Finally, one of the most important aspects of infusing DNML within social work education and practice is to understand, through a philosophy of science and critical theory lens, that technology has inherent challenges which preserve the status quo and may further harm marginalized populations (Bhatt & MacKenzie, 2019; Eubanks, 2018; Noble, 2018). Social workers need to utilize these skills to inspire oppressed groups and embolden them with the same technologies to empower themselves. Some may argue the master's house will never be dismantled with the master's tools while others contend that before structural transformation can occur, individuals must be equipped with the tools and experiences to promote consciousness raising and the ability to analyze the legitimacy or hegemony of systems and structures of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1968/1996).

Conclusion

Although the authors began collaborating and drafting this paper during the final days of President Trump's administration, the onset of COVID-19, and an era of deep social, racial, cultural, economic, and political unrest, these issues remain salient themes. While many people, including social workers and others in helping professions had a moment of respite and optimism with the election of President Biden, little has changed regarding the widespread use of misinformation, disinformation, and social unrest. The concept of "community" has altered quite a bit over the past 20 years, with more individuals identifying and interacting with community through digital and virtual platforms and spaces. Given that these trends are unlikely to change anytime soon, it is important for social workers and educators to consider the necessity and role that digital and new media literacies must have in any new vision of social work. Although we do not support any singular ideal vision for societal or professional transformation since utopian perspectives can be as hegemonic as the ones they seek to displace. We do however believe it is essential for social work to embrace its position within a digitally mediated society and its responsibility to prepare practitioners to critically navigate the complexities of virtual spaces. This can be done by selecting and applying best practices, and critically appraising the legitimacy, authenticity, and trustworthiness of digitally and non-digitally mediated information. We believe DNML must be integrated throughout the core competencies and standards of social work education, along with adequate training for educators and professionals who may also struggle with understanding these skills and tools, to realize the holistic competence described in the 2015 CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards. Schools of social work must focus on building critical digital and new media literacies among their departments through policies that promote critical thinking, collaboration, and innovation rather than those rooted in risk management and fear. In order

for social work to reimagine itself as a more progressive profession, it must prioritize building social workers' capacity to effectively utilize digital and new media literacies in practice.

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