

Rethinking Digital Citizenship: Learning About Media, Literacy, and Race in Turbulent Times

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RETHINKING DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP: LEARNING ABOUT MEDIA, LITERACY, AND RACE IN TURBULENT TIMES

The practice of politics is changing in the digital age. Indeed, whether one considers mainstream electoral politics or major social movements, the central role of social media and of the digital revolution more generally is clear. Youth are at the forefront of these

changes (Krueger, 2002) and are showcasing their sense of agency, strategic creativity, and commitment as exemplified by their central roles in large-scale movements such as the #blacklivesmatter, #marchforourlives, and the DREAMer movement. Overall, youth participate in politics online at higher rates than adults (Smith, 2013). These new political practices have been described in various ways, including “connective action” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), “e-expressive” participation (Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013), “connected civics” (Ito et al., 2015), and “online participatory politics” (Cohen et al., 2012). Such online political activities are interactive, often peer-based, and generally not deferential to institutional or elite guidance. This shift has transformed the ways that information is accessed, the ways that discourse and reasoning occur, and ultimately, the tools of political participation. To be sure, this transformation creates opportunities; in other ways, it creates challenges.

In this chapter, the authors focus on these opportunities and challenges and on ways that educators might better prepare youth for civic reasoning and discourse in the digital age.¹ More specifically, they analyze differing efforts to support reasoning and discourse by helping youth interact safely and civilly in online spaces, assess the reliability of information, leverage the power of connected learning opportunities, and engage in political action online. The authors find that there is a need to rethink what it means to educate for digital citizenship. Current media literacy efforts have value, but they often focus on individual skills, behaviors, and orientations and fail to prepare students to understand, recognize, and respond to structural factors, particularly racism, as they relate to discourse and reasoning in the digital age.

BROAD SHIFTS IN TECHNOLOGY, POLITICS, AND CULTURE THAT ALTER CIVIC DISCOURSE AND REASONING

Over the past 20 years, our understanding of our digitally networked (Castells, 2000; Raine & Wellman, 2014), participatory (Jenkins, 2006), and connected (Ito et al., 2013) society has shifted substantially. Rather than signaling a separation between how individuals interact online and how they do so in the physical world, the past two decades highlight how digital technologies mediate nearly every setting in our lives. Digital tools and culture affect how individuals learn, communicate, and reason civically. More than a decade ago, media scholar Henry Jenkins (2006) argued that these changes signaled a *participatory culture*, acknowledging that people today do not simply consume media—they also produce, remix, and expand on it.

This kind of peer-to-peer communication altered the nature of institutional influence. Indeed, one used to need institutional support from, for example, a television producer or a newspaper editor to share a perspective with a sizable public. Individuals’ opportunities for discourse generally occurred at meetings unless it was between family and friends. Now, as a result of online social networks, media platforms, and

¹ Along with others in this report, the authors define *civic reasoning* broadly as an effort to respond to the question, “What should we do?” Civic reasoning is done by both individuals and groups and should be informed by many factors including empirical understanding of the situation and the impact of varied responses, strategy, and emotions such as empathy and righteous indignation. Similarly, they use the term *discourse* to refer to discussions that might occur through varied media and again should be both guided by and influence one’s civic reasoning.

varied websites, an individual can share one's ideas at scale with far less institutional oversight.² Many youths take advantage of these opportunities. As Jenkins et al. (2006, p. 9) highlighted, both youth and adults can now "archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways." Young people, in many ways more than others, are engaging with these opportunities. In 2013, 36 percent of youth ages 15–18 reported creating or sharing media with a political focus in the prior 12 months. By way of contrast, 6 percent in this age group worked on a political campaign and 4 percent donated money to a cause or politician (Kahne et al., 2016). Moreover, while many youth do not actively create politically oriented content, they do rely heavily on social media and their participation in online social networks for news (Gottfried et al., 2016; Robb, 2017). In addition, studies have found that online political engagement is more equitably distributed across race and social class than many other forms of political participation such as voting (Cohen et al., 2012; Correa & Jeong, 2011). Indeed, these efforts by youth, and perhaps especially by youth of color, highlight their creativity, their ability to resist ongoing and at times life threatening forms of oppression, and, fundamentally, their resilience and desire to engage. Youth engagement has powered several of the most important social movements of our era. These movements aim to change the answers to critically important questions regarding how the police behave, whether and when racism and sexism are addressed, who gets to be a citizen, who one gets to marry, and the sustainability of our planet. As a result, increased engagement in these online participatory practices—practices labeled as participatory politics in this chapter—have the potential to promote political voice and influence and to do so in ways that are more equitable.

This relatively hopeful framing, taken as a statement of the possibilities of media production for shaping and engaging in civic reasoning and discourse, highlights youth agency and the potentially empowering opportunities of digital culture. Moreover, it is, the authors believe, a helpful counterpoint to the disparaging rhetoric often aimed at youth capacities and activities generally and at their engagement with social media. Indeed, this framing of participatory culture—drawing as it does on youth interests and prosocial leanings—has substantially informed how many progressive educators consider modernizing classroom instruction to align with the 21st century needs of learners (Mirra & Garcia, 2020). The optimism of possibility and the proliferation of maturing civic participation in every crevice of the internet, however, must be tempered. The authors do not wish to either glorify youth or to imply that digital politics are a panacea. The technological, cultural, and political shifts that have taken place also create risks and challenges related to discourse and reasoning.

One set of challenges grows out of the changed nature of gatekeeping. In earlier eras, news organizations were largely able to mediate access to politically oriented information and perspectives. The gatekeeping capacity of these legacy news organizations has been greatly diminished because individuals and organizations have countless ways to share their perspectives with sizable audiences (Madison & DeJarnette, 2017). Today, as Robb (2017) found, 13–18-year-olds were more likely to get their news from social media

² To be sure, the web platforms and search engines are institutions and, in some important respects, can play gatekeeping roles, structuring opportunities for discourse and exposure to content. As discussed later in the chapter, the roles they play, however, are rarely shaped by traditional journalistic values (see Madison & DeJarnette, 2017).

than directly from an institution such as a news show or newspaper. This does not mean that institutional influence has vanished. Rather, as the influence of traditional news organizations has declined, the influence of other institutions has grown. The largely invisible, implicit policies major platforms such as Facebook and Twitter employ regarding user privacy, the forms of speech that are allowed, and the algorithms that determine the kinds of content that users encounter are all calibrated to the interests of for-profit companies that may not be motivated to promote high-quality discourse or reasoning. For example, Facebook controls what information can be seen and the processes through which content can be flagged for moderation (e.g., Gray & Suri, 2019). In October 2019, Facebook's terms of use policies allowed political ads to make false claims (Kang, 2019). As a result, an advertisement with deliberate mistruths about presidential candidate Joe Biden circulated on Facebook despite major networks like CNN refusing to air the ad. When Facebook decides to enable fake videos of political figures to circulate, that choice is of enormous consequence for both discourse and reasoning.

The places of participation matter; platforms shape the kinds of interactions and set the rules of what is permissible and possible in these spaces. Reflecting on the ways that platforms such as Facebook amass power, Srnicek (2016) explains how "platforms became an efficient way to monopolise, extract, analyse, and use the increasingly large amounts of data that were being recorded" (pp. 42–43). Rather than the vision, just a decade earlier, of online space as a freeing environment for participation, platforms limit where civic discourse occurs, through what means, and for the gain of whom. This emphasis on *platforms* (van Dijck et al., 2018) shifts our understanding of an open and robust internet to one that is rather a conglomeration of platforms with their own fiefdoms of values.

Technological change has also expanded choice regarding access to news and perspectives. Specifically, the ease of accessing news and commentary on cable television and on the internet have dramatically expanded opportunities for choice regarding exposure to civic reasoning and discourse (Prior, 2007). In so doing, these changes have dramatically expanded the need for educators to orient students toward seeking out a range of views and to enable students to make informed judgments about the quality of what they find. News and media literacy efforts, then, are intended to help young people learn to search for, evaluate, and select online information while understanding the potential motivations, expertise, perspectives, and biases of that information.

Finally, the digital age has dramatically changed the control (and lack of control) one has over one's political identity. For example, the digital revolution has expanded opportunities to participate anonymously (which may make problematic engagement more common) and it has also expanded varied forms of surveillance by platforms, other companies, and governments. The permanence and broad access of others to one's online content has also highlighted the importance of what Elizabeth Soep (2014) termed the "Digital Afterlife" because one's thoughts can be repurposed by others to make very different points than those originally intended. Moreover, unlike most politically relevant comments that youth make in face to face contexts, those made online can be examined at a later date by, for example, potential employers or college admission officers. These dynamics necessitate that educators help youth develop a new kind of consciousness regarding expressions of one's temporal political identity and beliefs.

The significance of these technological changes has been amplified by several broader cultural shifts. Specifically, trust in institutions has declined over the past

several decades. Trust in government declined from its peak in 1964 at 77 percent to less than 25 percent in the past decade. Similarly, trust in mass media declined from 72 percent in 1976 to 32 percent in 2016. What is particularly striking is that these declines occurred for most major institutions. For example, trust in public schools has declined from 62 percent in 1975 to 31 percent in 2017 and trust in the medical system has declined from 80 percent to 37 percent over the same period (Zuckerman, 2017).

Coupled with declining trust, partisanship has increasingly characterized our political culture. For the first time since the Pew Research Center began tracking this topic in 1992, in 2016 a majority of both Democrats and Republicans said members of the opposing party “stirred feelings of fear and anger in them” (Pew Research Center, 2016). This increasing partisanship and the growing animosity toward those one disagrees with is relevant because research indicates that such feelings introduce significant biases into the reasoning process. Scholars studying ways that motivations impact reasoning, or *motivated reasoning* (Kunda, 1990), find that reasoning and discourse tied to highly charged issues often trigger “hot cognition” and that affect-laden beliefs bias information processing (Lodge & Taber, 2005). This process prompts individuals to look for evidence that aligns with their preexisting views (confirmation bias), to find reasons to reject perspectives that contradict their beliefs (disconfirmation bias), and to view arguments that align with their views more positively than equally supported arguments that do not align with their prior perspectives (prior attitude effect) (see Kunda, 1990; Taber & Lodge, 2006). These processes also diminish the likelihood of learning through discourse and, in particular, the likelihood of learning through exposure to divergent views. Indeed, rather than learning from new information, studies find that when individuals are exposed to substantive new information that contradicts prior strongly held beliefs, they often become even more committed to their prior beliefs (Redlawsk, 2002).

The challenges posed by these technological, political, and cultural changes are substantial and often reinforcing. The combination of diminished gatekeepers, the ease of circulation, heightened partisanship, lack of trust in the news media, and the ability to post content anonymously have both enabled and motivated the creation and circulation of deeply combative and disrespectful discourse—content often imbued with racism. In a recent Youth Participatory Politics Survey, 39 percent of all students, including 45 percent of Black and 47 percent of Latinx students, reported seeing or experiencing racist statements and interactions online (Cohen & Berk, 2015). Similarly, a study of approximately 260 high school youth’s experiences of direct and indirect racial discrimination on the internet found that 71 percent of Black, 71 percent of White, and 67 percent of multiracial/other adolescents reported seeing racial discrimination online, whereas 29 percent of Black, 20 percent of White, and 42 percent of multiracial/other youth reported experiencing racial discrimination (Tynes et al., 2008).

In addition, a tremendous volume of falsehoods circulates online. BuzzFeed’s analysis found, for instance, that false stories circulated to a greater degree than accurate stories in the run-up to the 2016 election (Silverman, 2016). Increased partisanship and choice regarding content have also led to increased engagement in echo chambers, which may well make false and offensive content more common. Such partisanship coupled with enhanced choice also appears to have diminished the kind of cross-ideological interchange that is needed for groups to both learn from and come to understand one another (Mutz, 2006; Pariser, 2011).

Given the complex and quickly changing context of discourse and reasoning, the need to develop a wide range of skills for digital reasoning and discourse—capacities for collaboration, participation, critique, and expression—is substantial (see Hobbs, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2006; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013). As Howard Rheingold (2008, p. 99) has written:

This population is both self-guided and in need of guidance: although a willingness to learn new media by point-and-click exploration might come naturally to today's student cohort, there's nothing innate about knowing how to apply their skills to the processes of democracy.

The complex forms of dialogue, the deep knowledge it often requires of community members, and the ways individuals' expertise is networked illustrate the layers of learning that shape and are shaped by participatory, digital civic literacies. Ito et al. (2013, p. 6) refer to these forms of learning that are "socially embedded, interest-driven, and oriented toward educational, economic, or political opportunity" as connected learning. Focusing on the kinds of out-of-school civic practices that youth and adults engage in, Ito et al.'s (2010) delineation of connected learning stems from their scrutiny of how youth are often "hanging out, messing around, and geeking out" with peers in digital contexts.

Connected learning centers socialization and community in how individuals frame changes in our digitally mediated culture; not simply seeing new civic uses of digital tools, we can consider societal changes as opening up new practices, such as acknowledging the digital spaces in which participatory culture thrives as connected civics—"a form of learning fostered via participatory politics that emerges when young people achieve civic agency linked to their deeply felt interests, identities, and affinities" (Ito et al., 2015, p. 17). These practices involve "'little p' politics" that contrasts with more overtly "'big P' Politics" that Jenkins et al. (2015, p. 162) describe. By casting light through this participatory lens, youth cultural activities that can be seen as disconnected from partisan, political beliefs are reified as complex forms of civic reasoning.

Though connected learning originally emphasized learning outside of schools, efforts to understand how youth connected learning is fostered and supported in schools has shaped literacies, civics, and educational technology research over the past decade. Furthermore, concerted efforts to bridge out of school literacy practices and interests into classrooms has long been recognized as a form of powerful pedagogical practice. From emphasizing how youth popular culture can meaningfully elevate some classroom learning (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1995; Morrell, 2008) to exploring forms of youth media production (Halverson, 2010; Jocson, 2018) to focusing on the tools for media participation in schools (Ortlieb et al., 2018; Wissman & Costello, 2014), a participatory lens can recast what work, assessment, and learning look like in schools.

REDESIGNING CIVIC EDUCATION FOR A DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

As the accompanying chapters in this report illustrate, the prospect of engaging students in civic reasoning and discourse in the context of formal classroom instruction has always been a fraught proposition for public school educators. Considering the delicate negotiations involved in introducing potentially controversial current issues

to the curriculum—including managing student disagreements, parent concerns, and their own opinions and beliefs—teachers are often wary of taking on the task (Hess & McAvoy, 2014). Arguably, the advent of the digital age amid increasing political polarization has made these practices even more difficult to implement as a connected culture has created a two-way mirror effect—a full range of voices and perspectives can be present in the classroom alongside the students in the seats at any moment, and what happens in that classroom can be communicated back out into the public sphere to become the subject of heated discussion and debate (Allen & Light, 2015).

Yet, despite the challenges, educators are finding it more necessary than ever to engage in these efforts, particularly in light of both the opportunities afforded by a vibrant participatory culture and the challenges posed by hate speech, virulent online racism, and online misinformation campaigns (Mirra & Garcia, 2017). The rancorous discourse and voter manipulation efforts surrounding the 2016 presidential election have sparked renewed interest in the role of schools in offering students a rigorous civic education that can prepare them to participate effectively in democratic life, which is becoming increasingly digital.

In this section, the authors first note existing efforts in research and practice to define and promote skills for digital reasoning and discourse, highlighting the discourse and reasoning skills that are most frequently addressed. They examine three current priorities—safety and civility, information analysis, and civic voice and engagement—and the ways that educators are grappling with them. In doing so, the authors summarize the extant research literature on these practices and their effects. They also discuss gaps in the research literature and ways to respond.

The authors' analysis and suggestions regarding needed studies, however, moves beyond suggesting ways to examine these efforts on their own terms. The authors believe that current efforts frame the need too narrowly. In particular, they argue that increased attention to race and racism is essential and that there is a great need for approaches to teaching digital reasoning and discourse that are grounded in values of equity, empathy, and anti-racism. The authors find that as educators, researchers, and policy makers seek to define digital citizenship and the roles that schools should play in fostering it, some define the term apolitically to encompass how young people should comport themselves online while others define it in terms of supporting youth to raise their voices and produce media for the purpose of social activism (Choi, 2016). This finding leads the authors to articulate a broader critique and provocation to the field about the need to situate civic discourse and reasoning skills within the broader social, political, and cultural contexts of digital communication and to clarify what they believe the normative values and ethics are that should guide democratic discourse and reasoning writ large in online (and offline) settings.

The last section of this review provides a case study focusing on young people's need for skills for digital reasoning and discourse that are attentive to race and anti-racism. Following this review, the authors discuss policy options and other broader implications.

Current Digital Citizenship Education Efforts

Based on the authors' review of the limited (but growing) body of research studies and curricular resources available, they have developed a typology of digital citizenship



FIGURE 7-1 Typology of current digital citizenship education.

illustrating three domains of the digital civic learning context that educators are currently attempting to address, to varying degrees, in schools (see Figure 7-1). While these domains overlap in practice, the authors tease them apart here for the purpose of highlighting trends across the civic education landscape.

In the **safety/civility** domain, educators focus on the reasoning and discourse skills that students need to understand and manage their online presence, identify and avoid risky online behavior, and interact with others safely and respectfully. This focus emerges as a response to concerns previously raised about the longevity of young people’s “digital footprints” that can follow them into adulthood, the collection of individual data by educational institutions and corporations, and the rancorous, divisive tone of much online discourse.

In the **information analysis** domain, educators focus on the reasoning skills that students need to understand and analyze the source, nature, and purpose of the information they encounter online. This focus reflects recognition of the multiple forces leading to the circulation of misleading and inaccurate content that is influencing today’s civic and political discourse.

In the **civic voice/engagement** domain, educators focus on the reasoning and discourse skills that students need to leverage online platforms to develop and share their perspectives on civic issues and engage in authentic digital civic participation. This focus speaks to continued efforts to spark youth interest in public life and translate engagement into digital contexts.

Safety/Civility

Marcus is an eighth grader at the local middle school. He creates a fake Instagram account, not under his name, and posts a picture of his rival school’s basketball team. The rival school’s basketball team is mostly black, and Marcus posts a racist message

about the players underneath the image. Other students from Marcus's school find the post and also post racist jokes about the players. (Common Sense Education, n.d.)

The scenario above is drawn from an 8th grade lesson plan published by the nonprofit organization Common Sense as part of their Digital Citizenship curriculum (Common Sense Education, n.d.; James et al., 2019). The lesson aims to help students develop strategies they can utilize when encountering cyberbullying and hate speech online; teachers are instructed to guide students toward becoming "upstanders" rather than bystanders by taking actions such as "defending the person being targeted" and "raising general awareness about the issue at school or in your community." The tagline for this strand of the curriculum reads, "We are kind and courageous."

This lesson is indicative of the most common understanding and enactment of digital citizenship operating in schools today, which revolves around considerations of safety, privacy, and internet etiquette. A national study of teachers conducted by Common Sense reported that 58 percent of teachers have used a digital citizenship curriculum and that "digital drama, cyberbullying and hate speech" and "privacy and safety" were the first (46 percent) and second (43 percent) most common digital competencies taught in U.S. schools (Vega & Robb, 2019). In multiple states that have proposed or passed laws mandating the inclusion of digital learning in school standards, including California and Texas, the term digital citizenship is embedded within calls for students to weigh the benefits and risks of their online decisions and make responsible, positive choices in their online reasoning and dialogue (see SB1839, 2017; SB-830, 2018). These calls largely focus on individual behaviors and actions rather than analysis of deeper structural influences and collective challenges.

For instance, in the lesson about online hate speech excerpted above, racism is both conceptualized and addressed at the interpersonal level; an individual expresses racist ideas and other individuals (e.g., the students in class) develop strategies to counter or silence those ideas and instead promote kindness and acceptance. The lesson does not delve into the ways that online environments operate to perpetuate and magnify discourse that has long undergirded systemic racism in the United States and beyond, nor does it offer avenues to pursue change beyond individual expressions of tolerance.

Despite the ubiquity of curricula that highlight the "civil" in civic discourse, it is crucial to note that the research base informing the development and effectiveness of these instructional materials is extremely thin. For instance, while organizations like Common Sense and Google publish "research reports," this research generally does not include evaluations of the impact of their curriculum. Often, their reports draw on e-surveys of parents, teachers, or youth, or conceptual arguments from education writers (e.g., calls for students to be taught "digital hygiene" [Sklar, 2017]). Sometimes these groups draw on summaries of general research on youth digital practices and factors that shape it to provide a rationale for the design and focus of their curriculum (e.g., James et al., 2019). In Google's report *Future of the Classroom* (Google, n.d.), the authors cite the work of Middaugh et al. (2017) to support their claim that "including online safety within the school's curriculum is key to helping children become safe and responsible users of technologies" (Google, p. 7), despite the fact that the cited article specifically states that more active and robust digital engagement—rather than narrow safety instruction—contributes to positive student outcomes. In addition, despite the

fact that as of May 2020, the Common Sense curriculum has 91,187 registered schools globally and approximately 77,000 in the United States, including 75 percent of all Title I schools, the effectiveness of the program has not been systematically evaluated (email from Common Sense sent to Brendesha Tynes, May 4, 2020).

Evaluations of internet safety programs, which the authors consider to be separate from digital citizenship programs due to their specific focus on consumption and risk, appear to be lacking as well. The National Institute of Justice supported one of the first quasi-experimental studies of the effectiveness of the I-Safe curriculum and found that participants in the treatment group improved their internet safety knowledge (Chibnall et al., 2006). Large effect sizes were noted in treatment versus control group; however, no changes in risky behavior were noted, perhaps due to low baseline levels. Other studies of the Missing (Crombie & Trinneer, 2003) and HAHASO—Help, Assert Yourself, Humor, Avoid, Self-talk, Own it—program show little to no changes in participants' behavior (see Mishna et al., 2011).

The Crimes Against Children Research Center conducted a content analysis of internet safety programs, including i-SAFE, NetSmartz, WebWiseKids, and iKeepSafe (Jones et al., 2014). Researchers noted that the digital literacy messages students received asked them to “think before you click or post” (66 percent of materials), “check your social network privacy settings and be careful who you friend” (55 percent), and “consider what information you put online says about you” (55 percent). They also found that no program they reviewed had full lessons on one topic across sessions and none were able to integrate homework assignments into the lesson. In addition, researchers note that like other digital citizenship curricula, few of the programs have rigorous evaluations of their effectiveness (Jones et al., 2014).

Perhaps because of decades old literature on developing and evaluating programs, bullying and cyberbullying prevention and interventions diverge from this pattern. Recent meta-analyses and systematic review of 100 evaluations of school bullying interventions show that they are effective at reducing perpetration by 19–20 percent and victimization by 15–16 percent (Gaffney et al., 2019b). Similarly, a meta-analysis of 24 studies (15 of which were randomized controlled trials) evaluating anti-cyberbullying programs shows they are effective at reducing victimization by 14 percent and perpetration by 10–15 percent (Gaffney et al., 2019a). Only a small number of these studies were conducted in the United States, however.

With the exception of anti-bullying programs, the classroom practices in this domain, while attracting a great deal of attention and concern among parents, educators, and curriculum developers, appear to lack a solid evidence base and highlight the need for more inquiry into their appropriate place within a more complex and nuanced digital citizenship approach.

Information Analysis

A person searching online for information on Martin Luther King, Jr., might have, until a few years ago, seen martinlutherking.org in the first several results in a web search for information about the civil rights leader. The website, titled “Martin Luther King: A True Historical Examination,” bore several commonly understood markers of trustworthiness. In addition to its often high ranking in search results, it had a straightforward

URL with King's full name, a ".org" top-level domain, and relatively clean web design. However, the site was anything but neutral. In fact, it was owned and run by the White supremacist organization Stormfront. The main page of the site uses decontextualized quotes from Federal Bureau of Investigation audio tapes in an attempt to portray Dr. King in a negative light and delegitimize him as a leader in the civil rights movement.

Martinlutherking.org was an early example of a cloaked website, or one "published by individuals or groups that conceal authorship or feign legitimacy in order to deliberately disguise a hidden political agenda" (Daniels, 2009a, p. 661; Ray & Marsh, 2001). Daniels (2009b) interviewed students as they attempted to evaluate martinlutherking.org and reported that they struggled to uncover the sponsorship and aims of the site. This example highlights the fact that young people need support to learn how to evaluate online information. However, it is also important for young people to understand and critically analyze the political motivations and strategies underlying online information. There is a particular need to support students to critically analyze the backers, motivations, and messages of and consider ways to respond to race-related and racist digital content.

Research on how young people evaluate digital content builds on and extends decades of research in media literacy, the "active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create" (Hobbs & Jenson, 2009). According to the National Association for Media Literacy Education, media literacy entails "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication" (Culver & Redmond, 2019, p. 1) and is conceived as both a way of protecting oneself against misinformation and a component of engaged, empowered civic activity (e.g., Hobbs, 2010; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013). Critical media literacy goes a step further to situate such reasoning within structures of power, voice, and equity, focusing not just on helping students determine the reliability of information online but on the structures that highlight certain voices while attempting to minimize others (Middaugh, 2018).

When deciding whether a source is credible, users should consider whether a source is trustworthy; is the person or organization presenting the information honest and unlikely to attempt to deceive the reader? Users should also consider expertise: what are the source's background, training, and experiences, and do those make the source likely to provide accurate information? Decisions that users make about trustworthiness and expertise, and ultimately credibility, may vary because credibility is not an objective feature of a source. Instead, judgments of credibility are contextual and vary based on the motivations, expectations, beliefs, experiences, and perspectives of the person judging information—as well what other information is available on the same topic (Metzger, 2007). Even if they focus on a process for evaluating information instead of determining the credibility of discrete sources, teachers still privilege certain epistemologies and forms of evidence while discounting others (e.g., boyd, 2018).

The abundance of online information and the motivation, skills, and knowledge required to effectively navigate it present a challenge to young people. In a 2017 survey (Robb, 2017), 44 percent of students 15 to 18 years old said they could identify fake news stories and nearly one-third admitted that they had shared a story online that they later found out was inaccurate. In another survey (Cohen et al., 2012), 84 percent of youth reported that they and their friends would benefit from instruction in how to tell if a given source of online news was trustworthy.

Young people's belief that they need more support learning to reason about online information is borne out in studies of their approaches to evaluating digital content. In studies in which students navigated search results to find information, students often clicked on the first or second result and expressed the belief that the higher a site was listed in the results, the more trustworthy it was (Gwizdka & Bilal, 2017; Hargittai et al., 2010; Pan et al., 2007). Instead of recognizing how algorithms generate results and how results can be manipulated through search engine optimization, these students trusted search engines to rank results by credibility. Once on webpages, students rarely judged information based on its source (List et al., 2016; Walraven et al., 2009). Instead, students focused on how closely the information matched what they were searching for and on the appearance of the website, including whether it appeared to present a lot of evidence (Barzilai & Zohar, 2012; Coiro et al., 2015; McGrew et al., 2018). Thus, young people may use the projected usability of information as a key element of their decision to use it (Gasser et al., 2012).

Most studies in this area have not asked students to evaluate information on social and political topics that are pertinent to civic reasoning and discourse, and more research is needed on how young people approach evaluations of contentious information. The need for such work is especially great given studies showing that directional motivation (a desire to find information that backs up beliefs one already holds) is often a powerful driver of behavior in the political realm (Ditto et al., 1998). Additionally, research is needed into young people's evaluation behaviors in out-of-school environments as they interact with information of their choosing. Ethnographic studies like that of Horst et al. (2010) could examine the strategies, resources, and knowledge young people draw on as they search for, evaluate, and use information online in their day-to-day lives. Attempts to learn more about these behaviors through surveys and interviews (e.g., Madden et al., 2017) are limited because young people's self-reports of their evaluation behaviors may differ from what they actually do in practice (Flanagin & Metzger, 2010; Hargittai et al., 2010). Finally, more attention needs to be paid to unequal access to opportunities to learn online evaluations skills. Gaps in digital skills exist along lines of race, class, and gender, even among those with equivalent access to the internet (Gasser et al., 2012; Hargittai, 2010). For example, Leu et al. (2014) found that more affluent students had an additional year's worth of instruction related to online reading abilities that are key for online reasoning and discourse (i.e., abilities to find, evaluate, integrate, and communicate online information) compared to students from lower income families.

Current support for curricular focus on evaluating digital content is quite thin. For example, in a 2013 study 33 percent of high school students did not report having a single class that focused on how to tell if information found online was trustworthy and only 16 percent reported having more than a few class sessions on this topic (Kahne et al., 2016). A 2015 nationally representative survey of high school age youth (Kahne & Bowyer, 2019) asked if they had had opportunities in school to learn how to effectively share their perspectives online in the past 12 months, and 64 percent responded "never."

When students have opportunities to learn to evaluate online information, they can improve. In a nationally representative survey of 15–27-year-olds, Kahne and Bowyer (2017) found that students who reported having media literacy learning opportunities were better at rating the accuracy of posts containing political arguments and evidence.

Additionally, intervention studies suggest that instruction in online evaluations can improve students' abilities at a range of grade levels, from elementary school through college (McGrew et al., 2019; Walraven et al., 2013; Wiley et al., 2009; Zhang & Duke, 2011). These studies have tested a range of approaches, including prompting students to draw inferences about a source's authority, motivations, and overall trustworthiness (e.g., Kammerer et al., 2016; Pérez et al., 2018; Zhang & Duke, 2011), outlining and supporting students to practice components of information problem solving on the internet (e.g., Argelagós & Pifarré, 2012; Caviglia & Delfino, 2016; Ibieta et al., 2019; Walraven et al., 2013) and using mnemonic devices to present steps for evaluating online information (e.g., Mason et al., 2014; Wiley et al., 2009).

Another set of studies tested a set of lessons designed to teach students approaches to evaluating information based on understanding of expert practice. Wineburg and McGrew (2019) conducted a study of the online search and evaluation strategies of professional fact checkers, historians, and Stanford University undergraduates. They found that fact checkers used a set of strategies to efficiently and effectively find and evaluate online information. Perhaps most importantly, fact checkers engaged in lateral reading. Landing on an unfamiliar site, they prioritized finding out more about the site's sponsoring organization or author and opened new tabs to search for information about the author or organization outside the site itself. In contrast, most historians and students engaged in vertical reading—they stayed on webpages and evaluated them based on surface-level cues like webpage appearance, name of organization, and lists of references. These findings were used as the basis for studies that tested lessons to teach high school (McGrew, 2020) and college students (McGrew et al., 2019) to evaluate social and political information online using strategies like lateral reading. For example, McGrew et al. (2019) reported that college students improved in their online evaluation skills after a 150-minute intervention in a first-year writing course in comparison to students in another class who received no instruction in evaluating digital sources.

In addition to these curricular interventions developed by university-based researchers, several nonprofit organizations have developed media and news literacy lessons. For example, the News Literacy Project developed Checkology, a series of digitally delivered lessons that are designed to teach students to evaluate news sources and arguments. However, these programs have not all published evidence of efficacy. Some, including the News Literacy Project, base claims of success on surveys of teachers and self-reports from students after completing the lessons but not on measures of students' ability to evaluate digital content.

Although these projects have taken promising steps in investigating the student learning that may result from lessons in digital evaluations, more is needed. First, investigations are needed on attempts to embed lessons in digital evaluations in the content and disciplinary learning goals of classrooms. This may help ensure that digital evaluations do not become just a curricular add on, but are instead seen as part of a larger effort that includes generating questions, discussing and debating issues and evidence, and planning and taking action. Secondly, more interventions that address evaluations of contentious information are needed. Given the prevalence of divisive social and political content online and the role that directional reasoning plays in influencing decisions about whether information is credible, digital literacy lessons are limited if they do not engage with politically charged topics. Finally, research is currently limited by

the quality and range of measures available. More diverse measures that reliably assess students' search and evaluations strategies are needed. These measures should account for students' prior knowledge and beliefs on the topics they are asked to evaluate and gauge students' motivation to engage in effortful evaluations.

Furthermore, current media literacy efforts need to expand to include a focus on the contexts, power, and motivations that underlie the production and spread of mis- and disinformation. In particular, efforts should help youth understand the ways in which mis- and disinformation is often produced and spread purposefully for political or ideological gain—as in Stormfront's design and promotion of martinlutherking.org. More research is needed about the ways teachers could support students to understand the production and spread of misinformation as a political act, and often one intended to promote racism and White supremacy. Young people need help considering not only how their analysis of information should change, but what actions they could take in response to misinformation that might discourage its spread and promote greater racial equity. If young people learn to see the production and spread of misinformation as political instead of accidental, they may be better positioned to do this work.

Additional hurdles remain. Even if they know how to evaluate information, people may still willfully post and share misinformation that aligns with their political views or ideological positions. In a 2016 survey, 14 percent of respondents said they shared a story that they knew was fake (Barthel et al., 2016). Furthermore, some theorists argue that media literacy may even backfire because its goal of growing students' skepticism and ability to critically question evidence aligns with the goals of groups responsible for spreading disinformation—and doing so by sowing distrust and skepticism of evidence. As media studies scholar boyd (2018) argued:

It's an entirely different thing to talk about these issues when the very act of asking questions is what's being weaponized. This isn't historical propaganda distributed through mass media. Or an exercise in understanding state power. This is about making sense of an information landscape where the very tools that people use to make sense of the world around them have been strategically perverted.

Furthermore, boyd (2018) warns that attempts to “fact check and moderate our way out of this conundrum” with citizens with vastly different epistemological frames of civic life will fail without deeper soul-searching about how to talk through deep ideological differences in ways that invite vulnerability and storytelling but maintain the literal and symbolic safety of minoritized civic groups. Thus, even robust media literacy education that includes supports for students to analyze and critique structures of power and politics will not, on their own, fix the torrent of online mis- and disinformation or necessarily lead to a more well-informed electorate. The authors return to this challenge in the section on next steps for the field.

Civic Voice/Engagement

“Accessing competent care is another hurdle Black folks shouldn't have to navigate.”

“Is COVID-19 a crisis within a crisis for Black women?”

These headlines were featured prominently in May 2020 on the homepage of the Black Youth Project website, a digital platform “that highlights the voices and ideas of Black millennials” (Black Youth Project, n.d.). This platform is one strand of a larger nonprofit and research initiative that seeks to create authentic and relevant content by and for members of the Black community in order to support their civic awareness and engagement. Digital media production and dissemination outlets are creating conduits that collapse the boundaries between civic discourse and action by connecting young people to public audiences and facilitating the expression of their civic reasoning. In turn, as a growing number of teachers seek to help their students transition from analyzing digital civic discourse to engaging in it themselves, they are wrestling with questions regarding who young people should be in conversation with and what this dialogue should seek to accomplish.

Just a few years ago, teachers and students had to engage in concerted efforts to make the writing produced in classrooms visible to a wider audience beyond the school building. Digital media now makes it possible for students to share their writing with a public beyond their teachers and classroom communities, adding levels of authenticity and relevance to what were previously solely academic exercises. For example, student efforts to write memos or essays stating and supporting their opinions about controversial social issues can now be posted online as blogs or transformed into multi-modal social media posts, which research suggests could increase interest in civic issues (Levy et al., 2015). The tension over who to make these posts available to speaks to the broader concern addressed at the start of this section about the status of young people in schools as not-quite-citizens and the role of schools in supporting youth civic expression; while some educators keep blogs and posts restricted in the classroom, others seek mediated engagement with a wider audience (Levine, 2008).

Small-scale descriptive studies are beginning to document the ways that educators seek to leverage these digital tools as a means for students to practice digital civic discourse and its potential impacts. Middaugh (2019) suggests that instruction about how to recognize and interrupt “outrage language” online—what she calls “mindful circulation”—can help young people produce more nuanced and productive online conversation, thereby contributing to the creation of healthier democratic counterpublics. Further research suggests that encouraging young people to compose and publish multi-modal texts that reflect their civic experiences and aspirations—and carry the potential for authentic response from members of the public—can help young people feel motivated to pursue further forms of online and offline civic engagement even amid their continued hesitance regarding the divisive context of online discussion (James & Cotnam-Kappel, 2019; Journell et al., 2013; Middaugh & Evans, 2018). In addition, drawing on an original longitudinal survey, Kahne and Bowyer (2019) found that youth who had instruction tied to creating, commenting on, or sharing digital media became much more likely to engage politically using digital tools in the year following that instruction.

Some educational organizations have responded to the desire to encourage youth civic discourse while maintaining the boundaries of school-sanctioned speech by launching youth publishing platforms. Such platforms connect young people across geographic boundaries around common topics of public concern through allowing them to post and comment on others’ content while simultaneously providing identity protections and content monitoring to mitigate fears about privacy and incivility, thus

creating mediated liminal publics that can serve as a training ground for the unfiltered digital public sphere. KQED, a northern California public radio station, produces a wide variety of youth-directed interactive content; in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, it spearheaded the Letters to the Next President project in conjunction with the National Writing Project, which asked young people from across the United States (with guidance from their teachers) to post multi-modal “letters” discussing issues that they hoped to see addressed by the president-elect. The letters were published on a platform that allowed members of the public to get a sweeping view of the civic interests of nearly 12,000 young people who represented a wide span of demographic groups and to analyze how young people engaged in civic reasoning and discourse (Garcia et al., 2019). Participants reflected the diversity of youth in U.S. schools, with more than 92 percent of the letters coming from public schools, 39 percent from Title I eligible schools, and 36 percent from schools with more than 50 percent non-White students. The research indicated that the letters reflected civic interests that were mediated by the students’ identities and the challenges facing the particular communities in which they lived stratified by the social constructs of race and class. Digital media thus provided a bridge between various civic levels (local, national, and global) and between individual and structural views of civic life. The National Writing Project has developed additional opportunities for youth publishing about civic issues, including the Writing Our Future project and the Marginal Syllabus project. The latter takes advantage of open-source annotation software to allow any text to become a site of remixing and community dialogue (Mirra, 2018b).

These platforms share a commitment to providing opportunities for young people to develop civic voice. Initial studies of youth online civic discourse suggest that young people are motivated to participate in authentic communication with individuals beyond their immediate context because it supports their developing sense of themselves as citizens and makes them feel that their views on public issues matter (James et al., 2016; Middaugh & Kirshner, 2014). Efforts to construct conceptual frameworks for quality online civic discourse are just beginning; Hodgins (2016) suggests that such efforts need to consider interpersonal, pedagogical, and wider political implications. What kinds of discourse moves invite or shut down dialogue? How do these moves correspond to particular types of civic reasoning? What are the best approaches to teaching such moves? Mirra and Garcia (2020) suggest that intentionally designed online communities that engage students from different geographic and demographic locations in civic dialogue mediated by teacher instruction about critical civic empathy (Mirra, 2018a) may offer a potential path forward, but much more empirical research is needed to tease out the structure and impact of such efforts.

As the field seeks to address these questions, teachers and researchers are also pushing to articulate the relationship between civic discourse and action with young people; while discourse itself represents an important form of action, civic discourse has a particular relationship to further forms of participation and engagement in a democratic society. The extent to which educators should be facilitating opportunities for students to engage in online and offline civic and political action represents another (and thornier) frontier for civic education in the digital age.

Roughly concurrent with the proliferation of digital media over the past 15 years has been a turn in civic education scholarship and practice toward youth-centered and

action-oriented approaches to civic learning in schools that adds complexity to conceptualizations of reasoning and discourse. Whereas previous approaches to formal civics stressed the elements of existing community and political structures and practices and sought to integrate young people into them, emerging research is seeking to privilege the experiences of young people as a starting point and support them in leveraging the levers of democracy to create civic change (Blevins et al., 2016). This focus on action and change in both online and offline contexts presents more possibilities and dilemmas regarding the appropriate role of schools in supporting youth voice (Greene et al., 2018).

As we have discussed earlier in this chapter, the rise of youth engagement in participatory politics within informal learning contexts has exposed both opportunities and problems of practice around discourse and reasoning that school-based educators can play a role in addressing. A lived civics approach insists that to address issues like hate speech and misinformation, educators should begin by engaging meaningfully with the experiences of young people—including those they have online—and move beyond the classroom and into the community so that young people can explore both what they have experienced and ways that they can act on issues central to their lives and priorities (Cohen et al., 2018). A complementary approach of connected civics advocates for the merging of popular culture, participatory politics, and student interest in the formation of shared civic purpose (Ito et al., 2015). These frameworks are in conversation with “action civics” programs in schools, including Generation Citizen and Mikva Challenge, that encourage students to conduct inquiry around issues they see in their communities and present the results of their research in multi-modal forms to civic leaders in order to seek solutions.

Such programs are becoming popular in school districts because their curricula leverage student civic discourse and reasoning for the purpose of authentic action in communities and support them to inquire into controversial and political topics. Participatory politics has highlighted the range of civic action in which youth can be engaged prior to reaching voting age that tackle the deepest challenges of American life (e.g., racial inequity, climate change, gun violence), and as such is ushering in a reckoning about young people as political actors whose beliefs and opinions do not switch off when they enter school buildings.

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) is a civic education practice that for years has been utilizing digital media as a tool to amplify the voices of young people and highlighting critical consciousness as a fundamental aspect of youth civic reasoning in an inequitable society (Akom et al., 2016; Garcia et al., 2015). YPAR challenges the positioning of young people in public life as “not-yet-citizens” and asserts their status as knowledge producers and bearers of expertise about the challenges they experience in their communities; it also challenges normative ideas about what kinds of discourse and reasoning can be considered valid in public decision making. For instance, YPAR inquiries encourage young people to consider their own testimonies and the stories of their elders as data that is just as valid as sociological statistics in describing communities, and they insist on the right of young people to express their expertise in a myriad of forms, from the spoken word to video documentaries to memes, rather than conforming to normative forms of deliberation (Mirra et al., 2015).

These stances have made YPAR a much more contested civic education practice in schools than action civics or more consumption-oriented forms of media literacy.

YPAR practitioners and others who advocate for practices of civic interrogation have documented the tensions inherent in encouraging students to engage in critique of structures of schooling and society while operating within those schooling structures (Kwon & de los Ríos, 2019). These instances embody the tensions of fostering authentic youth civic discourse and reasoning in school settings and speak to challenges that researchers and practitioners need to address to navigate complex issues of political identity, controversy, protest, and issues of power in merging online and offline publics. These tensions inform critique of current digital citizenship education efforts.

Pushing the Field Further: Confronting Inequity

As the authors analyzed the existing efforts to define and address digital civic discourse and reasoning skills, they found that many of them operate from a narrow philosophy regarding the nature and purpose of citizenship. For instance, many of the practices in the safety/civility domain seek to promote respectful dialogue and warn young people of the dangers of cyberbullying, but do not elaborate on the ways that trolling and online hate speech often transcend the interpersonal and reflect structural manifestations of racism, misogyny, and other systemic social ills. Many of the practices in the information analysis domain that encourage young people to evaluate the online sources they encounter should do more to engage with accompanying social and cultural considerations related to the influence of existing beliefs, prejudices, and trust that influence what we choose to believe.

While some may have initially hoped that the digital public sphere would transcend the intractable social challenges of analog society and offer an egalitarian—or even utopian—context for discourse and reasoning, the proliferation of hate, misinformation, and discord online reinforces the fact that digital citizenship education cannot pretend to take place in a vacuum.

In order to more vividly illustrate how practices of civic discourse and reasoning are mediated by social context in ways that demand further consideration of shared values, the next section of this chapter offers an exploration of how race is represented in online communication. This exploration adds complexity to each of the domains of the digital citizenship typology presented earlier. It complicates the safety domain by showing how racism proliferates in online dialogue. It complicates the information analysis domain by showing how misinformation is often designed to maintain systemic inequity across institutions. It pushes the civic voice and engagement domain to incorporate racial literacy into considerations of democratic education. An exploration of this problem of practice will provide the catalyst for the authors' discussion of a reconstructed vision of digital citizenship.

Problem of Practice

The authors have outlined extant research on civic discourse and reasoning along with the forms that digital citizenship efforts may take in traditional settings. As noted, this research neglects the increasing amounts of race-related messages that youth are exposed to online, the informal learning opportunities that youth may receive online, the demeaning messages that young people need to be equipped to counter and

critique, the recent disinformation campaign designed to sow racial division in the United States, and skills that youth may possess to assist with race-related information analysis.

The research cited below provides case studies and currently unpublished data to support a need for critical race digital literacy (Tynes et al., 2020), which includes a focus on media as in research using the term “critical race media literacy” (King, 2017; Mills & Unsworth, 2018; Yosso, 2002), but moves beyond this term to account for the race-related digital skills required to navigate a post-2020 online landscape. This term is informed by critical race theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995), traditional definitions of digital literacy (e.g., Buckingham, 2008; Martin, 2008) and calls for educators to help youth develop a critical lens to read race in words and the world (Yosso, 2002).

Tynes et al. (2020) define critical race digital literacy as “the knowledge, skill, and awareness required to access, identify, organize, integrate, evaluate, synthesize, critique, create, counter, and cope with race-related media and technologies.” They further note that these skills include

the ability to critically and laterally read race and intersecting oppressions in digital contexts; the ability to recognize and subvert the ways that technologies (algorithms, artificial intelligence, bots, etc.) oppress certain groups while maintaining the status quo for others, and foment racial division to suit political and economic ends; the development of historical knowledge and a lens to situate racist content, anti-Blackness and whiteness; an understanding of how attention and emotion have been weaponized in complex digital terrains, including internet politics, education, work, social interaction and entertainment, and cultivating capacities to navigate them; creating digital media, artifacts and processes in ways that embody a person’s interests and help to organize and liberate communities; and being able to reflect on each of these competencies. (p. 4)

In online contexts, the ability to critically read race in digital space (e.g., a fake Facebook profile created by Russians to deliberately mislead White conservative social media users, deep fake videos, etc.) along with understanding how forms of oppression based on race, class, LGBTQ status, and sex may overlap is central. Students should understand that racism is foundational to American culture and history, not simply a feature of exceptionally bad individuals or groups (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). A critical race digital literacy perspective would provide young people with the tools to navigate digital spaces that may draw on centuries of racist narratives from offline spaces (Kendi, 2016).

Learning Opportunities

A number of studies suggest that youth can be provided with opportunities to learn critical race digital literacy skills and broader 21st-century skills needed to become full participants in our democracy. In an analysis of discussions on BlackPlanet.com, for example, Dara Byrne (2007) found that race-specific conversations were most commonly engaged, with education, slavery, racism, AIDS, voting, and justice as the keywords most used. Other studies have shown that participants are also engaging in political organizing, critiquing dominant narratives, and policing racist infractions modeled for them on social media platforms (Tynes et al., 2011). Studies also suggest

that social media sites and their affordances provide this generation with a unique opportunity to engage in complex discussions about race with those expressing divergent views, those who are similarly positioned, and those who are more advanced and culturally sensitive. Despite the presence of online racial discrimination, social media platforms are important tools that empower youth to construct identities that counter dominant discourses about underrepresented groups. They also allow group members to become powerful political forces that collectively can help to reshape aspects of the American racial landscape, as was the case with social media more broadly in the 2008 presidential election (Tynes et al., 2011).

Young people are able to further develop their critical race digital literacy skills through participation in political movements online such as the Never Again movement and Black Lives Matter. For example, in their study of more than 40 million tweets related to #blacklivesmatter, Freelon et al. (2016) found that Twitter was used on several occasions for informal learning. Participants were exposed to conversations about police brutality that often countered mainstream narratives or went unreported (Freelon et al., 2016). Interestingly, they noted that under Black Lives Matter hashtags, conservatives could educate themselves with the images, videos, and comments from the tweets. Other research has shown that people using these hashtags could engage in digital counterpublics and pedagogies of resistance to a range of community concerns (Hill, 2018). They might also resist criminalizing techniques of state power as technologies allow for “new surveillances” or “a reconstitution of the relations of surveillance between individuals and the State” (Hill, 2018, p. 290). Perhaps most important are the opportunities to mobilize and extend online civic practices into offline life (Tynes et al., 2016).

In their research on the largely White, middle to upper class Never Again movement against gun violence, Jenkins and Lopez (2018) found that students acquired the skills to lead the movement through debate, newspaper, student government, and drama clubs as well as civics and public speaking classes. More specifically the skills included investigation, dialogue, feedback, circulation, production, and mobilization (as previously outlined in Kahne et al., 2016). One of the movement’s leaders and Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting survivor, David Hogg, recounted in his bestselling book on the movement that his teachers “put such a huge emphasis on studying real world problems in the world today, so we already knew a lot about politics and social issues and just presumed that we could do something about them” (Hogg & Hogg, 2018, p. 20). Students appeared to also be trained to understand the concept of White privilege as they often called out positive coverage of White individuals in the media along with widespread support and the lack of coverage on issues of police brutality that affect other groups (Jenkins & Lopez, 2018).

Adolescent Online Reasoning About Race

Despite the myriad formal and informal learning opportunities that youth may have, these opportunities may fall short with respect to preparing youth for a post-2016 and 2020 digital landscape. There is no greater example of this than the ways that a foreign power was able to exploit deep-seated racial divides in efforts to undermine U.S. democratic institutions. The U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

commissioned the company New Knowledge to conduct an analysis on tactics used by the Russian Federation's Internet Research Agency (IRA) to infiltrate the 2016 presidential election. Its report, titled *The Tactics & Tropes of the Internet Research Agency* (DiResta et al., 2018), recounts influence operations of the Russian government from 2014 to 2017. They note that this interference took three distinct forms: attempts to hack the voting systems, cyberattack of the Democratic National Committee, and a multiyear disinformation campaign designed to exacerbate social divisions (DiResta et al., 2018). The report further outlines the sheer reach of the Russian government on a number of platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. For example, the data set included 10.4 million tweets across more than 3,800 accounts, 116,000 posts across 133 Instagram accounts, and 61,500 unique Facebook posts across 81 pages. In addition, there were 187 million, 76.5 million, and 73 million engagements on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, respectively. The report also estimates that the Facebook operation reached 126 million people. Most importantly, the efforts were specifically directed at Black Americans and White conservatives.

The Russian government's sophisticated operation with Black Americans included an army of people attempting to engage them, as well as authentic Black media. The goal was to exploit the trust of Black audiences and create an immersive ecosystem, the report further notes (DiResta et al., 2018). Of the 1,107 YouTube videos for example, 1,063 focused on Black Lives Matter and police brutality. For the 81 Facebook pages, the largest number, 30, targeted Black people (with a focus on Right-leaning audiences coming in second with 25). The report also notes that the IRA created media mirages that surrounded targeted audiences. The report concludes by asserting that the IRA intended to blur the lines between fact and fiction and erode trust in media and the information environment. They also intended to sway opinion toward positions that were advantageous to Russians. These findings have implications for the lived experiences of Black Americans along with the ways in which blackness is viewed in the minds of other U.S. citizens.

Because so much of youths' learning and development is done online, where they are faced with a barrage of race-related material, they need critical race digital literacy skills to generate informed opinions (see Kahne et al., 2012, and Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013), challenge oppressive and racist media narratives (Mills & Unsworth, 2018), and evaluate race-related material in general. To understand how youth reason about race online, Tynes et al. (2020) conducted a nationally representative survey of 10–19-year-old participants. Researchers extended the civic online reasoning framework from the Stanford History Education Group (Wineburg et al., 2016) to specific tasks related to critically reasoning about race-related content online (Tynes et al., 2020). Mastery level responses acknowledged that race or racism might play a role in what is being expressed in the online materials. Responses to four online tasks were evaluated and coded based on their competency levels for evaluating the race-related content presented.

One of the tasks asked youth to evaluate a Facebook page from the Russian disinformation campaign previously noted. The task presented participants with the following prompt: "Below is a screenshot of a Facebook group. Please review the group image and answer the follow-up questions." The screenshot was of a Facebook page titled *Blactivist*, a fake group that grew a following by espousing a commitment to Black issues and unity. The picture showed an event announcement for a "Black Unity

March” on the feed. Participants were asked if they would join the Facebook group and why (or why not). Results indicate that about 60 percent of the respondents reported that they would NOT join the Facebook group, while 9 percent said that they would join the group. About 31 percent said “I’m not sure.” Only 8 percent of respondents were scored as “Mastery,” indicating that they would not join the group because the profile was fake. Results of this study suggest a dire need for teachers *and* students to develop critical race digital literacy.

The Need for Tools to Critique Negative Messages

Despite the focus in digital civic education on safety and civility, no curricula, project, or program systematically helps youth to counter the racist messages (or messages about superiority for White students) they receive online. In the first study to specifically focus on adolescents’ race-related discourse in monitored versus unmonitored chat rooms, Tynes et al. (2004) found that much of the dialogue was positive, but in the absence of social controls (in this case a host), the nature of discourse would shift to become more derogatory and racist in unmonitored rooms. Subsequent research has shown an exponential increase in these types of demeaning messages about race across the past decade (Tynes et al., 2015). Examples are provided in interviews from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development–funded Teen Life Online and in Schools Project that Tynes, the principal investigator, conducted via Google Chat and Yahoo Messenger (2011–2014) with 10–19-year-old participants. Black and Latinx adolescents report being stereotyped as unintelligent, criminalistic, lazy, and dirty. When asked to recount their experience, a participant noted:

I was on Facebook and I was scrolling on my news feed and it had a post and it said “black people be like” and it had three African American people and it showed them sounding out words with a book on their lap.

In addition, both are depicted as a scourge on the country that should not be afforded certain rights: “it was especially during the 2012 election that people were saying that Black people and Latinos shouldn’t be allowed to vote.”

Where experiences diverge includes reports of African Americans being represented as animals (e.g., President Obama’s face on a monkey) and Latinx participants being constructed as perpetual outsiders who are in the country illegally. Mexican participants report the following experiences:

my brother has a lot of friends online and I have some of the same friends and they were joking around first but then it got serious ... they said “go back to Mexico you be*ner” [asterisk included by this study’s authors] and “umm people would say Mexicans stink and they shouldn’t be in USA” and things like that.

They are also mocked for having perceived stereotypical careers or large families:

People would make stereotypical jokes about me because I’m Mexican, like that I was going to end up pregnant or that I was going to be a lawnmower and just making stereotypes like that.

Reports of being demeaned for being Spanish speakers or for language ability are also common. It is important to note that though the majority of participants were born in the United States and lived in the Midwest, they were exposed to images, videos, and language that may also be directed at Latinx immigrants in other parts of the country such as the Southwest.

Perhaps most egregious is the majority group inciting violence against Latinx and African American communities. For Latinx participants this could also be accompanied by justification for strict anti-immigrant laws, such as Arizona's Senate Bill 1070, which made it a misdemeanor to be caught not carrying proper documentation of immigration status. Participants provided a link to a video (KingCurtisJayy, 2012) in which three Arizona women advocated for shooting immigrants and went on to complain about teachers having to move at a slower pace so that English Language Learners can keep up.

Violence is incited and justified for African American participants as well, often using images of lynching Black bodies or nooses (for a more recent example, see Figure 7-2, of a Utah high school student "celebrating" Martin Luther King, Jr., Day). As a participant noted, African Americans also witness calls for genocide:

I was on YouTube one day, watching an informational video about ethnicity and such, and someone put up a comment saying something like "white is the superior race, all black people should be extinct" and I was really surprised because I thought it was just a cruel joke, but it was not because they had a paragraph explaining why blacks are ruining the world and should "go."



FIGURE 7-2 "Happy national n---- day."
SOURCE: Carlisle, 2018.

Participants note justification for widely publicized killings of Black people, including Trayvon Martin. These experiences echo mainstream White supremacist dialogue that is prevalent on a range of online platforms. They also preceded the widespread acceptance of a presidential candidate (and then president) who incited violence and demeaned African American and Mexican people, calling the latter criminals and rapists (CNN, 2015); this was also followed by numerous police killings (Mapping Police Violence, 2015) and a rise in hate crimes, particularly in places where the president held rallies (Eligon, 2018; Feinberg et al., 2019).

RETHINKING DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Civics and reasoning in this current digital age offer myriad, important issues that educators, policy makers, parents, and students must consider. The authors presently see a need for forms of digital citizenship education that center digital contexts of learning, that ground such work in racial awareness, and that offer pathways for civic discourse that are not cordoned off solely by considerations of safety and civility in the new contexts of online socialization and distance learning.

Societal pivots to online interaction in the digital age have dramatically increased the need for new forms of digital citizenship education. In line with these needs, there is clear evidence that the new media described throughout this chapter have created opportunities for increased and relatively equitable political participation by young people—opportunities to exert agency, voice, and influence. Youth are tapping into this potential as exhibited most prominently in movements such as #blacklivesmatter and #marchforourlives. At the same time, there is evidence that many youth do not actively engage in these forms of activity. Just as civic learning opportunities in the physical world are engaged with at different levels, so are opportunities for civic learning in online spaces.

In light of the disparities in who participates and the various forms of online civic reasoning, the authors end this chapter with a specific focus on the gaps that feel most pressing and suggest a revised and reconstructed typology for digital citizenship today.

Specifically, they suggest that authentic and meaningful digital citizenship education must explicitly engage with the social, cultural, and political contexts that are reflected and extended in online spaces and take principled positions on the values that should guide democratic discourse and reasoning in a polarized 21st century society. Figure 7-3 illustrates how these priorities encircle the domains, and thus each individual digital citizenship intervention.

To further specify the call to recognize social, cultural, and political context in digital civics education, the authors suggest that efforts to address digital civic reasoning and discourse should be embedded in a pedagogical paradigm that explicitly acknowledges how social (and civic) institutions reflect hierarchies of power and privilege and how they can serve to perpetuate and/or challenge structural inequity across the social constructs of race, class, gender, religion, national origin, and more.

Situating digital civic reasoning and discourse within such a paradigm pushes this field to articulate a coherent response to the question “what values should guide how citizens communicate and make shared decisions in civic life against a backdrop of systemic inequity and the powerful forces of division that digital media magnifies?”

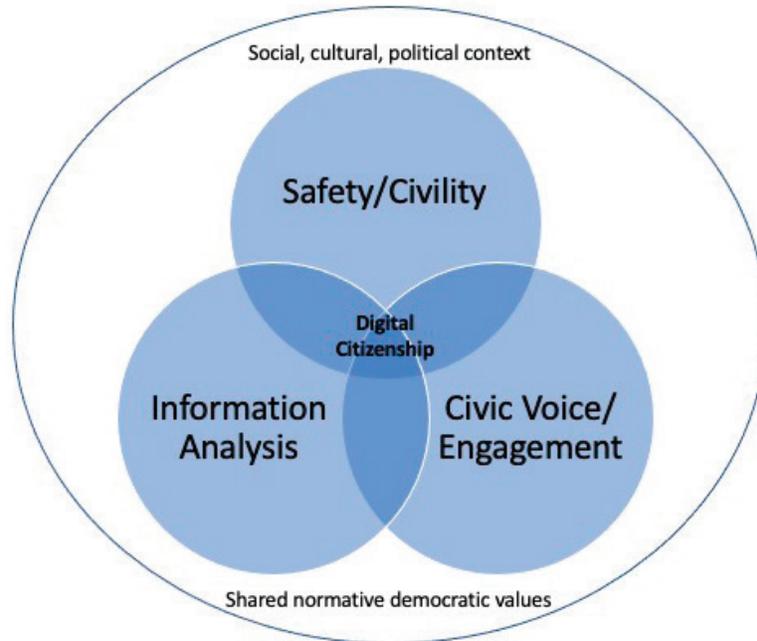


FIGURE 7-3 Emphasizing context and values in digital citizenship education.

While civics education has historically been committed to a liberal vision of reasoned and mutually respectful deliberation, the authors suggest that more inquiry is needed about what such deliberation can and should look like when grounded in values of equity, empathy, and anti-racism—and how to support educators to teach toward this delicate balance. They argue that this is the crucial task of digital citizenship education in the years to come, and turn now to a further explication of the “moves” that can aid educators and policy makers in articulating these values and lead toward an accompanying set of learning principles to be used in practice.

Moving Beyond Safety and Civility

There are widespread curricula on safety and civility, but few studies of whether they have any impact. Moreover, the focus of the curriculum and framing of goals are often problematic in that they obscure the ways that ills within our culture such as racism, misogyny, and heterosexism are often the factors that structure the problems people face with respect to safety and civility. Instead, the focus is on individuals and the need to be careful and polite. Yes, there is value in teaching kids to be careful and polite, but a curriculum that stops there is deeply problematic. Curricula should also teach youth about the more structural aspects of the brutal things that happen online—the exposure to racism, misogyny, etc.—so that they have a way to both understand it and discuss ways to respond to it.

Moving Beyond Discourse and Reasoning

While this chapter has focused on how individuals communicate and interpret across civic contexts in a digital age, considerations of youth civic engagement and innovation must also be taken seriously. Many of the movements online that opened this chapter reflect forms of participation that challenge the instructional foci of discourse and reasoning. Because we can see key features of these practices leading youth to be more equitably engaged than other forms of political expression and action, this is a key gap in existing literature. Studies and school-based supports for these practices are relatively rare despite emerging evidence that these practices help build civic capacity and interest.

Affirming the Centrality and Importance of Critical Race Digital Literacy

While the authors have addressed some of the few, preliminary findings in this area, current forms of online harassment, disinformation, and coordinated civic disruption are fomented across racist contexts. Additionally, racist vitriol seen online can mirror and even inspire similar forms of hate in physical settings (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016, 2019). For example, after the 2016 election, the Teaching Tolerance project surveyed educators across the country and noted a dramatic uptick in racial slurs, symbols, harassment, and bigotry of students of color (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). They noted students emulating the coarse, racist language of the newly elected president. Two years later, they surveyed 2,776 educators and two-thirds of them witnessed a hate or bias incident; racism was most common as a motivating factor in 33 percent of the cases (anti-LGBTQ, 25 percent; anti-immigrant, 18 percent; anti-Semitic, 11 percent; and anti-Muslim, 6 percent) and 57 percent of these went unreported (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019). Furthermore, educators reported that there was no response from administrators in 9 out of 10 racist or biased incidents. While there are concerns about how race is interpreted as part of civic discourse and reasoning across the digital typology, common pedagogical or scholarly commitments are not shared yet.

The synthesis offered throughout this chapter supports the authors' central premise that current efforts to articulate a vision for and educate students toward the development of civic reasoning and discourse skills in the digital age are largely occurring in ad hoc, patchwork fashion. They suggest that a stronger conceptual framework and evidence base are needed in order to bolster coherence and effectiveness in this developing field. Moreover, while parents, educators, and policy makers have understandably been scrambling to respond to narratives of risk and adapt to whirlwind advances in communication modalities, the field of educational research has a role to play in offering rigorous and careful examination of the paradigms guiding digital citizenship and the results they engender. In short, there is a need to rethink education for digital citizenship—a broader focus is needed.

Recommendations for Practice

1. **Opportunities for authentic online engagement:** Youth are immersed in digital content in all aspects of their lives and see countless examples of civic discourse and reasoning in action as they scroll through their social media feeds. Meaningful digital citizenship education should engage with this context as an authentic opportunity for learning rather than seek to step back or discuss topics in the abstract. While tackling real world content requires negotiation of controversy, it also serves as a catalyst for meaningful exploration, application, and analysis.
2. **Civic action through digital discourse:** More than ever before, the scope and reach of digital communication platforms has blurred the lines between speech and action. Meaningful digital citizenship education can encourage students to take action about civic issues they care about through the digital discourse they produce or share. While supporting civic action requires negotiation of the role of schools in democracy, it also connects student learning to the real-world workings of public life.
3. **Integration of civic learning as part of digital citizenship:** Efforts to engage youth in learning about online privacy or safety and to reason about online information should be integrated into larger questions of digital citizenship. Instead of being taught as isolated skills, lessons can engage youth in discussions about how their online reasoning connects to their civic discourse and action and engage students in gathering information, discussing issues and evidence, producing and circulating information, and organizing for change.
4. **Attention to critical analysis skills of online information:** Digital citizenship should involve not just teaching youth to evaluate online information, but supporting them to critically analyze the political and media contexts that incentivize the production and spread of misinformation, diminish our motivation to critically evaluate certain information, and grant some voices and perspectives more power while minimizing others.
5. **Structured support to prepare students for diverse digital engagements:** Discourse and reasoning takes place within communities and the digital world creates many opportunities to both connect with diverse others and to connect with those who share commitments and interests. When desirably enacted, both kinds of experiences can model for youth productive engagement in a democratic society. Of course, engagement with those who share (or do not share) interests and commitments can also lead to dysfunctional echo chambers and hostile pointless exchanges between those who do not agree. Schools are well positioned to support both kinds of connections, but doing so well will often require structured opportunities.
6. **Differentiated learning opportunities based on diverse student experiences:** Students should have opportunities to develop critical race digital literacy from kindergarten through undergraduate years. These opportunities should be differentiated to account for the diverging racial socialization experiences in the home, school and across online contexts. For example, some parents prefer to adopt colorblind racial ideologies and leave teaching about race to media and others explicitly provide children with messages of racial pride and preparation for bias. Learning opportunities should leverage the resources and learning experiences students bring to classroom settings.
7. **Critical examination of issue of representation in digital spaces:** Digital citizenship education should provide opportunities for students to learn how to determine the implicit values and ideologies, including those that are related to race, that are reproduced in digital spaces and materials. Students should be able to recognize, critique and counter stereotypes associated with their various social identities and place them in historical context. In addition, they should develop a positive sense of self with digital media and be exposed to educational materials that accurately represent their racial-ethnic group.
8. **Understanding of the importance of attention:** Students should understand the importance of attention and cognitive load in digital spaces. They should be provided with strategies to

avoid distraction and enhance their learning. Students should also be informed of ways that attention can be weaponized in digital spaces for political and economic ends.

9. **Awareness of the emotional dimension of civic reasoning and discourse:** Digital citizenship education should provide students with strategies to be able to monitor their own and others' emotions as they interact with digital media. Students should understand the ways that digital content is designed to stir particular emotions which can then inform their behaviors. They should be taught strategies to cope with viral traumatic events online that may lead to depressive and posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms.
10. **Examination of online communication and language:** Students should have opportunities to learn to evaluate how language may be used to reproduce social hierarchies. For example, metaphors such as "illegals" may be used to dehumanize immigrant groups. Students should also recognize codes and conventions of a range of genres and develop an awareness of how digital spaces are constructed through interactive communication.

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