Harnessing the Power of New Media for Good: Using TikTok as a Tool for Social Justice and Social Work Education

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Abstract: Social media and other forms of media are constantly emerging, from forums and chat rooms in the 1990s, to Myspace and Facebook in the 2000s, to Instagram and Twitter in the 2010s. One recent form of media is TikTok, an app that hit the United States in 2016 before catapulting to popularity in 2018. This article is a conversation between TikTok creator/social worker eli hess and social work professor/TikTok creator Shanna Kattari about the ways that TikTok has been/can be used for educational purposes. We address using TikTok both to teach students in formal social work programs and to engage the masses around topics related to social justice. We reflect on this method of social justice education and pose questions about this approach. Topics of discussion include personal impact of using TikTok, professional/personal challenges, and ways that TikTok content can be used in social work education and practice.

***Keywords*:** social media, practice, education, student, faculty

> *A white brunette person in a denim shirt and black beanie is seated in front of the camera. They begin to speak, their eyes searching and hands gesturing as they think about their words. The captions read: "Hi I love you. I am a perfectionist, and by that I mean it is very difficult for me to accept my work as good enough. Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun (2001) wrote about the characteristics of white supremacy culture, and they say that perfectionism is actually one of the characteristics. They argue that, under white supremacy, this construct of perfectionism creates a dynamic in which we are constantly searching for the inadequacies of work — and we view inadequacies of work to be a reflection of our own personal inadequacies. This also means that we're constantly searching for the best way of doing things or the best way of knowing things, instead of accepting that there are many ways to do and know things. If we approach social justice with a desire to capture and conquer and attain some level of mastery over knowledge, we're approaching social justice through the lens of colonialism. We've gotta approach our learning and growth as expansion outward and inward at the same time, and not a climb to the top of something that doesn't exist"* (hess [@gefiltefist], 2021).

Introduction

As the Internet has grown and developed over the past three decades, social media and "new media" have emerged, allowing for new outlets and opportunities to engage with issues of social justice and social work online, as well as in in-person settings. Various forms of new media are constantly being developed, from the forums and chat rooms of the 1990s, to Myspace and Facebook in the 2000s, to Instagram and Twitter in the early to mid-2010s. One of the more recent forms of new media is TikTok, an app that hit the United States in late 2016 before catapulting to popularity in 2018 and becoming a household name by 2020 (Leskin, 2020). TikTok is an app that allows users to create short videos (lasting 60 seconds or less) using

filters, captioning, music, and other accoutrement to share everything from jokes to self-reflection, cooking tips to information on issues of social justice. Other fields, such as public health (Basch et al., 2020) and medicine (Comp et al., 2020) have used TikTok as a platform to educate people on a variety of field specific issues. In this dialogue between eli hess, a Master of Social Work (MSW) student and TikTok creator/influencer, and Shanna Kattari, associate professor at the University of Michigan School of Social Work and TikTok creator, we discuss our experiences using this app to educate students, social workers, and community members about issues of social justice. We showcase snapshots (in italics) of some of our more popular TikTok social justice content to give examples to the reader of how we have done this work while also grounding our reflection in the examples themselves.

> *A white redheaded femme in a rainbow dress and rainbow glasses smiles at the camera, singing along to Sara Bareilles' Brave. The words "White folks nervous/anxious about calling in their white friends/family/peers:" appear, followed by "Trying to be perfect, to do the 'right' thing, etc., is a value of white supremacy." Then, as the chorus sings "I Want to See You Be Brave" plays, the femme raises their fist by their side, and the caption reads "do the d*mn work!"* (Kattari [@DrFemme], 2020a).

Using New Media for Social Justice Education in Social Work

New media technologies are quickly becoming a source for facilitating conversations in the classroom and beyond (Fang et al., 2014). In contrast to old media like printed newspapers and books, new media refers to digitized communications that are "interactive, hypertexual, virtual, networked, and simulated" (Lister et al., 2009, p. 13). The most recent revision of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (2017) indicates a move toward contemporizing social work engagement with technology (Joiner, 2019). Social workers have an ethical responsibility to adapt to a changing technological landscape (Council on Social Work Education, 2015; NASW, 2017). Likewise, social work educators should be prepared to attend to the needs of an evolving student body. According to Careless (2015), social media offers a space for "global discourse . . . unbound by the policies of formal education" (p. 13). Digital methods of communication and education create opportunities for a broad audience to participate in critical discourse.

Freire (2000) situates critical awareness of oppression within the concept of praxis: "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 52). Social justice praxis in the social work classroom necessitates an honest examination of our institutions. Epistemological elitism and the tenacious mythology of a bifurcation between scholarship and social work practice function together to lift academic knowledge production above daily social action. Social work classrooms may choose to redefine legitimacy in scholarship and nurture spaces of social change. New media technologies can expand pedagogical possibilities for engaging with real-world experience in concert with academic knowledge in the social work classroom. Further, new media mediates the delays in article and book publishing by creating a chronicle of social justice action in real time (Robbins & Singer, 2014). Thus, social justice conversations on apps such as TikTok can bridge the gap between study and action, academy, and community.

The purpose of this paper is to share personal experiences using TikTok as a tool and venue for social justice education in the field of social work. While there is a breadth of literature exploring the efficacy of social media in social work education (Fang et al., 2014; Hitchcock & Battista, 2013; Hitchcock & Young, 2016; Teixeira & Hash, 2017), to date there is no representation in the literature of TikTok as a tool for teaching in social work. Our interest is not in quantifying TikTok's validity as a pedagogical implement. Rather, we wish to offer personal anecdotes and pose questions about the possibilities for TikTok in social work education.

eli:

I joined TikTok in the spring of 2020. At the time, I was a month away from the conclusion of my Bachelor of Social Work program at Portland State University and two months away from the commencement of my graduate studies. In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, I caught wind that people were migrating to TikTok for some interaction and connection amidst the grief, chaos, and stagnation. I spent some time scrolling through the app, enchanted by what felt like a limitless feed of puppies, pranks, choreography, bread baking, indoor gardening, and political discourse. I started making posts with no real agenda or theme. Having watched videos on my feed accumulate hundreds of millions of views, I briefly entertained the seemingly quixotic dream of producing viral content. The lack of engagement with my initial posts dampened such a fantasy. Then, a week after I joined the app, one of my videos amassed 100,000 views overnight.

That same week, Portland residents began showing up en masse to protest police brutality following the murder of George Floyd. Having heard the many calls to defund, demilitarize, and/or abolish police, I began making videos about police abolition. I was going through a process of self-education on the topic, and I thought it might be helpful to share some of my own learning with this new audience. At first, my abolition and racial justice videos received little engagement. Eventually, however, a video about the broken windows theory and its impact on modern policing (Vitale, 2017) went viral and was widely shared.

Following the success of this video, I continued to post about abolition and reimagining justice. I broadened my subject matter to include reflections on gender and sexuality, mental health, relationships, and Jewish identity. I learned as I went, bringing literature into my posts and engaging with content from other creators calling for justice and social change. I continue to use TikTok to share my ongoing learning and hopefully bring my audience along in the process.

It is important for purposes of transparency and accountability to name the positionality from which I enter my work and social media presence. I am a white, Jewish, nonbinary lesbian. I am currently not disabled, I am thin, and I arguably benefit from "pretty privilege" (Mock, 2017). Some of these identities impact my palatability and marketability to a mass audience. It is very likely that some of my viewers are more motivated to absorb racial justice and abolition content from an attractive white person. I am interested in leveraging my privilege with intentionality and speaking to my own areas of oppression without capitalizing on them. This is a balance I consider every time I post.

Shanna:

I came to TikTok in February 2019 after seeing it marketed on Facebook over and over again. When I finally checked out what it was, I fell down the rabbit hole that is TikTok. (Given that the first video I saw was of a person cosplaying the Mad Hatter from *Alice in Wonderland*, the pun is intended.) This was before you could even write words on the video, so people were having to learn to write backward on paper and then hold it up to the camera if they had anything they wanted to display in writing. Videos were capped at 15 seconds, and they were mostly of people lip-syncing to existing sounds, rather than creating new ones. I started creating my videos by lip-syncing to sounds about queer and body-positive topics, cosplaying a few times myself, but after the fun of that started to wane, I really began to think about how I use social media. The main things I use other platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) for are connection with my various communities, and education, especially around issues related to social justice.

Right around this time, TikTok started to enable adding text to videos, extended the videos' allowable duration to 60 seconds, and included the ability to use your own sounds. With these changes, it made more sense to me to use this platform in similar ways that I use other social media platforms: to connect and to educate. I started to change what type of content I created, using new trends to bring up issues around disability and ableism, gender and cissexism, sexuality and homophobia, race and racism, size and fatphobia, etc. I found that people really enjoyed these short 15–60-second snippets about social justice issues, and they began to have meaningful dialogue in the comments sections of the videos and duetting the videos themselves [responding to the original video with new content]. With this shift, I found myself becoming part of #QueerTok (LGBTQ TikTok), #DisabilityTikTok, and eventually even #SocialWorkTikTok.

One day in class, I mentioned my TikTok usage to my MSW students, and they wanted to see some of my videos. Sheepishly I showed them a few, and not only did they love them, but they started to talk about how they could use these (or create their own!) in their practice settings, especially settings involving youth and young adults. We brainstormed ways to use TikTok "for good" and how we could create meaningful content within a social work lens. I loved getting to think about using the app in new and different ways with my students, and that started me thinking about the impact that being a TikTok creator has on oneself and on one's community.

eli:

I have certainly witnessed the possibility of transformation through connection on TikTok. Every video I publish is an exercise in vulnerability, a lesson in speaking concisely, and a big question mark when it comes to how the viewers will receive the information. It is a transformative experience to see my audience grapple with information and ideas they are encountering for the first time in my videos. In providing educational content for my viewers on TikTok, I am also engaging in an ongoing process of learning. I spend time carefully researching the concepts that I discuss in videos. I discover more and more what resonates with the viewers with each post. I refine my ability to deliver information in bite-sized chunks and

pare down abstract concepts. Sharing content on TikTok is a reminder that I must be actively engaged in my own learning as I work to facilitate educational spaces.

hooks (1994) proposes that "any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks" (p. 21). This model for engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) encourages educators to relinquish any sense of primacy in the classroom, embrace student acuity, and reciprocate the risk-taking that learners undergo when sharing their personal narratives. Educator vulnerability can serve as a means of flattening power disparity between teachers and students. In my work as a teaching assistant, I perch at the juncture between student and professor. This position allows for a certain malleability between the two roles. When I facilitate lectures and discussions with my students, I endeavor to operationalize the practice of vulnerability and mutual learning. I examine the accessibility of my teaching and the language I use to convey complex topics. I carefully share personal anecdotes as they pertain to course content. I seek to make more space for student responses before I interject my own thoughts and wield my position of power in the classroom with caution. I interrogate my own motivations when I contribute to student conversations: Am I saying this because it adds to the discussion? Am I speaking because I want my students to think I'm smart? What are the chances that a student will make the same point I am about to make if I wait a moment? How much can I learn from my students if I just take the time to listen?

Shanna:

Once I figured out a bit more concretely how I wanted to use TikTok, I started to find my groove. While never as prolific as eli, I really loved finding community and having another venue for educating folks on everything from the harm of misgendering someone to the challenges of being an academic. In the first year or so that I was on the app, there were very few other social workers using it, at least professionally, so we tended to connect with one another, comment and like each other's videos, and share them. However, I never really hit it big on the actual TikTok app. Instead, where I had the most impact was sharing the videos I had created on TikTok on Twitter and Facebook.

On TikTok, my 60-second clips might get 50–100 likes and a few comments, while on other forms of social media, I would get dozens of retweets, hundreds of likes, and significantly more people having dialogue in the comments sections of my posts. Potential MSW students started messaging me about applying to the University of Michigan School of Social Work because they had seen some of my TikToks on social media and wanted to take classes with me. At social work conferences, people would come up to me and say, "Oh, you're that social work TikToker! Can we make a video together?" On Twitter, I connected with many other social workers with similar viewpoints because they commented on my TikToks or asked to share them with their students.

I love that something as simple as a video of someone lip-syncing to Britney Spears with a caption about the harm that can be caused by intentionally not using someone's correct name was enough to make people think and connect to the lived experiences of trans people and

people with cultural names that are often mispronounced or shortened for the ease of white teachers and coworkers. I love teaching with every fiber of my being (except maybe the grading part), and using TikTok like this has given me a whole new way to engage others, especially around social justice and academic content. It also feels validating that I "still have it"—"it" being that spark that allows me to connect with students (official or not) from all walks of life and to inspire them to ask those deeper questions and to be more self-reflective. Moreover, TikTok has made me engage more critically with the content I create, to really boil down complex topics to snapshots and figure out how to make things as approachable as possible, which is always a good exercise for academics.

During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, making these TikToks was also incredibly helpful for my mental health; sometimes, the only reason I got out of my pajamas was to make a set of TikToks, despite the fact that I know that putting on clothes and earrings always helps me to feel a bit better. Thinking ahead about what content to create next helped me to focus on something other than the feelings of isolation I was steeped in as an immuno-compromised person. However, as the pandemic raged on, I found I had less and less capacity to make new content, especially once classes started up again in the fall. Currently, I tend to engage with others' videos, but I don't make a lot of new videos, though I am definitely missing the sense of community I had on the app.

I will also say there are hard moments of being low key "internet famous" (i.e., having people recognize you for your content). Some of my videos garnered hateful comments from the mundane (calling me a snowflake) to more vitriolic curse words, transphobia, anti-Semitism, fatphobia, queerphobia, ableism, and femmephobia that caused a somatic reaction in me. Throughout my 20+ years on social media (counting AOL message boards and LiveJournal), I've learned to grow a thicker skin AND be handy with the "delete comment" button. I always tell folks I don't mind educating and will have a conversation when there is genuine intent to learn, but that my social media spaces are indeed my own, and I will delete any comments or block followers who make me feel unsafe. On the other hand, having people tell me they want to explore social work, or even start using a new name, or ask to not be weighed at their medical appointment – each of these interactions brings such joy to me, as it is positive impact on someone's life I would not have had without the virtual connection to bring us together. That, to me, makes the occasional troll or hater totally worth it.

eli:

Like most social media platforms, TikTok utilizes an algorithm to sort posts on a user's feed. The algorithm is the mathematical core of the app, employing equations that learn from a user's engagement (Bail, 2021). TikTok's algorithm observes each user's behavior on the app: the videos they 'like' or comment on and how long they spend watching each video. From this data, the algorithm curates a feed of videos uniquely tailored to the presumed interests of the user and sorted by relevance rather than publish time. For many users, TikTok is eerily successful at directing them to "one of its many 'sides,' whether [they're] interested in socialism or Excel tips or sex, conservative politics or a specific celebrity" (Smith, 2021, para. 6).

Because TikTok's algorithm is perpetually adapting every user's feed based on their engagement, content creators may reach a new sphere of individuals with every video they post. No matter how many followers a creator amasses, each video has the potential to reach a fresh audience. Usually the algorithm successfully identifies a batch of viewers whose interests align with the content of the video. However, some videos end up on the "wrong side" of TikTok.

A term commonly employed by TikTok creators, the "wrong side" refers to a metaphorical space where viewers with vastly differing views or politics reside. Sharing pieces of my personal identities and experiences has not only meant building solidarity and connection with a global audience, but also contending with the "trolls," or those who interact online with the intent of causing harm or spreading hate. Whether their sentiments are rooted in a genuine adherence to oppressive rhetoric or simply a desire to be inflammatory, some users post comments targeting pieces of my identity. Though these comments have been varied, my Jewishness and queerness have been most noticeably picked apart by onlookers. Sometimes I ignore these comments, feeling that my energy is better spent focusing on positivity and connection. But since my professional background is in violence prevention and bystander intervention, I feel that I am well positioned to model interrupting oppressive statements with grace. On my best days, I respond to hateful comments with empathy, set boundaries, offer some education, and close with vulnerability. Other days I have less patience, and I lead with humor. In many cases, other viewers also interject and disrupt the trolls. Interestingly, the videos that garner the most hateful or oppressive comments also tend to be my most-viewed videos.

To name one example, I once posted a duet in response to a video of a toddler having an imaginary conversation on a toy phone. I filled in the spaces on the other side of the line with a lighthearted chat about interrupting homophobia. This post was intended to be amusing, and I wasn't *actually* having a conversation with the young person in the original video. Nonetheless, my comment section exploded with viewers accusing me of ruining the trend and giving a child the "wrong ideas." In some of the comments, people labeled themselves as proud homophobes. Others posted emojis of knives or rainbow flags surrounded by flames. As the hateful remarks amassed, a cadre of LGBTQ+ people and advocates took to the comment section to interrupt the homophobia therein. The video accrued 2.3 million views. Eventually, the resounding support eclipsed the bigotry.

Another challenge that comes with having a large following is the invisible pressure to create. At the end of the day, I am a commodity. My followers may care deeply about the image they see of me on the Internet, but I am ultimately still a product for consumption. Although this venture is not a requirement for my work, I nonetheless end up trapped in the capitalism hamster wheel. I find myself defining success by the reach and performance of my videos, not by the viewers' expressions of deep connection to the content. I feel pressure to put something out every day to maintain my following, knowing that the algorithm favors consistency. So my Internet presence becomes, in a way, a contradiction of my values.

The climate of commodification on TikTok is exacerbated by an accelerating presence of sponsored content on the app. When I first joined TikTok, I noticed that there were very few paid advertisements on my feed. Some creators promoted brands on their own accounts or

contracted with businesses and organizations to create collaborative videos, but the vast majority of videos that I encountered were unsponsored posts by individuals. As TikTok has carved out a position of prominence in the social media landscape, it has also become a booming marketplace (Herrman, 2021). These days I run into roughly one advertisement for every eight or nine videos, each ad with a discreet transparent "sponsored" label tucked away at the bottom. The ads sometimes feature notable TikTok creators and often mimic the youthful, informal style of typical unsponsored videos. They might play into a stylistic trend circulating on the app or make use of a popular soundbyte. Sometimes I don't even notice that I'm watching an ad until several seconds in. Meanwhile, products and brands strategically wrangle free advertising by creating trending hashtags and competitions. The bustling grind of consumerism has become an indissoluble fixture of TikTok's cultural lexicon.

In July of 2020, TikTok introduced the "Creator Fund," a pool of $200 million made available by application for creators who met the entry qualifications, including holding at least 10,000 followers (Pappas, 2020). The funds were distributed to creators based on "the number of views and the authenticity of those views, the level of engagement on the content, as well as making sure content is in line with … Community Guidelines and Terms of Service" (TikTok, 2021, para. 11). With the launch of the Creator Fund, I was met with a new incentive to post regularly, follow trends, and hopefully go viral. It was difficult for me to escape the allure of collecting a paycheck for something I was already doing without compensation for enjoyment, so I signed up. This only added to my internal interrogation of the rationale behind my sustained content creation. As it turns out, I have never collected more than a handful of cents on a single video. However, I have found a new opportunity for growth and inquiry. How can I put forth information without needing the validation that hundreds of thousands of people enjoyed it? How do I roll with the ebb and flow of engagement, where some videos get millions of views and others get a couple hundred? How do I find joy in the process, rather than the result?

Shanna:

Finding joy through connecting on social media is a huge piece of who I am and how I engage with the world. As a disabled and chronically ill individual, I often have to withdraw from attending events or decline to participate in community spaces due to pain, fatigue, or even just lack of capacity. Creating and cultivating an online community over the past two decades has been key to my mental health and, honestly, to my basic survival.

However, as the world of the Internet shifts, we can also see more and more challenges emerging. One such issue is that of uncritical moderation practices and something called "shadowbanning." Shadowbanning is the practice whereby a site, such as TikTok or Instagram, doesn't officially shut down a user's account, but instead keeps it from being seen in the main feed, thus making it harder for other users to interact with that individual's content. It is a virtual punishment of sorts. TikTok came under scrutiny in 2019 for shadowbanning content from users who were disabled, fat, BIPOC, queer, and/or trans and instead supporting content from the most privileged users on the app (Botella, 2019). One way this looks is making videos that then do not show up on the For You Page, and only show up to followers, or making them impossible to find without visiting an individual page. Moreover, sometimes hashtags get shadowbanned,

which means that you cannot click on them to see similar content. At least for a while, hashtags like #Fat, #Disabled, #BLM, and #MentalIllness were shadowbanned, in addition to creators who used similar language on their posts or bios. As one can imagine, this was incredibly frustrating to these marginalized users who experienced less engagement with their virtual community and made it difficult for someone like myself who is fat, disabled, queer, Jewish, and nonbinary, and who posted a lot of content on these and racial justice issues, to have my information viewed by others. However, after much public pushback with both creators and consumers calling out TikTok publicly and those with non-shadowbanned content dueting the marginalized creators so their content could still be viewed, TikTok changed their algorithms to be more inclusive, though some shadowbanning still occurs.

This privileging of certain experiences and bodies over others is not unique to the online world, as it often comes up in the in-person world under the guise of professionalism. In fact, throughout my career, first as a sexuality educator and now as a professor, I have continuously engaged in dialogue about what is and is not professional. I always find the conversation interesting, particularly as we know that what our society deems as "professional" often arises from white supremacist, ableist, and cishet patriarchal beliefs (Jarus et al., 2020; Manthey & Windsor, 2017; Marom, 2019). Whether it is about wearing fun prints, natural Black hair, a certain amount of makeup (or none at all), sitting vs. standing to teach, or sharing pieces of our personal lives with our students and/or clients, we are often critiqued on the professionality of these choices.

For a long time, the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists would not allow current or former sex workers to be certified (Hartley, 2010), likely out of a fear of this somehow making the field seem less professional (though, as a counter point, who is more professional in sexuality than professional sex workers?). However, this rule has changed as the field of sexuality has become more affirmed. As fields, both sexuality and social work are often forced to defend their validity, so using new media and sharing personal anecdotes are often seen as "edgy" or "inappropriate," whereas they would never be challenged in fields like marketing or sports writing.

Yet, the Council on Social Work Education (2015) and the field of social work affirms that *use of self* is an appropriate method to engage students in the classroom to support them in working with their clients and communities (Kaushik, 2017), and indeed, I find that sharing my own personal anecdotes around my social justice journey or experiences in community organizing are often some of the most valued interactions I have with my students. They serve to demonstrate my own experience, as well as humanize me in a way that reading an article simply cannot. Similarly, new media is often used for individuals sharing their own knowledge and experience on everything from sharing COVID vaccination dissemination sites and policy advocacy work to therapists sharing mental health tips and youth groups keeping connected. Given that the field of social work must use and interact with these types of media and that the field even has its own #SWTech hashtag, it makes sense that we figure out how to use these types of media, such as TikTok, to engage and educate students, clients, and communities that are part of our practice.

eli:

TikTok presents a compelling venue for conversations about social justice in the classroom, and making space for new media in the classroom can benefit students in several ways. First, including media like TikTok allows for engagement from different types of learners, particularly those who are more apt to absorb information through audio/visual methods. TikTok videos can also supplement readings and discussions with accessible and concise summaries of concepts covered in the classroom. Finally, bringing TikTok into the classroom demonstrates to students that there are an abundance of methods through which they can participate in national and global social work dialogues.

At the same time, TikTok creates a space where important conversations about social justice can be had by those who lack the resources or desire to pursue academic education. We can bring TikTok into the classroom as a teaching tool, but we can also view TikTok as a classroom of its own. I have found an awe-inspiring breadth of knowledge on the app from social work professionals and educators I might not otherwise have come into contact with, young people sharing their lived experiences, and students across academic disciplines. TikTok presents a space of possibility for developing and sharing knowledge across professions, nations, and generations.

> *A white redheaded femme in a blue dress is reflected against themselves, mirrored. On the left-side image, the text reads "Culturally Responsive Practice," and on the right-side image, "Culturally Competent Practice." The music plays and says, "I am Drew, I am Danny, and we are not the same person//We may have similar lives, we may have similar wives…" and in the middle, between the images, the text reads "Recognizes differences between groups, taught in many social work programs, rejects a one size fits all approach." The song then says, "but we are different nonetheless," and a new text box under culturally responsive practice reads "Constantly learning & growing in response to a community or culture's needs" while a new text box under culturally competent practice reads "Suggests that one can be competent in a culture not their own"* (Kattari [@DrFemme], 2020b).

Shanna:

As an instructor with a background in education, I am constantly thinking about creative ways to engage my MSW and PhD students. Research has shown time and time again that simply asking students to listen to lectures and write papers is not an effective way to teach critical thinking (Halton et al., 2007; Kaplan et al., 2020; Schmidt et al., 2015; Trinidad et al., 2020), yet these assignments persist as the bread and butter of the academy.

Sometimes, in class, I will ask students to pair or triple up, and in their small groups, they have three options to share what they have learned from a specific reading or a topic area of our course: (1) they can make a tweet (240 characters) or meme about it, (2) they can create an Instagram image or meme (using Canva or other free software) about it, or (3) they can make one 60-second (or less) TikTok video about it. I have had students use all three methods, and they almost always come out better than anything I could have created myself. My students

often share how much they value these assignments, and the recognition of multiple ways of sharing information with their audience, whether individual clients, organizations, or coalitions they are part of. Particularly given that most of our students have been online since their early teens, if not earlier, this social media content creation resonates with many students in a different way than traditional papers do. Furthermore, by working in groups, rather than independently, not only are students given the opportunity to share their own findings with others and condense those findings together, but those who are less familiar with technology and new media are afforded the opportunity to partner with others who could post to their Instagram story in their sleep.

I have worked with students in our children and youth track who have done projects where they create a series of TikTok videos to share with youth about topics such as sex education, healthy relationships, and substance use. Again, these submissions have all been fantastic and beyond anything I could have thought up on my own. Other times, students have made TikTok videos about a social justice topic engaged over the semester to share with their family over fall break—the reason being that the ability to teach someone else about a concept you have recently learned is a sign of true comprehension. Some of our more macro focused students have used TikTok videos to break down public policy issues for those who might not know as much about certain topics.

As we have moved online with the pandemic, I also encourage TikTok videos as a form of engaging on our Canvas boards that we use as our learning platform. For example, during the first week of class, we always have an introductions board, where I offer some prompts to which they can respond with text, a TikTok, or an infographic. Then, throughout the semester, they can engage on the boards in similar ways, which allows them to play to their strengths, as well as to learn new technologies in a super low-stakes environment.

While my institution is not always on the bandwagon when it comes to supporting new ways of contributing (especially from a tenure perspective), there are absolutely groups on campus that support this work. From the Center for Research on Teaching and Learning to the National Center for Institutional Diversity and their public scholarship *SPARK* virtual magazine, there are supports for approaching social justice issues beyond peer reviewed journal articles and assigning papers. Moreover, my institution's own social media team has had me record TikTok and similar style videos for a variety of topics, including to discuss pronouns and their usage. These were promoted on the institution's main social media channels, which helps me feel my work on social media is recognized by some people at this institution.

Is TikTok the "end all, be all" of new media? Certainly not; the youth, as they say, have already moved on to other ever-emerging technologies. Yet, it has been an excellent platform for me as an educator, as a social justice advocate, and as a community member. There are so many interesting ways one can use TikTok in both social work education and social work practice.

> *A white brunette nonbinary person in a black tank top and baseball cap sits in front of the camera. They begin to speak. They say, "I want to talk really quickly about the idea of resilience. This comes up a lot for me in school, studying social work and talking about*

> *community resilience, individual resilience, etc. Often it seems like we define resilience as someone's ability to function within capitalism and white supremacy—because that's how we've defined 'functioning' in American society. The experience of living through ongoing oppression is an experience of trauma. And we shouldn't be defining someone's resilience by their ability to function within the very system that oppresses them in the first place. Yes, we should absolutely be recognizing the strengths of people who are living through oppressive forces. But if our only definition of resilience is the ability to function within those oppressive forces, then we're kind of trapping ourselves in a reality where those oppressive forces retain power. We're never going to dismantle these oppressive forces if we rely on them as our sole definition of how someone can succeed" (hess [@gefiltefist], 2020).*

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