Equity and Impact in Media Literacy Practice: Mapping the Field in the United States

A REPORT FOR

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

October 2021

MAPPING IMPACTFUL MEDIA LITERACY PRACTICES

Equity and Impact in Media Literacy Practice: Mapping the Field in the United States

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How to cite this report:

Mihailidis, P., Ramasubramanian, S., Tully, M., Bhusari, B., Johnson, P., & Riewestahl, E. (2021). Equity and Impact in Media Literacy Practice: Mapping the Field in the United States. National Association for Media Literacy Education. https://mappingimpactfulml.org

Table of Contents

Version 1.0 (October 28, 2021)

I. Executive Summary

For many years, media literacy educators, researchers, advocates, and practitioners worked under the assumption that media literacy serves to protect and uphold democratic practices within the United States. We assume media literate citizens are the best safeguards for our democracy;however, little attention is paid to defining how media literacy achieves this goal or how it is connected to ongoing inequities within democratic societies like ours.

While calls for media literacy practices to better support an equitable society are increasing within the field (and society at large), there remains a gap between how impactful media literacy practices are defined and how they are connected to equitable goals supporting social justice. We argue this chasm persists because many of the underlying assumptions about media literacy practice are amorphous and difficult to capture through more traditional impact measures.

In this project, we worked with three core assumptions made within the field of media literacy--that media literacy practices empower individuals, support communities, and ultimately contribute to engaged citizenship within a democracy. This report encapsulates a year's worth of research into the connection between impactful media literacy practices and equity. For our research, we started by interrogating the three assumptions made within media literacy to develop three research questions:

- **RQ1: How is impact defined in media literacy research?**
- **RQ2: What are the main practices and processes that lead to impactful media literacy practices?**
- **RQ3: What are the challenges and opportunities for incorporating equity into impactful media literacy practices?**

Working from these questions, we developed a multi-method approach to studying impact within media literacy practices that centers issues of equity and social justice. This approach included (1) a scoping review of media literacy literature spanning a decade; (2) in-depth interviews with 27 educators, administrators, and practitioners in the field; and (3) a survey of 741 media literacy practitioners from a number of fields and organizations.

The findings from the scoping review of current literature on media literacy practices suggest impact is defined by six distinct themes we call the "6 Es." These include impact as evaluation outcomes, enquiry, expression, experiential learning, engaged citizenship, and equities. Findings from the in-depth interviews reflect back on the three core assumptions that media literacy empowers individuals, supports communities, and contributes to engaged citizenship within a democracy.

I. Executive Summary

The interviews also indicate the urgency for media literacy to be implemented as a core educational standard, especially in light of the events of the Jan 6, 2021

insurrection in the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. and the worldwide #BlackLivesMatter uprisings after George Floyd's murder in May 2020. Finally, the results of our survey of media literacy educators, administrators, and practitioners align closely with the findings of the in-depth interviews. Many respondents indicated that their media literacy practices focused on individual agency over the more abstract concepts of community empowerment and democratic practice. The survey also captures the challenges that many practitioners face with incorporating topics related to equity and social justice within their communities and classrooms.

We believe that if media literacy practices are to be truly impactful, they must necessarily address social inequities within democratic societies. Therefore, impactful and equitable media literacy practices are one and the same. This report includes our findings and the full methodology of each study, including the development of new survey measures for equity in media literacy practices. We also include a public-facing, practical, user-friendly tool about equitable media literacy practices in the form of a field guide to help practitioners reflect on their existing media literacy practices and consider more equity-driven approaches to media literacy education in formal and informal learning ecosystems.

II. Locating Our Research

This project is situated in a long and wide trajectory of media literacy research and practice. The large and growing body of scholarship in media literacy and its wide array of sub-literacies has guided our thinking around how media practices, in formal and informal learning environments, contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society. While it is impossible to include all published research, we draw from rich literature across media literacies and related disciplines to explore the research questions posed for this project . In this research, we have made choices that will speak to certain academic communities more than others. Through this process, we stand by the values of honesty, transparency, and openness in the pursuit of greater understanding. We believe that this research can provide valuable insights for scholars and practitioners who are exploring the relationships among media, educational practices, and social justice. We strive to make the complex clear, the clear complex, and to re-visit the core assumptions that have long guided media literacy research and practice in the United States within contemporary socio-political contexts.

Our goal is to provide rich, nuanced, and rigorous insights into how media literacy practices impact communities in the United States today. We acknowledge those who work tirelessly to advocate for more media literacy opportunities across this country, especially those within marginalized and under-resourced communities. We lift up those who believe that media literacy opportunities are far too few to make an impact in our country. We recognize those who built and continue to build impactful media literacy educational practices in the United States over the past decade. And we call to attention those who have been working with and in communities, those who may not call their work “media literacy” but who provide media-based interventions to help communities express, share, advocate, and thrive.

We believe this work can and will start conversations, challenge conventional approaches, and call to question existing research and practice of media literacy. We believe that it is through such conversations that spaces of research grow and fields evolve. We lead with our values, which we share below. We hope that all those who engage with this report do so with criticality, openness, and solidarity. This report will help us better understand how media literacy practices work today in terms of their articulation of impact and the processes that support this articulation. But more importantly, we hope l this research will launch conversations,

And we call to attention those who have been working with and in communities, who may not call their work “media literacy” but who **provide media-based interventions** to help communities express, share, advocate, and thrive.

initiatives, and collaborations that center equity and inclusion in all media literacy practices because

impact and equity are inextricable within educational practices. We aspire not only to find opportunities for media literacy to thrive in well-resourced schools and communities, but also to support, cultivate, and facilitate more just, inclusive, democratic, and equitable futures for under-resourced ones.

Why Now?

This report comes at an inflection point in the United States. Our political systems, while maintaining basic institutional democratic functions, are subject to spectacle, sensationalism, divisiveness, and manipulation. These trends are certainly not new, but they are heightened in this time of ubiquitous media, declining trust in institutions, low levels of local political participation, and a dearth of civility among elected officials and citizens. Additionally, deep geographic and social inequalities persist in the U.S. in terms of education, technology, social mobility, and health, which are further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our media systems provide a vibrant and vast array of information, points of connection, and mechanisms for engagement. The abundance of these infrastructures creates questions about how media are understood and utilized for engagement in personal and civic life. We need not explain at length the impact of platforms, algorithms, and data on our basic democratic functions. We see again and again the opportunity that these tools have to call truth to power, to mobilize and advocate in support of important social causes, and to build bonds in communities with compassion, care, and love. At the same time, we see how these technological tools are co-opted to manipulate, to mis-and dis-inform, to lie, to spread bullshit (Frankfurt, 2005), and to undermine the very institutions that support the needs of all citizens in democratic nations.

> School systems are asked to do more with less, families are burdened to work more for less, and **digital technologies take on more central roles** in the social-emotional well-being of young people with little oversight or purpose.

These current phenomena strain our educational systems, burden community-level organizations, and cultivate a generation of young people immersed in mediated realities with little support to help navigate their impacts. Media have become so omnipresent that we no longer question their effects on our core democratic processes, but rather we question how much and to what extent these impacts will preserve or disrupt democratic life. At the same time, growing socio-economic inequities have further enabled those communities and institutions at the top to

thrive, while further marginalizing those in the middle and the bottom. School systems are expected to educate more students with less resources, families are

burdened to work more hours for less pay, and young people are immersed in digital technologies for more time with decreasing oversight or purpose.

The calls for media literacy have been growing. National organizations that support educational practices across the United States have built alliances to explore how media literacy can support their sites of learning. Funders are devoting more resources to the development of media, news, and digital literacies in particular. Schools are having conversations about how to integrate effective media education opportunities for their students. Community-based media education programs continue to grow. This report is situated in this growing ecosystem of media literacy research and practice. We believe that increasing calls for media literacy education in the United States should be met with research that helps us understand how media literacy practices are articulating their effectiveness and how they are defining and striving for and assessing impact. We believe that media literacies, to uphold their aspirations to support strong democracies, must prioritize equity, inclusion, and social justice. This report calls vehemently for media literacy initiatives that lift up our democracy, that build collective agency of marginalized people to form media ecosystems reflecting their interests,that hold truth to power, and push for transformation, solidarity, and meaningful engagement.

We locate this research in the traditions of media literacy scholarship and practice that have come before us. Decades of work in media and communication, educational practice, and related fields of civic media, human development, technology studies, and beyond, have supported new knowledge and applications in the relationship between media and our society. We believe that in this time of ubiquitous digital media use and rapidly changing socio-political environments, we must urgently develop new agendas for research, and new avenues for practice, that respond to current realities and future challenges relating to media literacies.

Where We Stand

Throughout this project, our team of researchers, designers, and contributors have been steadfast in acknowledging, leading with, and reflecting on our values and their impact on this research. We represent scholars, practitioners, activists, and educators from a range of backgrounds. We

> We believe that **media literacies** are central to a society that demands accountability from public institutions, equity for marginalized and underserved communities, and robust opportunities for people to use their voice to advocate for more inclusive futures.

acknowledge the impact our lived experiences and our social, political, cultural, geographic, and economic locations and intersectional

identities have on this project. We acknowledge our privilege as scholars working at research-intensive universities and colleges in the United States and the resources our positions bring with them. Our fields of research, journalism and communication, also shape our perspective about the goals of media literacy educational practice in the United States.

*We believe that **media literacies** are central to a society that demands accountability from public institutions, equity for marginalized and underserved communities, and robust opportunities for people to use their voice to advocate for more inclusive futures.* This project examines how impact is defined in media literacy and advocates for resources that support the needs of communities and people at the margins of society to build a more inclusive democracy through media practices

As such, our research is informed by our work with marginalized communities both within and outside of the United States in formal and informal learning environments. The principal investigators have experience being part of, conducting research with, and working alongside marginalized groups in various parts of the world. Our past research, lived experiences, and review of media literacy literature informed the three main assumptions that we interrogate throughout this project:

- Media literacy prioritizes individual agency.
- Media literacy empowers communities.
- Media literacy supports democracy.

We expand on these assumptions at length throughout this report. These assumptions emerge from our everyday experiences working in classrooms and communities, from our deep reading and understanding of current media literacy scholarship, and from our shared interests in social justice and equity. These assumptions guide our research process, the findings detailed in the report, the practical tools created from this process, and the recommendations and calls to action that follow.

II. Locating Our Research

Who is the Report For?

This report should be useful to stakeholders interested in media literacies and the future of civic society. We present the research findings and the call to action in ways that are accessible to a range of constituents:

- *Educators* - The research can offer insight and guidance to educators across K-12 and higher education, and pre-service teachers, who are interested in building or refining their curriculum. While we do not provide specific lesson plans, the field guide offers a series of activities and processes to infuse learning with equity-driven media literacy practices. We hope that educators will read the research with interest and use the field guide and our educational practice agenda to inform and support their work in the classroom.
- *Researchers* - This report sets a research agenda for media literacy moving forward. The data provided here ask important questions that support new emerging areas of scholarship at the intersection of media literacies, social justice, and equity. We hope they challenge norms and traditional conventions and offer academics insightful information to build from, to challenge, and to engage with.
- *Practitioners* - Those working in communities, after school programs, and in other public/non-governmental institutions can use the field guide and recommendations to engage their communities with equitable media literacy practices. The report connects research with implementation in diverse learning ecosystems.
- *Policy Makers* - This research provides data and trends explaining how media literacy research documents impact, how stakeholders understand impactful practice, and how practitioners understand media literacy's relationship to equity in their place of learning. Policies often rely on strong data, so this report provides an avenue for those hoping to reform educational bodies the chance to use empirical evidence to support their work.
- *Funders* - Media literacy's conceptual broadness has often constrained its clarity to funding organizations. This report can clarify how impact and outcomes are understood and provide guidance for funding impactful and equitable media literacy practice.
- *Parents, Advocates and Activists* - Lastly, we envision our field guide as a call to action for those working on community reform efforts. Parents, advocates, and activists can connect with peers and constituents to utilize the guide to prioritize equity in their work. They can use this research to advocate for school reforms and resources to support new community programming, or to share with parent groups.

II. Locating Our Research

We hope that people outside of these identified spaces will be able to use this report in meaningful ways.

Defining Terms

We use many terms throughout this research to support our process and provide context for the terminology found here. We also offer definitions of these in the context of our Field Guide for Equitable Media Literacy Practice.

1. **Media Literacy** - Definitions of media literacy abound. Widely used definitions of media literacy generally incorporate skills and competencies to access, comprehend, evaluate, critique, create, reflect and act with and around media. This includes texts and platforms. Organizations like NAMLE, UNESCO, and the Aspen Institute have provided encompassing and useful definitions and core principles to activate the term and its application. Scholars (see Renee Hobbs, David Buckingham, Paul Mihailidis, W. James Potter) also provide robust conceptualizations and frameworks for media literacy, which is rich with sub-literacies. Media literacy extends to new areas of inquiry and practice to include specific applications in news, technology, algorithms, data, health, and information . While this definitional expansion has caused concern about repetition, it has also brought various approaches to media literacy more fully into all aspects of daily life.

   Rather than adding another definition to the already saturated term, this project builds from these core definitions, using them to approach the research questions. We have, additionally, put forth a set of values that we use to guide our project from planning to implementation, analysis, and output:

   - ***Media literacy practices should prioritize marginalized and underserved communities.***
   - ***Media literacy practices should work toward more just and equitable futures.***
   - ***Media literacy practices should be guided by care-based ethics.***
   - ***Media literacy practices should encourage experimentation, risk-taking, play, and failure.***
   - ***Media literacy practices should be nourishing, supportive, and inclusive.***

2. **Media Literacy Educational Practice -** Throughout this report, we use the term media literacy educational practice when discussing survey findings, emerging narratives from interviews, and interpretations of the data. We use this term to indicate that we are interested in learning as it occurs beyond the formal spaces and traditional levels of education. We recognize that

   educational practice signifies the range of ways that we can design, facilitate, and implement learning processes more broadly speaking. We believe that our research and field guide can be beneficial in the contexts confronted by a primary school educator, a college course professor, a parent, or a community organizer. Educational practice reminds us to be cognizant that we are focused on learning as a process rather than education as a social institution.

3. **Impact -** Impact is a loaded term. We use it in our report because it allows us to cast a wide net around the effects that media literacy claims to have and the ways in which stakeholders understand and evaluate those effects. Impact is defined as processes and practices that media literacy practitioners use to achieve intended outcomes from their educational practice. We are interested in how impact is considered in the practice of media literacy education, in how it is conceptualized in existing research, and in how the media literacy community uses it to evaluate the effectiveness of their processes, policies, and practices. Impact also helps us understand the priorities of media literacy practitioners and researchers. When we say "impact," we are not looking for a silver bullet to serve as an end goal for media literacy interventions. Rather, we are looking for positive changes in learning communities and learning cultures that can be measured in relation to the goals and needs of those communities and cultures.

4. **Equity-** For the purposes of our report, we define equity as follows: "Equity refers to fair treatment, access, opportunity and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that prevent the full participation of some groups." (University of California at Davis, 2021). We use this term because it aligns with the values of media literacy, with our values as scholars and practitioners, and with the aspirations of a more equitable democracy for all. We use equity as a way to frame systemic and structural challenges to creating just and fair environments for all.

5. **Social Justice -** Although we primarily use the term equity in this report, we also refer to social justice in the context of media literacy practice. Social justice is a broader term that includes equity but also encompasses related terms such as empowerment, solidarity, and actionable change. As we focus on how media literacy addresses equity and fairness, we use social justice as

> a lens to consider systemic challenges to historically marginalized groups denied opportunities for accessing wealth, knowledge, technology, tools, education and other such resources that enable communities to flourish to their fullest potential.

This project attempts to be thorough in its inquiry and scope. However, it is impossible to include an exhaustive review of all the ideas around these large and complex topics. Instead, we are conscious of our own positionality within this project, and we are transparent in our processes, intentions, and shortcomings. We hope this report speaks to a range of interested communities. We are excited to have open conversations about this work, about the work that helps locate this research, and about the work that this research will help locate moving forward.

III. The State of Media Literacy & What We Know About it

Our Current Media Ecosystem

Today, we live in immersive media environments. Estimates place teens' media use in the United States nearing eight hours a day, while younger children spend almost five hours of their day engaged with media (Siegal, 2019). While we may no longer be surprised about how ubiquitous and immersive our media environments have become, what remains surprising is how little control we have over these environments. A 2018 Pew Research study found that over half of young adults in the United States believe they spend too much time with media (Jingjing, 2018). At the same time, over two-thirds of parents are worried about their children's media use and have also admittedly lost control of their own media consumption. Parents struggle to find their own media use balance in addition to monitoring the balance of others' in their homes.

Media become conduits for understanding the world and ourselves, from how we learn about local happenings, engage with peers, and track happenings across borders, cultures, and divides. We notice emerging tensions in the relationship between immersive media environments and democratic practices in the United States. We also ask how, if at all, young people can learn to navigate media ecosystems effectively.

Broadly, studies show that trust in media institutions has declined (Gottfried, Walker, and Mitchell, 2020). Relying on news information from social media platforms(such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube,Twitter, and others) often correlates with more biased information consumption and less knowledge about the credibility of the content (Mitchell, Jurkowitz, Oliphant, and Shearer, 2020). Companies never designed these platforms for the types of information consumption, dialogue, and engagement necessary for healthy societies. Their values prioritize the extraction of data and continued attention of users. Such platforms and the policies they prioritize, combined with little to no oversight or regulation, exacerbate division, divisiveness, and fracture civic dialogue in the United States (Meyer, 2018). These platforms are also, by a significant margin, where young people spend their time online.

A 2020 Knight-Gallup report on American views toward the media and its role in democracy found that a majority of Americans feel overwhelmed by the speed of media environments, believing that media organizations are to blame for social

polarization (American Views 2020, Knight Foundation, 2020). People also see misinformation and lack of credibility as the significant problem in our media environment. While respondents believe that local news is vital to healthy civic engagement, the collapse of local media infrastructures leaves a gaping hole in the potential for civic cohesion and trust (American Views 2020, Knight Foundation, 2020). According to a 2018 Tow Center report, while the trust of news on social networks is low, audiences continue to use these networks for news, and editors at news organizations continue to prioritize these platforms for news distribution and audience engagement (Tow Center Report, 2018).

Disarray is the resulting environment for media and civic life in the United States. Extractive media technologies continue to proliferate with little regulation or will to push back. Misinformation on these platforms spreads with little consistent strategy for countering it from either governmental institutions or the technology giants who benefit from users who click, share, argue, and harass on their sites. In a recent *Guardian* essay, journalist Paul Lewis wrote that "tech companies exploit human vulnerabilities to keep people hooked, manipulating when people receive "likes" for their posts, ensuring they arrive when an individual is likely to feel vulnerable or in need of approval" (Lewis, 2018). Mobile technologies are an extension of these platforms, using attention-seeking techniques popular in advertising and the gaming industry to continually keep users "notified," reaching for phones for another affirmation of their identity. With mobile phone adoption growing in scale and significance, and with social apps at the center of their use, these invasive media techniques will only grow. Research indicates increasing concerns around anxiety and depression in young people, especially young women (Twenge, 2018). Privacy concerns, while not new, continue to grow as new platforms like TikTok introduce invasive extractive algorithms (McMillan, Poulsen, and Robert, 2020).

Legacy media, in particular television news, reverts to sensationalizing their offerings to compete with the online platforms at the center of young people's mediated lives. Moreover, as TV audiences skew older, companies' tactics to engage viewers become more polarizing and obfuscate their responsibility to different media forms and content objectives (Entman, Robert, and Knupfer, 2020; Hart, Chinn, and Soroka, 2020; Jurkowitz and Mitchell, 2020). Cable news reverts to heavily editorialized news delivery, polarizing commentary, and a disregard for the norms that once guided television news production. For example, the Sinclair Broadcasting Group actively prioritizes news and content that align with a specific political agenda while at the same time increasing their control of television news, owning over 170 television stations in over 83 markets across the United States (Rosenberg, 2018). On more than one occasion, Sinclair distributed required

reading scripts to its anchors that promote conservative agendas and talking points.

These trends are leading to a United States that is strained by derision, divisiveness, and polarization. In *Why We're Polarized,* journalist Ezra Klein describes the logic of polarization: "To appeal to a more polarized public, political institutions and political actors behave in more polarized ways. As political institutions and actors become more polarized, they further polarize the public" (Klein, 2020, p. xix). Media is complicit in this feedback loop, where news organizations cover politicians through reporting norms that no longer match our era's information and technology norms. Platforms exacerbate and amplify polarization to garner more sustained engagement in their systems. The result is what Andrew Marantz (2020) calls the "hijacking of the American conversation," where sophisticated algorithms and the manipulation of online platforms enable extremist, often racist, ideas and ideologies to displace the norms of democratic engagement in the United States. While white nationalist and extremist groups have existed since the founding of the United States, they now reserve a more substantial and more central presence in our local and national dialogues, thanks in large part to the decentralization of mainstream media infrastructures and the resulting growth of internet subcultures with immense reach and impact. These groups also find support within educational environments (Ramasubramanian & Miles, 2018).

Automation and algorithms further contribute to the polarization of media systems and cultural climate. In *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor,* Virginia Eubanks (2019) makes the case that many of the algorithms designed to maximize efficiency are both intentionally and unintentionally surveilling communities with low socio-economic indicators. Access to welfare, public housing, and social resources become embedded in algorithms that favor some over others. Similarly, *Algorithms of Oppression* by Safiya Noble (2018) highlights how embedded racism works in our most-used online spaces: search engines. Her term, *technological redlining*, calls attention to the inequitable efficiencies built into algorithms (Noble, 2018). In *Race After Technology,* Ruha Benjamin (2019) highlights how technologies often reinforce and expand the racial disparities that are routine in our social and civic systems today. Writes Benjamin (2019, p. 61), "much of what is routine, reasonable, intuitive, and codified reproduces unjust social arrangements, without ever burning a cross to shine a light on the problem."

As we write this report, communities across the world continue to protest the unjust killings of Black and Brown people in the United States. Protests are documented, streamed, and shared, becoming part of the media narratives that

III. The State of Media Literacy & What We Know About it

further divide communities across racial, ethnic, political, and economic lines. We must question how our current media environments are designed to contribute to the divisions or reflect societies fractured in complex ways. These questions have no easy answers. A combination of factors is at play. Structural inequities in access to resources, income inequality, lack of adequate care for those at the margins of society, and politicians emboldened to reduce complex social problems to calls for populist mandates all contribute to our current state of unrest. However, media is often seen as a central contributing factor, and calls for reform often focus on teaching media audiences how to navigate media environments with skills and savvy.

Of course, our current digital culture is not all uniformly negative. We focus here on the challenges to democracy, civic life,and social well-being. We acknowledge all the ways in which our digital ecosystems connect, spur meaningful engagements, build advocacy, and provide outlets for sharing, exposing, and cultivating joy. Our analysis here focuses on the macro-level constraints of our technologies on democracy and civic life. While there are no conclusions about the effects of digital technologies on democracy, we believe the risks to social well-being, equity, and the overall health of the United States are worth framing here as we explore media literacy processes and practices to date.

Responding to Media Polarization, Misinformation, and Civic Fracturing

Amid this climate of unrest, many ask what steps can and should be taken to respond to climates of polarization, misinformation, and the resulting civic fracturing within and across communities in the United States. Civil protests against oppression and violence are now regular. Communities are working hard to build initiatives that support equity and push back against inequitable structures. Some

policymakers are asking hard questions about what we can do within our public institutions to prepare citizens to combat the information realities produced by our digital culture.

Increasingly included in these dialogues are efforts to expand media literacy opportunities for young people. Across formal and informal spaces of learning, corporations, nonprofits, and public institutions are investing in supporting the development and implementation of media interventions that help young people in the United States become savvy media consumers and creators. In addition, foundations--including Rand, Knight, MacArthur, Kettering, and others--continue to invest in research and practice that respond to our current climate of

misinformation, polarization, and fracturing. In the last five years, we have seen significant resources devoted from the tech industry and large corporations to support user-focused efforts to stop misinformation and address extremism. Initiatives like the News Integrity Initiative funded by Google and Civic Media Initiative funded by MacArthur provide stratified resources and commitment to innovation and engagement. These initiatives, however, generally aim to help audiences become savvier and smarter information consumers and creators, often using the language of individual responsibility. Regulation of the platforms that prioritize and support these information realities is an afterthought. Decisions made in congressional hearings and commissions indicate little will to regulate corporations or protect users from manipulative and inequitable algorithms. Repeals to protections of internet content further compromise the equitable core of our digital information infrastructures.

What remains is the call for media literacies to build and implement responses in formal and informal learning spaces. The public calls on an already heavily burdened and vastly underfunded public education system to help young people better navigate our information realities, doing so as state legislatures continue to de-emphasize civics education and social studies in public schools. Outside of school, libraries and community centers also encounter fewer resources with the charge to better serve vulnerable communities and provide basic support to those without access to information.

For decades, the public has called for media literacy as a solution to social problems. These calls arise from a state of insufficiency: If only we had more media literacy, more news literacy, or more information literacy, our citizenry would be more informed, reflective, active, and engaged. In his book, *NetSmart: How to Thrive*

III. The State of Media Literacy & What We Know About it

Online, Howard Rheingold (2012) reminds us that educational bureaucracies have never been able to keep up with the pace of technological innovation and its impact on societal norms. These calls are also embedded with assumptions about media literacy serving the needs of individuals, communities, and democracy. But media literacy has hardly focused on equity as much as it has on equality. Unlike equality, which is often colorblind and race-neutral, equity-mindedness explicitly addresses issues of structural racism and other forms of intersectional disparities (Ramasubramanian et al., 2021). Whether an individual receives media literacy education and interventions largely depends on their socio-economic standing and access to educational programs, after-school opportunities, and the flexibility to participate (Kahne & Bowyer, 2019).

Media literacy serves communities, but which communities, and to what end? Media literacy's community mission is embedded in tensions of individualism and

corporate interests versus social justice and the public good. Issues of structural oppression and exclusion are often left aside in the hopes that learning to use technology to share relevant information may empower communities. Media literacy in the United States is seen as a democratic imperative. However, we must ask if the norms of American democracy and participation are available to all citizens, regardless of socio-economic standing, race, ethnicity, or religion.

Moreover, media literacy is a solution to a problem that is not clearly defined. It seeks to impart skills and knowledge to ends that we cannot always identify. While media literacy education has made great strides in its ability to build skills and knowledge about media texts, studies still show that young people struggle to assess media credibility online (Wineburg et al., 2016). For the past decade, information on digital platforms has rapidly proliferated such that no singular set of skills or competencies can effectively respond to the changes. We have seen the expansion of research, reports, and educational initiatives, many of which we detail below, that offer responses to better prepare young people for the new realities of our digital culture. We have heard repeated calls for more "critical thinking" about media texts, systems, and industries (Goldstein, 2017; Mantas and Harrison, 2020).

III. The State of Media Literacy & What We Know About it

The calls for increased media literacy in the United States have not come without controversy. In the wake of our 2016 presidential election, many believed that more media literacy could combat the proliferation of misinformation implemented by

tech-savvy--perhaps even media literate-groups working in internet subcultures. These subcultures are promoted by politicians, made widely visible by mainstream media, and sustained by the algorithms that work to keep readers engaged. Some believed this moment exposed the failure, "or backfiring," of media literacy as a practice that could further push people into silos of false confidence, perpetuate disengagement from difficult dialogues, and obscure compassion and empathy for the plight of others (boyd, 2017). Some studies on fake news and misinformation seem only to support the idea that media literacy as currently constituted does little to confront the present challenges of inequities that are built into our digital culture (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018).

These disagreements echo earlier studies and essays that question the outcomes of media literacy interventions. In 2010, James Potter wrote an essay on the state of media literacy. He argued the field has exhausted efforts to respond to adverse media effects and has stagnated in its attempt to bring more skills to learners (Potter, 2010). In response to his essay, Renee Hobbs (2011) noted the extensive work being done in digital and media literacy and made an explicit point to highlight the aims of media literacy education:

> pedagogical practices must be emphatically student-centered and inquiry-oriented, helping students interrogate the process of making meaning through critical investigation using strategies of both close reading (also called deconstruction or decoding) and media production, where the practices of brainstorming, scriptwriting, and video or website production are enacted, not for the primary purpose of developing vocational or professional skills, but as a means to promote the transfer of critical thinking skills from the classroom to the contexts of home, community, and culture. (p. X)

Hobbs (2011) makes an important distinction. When we ask for "more media literacy," we must ask *what does more look lik*e? What do we understand as an impactful media literacy practice that can "transfer" critical thinking skills from formal and informal learning spaces to the spaces of daily life? We believe these questions demand inquiries about the nature of critical thinking skills regarding media and the processes that enact the transfer Hobbs describes. The outcomes of media literacy interventions embedded in assumptions about individual agency, community, and democracy evoke questions of equity, social justice, and continued oppression of those at the margins of society.

III. The State of Media Literacy & What We Know About it

What good are media literacy practices and processes if they don't support emancipatory goals for underserved communities? How do critical thinking skills differ for middle-class suburban majority-white schools versus diverse inner-city after-school programs? And what are the processes that support the transfer of

skills, new knowledge, and competencies from learning to practice? How do we articulate, understand, and evaluate the impact of our media literacy practices toward such ends?

We know that media literacy practices strive to enable people to more critically consume and create media. We know that great efforts have been made to this end. We also know that media literacy educational practices have been vastly underdeveloped across the United States. In the context of increased calls for media literacy, we reflect on the major assumptions that have guided such practices to understand where great strides have been made and where media literacy can respond to the norms of digital culture, political polarization, and social inequalities.

Assumptions Guiding Media Literacy

The assumptions that have long guided media literacy educational practice align with our basic democratic values. A more informed citizenry will safeguard democracy. A more critical citizenry will be able to speak truth to power. A more participatory citizenry will produce more vibrant means of democratic engagement. These assumptions are grounded in ideals of American democracy. They are connected directly to the social health of our society, which is connected to the fundamental right to be educated and to participate freely in democratic practices.

Media literacy, with critical thinking about media at its core, aligns with the civic and democratic health of citizens. Whether thinking critically about health, news, politics or the economy, we assume that by educating people to be more media literate, they will be better prepared to support a strong and vibrant democracy. These ideas still hold true for the field of media literacy. However, we must now consider more squarely their relationship to ongoing inequities within democratic societies. Comber (2015) writes about problems with the assumption that education is a means of social justice:

> Designing a curriculum with a social justice agenda requires knowledge about the relations between people, places, and poverty. [...] Future critical literacy practices need to engage teachers and students in investigating relationships between changing phenomena, including money, rather than a static embracing of the old so-called basics and compliance with the status quo. (p.366)

The connections between ML and equity have long centered around information access, media ownership, and an analysis of power dynamics in media, voice, and manipulation (Kibbey, 2011; Saunders, 2017). More recently, the concept of critical media literacy positions media literacy practices in line with emerging discussions of social justice and equity in learning environments. Kellner and Share (2019), for example, advocate for critical media literacy approaches to “empower individuals and groups traditionally excluded” so that “education can be reconstructed to make it more responsive to the challenges of a democratic and multicultural society” (p. xvii-xviii).

IV. Assumptions Guiding Media Literacy

Classrooms and communities increasingly call for media literacy practice to prioritize issues of equity and inclusion. In this report, we find that many stakeholders invest in positioning media literacy as a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)-driven pursuit. However, we find ambiguity about how to connect media literacies to DEI and a lack of resources to help practitioners.

To explore current approaches to media literacies and their relationship to DEI work, we frame our research project in relation to three general assumptions found in media literacy research and practice, derived from our review of the literature. The three assumptions guide the formation of our research questions, approach, and findings. We explore these assumptions and issues of media literacy and equity in an essay published in the *Journal of Media Literacy Education* (Mihailidis, Ramasubramanian, Tully, Foster, Riewestahl, Johnson, & Angove, 2021), which is excerpted below.

Assumption 1: Media Literacy Prioritizes Individual Agency

Our review of the literature revealed that those involved in the work of media literacy tend to assume that their work hinges on the concept of individual agency. Agency, as public democracy scholar Harry Boyte (2020) writes, "includes a set of developing practices and concepts which enhance the capacities of diverse groups of people to work across differences to solve problems, create things of common value, and negotiate a shared democratic way of life" (p. 1). Media literacies, similarly, build the capacity for people to make smart choices about media consumption and how to use and create media to participate in daily life. At its basic level, mainstream approaches to media literacy education assume that its pedagogies will protect people from harmful media effects, empower them to be more critical and informed media consumers, and develop more reflective and savvy media creators. Thus, longstanding approaches to media literacy incorporate frameworks that integrate skills in media analysis, deconstruction, inquiry, and production, alongside reflection, engagement, and action-taking in the world (Bulger & Davidson, 2018). Commonly, media literacy education assumes that learners, through a process of skill attainment and critical thinking, will become more active and engaged in their media ecosystems and their local, national, and global communities.

We prioritize this assumption as it impacts media literacy at its most fundamental level in formal and informal learning environments: what do we want the outcomes of media literacy experiences to produce? In thinking about practices that center equity and justice in media literacy, we are specifically concerned with how they approach individual skill attainment and its connection to what sociologist Anthony Giddens calls "knowledgeable action." Giddens (1984) writes "agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things, but their capability of doing those things

in the first place" (p. 9). Giddens sees agency as how humans create and recreate the social structures that support daily life. Similarly, Hannah Arendt (1971) sees agency through the lens of how people feel empowered to act in public and what spaces and norms must exist for people to engage, alongside others, in the world. Following the logic of agency, media literacy considers how people can critique and create media toward the goal of using media literacy skills to be more informed, reflective, and meaningfully engaged in the world (Buckingham, 2019; Hobbs, 2017; Kellner & Share, 2019).

Yet a focus on agency has a downside. Despite attention to skills geared toward real-world application, media literacy skill attainment concentrates largely on personal responsibility over collective wellbeing. In their 2018 report, Monica Bulger and Patrick Davidson (2018) write "media literacy has long focused on personal responsibility, which not only can imbue individuals with a false sense of confidence in their skills (Sanchez & Dunning, 2018; Kruger & Dunning, 1999) but also puts the onus of monitoring media effects on the audience, rather than media creators, social media platforms, or regulators (p. 9)." The priority placed on individual responsibility, also noted in recent research by Mihailidis (2018), can be problematic for understanding the truth in a complex digital media environment. Digital platforms design ever invasive and manipulative personal information experiences for young people, where truth becomes siloed and driven by algorithms.

Another outcome of media literacy's focus on agency is that while exposure to media literacy learning experiences can move the needle on engagement (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017; Wineburg et al., 2016), they often prioritize the skills and knowledge sets that can lead to this needle moving over changes in behavior or practice (Jeong, Cho, & Hwang, 2012). Behavior-change studies are hard to develop, undertake, and sustain. At the same time, media literacy outcomes are often mapped along the same socio-economic divides that harm education institutions in general and society at large. A study by Kahne, Lee, and Feezel (2012) with public school students in the state of California found that traditional media literacy practices, such as learning how to analyze information and navigate online spaces for information purposes, could lead to more political interest, exposure to diverse ideas, and discussion about politics in the home. They found, however, that such learning experiences were more available to youth in higher socio-economic areas

than those with fewer resources. With the same sample, Kahne and Bowyer (2019) found that increased opportunities to learn about digital media and politics can increase youth's disposition to be politically active online, but "significant inequities" exist in terms of who participates and how. A study by Martens and Hobbs (2015) found that students from higher SES backgrounds improved media and news analysis skills through exposure to learning modules in the classroom. Ashley, Maksl, and Craft (2017) found in a survey of youth at East Coast universities concerning their news media literacy skills that increased education about media can nudge young people to increased political engagement, but this again aligns with the inequities in educational systems in the United States.

In their review of research, Bulger and Davidson (2018) suggest that "as a field, media literacy suffers from issues plaguing education generally; primarily, the longitudinal nature of media literacy creates difficulty in evaluating the success of particular training initiatives. Across education, a diversity of goals leads to incoherent expectations of outcomes, making decisions about what is measured, how, and why very important" (p. 11). The result is a tendency to downplay assessing questions of equity and empathy in favor of assessing outcomes associated with individual learning and skills accumulation. Focuses on issues of equity are challenging. Political barriers and constraints to civic dialog persist in education, exemplified most recently by the movement to remove Critical Race Theory from public schools and institutions. These cultural battlegrounds make it challenging for media literacy educational practice to move beyond a focus on individual skill attainment alone. When media literacy prioritizes individual agency without acknowledging the identity of the person and how that identity maps onto larger socio-economic and political realities, it risks missing the important connections between individual knowledge and skills, and their relation to larger concepts such as community and democracy.

Assumption 2: Media Literacy Education Empowers Communities

Our second assumption explores the often-presumed connections between media literacy and community empowerment. Media literacy scholarship has often assumed that media literacy can empower communities but has not necessarily tested this evenly across varying communities, nor accounted for differing levels of access and resources across these communities. Our review of the literature found regular assumptions between media literacy education and the reducing community participation gaps, shaping responsible citizenry, and increasing the capacity of community engagement.

The word "community" means different things to different people, and in different contexts (Dempsey et al., 2011). Community as a term is often left uninterrogated within media literacy scholarship. Community is often understood within media

literacy literature as based on shared media habits and fandom. From a civic engagement and democratic practice perspective, media literacy can have community-level impacts, among those sharing a sense of place with communal resources, goals, outcomes, and social norms. Communities may be distinguished based on shared characteristics such as social class, education, race, and ethnicity (Theodori, 2020). Based on such dimensions, various community members can have differing levels of access, resources, power, and privilege. Often taken for granted, communities' dominant values and belief systems shape media literacy practices, just as media literacy practices shape communities, especially in terms of equity and social justice (Ramasubramanian & Darzabi, 2020).

No doubt that media literacy education *can* help in community building, resilience, and collective action for bringing about social transformation (Mihailidis, 2018; Ramasubramanian & Darzabi, 2020 Robertson & Scheidler-Benns, 2016). Media literacy education can empower youth to voice their concerns and actively engage others in digital and on-the-ground movements to resist and dismantle xenophobic and racist systems that impact their communities (Ramasubramanian & Darzabi, 2020; Ramasubramanian et al., 2020). When members of marginalized groups do obtain media access, they often use it to "talk back" to their communities through social media spaces such as TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat to raise social consciousness about social issues (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2020; Jeffries, 2011; Jenkins et al. 2018; McArthur, 2016; Ramasubramanian, 2016; Ramasubramanian et al., 2020; Villa-Nicholas, 2019; Yosso, 2002). For instance, McArthur (2016) discusses how the collaborative Black Girls Literacies Collective (BGLC) program with fifth-grade Black girls provided digital literacy education. The girls then used their new skills to create podcasts and spoken word performances, analyze hegemonic advertisements contesting dominant mainstream representations, advocate for themselves, and become socially productive citizens while re-envisioning a transformative world for themselves as a community. Similarly, *The Message* media literacy movement in Boston and Toronto uses media literacy and hip hop to provide space for youth of color to express their ideas and learn to advocate for community needs.

Youth activists have used social networks to raise awareness about issues affecting their communities, coordinate action, and highlight inequities. For example,

undocumented immigrants used social media platforms in coordination with street protests to share their experiences and garner support for the DREAM Act (Jenkins et al., 2018). In 2009 and 2010, youth activists used new media such as blogs, videos, social media posts, and tweets to coordinate large-scale protests such as sit-ins at Congressional offices and the "Trail of Dreams," a 1500 mile walk from Miami to Washington, D.C. (Zimmerman & Shresthova, 2012). In 2014, youth across the country used social media to highlight the injustice of the decision not to indict the officers that shot and killed Michael Brown and Eric Garner. Students held school walkouts and coordinated online to raise awareness of police brutality against Black men and show their solidarity with protesters (Clark, 2016). Other students created, retweeted, and shared messages that called attention to the unequal treatment and negative news framing of Black protestors.

Alternative and community-based media can also challenge existing systems by pointing out the flaws and gaps in mainstream media representations and providing counter-narratives that extend beyond the individual to the community. Yosso (2002) engaged youth in a media literacy project focused on critically analyzing images of Chicanas/os in film. The Chicana/o college students that participated in this project recognized the deficit-based framing of Chicanas/os in the media and were motivated to challenge these stereotypes through their behaviors, lifestyles, and professional and educational goals. Johnston-Goodstar and Sethi (2013) created a participatory critical media literacy program for Native American youth living in urban communities. Throughout this program, Native American youth critiqued the Whiteness of educational institutions, created media that celebrated their cultural identity, and produced counter-narratives that characterized Native American youth as superheroes rather than "risks."

Media literacy organizations can also provide mentoring networks, professional development and training, and micro-financing options for small media outlets and educators to facilitate community-oriented participatory media practices. Beyond multicultural education, taking an explicitly anti-oppression and civic media

orientation to create, analyze, and share culturally informed content can be a powerful experience for young learners (Mihailidis, 2018; Ramasubramanian & Darzabi, 2020). Trauma-informed approaches to media, communication as healing, and social media counter-spaces can transform literacies, identities, and communities (Ramasubramanian et al., 2021). Greater support for equitable media literacy practice, low-tech and low-budget media productions, and alternative spaces for counter-storytelling such as small media start-ups and lesser-known community media could be especially beneficial (Tracy, 2020).

While media literacy has wanted to see itself as empowering communities, the continued inequalities in outcomes and impacts in poorer communities does not necessarily support this claim. By assuming rather than interrogating how media

literacy empowers community, media literacy has missed an opportunity to explore why there are fewer programs in lower income rather than higher income communities or in predominantly white neighborhoods rather than within communities of color. Centering principles of equity and social justice would allow researchers to examine how individualism competes with values of community practice and equitable access within media literacy. It is possible that much of the scholarship has emphasized impact on individual-level data rather than on active citizenship, civic engagement, and social justice at the community-level (Hobbs, 2010).

As the COVID-19 pandemic has clarified that differences in media and technological access are stark. Poor communities, especially those with majority people of color, continue to have limited access to broadband and wireless technologies, which are essential to today's media context (Berners-Lee, 2020). The pandemic has also further deepened awareness of economic divisions along lines of race, social class, and gender, and has highlighted that such differences cannot be overcome with educational programs or individual empowerment alone.

Additionally, the disproportionately high rates of juvenile delinquency and incarceration among youth of color restrict access to many basic media amenities (Vickery, 2016). Furthermore, neoliberal market-based logic contributes to the corporatization of the media industry and to large platforms dominating much of the media landscape (Taplin, 2017). Public systems provide the main spaces for many racial/ethnic minority or working-class youth to access technologies. Instead of serving communities and the public interest, media industries, including news media and social media spaces, often prioritize profits and individual rights over civic engagement and social justice (Fuchs & Mosco, 2017).

Another challenge here, of course, is that media literacy initiatives can take on a patronizing view of marginalized communities. Rather than assess the continued needs of the community, media literacy practitioners often set limited boundaries for projects and initiatives, control the means of media production, and leave once the project is concluded or funding runs out. Mainstream media literacy practices need to critically evaluate which communities truly benefit from their initiatives. Instead, practitioners assume that communities will be empowered to participate in civic life by developing individual competencies, thus strengthening democracy. While social media movements have done much to change public discourse on issues of institutional oppression, media literacy research connecting community empowerment to democratic practice remains underdeveloped.

Assumption 3: Media Literacy Education Supports Democracy

IV. Assumptions Guiding Media Literacy

The third and final assumption explores media literacy's relationship to democracy. To reiterate, we are focused on the U.S. context of American democracy with its many contradictions and shortcomings. Despite the challenges of upholding the ideals of American democracy (Wood, 2020), scholars and practitioners often develop approaches to media literacy with a specific type of Western democracy in mind, assuming that informed citizens make decisions (like voting) and participate in politics in ways that serve them and their community's interests. In his recent book, *News Literacy and Democracy*, Seth Ashley (2019) asks "why does this [news literacy] matter, and why should we care?" He responds with a resounding, "In a word, democracy!" He goes on to say the following:

> As individuals, we might not write laws or punish wrongdoers directly, but we do have the privilege of exercising our collective voice about who will lead us and how we will organize our societies. Many of us are able to do this at the voting booth every so often, but we also can speak freely to our representatives and our fellow citizens, and we can influence the policymaking process through a number of ways. To do any of this well, we need access to reliable information. As the challenges presented by the digital environment grow (and it will almost certainly get worse before it gets better), we need to develop our news literacy to become effective participants in democratic life. (p. 10)

Ashley concludes his book by addressing larger questions of democratic life and the future of our societies, prompting us to continue to pursue democratic ideals to create a just society, as do other scholars who see democracy as fundamental to media literacy.

Although democratic principles are often embedded in media literacy practices, educators, practitioners, and researchers often approach both democracy and media literacy with ideals in mind that we wish to bring to fruition and that we believe possible through this work. While media literacy considers itself as democratic, this assumption needs to also be challenged. For instance, some scholars discuss how mainstream understandings of media literacy are often rooted in White Eurocentric versions of democracy (Ramasubramanian & Darzabi, 2020). This version of democracy not only prioritizes individual agency and outcomes but centers Whiteness, which is often true of media literacy education as well. Ramasubramanian and Darzabi (2020, p. 279) point out that "simply encouraging the creation of online communities and participation is not sufficient. Collaboration and community-building should be tied clearly with a critical emancipatory approach that incorporates social justice and anti-oppression pedagogy."

Certain subfields of media literacy (e.g., news, information, and digital literacies) often foreground democracy and democratic ideals in their definitions, practices, and outcomes but rarely address issues of equity and social justice head-on. Rather, these notions are embedded in broader understandings of democracy and democratic practice. The News Literacy Project, for example, aims to provide

programs and resources to enable the public to become "active consumers of news and information and equal and engaged participants in a democracy" (About Our Organization). The Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook University describes news literacy as essential for civil society and for a democratic society (What is news literacy?). News literacy research also prioritizes the relationship between news literacy and democracy, often highlighting the connection between news literacy and democratic attitudes and behaviors (Fleming, 2015). Ashley, Maksl, and Craft (2017), for example, find a link between news literacy and two relevant democratic outcomes: current events knowledge and feelings of political efficacy. In their work on news literacy, Tully and Vraga (2018a, 2018b) argue that understanding the relationship between news and democracy is fundamental to developing news literacy and that news literacy efforts can promote democratic outcomes. Much of this research has focused on the relationship between news literacy and traditional political outcomes. Although this work contributes to our understanding of these relationships, it has not challenged how we define or understand "democracy," "politics," or "participation," keeping individual-level outcomes at the forefront and not fully addressing community and societal-level change or the lack of equity and justice that plagues American democracy.

Democracy is imperfect and takes many forms both in the United States and around the world. Accordingly, media literacy education has remained committed to supporting democratic ideals. What do media literacy educators, researchers, and practitioners see in this form of "democracy" that resonates so much with their own values and work? For one, both American democracy and media literacy education center individual agency and notions of informed decision-making. Media literacy research and practice that connects to democratic practices is, at its core, still about the individual and rooted in White Eurocentric democracy (Higdon, 2020). Although we see a shift in thinking about the harm that political participation and speech in all forms (including creative media) can cause, we tend to overlook the damage to marginalized communities that occurs from "dark participation," especially when racist and sexist speech is presented as just one of many ideas to be debated in the "marketplace of ideas" (Quandt, 2018).

The high regard for the individual, free speech, and privileged versions of democracy , at times, limits the scope of our efforts, but educators, researchers, and practitioners continue to develop new and innovative ways of expanding and pushing the boundaries of this work. For example, "Our Space: Being a Responsible Citizen of the Digital World" is designed to address some of these shortcomings with its focus on "ethical thinking" and participation. "Our Space," a collaboration of the GoodPlay Project and Project New Media Literacies, asks young people to "consider the impact of one's actions beyond the self and on a larger collective." Mihailidis (2018) has argued that media literacy must be "intentionally civic" and pushes the field to move beyond traditional understandings of democratic

participation and outcomes with an eye toward societal outcomes and the greater public good.

Despite the positives emerging from prioritizing the relationship between media literacy and democracy, we continue to live in a society that fails to serve all its citizens, and media and media literacy have a role to play here. We can ask the following questions:How does this obsession with Western democracy limit the kinds of conversations and research that we engage ? Who is marginalized and abandoned because of the focus on democracy and media literacy ? If media literacy is designed to promote individual agency and to serve communities, how (if at all) does this translate to promoting and sustaining a democracy that serves all citizens? How can media literacy education's focus move from the individual level to societal level with a mission that centers on equity and justice, and what would that look like in research and practice? As we move forward, we must expand not only our approach to media literacy education and research but also the relationship to democratic ideals and practices that extend beyond traditional means and measures.

Situating Our Research

The assumptions we have described above guide the development of research questions and methods for this study. To address the assumptions that have driven media literacy work for the past few decades, if not longer, we pose the following three general research questions:

- **RQ1: How is impact defined in media literacy research?**
- **RQ2: What are the main practices and processes that lead to impactful media literacy practices?**
- **RQ3: What are the challenges and opportunities for incorporating equity into impactful media literacy practices?**

Each question in our generative project builds on the next. As a research team, we believe that media literacy practices, to be truly impactful, must be squarely aligned with work that addresses structural inequities in democratic societies. Whether areas of inequity are economic, social, political or environmental, media literacy educational practice must approach its pedagogical mission of increased knowledge, competencies, and skills, alongside its democratic mission to increase inclusive, diverse, and equitable societies.

To explore these questions, this project employed three methods: *a scoping review, in-depth interviews, and a survey*.[1] To answer the first research question, a scoping review was used to explore the last decade of research into how media literacy practices in the United States understood and evaluated the impact of media

[1] The methods used in this report are expanded upon in the Methodology chapter.

literacy. From a review of 270 articles spanning the past test years across various media, education, and information science disciplines, we found that outcomes or impacts of media literacy practice are rarely included in research, and equity is even less present. Impact is a complex term that often lacks clarity as an outcome or a process. Our research found that impact is a sticky term that is often positioned differently depending on the discipline from which it emerges.

To explore this concept further, the scoping review developed a framework to contextualize impact across its various applications and approaches. The framework is composed of **"6 E's of Media Literacy Impact"** -- evaluation outcomes, enquiry, expression, experiential learning, engaged citizenship, and equity -- each representing a body of research and its summative approach to impact. This framework positions impact as action-orientated and examines how different approaches to media literacy research and practice are defining impact.

Building from this framework, our team was able to offer a definition of how media literacy impact approaches outcomes that support and address inequities. This definition was used to explore our second research question:

What are the main practices and processes that lead to impactful media literacy practice?

To explore this question, in depth interviews were conducted with 27 media literacy stakeholders across the United States. The stakeholders were selected randomly from a list of organizations and institutions leading media literacy efforts, alongside the major national educational and media nonprofit organizations. The interviews explored how these stakeholders understood impact in their work and how their work responded to the assumptions about media literacy on individual, community, and democracy levels. The interviewees found their most impactful work on the individual level, with more aspirational goals connected to community empowerment, equity, and inclusion. They were less sure of how their work was directly supporting such norms, however. With regard to the wider democratic aims of media literacy in the United States, many of the interviewees were steadfast in their hope to connect them to more inclusive democratic norms, but found that such a goal was elusive with no clear means to approach such outcomes. The interviews resulted in concrete emerging ideas about impact as involving trust, empathy, and the plight of others. While this connection was elusive to the stakeholders, it allowed our research team to more squarely investigate these connections in the third part of our research, anchored by the question:

What are the challenges and opportunities for incorporating equity into impactful media literacy practices?

IV. Assumptions Guiding Media Literacy

To answer this research question, a survey was developed to ask media literacy practitioners about their education practices and issues of equity and inclusion. Combining existing and new scales for research, the survey collected 741 responses from media literacy practitioners around the United States. Respondents include K-12 educators, higher education educators, administrators (both K-12 and higher education), educational librarians (both K-12 and higher education), nonprofit workers, and media organization members. The survey responses confirmed the accuracy of our stated assumptions, that the development of the individual is often the priority of media literacy educational initiatives. While community and democratic level outcomes were seen as important, they were not clear as attainable goals of media literacy education. In the context of inclusion and equity, the picture becomes complex. Although there was a great deal of interest in incorporating equity and inclusion into their media literacy practices, unfortunately, almost 40% of respondents reported experiencing backlash for trying to do so in the past. About 40% of them also reported feeling distressed about addressing equity in media literacy practice.

The emerging narratives from the research show trends that remain dominant in media literacy education, while opening up spaces for new and more inclusive approaches to media literacy. Across our research, we find that the individual still occupies the heart of ML education and practice. However, thinking about the individual in connection with their communities is valued by media literacy practitioners. Practitioners share a commitment to equity and justice, but they are not always clear on how to move forward in this space of education or practice. Lastly, concepts like democracy and democratic participation remain elusive, and rightfully so. They are theoretical concepts with little active connection to tangible education practices. However, because these concepts persist in the minds of media literacy educators and practitioners, we believe that the research findings presented here can propel further practice and research into spaces applied to collective work, connected to community, and related directly to processes that support vibrant and strong democratic practices.

The Research

Research Question	Method	Data
RQ1: How is impact defined in media literacy research?	Scoping review	270 articles that are U.S. focused and published in last 10 years
RQ2: What are the main practices and processes that lead to impactful media literacy practices?	Interviews	27 interviews with a diverse group of media literacy stakeholders across the U.S.
RQ3: What are the challenges and opportunities for incorporating equity into impactful media literacy practices?	Survey	741 practitioners from a range of organizations

Synthesizing the Literature: A Scoping Review of Media Literacy Research

To answer questions about the potential for media literacy practices to support a more equitable society and the well-being of democracy, we conducted a scoping review of current literature. Examining the existing published scholarship on media literacy practices allows us to better understand how "*impact*" has been defined and conceptualized in prior literature. Our aim is to explore, identify, synthesize, and clarify key concepts within current media literacy research over the last decade as it pertains to impact.

As the name suggests, a scoping review aims to provide insights about the scope or coverage of a topic within the literature. Unlike a systematic review, a scoping review takes a broad approach to investigating how key concepts are used, what gaps exist in the literature, and how the body of research can be mapped in meaningful ways (Munn et al. 2018; Pham et al. 2014). We conduct a scoping review to make sense of the key concepts and definitions in the field.

In our case, we were interested in reviewing scholarly publications within the last 10 years to understand how impactful media literacy practices are being discussed in the literature. Given the multidisciplinary nature of media literacy research, we examined U.S.-based studies from 2010-2020 from databases that covered media studies, communication, and education: Communication & Mass Media, EBSCO, WorldCat, and Google Scholar. We focused on the last decade as a way of

narrowing the scope to the most current literature. First, we reviewed the articles' abstracts to determine whether the articles fit the above requirements. Once we removed the articles that did not fit the criteria, we had a final dataset of 270 articles, which we reviewed to investigate how "impact" is described, defined, conceptualized, and articulated within media literacy research. This review included articles in the area of media literacy broadly defined as well as a number of related fields like "news literacy," "information literacy," "health literacy," and "critical media literacy," among others.

The Multiple Articulations and Meanings of Impact within Media Literacy Scholarship

The findings from the scoping review reveal that media literacy research does not widely use the term "impact" As defined in the introduction of this report, impact is a challenging term that, when used, often narrowly connotes experimental and intervention studies of media literacy. Instead, the majority of articles focused more broadly on media literacy impact as a *process* that brings about changes to individuals and communities through empowerment. These articles focused on empowering learners with the skills, techniques, and tools to access, use, challenge, create, and change media content and technology. More broadly, impact within media literacy tends to focus on the role of media literacy to empower learners to facilitate change in some way. Impact beyond measurable outcomes includes artistic or creative media products, using media for civic engagement and digital citizenship, encouraging different ways of knowing, and increasing critical thinking and individual agency among media learners.

The Six E's of Media Literacy Impact

We noticed that impact meant different things to different scholars and practitioners within media literacy literature. Through the scoping review, we identified six ways that impact is conceptualized and articulated in media literacy research (see Figure 1). These are (1) impact as evaluation outcomes, (2) impact as enquiry, (3) impact as expression, (4) impact as experiential learning, (5) impact as engaged citizenship and (6) impact as equities.

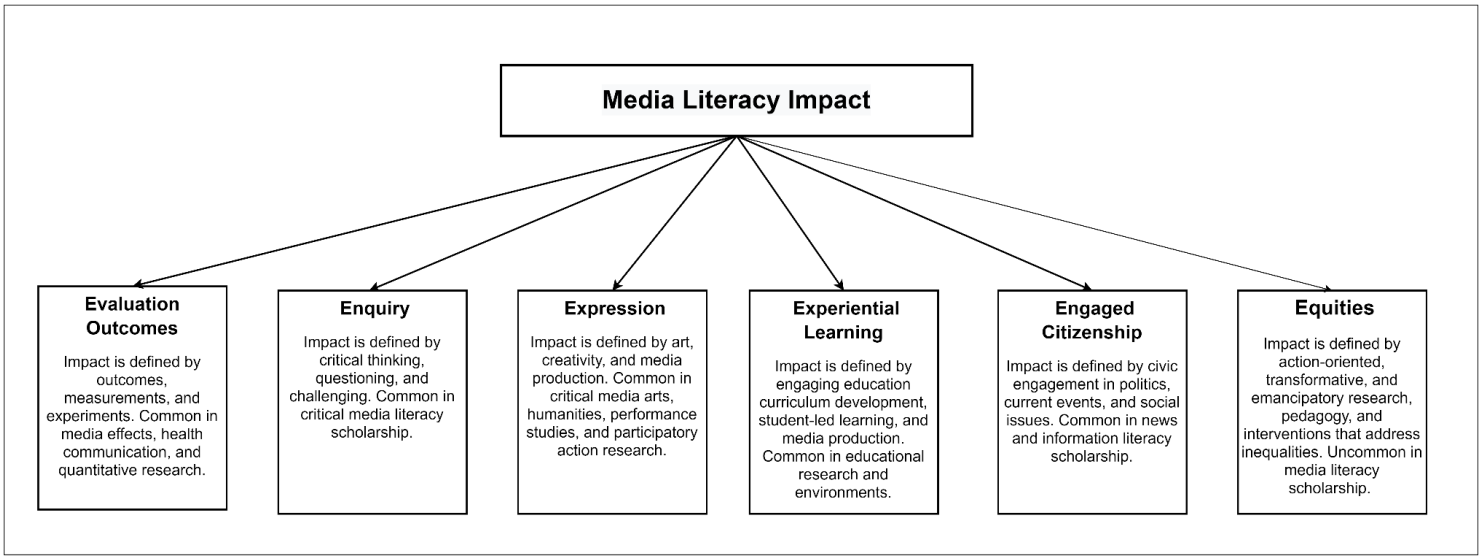

Figure 1. A framework to illustrate how impact is articulated in research. It is composed of evaluation outcomes, enquiry, expression, experiential learning, engaged citizenship, and equities.

Below, we elaborate on how each perspective relates to equity within the literature. We do not suggest that each of the categories is independent of the others. Rather, these are overlapping categories. A single research study plausibly could incorporate media literacy impact in multiple ways. While each of these conceptualizations of impact has distinct characteristics, most existing research and many media literacy initiatives integrate more than one definition of impact. For example, Ashley et al. (2013), developed a News Media Literacy Scale that conceptualizes news media literacy as an outcome but also emphasizes the importance of news media literacy and civic engagement. Using our framework, impact in this research is conceptualized as both *evaluation outcomes* and *engaged citizenship*. Similarly, Hobbs et al. (2013) examines the relationship between high school video production courses and civic engagement, articulating impact as both "experiential learning" and "engaged citizenship.

ML Impact as Evaluation Outcomes

Few articles from our review describe a direct media literacy intervention such as a specific curriculum, intervention, or experiment. Studies that seek to measure effects of media literacy interventions, whether they are in the domain of health, education, or news, often imply that impactful interventions produce quantifiable and statistically significant effects. We see this trend most commonly in the fields of media effects, health communication, and related spaces of inquiry that employ quantitative research methods. In these articles, impact is understood as having significant effects on learning from media literacy interventions.

At the individual, community, and societal levels, differences in access (often as a result of marginalization) lead to *differential impact*. Differential impact can refer to multiple phenomena;for example, different communities often have disparate access to resources, or different communities could have access to the same resources but those resources could have less impact in one community than in another. In sum, the literature recognized that media and media literacy could differentially impact different individuals, communities, and contexts.

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Existing studies measure a wide variety of outcomes, including intention to consume alcohol or tobacco (Chen, 2013; Kupersmidt et al. 2012), digital problem-solving skills (Cai & Gut, 2020), indoor tanning behavior (Cho et al. 2020), selective exposure (Vraga & Tully, 2019), parent-child communicaton about food (Austin et al. 2018), adolescent attitudes towards delaying sex (Pinkleton, 2013), and perceived accuracy of news headlines (Guess et al. 2020). In these studies, impact was expressed as changes in the attitudes or behaviors that could be attributed to media literacy interventions such as increased negative expectancies and lower behavioral intention for youth to consume alcohol (Chen, 2013) or more favorable attitudes toward marginalized groups (Erba et al., 2019).

Another category of research that conceptualizes impact as measurable and evaluative outcomes are scale validation studies such as the News Media Literacy Scale (Ashley, et al., 2013), the Sugar-Sweetened Beverages Media Literacy Scale (Chen et al. 2017), and degree of engagement questionnaire (Greene et al. 2015). For example, Greene articulates that the degree of engagement scale can be "adapted to the particular context of the intervention, and be used (in addition to existing measures that track the influence of the program) for formative, process, and outcomes evaluation" (Green et al., 2015, p. 12). Here, the authors imply that the impact of media literacy interventions can, at least partially, be measured and predicted via concepts such as engagement and personal reflection. A primary focus on measurement, prediction, and outcomes are essential indicators of "impact as evaluation outcomes."

This category of research rarely centers inclusion and equity in its arguments, but disparities in resources, access, and effects are sometimes addressed. For example, Lienemann and colleagues (2018) refer to disparities in the strength of the association between tobacco advertisements and tobacco use among populations at various educational and socioeconomic levels. While such studies sometimes

include measures of poverty and educational access, those issues are not the focus. Additionally, studies that articulate impact as evaluation outcomes tend to measure effects at the individual level. This point reflects and supports the first assumption of media literacy practices that "media literacy prioritizes individual agency." Occasionally, democratic practices and civic engagement are also measured but usually at the individual level. While it is possible that media literacy interventions on the individual could lead to broader reaching effects, more research at the community and societal level is also needed.

ML Impact as Enquiry

Several articles in our review focus on impact not as an outcome but more as developing one's ability to engage in open questioning and critical self-reflection. We call this "media literacy as enquiry." Research in this area often articulates impact as the ability to ask questions about the production, economics, content, and reception of media texts. Brown et al. (2012) created an educators' guide , "using open-ended questions and critical inquiry" (p. 141) to help students analyze a video called *Kony 2012* . The questions asked students to think critically about the creator of the video, the intended audience of the video, and the stereotypes endorsed by the video.

Media literacy impact as enquiry is most closely aligned with traditional conceptualizations of media literacy. Kingsley and Tancock (2014) imply that impactful media literacy education interventions are those that increase fundamental competencies of internet-based research, such as generating topics, effectively searching for information, critically evaluating resources, and connecting ideas across digital texts. Studies in this area assume that impact happens at the individual-learner level but can scale to community levels through more engaged and effective digital citizenship. Kingsley and Tancock (2014) write "the key to successful instruction lies in embedding competencies within an authentic inquiry-based process" (p. 398). Similarly, Ireland (2018) emphasizes the importance of teaching users how to assess information as the most important mission of librarianship, prioritizing information literacy in the form of the ability to critically evaluate sources, understand media production processes, identify false information, and address bias or logical fallacies.

Research in this area often articulates impact as the ability to ask questions about the production, economics, content, and reception of media texts.

Impact as enquiry is investigated primarily at the individual level. Additional research is needed to determine if these individual skill-building educational interventions lead to community and societal-level effects. While most studies in this area relate broadly to assessing media texts, some take a more social justice approach by examining the role of racial stereotypes, white supremacy, and

systemic racism in media narratives and production (Brown et al. 2012, Dowie Chin, 2020, Matias, 2020).

ML Impact as Expression

Impact as expression emerges from research that articulates impact as the ability to create media for individual, collective, or public consumption. Such expressions may include creating artwork (Burke & Hadley, 2018), a blog series (Garcia et al., 2015), a video essay (Clark, 2013) or music (Turner et al., 2013) that demonstrates the skills and values acquired through media literacy education and training. This body of research often implies that media creation impacts individuals and communities through processes such as developing identity, cultural awareness, cultural perspectives, and agency. Creative works of this kind include storytelling (Burke & Hadley, 2018; Clarke, 2020), spoken word (Call-Cummings et al., 2020), documentary filmmaking (Gainer, 2010; Garcia et al., 2015), podcasting (Bostock, 2012), and other modes of communication. In some cases, expression and empowerment are tied directly to equity, by focusing on empowering marginalized communities, especially when they are community-led.

This body of research often implies that media creation impacts individuals and communities through processes such as developing identity, cultural awareness, cultural perspectives, and agency.

Scholarship within this type of media literacy impact often uses community-based research, participatory research, and action-based research within marginalized communities to empower youth to use digital tools to express their identity, engage with their community, and better understand problems within the community. For example, Turner et al. (2013) helped coordinate a Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR) program at a middle school that has the lowest test scores in the San Francisco Bay Area, a school located in a district where only 30% of African American boys who start high school finish high school. This project included a youth-led research project, with results expressed to the wider community through rap music written and produced by students themselves. Burke and Handley (2018) adopted "empowerment" to frame their participatory action research: "in the broadest sense, empowerment refers to individuals, families, organizations, and communities gaining control…within…their lives, in order to improve equity and quality of life" (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 32). Through the intentional development of youth programs in marginalized communities, media literacy is used as a vehicle to work toward a more equitable and inclusive future.

A number of studies that fall into the category of "impact as expression" not only focus on media production but also deeply consider the audience. This consideration creates opportunities for youth and other individuals to actively engage with communities through media they produce. Often "impact as expression" research implies that it bridges the gap between impact on individual,

community, and societal-level change by arguing that interventions that focus on empowering youth can make continual impact over the course of their lives as they engage further with their own communities. For example, Garcia et al. (2015) discuss that media production and dissemination potentially enables individuals to make an impact on their wider community. They state: "participatory media has the potential to transform research into an ongoing civic dialogue between youth and adult members of a community" (p. 160). They describe expression through media creation as agency-building experiences that impact both the individual and the community. While media literacy impact-as-expression takes place at the individual level, these practices are assumed to affect multiple parties: the individual creator, the community of audiences who interact with the creative work, and society at large. However, scholars and practitioners do not usually evaluate these assumptions, especially regarding how the creator or the audience are impacted by the expression.

ML Impact as Experiential Learning

Articles that articulate impact as experiential learning focus on creating more meaningful, dynamic, engaging, and integrated learning experiences for students. Research in this area highlights media literacy practices that create spaces for students to interact with digital technologies and share their skills with others, providing them with opportunities to learn digital literacies by doing and recognizing the knowledge that students bring to the classroom (Bostock, 2012; Clarke, 2020; Nowell, 2014; Redmond, 2019; Vu et al., 2019). As Redmond (2019) asserts "it is increasingly becoming clear that media production is a way for students to learn through or with media, and is essential for media literacy education" (p. 215). Such media literacy practices focus on teaching students how to interact with, use, and critique media or elaborating on the ways that educators can learn about digital media production from their students. This literature often implies that incorporating digital media into the classroom can improve student learning by supporting agency, expression, broader worldviews, and engagement.

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Along with a focus on integrating digital tools and activities into the classroom, another common component recognizes students' interests and agency. Bostock (2012) uses the "third space framework," which recognizes students' knowledge and experiences by allowing them to be the teacher. This practice gives learners the opportunity to develop skills by teaching them how to use creative software programs, create podcasts, and ultimately uses this experience to educate others by similarly facilitating agency-building and creative interactions within their own classrooms. Similarly, Clarke's (2020) Walk a Day in My Shoes Project integrates digital technologies into the classroom to help students recognize "the power of

digital technology as a way to explore other cultures and increase students' experiences with people different from themselves without leaving their classrooms" (p. 662). Within this literature, it is often implied that experiential and student-led media literacy learning experiences lead to increased student achievement. Moreover, these studies suggest that future media scholars and educators be more intentional in evaluating the impact of their media literacy practices to ensure that they do indeed lead to experiential learning about the self, others, and the social world in transformative ways.

ML Impact as Engaged Citizenship

A subset of research studies focuses on outcomes related to news, politics, and democracy--concepts generally aligned with notions of engaged citizenship. Research in this area focuses on how young people learn to critique and create media for stronger participation in civic life (Burke & Hadley, 2018; Hobbs et al., 2013). While certain behaviors such as interpreting, evaluating, and critiquing media are also aligned with articulations of impact as enquiry, research in this area situates these skills as deeply connected to politically engaged citizenship, civic engagement, and democracy (Ashley, 2019; Ashley et al., 2017; Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017; Ramasubramanian & Darzabi, 2020; Tully & Vraga, 2018b). This conceptualization of impact is common in research in the areas of news media ownership, agenda setting, media effects, journalism studies, civic engagement, and news literacy. Farmer (2019) expresses the importance of students' ability to access, assess, and respond to "news in its various forms" (p. 9). While Farmer (2019, p. 9) emphasizes some skills are more aligned with impact as enquiry, she situates her research in literature on informed citizenry, fake news, and the spread of misinformation, connecting media literacy skills to the broader goal of helping students to become "better informed citizens," a common approach n in news literacy research (Vraga et al., 2020).

Research in this area focuses on how young people learn to critique and create media for stronger participation in civic life (Burke & Hadley, 2018; Hobbs et al., 2013).

Generally, this type of impact occurs at the individual or community level, but some researchers do imply that these individual-level differences in news literacy and democratic engagement are connected to systemic changes and disparities. For example, Frechette (2016) draws attention to the impact on accessibility that occurred when daily print news media moved to online "pay-as-you-go systems."

Frechette (2016, p. 57) emphasizes that the shift to social media has also resulted in disparities in access: "While the participatory nature of social media has endowed certain populations within particular geographic regions with a new set of agency, others have not found their place within these social spheres due to political, economic and social reasons." She uses these accessibility changes to articulate the ways that identity, place, and socioeconomic status impact individuals' ability to be informed citizens, highlighting that people with more socioeconomic resources, critical news literacy skills, and access to technology are able to access news more easily than populations with fewer resources.

Connecting media literacy to democracy is a consistent theme of much research that positions the audience or consumer as a citizen, a framing that elicits connections to civic life. Saal and Shaw (2020), for instance, emphasize the need for media literacy to serve engaged citizenship by stating "the cornerstone of democracy is an informed citizenry, and without adequate literacy tools or information, citizens' self-determination and freedom suffer" (p. 221). Much of the research in this area implies that media literacy interventions and civic-focused educational experiences will not only better the individual but can promote democratic values and perhaps strengthen democracy (Ashley, 2019; Tully & Vraga, 2018a).

ML Impact as Equities

In our scoping review, we examined whether and how impact in media literacy practice was connected with issues of equity, social justice, transformation, and action-oriented emancipatory practices. Given the emphasis of this report on impact on marginalized populations, we sought out media literacy research that emphasized social inequalities. We noted only a small body of research that sought to use media literacy interventions and education to address social inequities, which we called *impact as equity*. Topics relating to social justice, transformation, emancipation, and community-oriented action research are not common within the literature.

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While equity and impact were not addressed directly, there were some articulations of impact that connected with equity in indirect ways. Some articles also identified factors that served as barriers to impactful practice including within the field of media literacies. For instance, some publications identified the lack of focus on adult learners as a challenge within media literacy education in general, which affects its overall impact on communities (Bowen, 2011). Other factors include lack of focus on youth in special education programs (Kesler et al., 2016), the digital

divide (Jaeger et al., 2012), socioeconomic struggles/status (Frechette, 2016), and historically marginalized communities.

Bowen (2011) and Cordes and Sabzalian (2020) call attention to the ways that media literacy education itself can be a marginalizing force through underrepresentation or misrepresentation of some groups within the literature. For example, Bowen (2011) argues that media literacy interventions often ignore the digital competencies of adult learners, their technological needs, and possible influence on the community. Cordes and Sabzalian (2020) emphasize the need for educators to understand anticolonial media literacy and Critical Race Theory in order to teach youth about the misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in media and to promote media production skills that could lead to changes more diverse and inclusive representations of Indigenous communities. While media literacy education, and education more broadly, are often seen as liberatory forces, these articles draw attention to the ways that they can actually reinforce societal inequalities and further disenfranchise already marginalized groups. Overall, our review identified a need to address equity more directly and centrally within the literature on impact of media literacy practices.

Conclusions

Throughout our sample of media literacy research, “impact” was rarely defined explicitly but was articulated through the measures, outcomes, and implications that media literacy studies prioritizes. In a literal sense, the word “impact” is most commonly used within social scientific studies of media literacy interventions to denote changes in attitudes or behavior due to the intervention. However, when we consider a broader definition of impact, a number of the articles that we reviewed spoke to how media literacy practices can be used for expression, experiential learning, empowerment, and critical evaluation. While most media literacy interventions are focused on individual-level change, almost all of them seem to imply that these individual-level changes may lead to larger changes in the community or even in society. However, very few published studies clearly theorize or provide empirical evidence for community or society-level impact of media literacy practices. Additionally, media literacy itself is conceptualized as an individual-level practice more than as one that is at the community, institutional, or societal-level. While

research at broader social levels could be more challenging, it is needed to provide evidence for the broad and lasting effects of media literacy interventions on students, schools, communities, and society. Future research can work to fill this gap in the literature and to continue to conceptualize how media literacy researchers articulate impact within their research.

As we examine these findings through the lens of the three main assumptions of this project, we find that impact is most often discussed as individual agency within the literature, rather than as community empowerment or as support for democracy. Further media literacy research investigates the connections among individual agency, community empowerment, and support for democracy. As we engaged with the literature, we learned that more work is needed on how equity is an important aspect of creating impact through media literacy practices at the individual, community, and societal levels. To further build on the findings of the scoping review, we conducted in-depth interviews with media literacy educators and practitioners to better understand how they view impact in their work and how these viewpoints relate to issues of equity and inclusion.

Examining Impact and Equity in Practice: Stakeholder Interviews

Building from the findings of our scoping review, our team conducted 27 in-depth interviews with media literacy stakeholders from around the United States, including members of the NAMLE Media National Media Literacy Alliance. This part of the research project is guided by our second research question:

RQ2: What are the main practices and processes that lead to impactful media literacy practice?

Interviewees represented organizations working to advance media literacy and included educators, administrators, and community stakeholders. The interviews, ranging from 25 minute to over an hour, expanded on the findings of the scoping review to explore how stakeholders understand impact in their work and if their work addresses equity and social justice to support impactful media literacy practices. The interview transcripts were read and coded multiple times to cross-reference the three core assumptions of media literacy--that media literacy prioritizes individual agency, empowers communities, and supports democratic wellbeing.

Cultivating Media Literate Individuals

Interviewees generally see developing media-literate individuals as foundational to the success of media literacy practices to support community empowerment and democratic outcomes. In our interviews, individual agency is foregrounded and is most prevalent in media literacy activities and practices. While media literacy stakeholders see individual skills connected to how individuals interact with their social environments, that emphasis is not central to how they approach their media literacy practices.

One stakeholder expressed their views on impact in media literacy education as similar to outcomes associated with health initiatives: “if you wanted to actually lead to a change in a child's media diet, you have to do media literacy with both children and parents and those were the most effective interventions” (ML9). This view resonates with the Evaluation Outcomes approach to impact that is so prevalent in the literature. For some stakeholders, media literacy interventions have the power to make a change at the individual level, if the systems in place

allow for it. Here, issues of access to technology, media, and education become important. As one stakeholder noted:

> The digital divide is real and the way that young people with money and young people without money use media is very different. And, you know, we talk about access when we talk about the digital divide, but not necessarily or not always utilization. And I feel like media literacy is like a pinpoint of the utilization. ... Just because you have a phone doesn't mean you know how to use it, just because you can read a news article doesn't mean you know how to use it. (ML18)

While one's individual agency is tied to access, a longstanding core media literacy concept, in the quote above and throughout our interviews, access was connected to and reflected social inequities. Access (or lack thereof) to technologies was a theme that emerged throughout the interviews, as were the social and economic conditions that further exacerbate such inequities.

Alongside access issues, stakeholders brought up the pace of technological change as another hurdle to media literacy practices in general, especially practices that prioritize equity. There was a need to "continually reevaluate what we thought was possible" (ML4) because media content changes so continuously and oftentimes drastically. The need for this type of continual assessment speaks to "technical knowledge and digital savviness" (ML3), but here stakeholders see individual agency as connected to larger systems like state educational standards. The speed of the adoption of new state standards does not match the expediency of the evolution of technology or the knowledge associated with it. To improve agency, with an eye toward technological savviness, state standards should be updated to reflect the current knowledge gaps and needs. Expressed one stakeholder:

> I think the state standards are critical. I think that not only to require media literacy or news literacy in civics being taught, but to require [media/news literacy] as a skill to test for graduation that requires students demonstrate that they have the ability, to discern fact from fiction, know to discern credible information before they go out into the to the wider world, or on to college or wherever they go after. (ML21)

This shift, the interviewees argue, provides the means to help promote individual agency. Without it, and without the capability to evaluate that knowledge and impact.

Not surprisingly, attention to an individual's ability to critically think remains a priority to stakeholders. The interviewees reinforced enquiry as foundational to developing media literacy competencies. One stakeholder reflected:

> We're teaching not only reading and reflection but also writing and the creation of content all day. Well, as to how to think critically about experiences and society... And so, you know, media literacy is very much a part of that. I think the real difference is seeing it at the core rather than the additional thing to do. (ML25)

A number of interviewees describe media literacy as "a valuable experience" that contributes to life skills and developing "cultural competency," reinforcing the idea that it must be core to an individual's development in today's digital culture. Interviewees see an integral need for media literacy as a way to improve an individual's ability to navigate the communities they work in and to participate in democracy writ large. The ability to be "critical consumers," as one stakeholder describes it, is both a starting point to a sense of agency and one of the most significant ways individual agency is fostered; however, many felt the focus on individual agency should not take away from understanding the role of systems, including education:

> We also know that we can't abdicate our responsibility to help kids understand truths that aren't necessarily equal. So how do we come to an understanding in education about the way to do that with nuance that appreciates the gray areas, but also names the clarity of when we need to intervene with our voices and where we need to leave it up to the kids to work that out, among other things. (ML4)

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This "understanding" is echoed throughout the interviews, particularly emphasizing that an individual is only able to exercise agency if they interact with their communities. Interviewees expressed that teachers, after parents and families, are the most likely figures to promote this type of thinking. As one stakeholder posits "being a critical media- literate person means you ask things about who benefits from stories being published [and] whose voice is not being heard" (ML19). Furthering the theme of individual agency, interviewees referenced building the capacity of young people to express themselves and their ideas as core to their ability to move from individual competency to contributing to community empowerment.

In the interviews, expression is clearly connected to the idea of media creation. A number of the interviewees drew from their own backgrounds in media to advocate for creating media as a core attribute for developing agency in learners. One stakeholder describes her first-time hand-cutting 16-millimeter celluloid. Her memory is not just about the physical act of cutting film, but that the same day she

did this, Final Cut Pro was first released, signally a shift in film editing that would bring about changes in film production and possibilities for expression. “Media literacy became a kind of different animal,” she said. “When everyone had access to digital tools, storytelling became more ubiquitous or was becoming more ubiquitous and quote-unquote democratized” (ML1). Interviewees believe that young people build agency through seeing their creations in public life and reflected in media texts. Media literacy stakeholders see publishing and sharing work both as ways for students to see their own experience represented and to heighten awareness about media messages.

Building from expression, interviewees see experiential learning as core to moving beyond narrowly defined outcomes for media literacy education. Most commonly, experiential learning is connected to specific examples from classrooms, activities, and professional development. A pair of stakeholders described using media literacy to teach about carbon cycles and the Revolutionary War. They both feel that media literacy practices applied to real world issues teach students to work *with* the content instead of simply responding to content. If stakeholders see the curriculum as a means to enhance student agency through experience and application, then there is a clear sense of “value for respect, for justice, for equity, for honesty, for fairness, for kindness, for empathy that will shape how we create our curriculum and how we lead our class” (ML4). The desire to attach to issues of justice and fairness means “looking to increase students’ confidence in both creating and dealing with media [and] increasing their self, their perception of themselves…” (ML8) while also exploring issues critical to improving individuals’ communities

Experiential learning connects directly to engaged citizenship as interviewees express an aspiration that learners apply classroom experiences to their broader civic lives. Stakeholders generally referenced ideas like “advocacy,” “taking action,” and “discerning” when discussing the civic goals of media literacy education. One interviewee sees this moment of engagement being one of the most important components to avoiding democratic crises:

> [Media literacy] is about being a productive citizen of this country, and I think you saw what happened in, in 2020 and before, I mean it's become a real crisis. It was bad before but it's just ridiculous now that people who are spreading lies [...] so if we don't arm our students with the sort of capacity and the aptitude, and the sort of desire, to have a healthy news diet as early as possible, who knows what, where they'll end up. (ML18)

Positing toward the future was common in the interviewees’ reflections on civic engagement and media literacy. Stakeholders believe that media literacy generally supports individuals building capacity to engage in a media society “feeling like a whole human” (ML2). Others believe that what connects individual agency to engaged citizenship is moving from passive consumption to critical consumption,

which, as one stakeholder describes, is an "intellectually honest way that … isn't just about verifying their beliefs or otherwise" (ML7). For our interviewees in general, engagement requires a safe space because oftentimes the practice of civic engagement needs both trial and error to move from individual agency to community empowerment and support for democracy.

Connecting Media Literacy to Community Well-being

Empowering community is a central component of many interviewees' media literacy goals. Many see themselves directly approaching the communities within which their learners reside and engage. The various communities the stakeholders and alliance members serve are also vast. A number of our interviewees are involved with national initiatives and serve diverse populations across the country. Regardless of the demographic make-up of the community, the commonality is that there is a desire to support and empower communities.

Evaluation of media literacy outcomes is challenging when discussed in the context of community empowerment. Interviewees found it easier to connect individual skills to speculation about community empowerment than to directly approach community issues. Stakeholders expressed challenges with regard to the resources communities have, their socioeconomic makeup, and other relevant issues. Multiple interviewees mentioned needing to find appropriate ways into communities for their learners: "you need to work with organizations that are in those communities, […] who already are in communication and, you know, have touchpoints in those communities" (ML6). Entering communities requires care and awareness. Community organizations can provide strong existing networks for media literacy educators to support. Without that, the community aspirations for many media literacy stakeholders are embedded in complex and often significant boundaries:

Multiple interviewees mentioned needing to find appropriate ways into communities for their learners: "you need to work with organizations that are in those communities, […] who already are in communication and, you know, have touchpoints in those communities" (ML6).

> I mean there's this massive like media literacy divide, there's a digital divide there's a professional divide, etc., and you know, one of the places that we were first starting to do like real media training is [location redacted] which is, you know, there are some really poor neighborhoods; there are high school kids who have never left their block… Certainly, never left, you know, the city and think of the media as the enemy. Or you know, they're only interested in us when there's a shooting and then they come over and take a picture and get all the names wrong and leave. Like they feel very exploited by the local media and so they don't want to join that. (ML18)

Stakeholders and alliance members consistently identify big technology and large media corporations as barriers to meaningful opportunities for communities to thrive. One interviewee notes the stark impact of inequities in opportunities for media literacy: "I believe that socioeconomic status determines whether or not we get [media literacy] skills at home or not" (ML22).

"Caring for subjects in new ways" is one way a stakeholder (ML1) connects media literacy practice to community empowerment. This sentiment emerges from the stakeholder discussing the power of representing a community and thinking differently about the ways media literacy work can support a community. Interviewees emphasized the need to work diligently to cultivate and maintain strong relationships with communities, centering on ethics and appropriate representations of the community. One stakeholder saw this as a form of community service. For this stakeholder, it is "about bringing people together for dialog and discussion and doing that in a way that is generative" (ML5). The work of empowering communities must create new pathways in which equity is central to the practices being executed. This includes thinking about "the pattern of the kind of stories that are not covered" (ML19), which is typical of marginalized communities, and, this stakeholder mentions, are "stories about people who are not in the *quote* mainstream of our society" (ML19). Several stakeholders believe community-centered media literacy practices are important to change how the stories of communities are read and shared. Reflected one stakeholder:

> [...] with media literacy you've got not just one misconception, but you've got a whole group of people with a variety of misconceptions from bad science to trusting the wrong people to all of these kinds of things, all in kind of one pot. It's incredibly hard for an educator to kind of sort through that and, and support students kind of both individually and as a group. (ML8)

This need to address larger misconceptions about communities involves what one stakeholder calls a "critical understanding," about "the lack of diversity and inclusion historically in newsrooms and why certain communities have felt underrepresented or under-seen and not heard" (ML21). Taken collectively, media literacy's ability to empower communities means that there is a need to reflect on how our communities are presented, understood, and interacted with. Or, as one alliance member shares, "it comes to that sort of higher-order thinking" (ML23) that leads to a chance to elevate community voices.

For both alliance members and stakeholders, positioning marginalized media creators' work at the forefront is a way for their expression to become more public and, hopefully, more accessible to a broad range of audiences. One stakeholder describes this as "telling the stories on the margins" and instead of "keeping them on the margins, [...] center those stories" (ML1). Another stakeholder says she

convenes “gatherings to share knowledge. And through that spirit of collaboration, many wonderful projects and creative initiatives, including research, curricula, multimedia, other conferences and gatherings, publications, [and] advocacy are the results” (ML5). This collaboration for the purpose of expression and empowerment is, as one stakeholder believes, about building “community resilience” (ML1). In order to build that resilience, stakeholders believe that an equity lens must be central to their media literacy practice. This includes finding avenues for “marginalized or underrepresented students who don’t have access to creating and telling their own stories” (ML3). It means creating organizational missions that reflect the community and “trying to diversify” (ML20). It means providing a purpose to want to create with the community in mind:

> [...] when it's an audience that is outside of the room that really cares about what you're actually producing that comfort disappears in a good way because it inspires them to be like oh I've got to really be on my game, I really got to produce media that really make a difference or, yeah, you know, or, or I'm going to miss an opportunity to connect. (ML8)

According to our interviews, the more visibility a community has, the more empowerment it feels. This visibility is predicated on both the need to create and share stories with communities, but also the lived experiences of the communities they engage with.

According to our interviews, the more visibility a community has, the more empowerment it feels. This visibility is predicated on both the need to create and share stories with communities, but also the lived experiences of the communities they engage with.

If community-centered media literacy practices are to be equitable, they must recognize the diversity of life experiences in these communities. One interviewee sees this recognition as imperative to impactful media literacy practices. They challenge educators to “dedicate ourselves” to practices that “really reflect how [communities] are experiencing life. This not only includes recognizing diversity like in the LGBTQIA example but also in the educational experiences and opportunities learners may have” (ML2). Another stakeholder recognizes that the programming they create often is dictated by the learning experiences students have in their formal learning spaces. Another took it one step further by sharing that it isn’t just about what the teacher wants anymore. If we are truly to have equitable media literacy practices then youth must be a part of the planning and programming processes. Another feels it is important to acknowledge that experiential learning isn’t confined to the walls of a school, rather “community and family engagement is possibly the most where media literacy fits” (ML31). For media literacy practice to speak directly to

communities, learning experiences must be "relevant to their life and [...] how they creatively address [problems]" (ML23). If communities are unable to identify and address problems creatively, they will struggle to engage in pursuit of equity and inclusion in their communities and beyond. Reflects one stakeholder:

> We want [students] to understand the impact of their newsroom and how best they can serve their communities. And that's going to be by being inclusive, by being a diverse newsroom, by auditing your coverage, and making sure that's diverse as well. And looking for those blind spots that you might have. And that's part of literacy as well because we know newsrooms have to understand that they might have the best intentions in mind and very good people in place. But if there's no diversity, then there are blind spots you're not aware of and you really need to have that representation in order to best inform your community. And so that applies to our students and their newsrooms as well. And so we absolutely have had concerted efforts to provide specifically that type of resource for our members and their students. (ML26)

In all cases, interviewees emphasize the need to create supportive environments in a hope that it translates beyond the individual students to their broader communities. As one interviewee reflects, "making sure that people have access to a free and open internet and making sure that when they're there they're not subject to hate and discrimination at every turn" is critical (ML14). It is clear that community-oriented media literacy practices must prioritize issues of equity and inclusion if they are to move beyond individual impact, and towards that of the community.

Democratic Participation, Media Literacy, and Social Well-being

The final emerging theme from our stakeholder interviews focused on the larger goals connected to media literacy educational practice: the aspiration to support strong democracy and social well-being. In the interviews, the research team acknowledged that this connection is murky and involves many complex factors. We were, however, interested in how media literacy stakeholders think about this mission in the context of their own work, particularly after they discussed their media literacy practices on individual and communal levels.

Conceptualizing how media literacy supports democracy is under-researched; perhaps the issue is too difficult to discuss in the absence of both individual agency and empowered communities. The need for both levels of assumption to identify how the individual can affect democracy l and the community is paramount to achieving stable and lasting civic culture. Democracy itself does not lack support in discussions with media literacy stakeholders and alliance members. Rather, democracy is constantly reinforced by them through their discussions of civic responsibility. The interviews provided here were reflective of larger structural

concerns about the future of democracy in the United States. Interviewees expressed concerns that unregulated and deeply invasive media norms were potentially detrimental to young people and largely beyond control of families and users themselves.

One stakeholder expressed the following: "one of our primary concerns is the way in which the business model for children's media leads to so many problems, including the fact that almost all media is designed to either get kids to spend more time on platforms or get them to spend money on in-game purchases or a combination thereof" (ML9). This line of thought extended beyond invasive media practices on young people's own media use to also reflect on who is harmed the most by these practices.

The need to think about "the punitive effects of racism" reflects a need for equitable media literacy practice to help those with "the most to gain or lose through media literacy" (ML25) an opportunity to build equity and fight injustice. Interviewees connected the democratic aspirations of media literacy education to an equity-based lens. One stakeholder saw media literacy as supporting practices that can "create the conditions for change" (ML1). Others saw media literacy as a means to "advocacy" or "activism"--a "social justice orientation." These practices must be specifically related to justice and "guided by discernment and truth." In this way, as one interviewee stated, media literacy that supports strong democracy is "not only owning the truth but also being able to create new media and new content [to] make our worlds better" (ML25). Media literacy "on a very practical level" is a means "for radical democratic liberatory education" (ML4). Stakeholders see democracy being central to educational practice when it is "more radical in the sense that it will empower individuals to read the world and create the world" (ML4).

For example, one stakeholder sees a clear need to "talk about efficacy and the need to do our part in our society to help others educate others so that they're informed" (ML26).

Civic responsibility is a natural partnership to promote democratic outcomes. For stakeholders and alliance members, "building a more just and inclusive world" focuses on "change and transformation" and encouraging "active participants in democracy." Interviewees describe democratic outcomes in relation to the types of actions needed to make the world better or more equitable. For example, one stakeholder sees a clear need to "talk about efficacy and the need to do our part in our society to help others educate others so that they're informed"

(ML26). This translates to citizens becoming more “effective members of the democratic process,” (ML26) an important goal to achieve the aims of equitable media literacy practice. Most stakeholders shared that the George Floyd protests and January 6th insurrection are pivotal moments for democracy needing to be positioned at the forefront of media literacy practice. Therefore, according to an alliance member, we must have initiatives to help members of our communities(teens, in particular) to “become voter eligible” and focus on “civic engagement” (ML31).

Another stakeholder takes this further, claiming that “being an effective citizen matters, and you cannot be an effective citizen without being media literate” (ML18). This explicit connection between media literacy and democratic participation, while often elusive, provides strong evidence for positioning media literacy through an equity lens. The stakeholders prioritized individual agency as foundational to media literacy’s ability to support vibrant communities and a strong democracy. The interviewees reflected that evaluation outcomes were necessary for measuring the impact of media literacy practices but often lead to greater divides among community access to media literacy skills. Interviewees suggested that by fostering individual agency and empowering communities, a healthier democracy will follow, and all suggested a greater need to include media literacy as a core competency in formal and informal learning ecosystems. To the stakeholders we interviewed, supporting democracy was a justification for their work in media literacy, not necessarily a goal. This insight was supported by the unanimous call for more equity-focused approaches to media literacy education practices, which we explored in the final stage of the research project.

Surveying Equity and Impact: National Survey of Media Literacy Practitioners

The final stage of our research project sought to answer our third research question: **What are the challenges and opportunities for incorporating equity into impactful media literacy practices?** This question builds from the scoping review and interviews, from which we found that media literacy research defines impact widely and that stakeholders generally believe community and democracy-oriented media literacy practices must support equity and inclusion. To approach this question, we developed a survey focused on media literacy and equity and fielded it with media literacy practitioners from a range of formal and informal learning environments across the United States. The survey built on the findings from the scoping review and interviews and continued to probe our three core assumptions as well as the values and practices that drive media literacy work.

The survey was organized in five sections: 1) Organizational/role information, 2) Media literacy practice and values, 3) Media literacy and equity, 4) Professional memberships, and 5) Demographics. The survey was circulated to NAMLE members and the listservs of professional membership organizations represented in the National Media Literacy Alliance. The final dataset for analysis includes 741 respondents who engage in a diverse set of practices from a range of organizations. Most participants were affiliated with formal education in K-12 and higher education followed by media organizations. The most common media literacy educational practice was teaching media literacy (N=303) followed by creating educational resources like curricula and lesson plans (N= 271). Information Literacy, News Literacy, and Digital Literacy were the three most commonly selected areas of focus followed by Critical Media Literacy and Media Production. Nearly 82 percent of respondents indicated that they were members of a professional organization that supports media literacy educational practices.

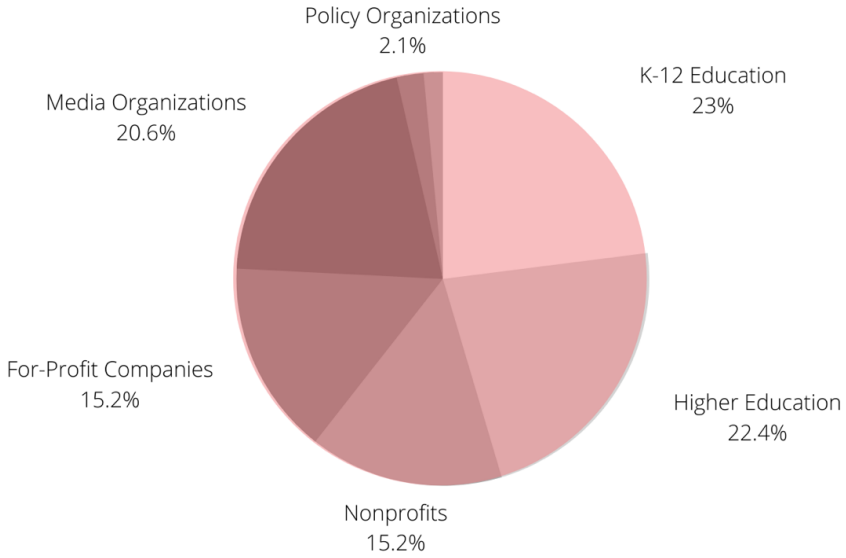
Table 1: Organizational Affiliation

Organization type	**N (710)**	**Percent**
K-12 Education	163	23%
Higher Education	159	22.4%
Nonprofit/Not-for-Profit Organization	108	15.2%
For-Profit Company (e.g., educational services, products)	108	15.2%
Media Organization	146	20.6%
Policy Organization	15	2.1%
Other	11	1.5%

V. The Research

Given the focus of this report, the following section details our findings regarding participants' views on our three core assumptions and their views on media literacy and equity. In addition to presenting the overall findings, we also compare responses from six groups of practitioners[1]:

- Higher Education Educators (N = 92)
- K-12 Educators (N = 91)
- Educational Librarians/Media Specialists (N= 69)
- Educational Administrators (N = 34)
- Nonprofit Workers (N = 108)
- Media Organization Workers (N = 146)



Impact and Equity in Media Literacy Practice

We asked participants to rate their agreement with the following statements as they pertain to their media literacy educational practices (See Table 2). Agreement was measured on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These statements tap into our core assumptions about the role of media literacy in supporting individual growth, empowering communities, and contributing to democracy, as well as the role of media literacy in addressing inequalities. We also asked about two common media literacy practices: deconstructing media texts and producing media content. In general, participants showed strong agreement with all items, with the lowest agreement for "focuses on media production" at just

[1] See the Methodology for full details on practitioner categories.

under 50 percent agreement, which may be due to the skills and resources required to teach media production. The highest agreement was with the statement "creates knowledgeable individuals," which had 64 percent agreement, lending support to the notion that the individual is central to media literacy educational practice.

Table 2: Media Literacy Educational Practices and Core Assumptions

Next, we'd like to ask you questions about your media literacy educational practice in your professional capacity. Again, keep your primary role/job in mind. My media literacy educational practice:	Disagree*	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree**
prioritizes individual development (N=672)	14.3%	33%	52.7%
creates knowledgeable individuals (N=671)	13.1%	22.8%	64.1%
empowers communities (N=673)	14.1%	30.3%	55.6%
serves diverse communities (N=673)	14.3%	28.7%	57%
encourages democratic participation (N=672)	12.5%	26.6%	60.8%
supports democracy (N=673)	13.1%	26.3%	60.6%
addresses issues that affect marginalized communities (N=673)	16.2%	28.2%	55.5%
attempts to address structural inequalities (N=673)	14.1%	28.4%	57.5%
focuses on deconstructing media messages (N=672)	18.3%	25.7%	55.9%
focuses on media production (N=672)	20.5%	29.9%	49.6%

* Disagree includes "strongly disagree" and "somewhat disagree."
** Agree includes "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree."

Given the high agreement with these statements, which was assumed based on the existing literature and our interview findings, we also asked participants to select the statement that reflected which was ***most important*** to their media literacy practice (See Table 3). The three statements align with our core assumptions: 42.5 percent selected "promoting individual development," followed by 35.5 percent who selected "promoting community engagement," and 22 percent who chose "promoting democratic participation."

Table 3: Core Assumptions

Which of the following is **most** important to your media literacy practice?	N (654)	Percent
Promoting individual development	278	42.5%
Promoting community engagement	232	35.5%
Promoting democratic participation	144	22.0%

To dig deeper into participants' values regarding diversity, equity and inclusion, we asked participants to rate their agreement with statements that asked about access, representation, engaging with marginalized communities and perspectives, collaboration, and activism within their media literacy educational practices (See Table 4).

Responses in this section show participants engage in a range of practices that promote equitable media literacy practice such as making "sure digital access is available to all" (59.2%), incorporating "media representations from diverse populations" (57%), and providing "a safe space for marginalized voices to be heard" (58.1%). At the same time, however, nearly 42 percent of respondents indicated that they "avoid difficult topics such as values, ethics, and discrimination" in their practice, suggesting that their is still room for growth and expansion of what it means to engage in equitable media literacy practice. In addition, nearly 60 percent of respondents indicated a desire to make sure digital access is available to all, which was also emphasized in the interviews and is a key component of most approaches to media literacy education. A lack of access is viewed as a barrier not only to learning media literacy but being able to engage as a citizen.

Finally, we explicitly asked participants about their media literacy educational practices and views on equity (See Table 5). We provided the following definition of equity so that participants would be aware of how we are defining this key concept: "Equity refers to fair treatment, access, opportunity and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that prevent the full participation of some groups" (University of California at Davis, 2021).

Table 4: Media Literacy Educational Practices and Values

To what extent would you agree that the following statements describe your media literacy educational practice. My media literacy educational practice:	Disagree*	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree**
makes sure digital access is available to all (N=659)	12.9%	27.9%	59.2%
incorporates media representations from diverse populations (N=659)	12.9%	30.2%	57%
elevates marginalized voices through media production (N=658)	18.2%	33.6%	48.2%
provides a safe space for marginalized voices to be heard (N=659)	16.4%	25.5%	58.1%
provides opportunities for relationship building and collaborative learning (N=659)	12.9%	27.5%	59.7%
avoids difficult topics such as values, ethics, and discrimination (N=658)	33.1%	25.2%	41.7%
provides an atmosphere where individuals feel affirmed (N=659)	13.2%	27.5%	59.3%
fosters an environment that engages teamwork and collaboration (N=659)	14.4%	25.6%	69.9%
offers outlets for expressing individual ideas and perspectives (N=657)	13.1%	25.3%	61.6%
engages with elected officials and government organizations (N=659)	22.2%	35.1%	42.7%
cultivates media activism (N=659)	17.1%	30.5%	52.4%

* Disagree includes “strongly disagree” and “somewhat disagree.”
** Agree includes “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree.”

Table 5: Media Literacy Educational Practices and Equity

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the statements below as they describe your media literacy educational practice.	Disagree*	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree**
I have noticed many biases in media literacy learning materials (N=651)	17.5%	33.6%	48.9%
My organization's practices disadvantage students (N=650)	29.2%	33.8%	36.9%
I feel confident to facilitate conversations on inequalities in media literacy education (N=651)	13.5%	31.2%	55.3%
I prioritize historically marginalized communities within my learning environment (N=651)	15.9%	30.3%	54%
I actively cultivate equitable media literacy practices in my learning environment (N=651)	12%	28.9%	59.1%
I talk with my colleagues about inequities and biases in media literacy learning materials (N=650)	15.7%	30.2%	54.1%
I proactively advocate against inequitable practices within my organization (N=651)	14%	33.2%	52.8%
I have experienced backlash when I advocate against inequitable practices within my organization (N=651)	28%	33.3%	28.7%
I am confident about sustaining long-term efforts towards equitable media literacy educational practices (N=651)	17.7%	33.5%	48.9%

* Disagree includes "strongly disagree" and "somewhat disagree."
** Agree includes "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree."

The survey section on equity concluded with questions that asked about personal and organizational support, challenges, and change (See Table 6). This section attempted to gauge the more direct and practical experiences and outcomes of engaging with issues of equity in media literacy practice. Responses show that participants have mixed views and experiences. For example, while nearly 60 percent agree that addressing issues of equity in media literacy educational practice "is important" to them and nearly 43 percent believe this work "has led to visible change," 36 percent reported that this work "is not something [they] have done, nearly 50 percent said it "is challenging" for them, and 46.3 percent indicated that this work "is not widely understood by my organization." Despite these mixed views, the responses showed a willingness to engage with issues of equity in media literacy practice in their organizations with approximately 54 percent agreeing that this work "has led to important conversations" and it "is something I discuss with my colleagues." The range of responses reflects the complexity of addressing equity in practice and suggests a need for further training, education, and research in this area. Responses also reflect the importance of organizations as potential advocates or adversaries in the pursuit of equitable media literacy practice. While individual effort is critical and conversations and support among colleagues is essential, organizational support can make or break efforts toward equity.

Table 6: Equitable Practices

Addressing issues of equity in my media literacy educational practice:	Disagree*	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree**
is important to me (N=650)	10.7%	29.4%	59.9%
is controversial (N=650)	21.6%	35.8%	42.6%
is not supported at my organization (N=650)	31%	34%	34.9%
is easy for me (N=650)	19.2%	34.9%	45.9%
is challenging for me (N=650)	19.7%	30.9%	49.4%
makes me uncomfortable (N=650)	29.4%	30.9%	39.7%
has led to visible changes (N=650)	18.7%	38.6%	42.6%
has caused me distress (N=650)	23.4%	38.3%	38.3%
has led to important conversations (N=650)	14.5%	31.2%	54.3%
has been more challenging than it's worth (N=650)	29.7%	30.5%	39.8%
has been welcomed by others in my organization (N=650)	16.5%	33.8%	49.7%
is not something I have done (N=650)	32.3%	31.7%	36%
is not widely understood by my organization (N=650)	20.1%	33.5%	46.3%
is something I discuss with my colleagues (N=648)	14.8%	31.2%	54%

* Disagree includes "strongly disagree" and "somewhat disagree."
** Agree includes "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree."

Comparing Media Literacy Practitioners

To explore similarities and differences in approaches and views regarding media literacy practice and equity, we compared responses from six groups of survey participants:

- Higher Education Educators (N = 92)
- K-12 Educators (N = 91)
- Educational Librarians/Media Specialists (N= 69)
- Educational Administrators (N = 34)
- Nonprofit Workers (N = 108)
- Media Organization Workers (N = 146)

Looking at the core assumptions, K-12 Educators were more likely to agree that their practice "encourages democratic participation" and "supports democracy" than any other group with 72.6% of K-12 Educators "somewhat" or "strongly" agreeing that their practice encourages democratic participation and 71.4% of K-12 Educators "somewhat" or "strongly" agreeing that their practice supports democracy. Participants affiliated with non-profits showed the lowest agreement for these statements across groups.

Table 7: Media Literacy and Democracy

My media literacy educational practice encourages democratic participation						
	K-12 Educators	Higher Ed Educators	Librarians	Admin	Non-Profit	Media Orgs
Strongly disagree	4.8%	6.1%	6.1%	3%	2.9%	0.7%
Somewhat disagree	4.8%	6.1%	6.1%	30.3%	8.7%	6.4%
Neither agree nor disagree	17.9%	24.4%	22.7%	9.1%	38.8%	27%
Somewhat agree	32.1%	17.1%	30.3%	36.4%	33%	44.7%
Strongly agree	40.5%	46.3%	34.8%	21.2%	16.5%	21.3%
My media literacy educational practice supports democracy						
	K-12 Educators	Higher Ed Educators	Librarians	Admin	Non-Profit	Media Orgs
Strongly disagree	8.3%	4.8%	4.5%	15.2%	3.9%	2.8%
Somewhat disagree	7.1%	7.2%	6.1%	6.1%	7.8%	7.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	13.1%	20.5%	28.8%	12.1%	35%	25.5%
Somewhat agree	22.6%	26.5%	30.3%	36.4%	30.1%	44%
Strongly agree	48.8%	41%	30.3%	30.3%	23.3%	20.6%

Turning to questions of equity in media literacy practice, some interesting differences emerge. For example, a higher percentage of K-12 Educators (25.6%) strongly disagreed with the statement “My organization’s practices disadvantage students,” than respondents from any other group. On the same question, nearly 20% of Higher Education Educators surveyed said they strongly agreed with the statement. Continuing to look at questions about equity and organizations, Administrators were the most likely group (19.4%) to strongly agree with the statement “I have experienced backlash when I advocate against inequitable practices within my organization.” However, the same percentage of Administrators also strongly disagreed with this statement, suggesting a diverse range of responses and experiences with advocating for equitable practices within educational institutions.

Looking at individual practices, 31.3% of K-12 and 40.2% of Higher Education Educators strongly agreed with the statement “My media literacy educational practice provides a safe space for marginalized voices to be heard,” rates higher than any other groups. Just over 32% of Administrators strongly disagreed with this statement, the highest percentage of any group. Findings such as this underscore the potential divide between media literacy educators in formal learning settings and the administrators that oversee their places of work. Educators also indicated that they engage with difficult topics like ethics, values, and discrimination in their practice and were more likely to do so than other groups. K-12 and Higher Education Educators were more likely than the other groups to strongly agree with the statements“My media literacy educational practice fosters an environment that engages teamwork and collaboration” and “My media literacy educational practice offers outlets for expressing individual ideas and perspectives.” These differences could be due, in part, to the nature of their work, which is often teaching and direct engagement with students, while others, like non-profit and media professionals, engage in a range of activities. Finally, K-12 (49.4%), Higher Education Educators (43.2%), and Librarians (43.1%) were more likely to strongly agree that addressing issues of equity in their media literacy educational practice is “important” to them compared to the other groups.

Connecting the Data

The survey set out to explore how a large subset of media literacy practitioners understand equity and inclusion in their media literacy educational practices. The results paint a complex picture of media literacy practitioners and administrators who in general acknowledge and support the need for more equity-focused media literacy work in their classrooms and communities. However, the survey indicates institutional resistance to this work, a lack of support for these efforts, and a lack of resources for these endeavors. Respondents reported feeling unsure of how to navigate equity-based media literacy practices, alongside fear of repercussions.

We believe this research, alongside the findings from the scoping review and interviews, shows a clear need to support media literacy educators and practitioners with processes, approaches, and resources to build more equity-driven media literacy practices in their learning spaces. This is no easy task. We acknowledge the challenges associated with doing this work, often seen as politically-charged and sensitive in formal primary or secondary spaces for education. Despite these challenges, we believe that pathways exist to build equitable media literacy learning experiences that speak to the findings here and that can be used in ways that are not divisive or that ask learners to align with any certain political views, ideologies, or lines of thought.

Rather, the results of this research affirm the need for equitable media literacy practices that speak to the assumptions we explore here. Much media literacy practice in the United States is grounded in the development of the media-savvy individual. This is a distinctly American trait, as it resides at the core of our social and democratic norms in the country and views on individualism. However, focusing on the individual risks deprioritizing the larger communal, social, and democratic norms and necessities that must exist for individuals to thrive in digital cultures and contribute meaningfully to society's overall well-being. While empowering communities is a noble goal, it is often assumed, alongside larger democratic outcomes, as a natural next step for a media-literate citizenry. Our research shows that media literacy education cannot necessarily rest upon this assumption.

Connecting our data here, we find that impact is a moving target that risks obscuring media literacies' larger goals, that practitioners' focus on individual skill sets can limit the larger connections to community and society, and that media literacy's connection to stronger and more equitable democratic norms are constrained by a lack of uniform support, assumed politicization, and a lack of resources to do this work within a safe and supportive environment.

V. The Research

We do not believe that we should seek a silver bullet approach to impact and equity in media literacy educational practices. Rather, we believe that the field must address its commitment to developing media literacy education that responds to the norms of an abundant, diverse, and immersive media ecosystem. Across the data, we acknowledge the natural struggle that our research participants grapple with around how to implement effective and engaging media literacy experiences,

while aspiring to make them focused on more equitable and inclusive futures. We recognize that this challenging work occurs while navigating increasingly sensitive and polarizing spaces for formal and informal learning.

What we offer below is a response, and a resource, that speaks to the findings of our research study. We hope to offer a pathway for media literacy practitioners to re-orient certain experiences to align more directly with an equity-driven lens. We have worked diligently to avoid direct politicization of content, concepts, or approaches. We have centered this response on what we believe are the applicable outcomes of our research exploration, which suggest the following:

- ➔ Impact in media literacy education should be process-oriented.
- ➔ Media literacy experiences should explicitly move beyond a focus on the individual.
- ➔ Media literacy practices should embrace equity and inclusion at the outset of their design.
- ➔ Media literacy resources should provide guidance for educators who may be working in unsupportive environments.

VI: A Practitioners' Field Guide for Equitable Media Literacy Practice

The findings of this research have implications for the future of media literacy educational practice. The conceptual vagueness associated with impact and loose target for how it's achieved constrain the ability for media literacy to meet its claims for being a benefit to a strong and vibrant democracy in the United States. This lack of clarity hinders the ability of educators to connect individual learning achievements to community engagement and democratic participation. *Further, while the participants in this study show a clear commitment to equity and social justice in their media literacy practice, they are unclear about how to move forward with building equity-driven processes into their media literacy work.* The results of our work show a need to provide pathways and processes for media literacy practitioners to consider equity-driven media literacy practices. We believe scholarship should not only advance theory and methods but provide applications for the field.

- **Who?** This guide is for all media literacy practitioners interested in designing equity-focused interventions.
- **What?** This guide offers five priority areas to consider when building equity-focused interventions**.**
- **How?** This guide provides places for self-evaluation, questions to consider, and guidelines to implement when designing equity-focused interventions.
- **Why?** This guide reinforces equity, care, and social justice in all media literacy practices to build more inclusive futures.

The Field Guide for Equitable Media Literacy Practice is designed to provide guidance on prioritizing equity and inclusion in media literacy educational practices. The field guide serves as an interactive map through five sections that collectively prompt us to be more mindful of how equity is reflected in our media literacy practice. In the guide, we spend time defining our terms, explaining our articulation of process versus outcomes, and acknowledging all the past guides, playbooks, and road maps that this guide builds on.

Below are short overviews of each section of the field guide. As you read further about these sections, it's important to remember that these sections are not meant to re-invent or replace any specific media literacy approach. Rather, these are meant to add to existing guides and break new ground by having an equity-orientation. In the field guide itself, we offer various ways to engage with students, communities, and stakeholders. We don't offer lesson plans or curricula, but instead, entryways for practitioners to build on, around, and within. The sections were developed in response to our research, focusing on community, equity, and intention with regard to meaningful engagement in public life.

VI: A Practitioners' Field Guide for Equitable Media Literacy Practice

Field Guide Sections

Note: These sections are descriptions of what you'll find in the field guide. The text is slightly adjusted for this report. For the full section introductions and guides, please see the Field Guide for Equitable Media Literacy Practice.

SECTION 1. Where Do I Stand

The first section of the guide is focused on understanding our location, both physical and social, with regards to the people, spaces, and messages around us. The messages we engage with are embedded in our own personal lived experience, influenced by the communities we are in, and by the systems within which we live. Before we can deconstruct media messages, we must consider the contexts within which we consume, express, and participate in those messages, and their mechanisms for delivery. And each time we engage with a message or platform, we should ask where do I stand in relation to this content/space, and how does my lived reality shape how I interpret this information.

This section responds to our research by using "Standpoint" theory to approach equitable media literacy practices. Standpoint is a concept developed to help us understand how our own perspectives and ideas about the world are shaped by our lived experiences. This concept grew out of feminist research in the 1970s and 80s, and not without controversy (Harding, 2004). While scholars have debated the merits of the theory and its application in the world, we believe the orientation of Standpoint theory can help media literacy practices approach how people's own social location influences how they see the world, and their own objective reality (Allen, 1996). Wrapped into this are notions of power, dominant cultural groups, and insider/outsider status. Our research has shown that media literacy practices lack specific attention to how our own cultural realities and lived experiences shape our engagement with messages, and in turn, our engagement with those people and places around us. Standpoint acknowledges the following ideas about how we approach living in society today:

- **A physical space to view things**
- **A mental place to view things**
- **A way of constructing a worldview**
- **A means to compare and judge objects or principles**
- **Dependent on social inequities or differences in opportunities (Rolin, 2009).**

VI: A Practitioners' Field Guide for Equitable Media Literacy Practice

In our guide, equity-driven media literacy practices start with self-reflection on our standpoint. What each individual brings into a media literacy learning environment will shape how they engage with media, with co-learners, and with the information and ideas around them.

Questions To Consider

- What is my standpoint? Really think through the different interpretations of standpoint listed above. How does each affect you?
- Think about the community your work in. Do you understand their standpoint? Are there questions you can ask to understand their standpoint more?
- How can your students better understand the standpoint of the media they consume? How can you help them better understand their own standpoint?

SECTION 2. Who Cares

We care a lot in this world. We care about our families, our friends, and issues that matter to us. We care about fairness, justice, and equity. We care about our environment, our possessions, and our health. Our instincts ask us to be with others, to find points of engagement, and to advocate for our needs. Sometimes caring for things also separates us, creates divides, conflict, and harm. We're influenced to care by the messages we hear, see, and we interact with.

Media helps reinforce all the ways that we care: from supporting causes to donating resources to public initiatives that we want to succeed. We signal caring through media as well: from liking causes online, to posting, sharing, and affiliating with groups and organizations we like. We also care through the media by connecting with others and supporting them in their work. We donate time, resources and energy to help others, and we are offered the same in return. The second section of the field guide asks us to consider how we care about ideas in the world, and how media plays a role in this process. We ask here how care is a part of our media literacy experiences? And what role can caring have in building more equitable media literacy practices?

Scholars Joan Tronto and Bernice Fisher (1990) define care as: "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our "world" so that we can live in it as well as possible" (p. 40). Tronto in subsequent work (2013) distinguished multiple types of caring. In particular she is interested in how "caring

about" signals affiliation, while "caring for" concerns the ways in which we act towards what we care about. Caring about is transactional. Caring for is relational. Caring with, Tronto notes, are "caring practices that are consistent with democratic commitments to justice, equality and freedom for all" (p. 23). In her work, and those of her peers, Tronto (2010) believed that care is an expansive concept, something that undergirds how we approach democratic life, from politics and economics, to issues of gender equity and social welfare.

How we build a culture of care in media literacy practices can have great impact on the ways in which we see media messages work in the world, but also the ways in which we develop personal relationships with others in learning and community settings. Rather than thinking about the outcomes of media literacy practices, care allows us to see how our relationships enrich our engagement with each other, and with media. The second section of this guide asks us to explore the intersection of care, media, and our communities.

SECTION 3. Imagining [more] Inclusive Futures

Imagination is what compels us to think differently. It takes us beyond the current constraints we may face in our communities, in politics, society, and the world. Imagination is also a spark. It also allows us to depart, momentarily, from the realities that are sometimes too difficult or dire to confront with energy, passion, and joy. Media scholar Henry Jenkins and his colleagues (2020) write about the potential of imagination in civic life: "the capacity to imagine alternatives to current cultural, social, political or economic conditions: one cannot change the world without imagining what a better world might look like" (p. 5). We can use our imagination to project ideal futures, more inclusive, equitable and sustainable norms for our surroundings. And we use imagination as a way to circumvent the boundaries from which our present struggles are constrained.

VI: A Practitioners' Field Guide for Equitable Media Literacy Practice

In this section of our field guide, we use imagination to think creatively about media messages, platforms, and ecosystems. We have designed a series of creative interventions that ask learners to:

- Get outside of the box, burn it if we have to, and make something of the ashes that's new, different, and vital.
- Strengthen our minds and stretch our thinking to create something from nothing.
- Explore alternative forms of expression, engagement, and participation both within and beyond the platforms we spend so much time with.
- Find alternative forms of engagement, whether to simply circumvent norms for communication, or to experiment with radically new or different media spaces.
- Move people beyond the limitations that they often perceive or experience within the constraints of daily information and communication routines.

Thus, imagination is a way to forge connection, spark creativity, and pursue more inclusive media, and thus civic futures. Critical education scholar Paolo Freire (2005) wrote, "Imagination helps curiosity and inventiveness, just as it enhances adventure, without which we cannot create."

Equitable media literacy practices cannot be prioritized by pushing against the systems that are currently in place, which contribute as much to our social and civic inequities as our political and economic systems do. To truly aspire to more inclusive and equitable futures, we must use imagination to envision and enact the types of media environments that will allow us to strive for such futures. Media literacy practices often start through the lens of what is. This includes focusing on the realities of the present, and the systems and platforms that support this present. In this section of the guide, we explore how imagination can move us towards more vibrant and equity-driven media futures.

VI: A Practitioners' Field Guide for Equitable Media Literacy Practice

Questions To Consider

- Do you focus primarily on outcome-based measures or on relationships and connections?
- How have you worked to create spaces for caring with your students/participants?
- What are the ways that caring practices can be replicated in digital and virtual spaces?
- How can learning communities move from signaling care to building caring relationships with their communities, both within and beyond the formal learning system?

SECTION 4. With communities

Communities are anchored in large part by shared norms, customs, traditions, and responsibilities. These shared spaces allow communities, in theory, to be together across differences, across divides, and across cultures. In reality, not all communities are equal. Both within and beyond communities, access to resources and power differs. At the same time, communities do not depend on physical spaces alone. In a ubiquitous media age, online, or networked, communities are arguably more common in our lives than physical ones. As mediated spaces don't necessitate the rigors of human interaction, they take on new norms to guide the online interactions.

This comes with some significant implications for how we use media, and how we connect with those in our communities. Media scholar danah boyd (2013) writes that networked communities offer the affordances of connectivity, durability, and spreadability. But at the same time, they can be invasive, and often lack the human presence necessary to build trust, and care. Michael Bugeja (2005) writes of how taxing mediated platforms are on the norms of human communication, specifically approaching challenges to the values that we uphold when we engage with others in our physical lives.

VI: A Practitioners' Field Guide for Equitable Media Literacy Practice

While it's a useful exercise to parse out the positives and negatives of abundant connectivity in our lives, our report has shown that media literacy practitioners aspire to connect their learning environments to community engagements. They hope that their media literacy practices can scale, but they are less than sure about how that would happen, and they are often constrained by the limits of a formal classroom, or the lack of resources to focus on meaningful community engagement work.

This section of our guide focuses on how media literacies can work to be "with communities" in theory and in practice. We intentionally use the term with communities, instead of, say, "for communities" to signal that media literacy shouldn't be simply doing things for communities, but focused on the collective agency of being with others in support of equitable pursuits. How we learn to use media to be engaged in communities can define the health and strength of the community spaces we inhabit. Whether an online community forum or a group working on environmental health, how we use media to build deep spaces for care, dialog, and trust matters. This means not only exploring how media impacts community well-being, but also how media can be used to build stronger, better, and more connected communities.

Questions To Consider

- How often do you engage in community outreach?
- Do you seek voices/perspectives outside of your organization?
- How often do you seek feedback from your community?
- In what ways do you seek feedback from your community?
- Do your goals align with the community you serve or are they modeled to fit a different community/outcome?

VI: A Practitioners' Field Guide for Equitable Media Literacy Practice

SECTION 5. Where Do We Stand

"It takes a village," so the saying goes. To support any meaningful change in the world is beyond the capacity of any single individual. While individual approaches to social change matter, we believe that it's the collective power of the community that's most important for media literacy practices that move beyond spaces of learning. In this guide, we've moved from thinking about our own personal relationship to media, to how we care for others with media, use media to imagine better futures, and think about community connections with media. In this portion of the guide, we ask "where do we stand" in support of the collective capacities and connections needed to engage in the equity work of media literacy. Boyte (2008) writes that we need to reinvigorate civic education and engagement norms for our students:

> We live in a hyper-regulated world that constrains agency on every side, a world of hidden manipulations, standardized programs, mass mobilizations, and bureaucratic interventions. In a memorable turn of phrase, the South African writer Xolela Mangcu has termed the invisible virus spreading through modern societies that erodes agency, "technocratic creep." Given this erosion, it is no wonder that our students feel powerless about changing institutions that seem to have a life of their own, even if institutional pathologies insult their basic values and standards. (p. 10)

How can media literacy push back against the technocratic creep that Boyte references? Equitable media literacy practices embrace the collective capacity of people to act together towards more equitable and just futures. This means learning to leverage media to be with others, in concerted and connected efforts to bring positive change in the world.

Our research project showed us that media literacy stakeholders have a deep interest in advancing equity, and in teaching towards explicit goals of meaningful civic engagement. While there are no clear and direct pathways to these ends, we believe that focusing on the collective capacity to use media to be with others, in pursuit of equitable futures, is core to all media literacy practice. Whether deconstructing messages, working on advocacy campaigns, or in media production, connecting our experiences with media to those around us, and to the larger collective goals of equity and inclusion, can move media literacy from an educational pursuit founded on individual transfer, to a more holistic pursuit of meaningful engagement in the world.

VI: A Practitioners' Field Guide for Equitable Media Literacy Practice

This isn't a perfect science, but it's vital to media literacy's connection to stronger norms for democracy and civil society.

Questions To Consider

- In what ways have you used media to support or be supported by others?
- Can you think of an example of "technocratic creep" that is specific to your community or the community you wish to serve?
- How can we use media to not only highlight a problem but imaging creative solutions?
- Consider not only the specific needs of the community, but the specific ways in which your community uses media.

VII. Conclusion

Conclusion: Setting Agendas for Research and Practice in Equitable Media Literacy

This report provides insights into how media literacy research and practice approach the complex space of impact and equity. The research findings shared here intend to spark new conversations and agendas for research and practice that approaches impact and equity in media literacy. We are interested in the types of self- and collective-reflection that emerge from the approaches taken in this project.

We believe this project can set new agendas for media literacy scholarship around how we integrate impact into the design, implementation, and measurement of media literacy practices. Our model for impact allows us to move beyond data points focused on the outcomes of our work and toward approaches that conceive of media literacy educational impacts more broadly. The findings from our interviews and surveys show the constraints that media literacy educators face in thinking about equity in their spaces of work and learning. Researchers can use the work here to explore questions about the conditions needed to engage in equity-focused media literacy efforts. They can consider which aspects of equity are most important for media literacy, how those can be made evident in practice, and how their efficacy can be understood in research.

Practitioners can use this report, and the field guide, to support the design of media literacy educational interventions that incorporate equity-driven ideas, concepts, and activities. We envision the guide supporting educators, community stakeholders, school and public administrators, and policy makers, in thinking more about the ways in which they nurture media learning environments in their places of work.

VII. Conclusion

Both the research and field guide are broad in scope. We hope that this work will spark conversations among smaller communities of practice to translate their principles and concepts into curricula, lesson plans, community projects, workshops, and other specific interventions focused on particular age groups, disciplines, organizations, and geographic regions. We hope that this work sparks creative re-imagining, shifting, and updating of media literacy practices with the ideas, approaches, and questions we've provided in this report.

Lastly, we hope this report provides insight to the media literacy community writ large. We have learned, and continue to learn, from those who have come before us. We hope this work continues to propel our practices and inquiries into more expansive and equity-driven realms. We believe that media literacies are central to vibrant civic and daily life in our current digital cultures. This work, we believe, can push our approaches to media literacy forward, in ways that advance equitable and just futures in the United States, and beyond.

VIII. Methodology

Methodology

To assess how equity and impact are discussed, evaluated, and theorized in media literacy we developed a mixed method study that would enable us to examine both the existing literature and scholarship through a systematic scoping review of the literature as well as connect with practitioners and their practice using semi-structured interviews and a national survey. Each stage of the research and findings informed the next step in the development of our overall project.

It was important to first evaluate the existing scholarship to understand how researchers were defining and measuring equity and impact in media literacy. We developed a scoping review to gather and analyze media literacy research in the United States over the last 10 years. Once the scoping review was completed, the analysis from that project was used to develop semi-structured interview questions. A database of media literacy stakeholders was developed through membership in NAMLE and broad Internet searches to identify groups and individuals working in media literacy across the U.S. Once the interviews were complete, a survey was developed from the interview protocol and initial findings. The survey aim was to further understand how media literacy practitioners view their role and evaluate equity and impact in their work. The sections below detail the methods used for each part of this study. Additional information can be found in the appendices.

VIII. Methodology

Scoping Review

We searched for a large variety of media-literacy related keywords to give a holistic view of media literacy research including the terms: media literacy, media literacy research, critical media literacy, media literacy interventions, digital literacy, news literacy/news media literacy, and information literacy. The geographic scope of the review was limited to the United States. During the scoping review, empirical articles that were conducted on people or media texts outside the U.S. were excluded from the study. Theoretical articles that did not have empirical data as well as articles that were about interventions conducted within the U.S by scholars outside of the U.S. were included. For theoretical articles, if the theoretical framework used examples, case studies, and anecdotes from the U.S, they were included in the analysis, regardless of the geographical location of the author(s). The initial coding was conducted by reviewing the study abstracts to determine whether the articles fit the above requirements.

The following are the constraints used for the search:

1. Region - U.S. focused, based studies
2. Timeline - 10 years
3. Databases - Communication & Mass Media, EBSCO, WorldCat, Google Scholar
4. Keywords for search - media literacy, media literacy research, critical media literacy, media literacy interventions, digital literacy, news literacy, information literacy

After articles that did not meet the above criteria and duplicate articles were removed, the final sample of 270 articles was hand-coded by a team of graduate students. Initial meetings of the coding team involved coding sample articles together. The coder-training sessions allowed for them to discuss, clarify, and deliberate about the coding process. We used a grounded-qualitative coding approach at first to generate categories. A coding sheet was created to allow coders to collect data for each article. The preliminary analysis of 270 articles was conducted to better understand how the term “impact” is defined within the field of media literacy. Then a thematic analysis of the coded responses was conducted by a team of four graduate researchers.

VIII. Methodology

Stakeholder Interviews

This project used semi-structured interviews to interrogate the connection between media literacy practices, equity, and social justice. Our goal was to understand how media literacy practitioners view impactful and equitable practices. What does that mean? How do stakeholders interpret those terms? Where does this emerge in the work stakeholders do with media literacy and the communities they serve?

We interviewed two groups of participants: (1) members of a media literacy alliance and (2) stakeholders that participate in media literacy work across the United States. The members of the media literacy alliance support the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE); we found stakeholders through various online searches. The research team created a database of organizations that do media literacy work directly or work tangential to media literacy--such as civic engagement or a media company that creates educational content. The database included 80 organizations that we found either through search engines or from the NAMLE alliance and our advisory board.

Interview Information

Code	Designation	Organization Type	Interview Length
ML1	Stakeholder	Media Nonprofit	53 minutes
ML2	Stakeholder	Media Nonprofit	42 minutes
ML3	Stakeholder	Media Nonprofit	32 minutes
ML4	Stakeholder	Education Nonprofit	68 minutes
ML5	Stakeholder	Education Nonprofit	52 minutes
ML6	Stakeholder	Media Nonprofit	26 minutes
ML7	Stakeholder	Education Nonprofit	29 minutes
ML8	Stakeholder	Media Nonprofit	35 minutes
ML9	Stakeholder	Education Nonprofit	28 minutes
ML12	Stakeholder	Education Nonprofit	35 minutes
ML14	Stakeholder	Media Nonprofit	27 minutes
ML15	Stakeholder	Arts Nonprofit	40 minutes
ML16	Stakeholder	Education Nonprofit	32 minutes
ML18	Stakeholder	Media Nonprofit	43 minutes
ML19	Stakeholder	Media Nonprofit	61 minutes
ML20	Stakeholder	Education Nonprofit	54 minutes
ML21	Stakeholder	Education Nonprofit	34 minutes
ML22	Alliance		38 minutes
ML23	Alliance		45 minutes
ML24	Alliance		59 minutes
ML25	Alliance		26 minutes

ML26	Alliance		42 minutes
ML27	Alliance		50 minutes
ML28	Alliance		37 minutes
ML29	Alliance		36 minutes
ML30	Alliance		43 minutes
ML31	Alliance		48 minutes

Semi-structured Interviews

We used a random number generator to identify 33 organizations to interview for this phase of the project. Of those identified, 18 (54.5%) of the organizations responded and were interviewed. In addition, the PIs interviewed 10 of the 11 NAMLE Alliance members who are all leaders of large U.S.-based educational organizations. Both sets of participants received and signed a consent form and their interviews lasted no more than one hour.

The protocol for each interview included interviewee background, media literacy practice, media literacy and impact, and social justice and equity. In each topic, interviewees were asked three to five questions that would contextualize the topic.

For example, when attempting to understand stakeholders' media literacy practice, we asked about experiences the stakeholder had with media literacy, what their organization does within the landscape of media literacy, challenges they face, and the potential of media literacy at different levels. Given the semi-structured nature of each interview, the interviewers sometimes deviated from the questions outlined in the protocol to address or expand upon a point the interviewee made.

Researchers utilized Zoom for interviews and Zoom's transcription programming for transcripts. At the conclusion of each interview, the interviewer listened to the conversation and cleaned the live transcript as the interview played. According to the IRB, each interviewee was to remain anonymous; therefore, as the researcher cleaned the transcript, they removed identifying information and replaced it with a code (i.e., ML1, ML2).

To find out what impactful media literacy practice was, researchers read through interview transcripts multiple times and used a constant comparative approach to

generate themes. After three readings, our team solidified the themes that emerged and curated evidence from each interview transcript to support each theme. A fourth and fifth reading of the transcripts provided additional context informed by the assumptions of this project and the themes about impact that emerged from the scoping review. Our approach required taking an initial soak in the data before diving deeper into the transcripts to answer our question. The use of the interviews provided the team with an opportunity to see how community members use media literacy to impact social justice and equity at individual, community, and societal levels.

Survey

After the stakeholder interviews were complete, we developed a survey to assess media literacy practice, values, and equity. The survey questions were developed from reviewing the interview findings and a review of relevant reports and literature (Equity Literacy Institute; Fedorov et al. 2016; Literat 2014; Koc & Barut 2016; NAMLE 2019; Robinson, Al-Freih & Kilgore, 2020). Given our focus on media literacy, equity, and impact, we developed questions and measures that linked these core concepts. Questions addressed the three core assumptions in media literacy that we explore in this research: individual agency, community empowerment, and democratic engagement. The survey was organized as follows:

- **Organizational/role information**
- **Media literacy practice and values**
- **Media literacy and equity**
- **Professional memberships**
- **Demographics**

To capture a broad range of media literacy practitioners, the survey was circulated on a number of email listservs, including the NAMLE listserv and the listservs of members of the National Media Literacy Alliance. Participants were invited to take the survey and directed to the consent page, which explained the survey further. Participants had the opportunity to provide their email address to enter a raffle to receive one of ten $100 gift cards for participating in the survey. The survey was available from May 28 to June 15, 2021.

Survey Dataset

To ensure the quality of the data included in this report, we cleaned the full dataset following a number of steps. First, we removed any participant who completed the survey in under 3 minutes (179 seconds or less). Next, we sorted the data by date and created a dataset that included two groups of participants: (1) everyone who completed the survey before June 8; and (2) anyone who completed the survey on

or after June but did not include an email address. We chose this date and approach because the survey was posted on multiple public social media accounts on June 8, and was reposted by social media accounts that alert users to survey opportunities that offer incentives. Given this and our review of the complete data, we were not confident that we could disaggregate the "quality" data from the "spam" data after June 8; and therefore, removed the majority of these data from the analysis. However, we did keep participants who did not enter an email address for a chance to win a gift card because it was less likely that these were "spammers," as they did not attempt to enter the raffle. Finally, using this new reduced dataset, we removed data from the same IP address to ensure that we did not include multiple responses from the same person. After completing these cleaning steps, our final dataset includes 746 total participants.

Survey Participants

From this dataset, we created subgroups of participants to compare practices and perspectives of different media literacy practitioners:

Higher Education Educators (N = 92): Includes participants who selected "higher education" as their organization/place of work and "teacher" or "faculty/professor" or "pre-service teacher educator" as their role.

K-12 Educators (N = 91): Includes participants who selected "K-12 education" as their organization/place of work and "teacher" or "faculty/professor" or "pre-service teacher educator" as their role.

Educational Librarians/Media Specialists (N= 69): Includes participants who selected "K-12 education" or "higher education" as their organization/place of work and "librarian" or "media specialist/trainer" as their role.

Educational Administrators (N = 34): Includes participants who selected "K-12 education" or "higher education" as their organization/place of work and "principal/administrator" or "director" as their role.

Nonprofit/Not-for-profit (N = 108): Includes participants who selected "nonprofit/not-for-profit organization" as their organization.

Media Organization (N = 146): Includes participants who selected "media organization" as their organization.

VIII. Methodology

Survey Question Wording

First, we are going to ask you questions about your job/professional role. Please think about your primary organizational/institutional affiliation as you answer these questions. Keep the same organization/institution in mind throughout the survey.

Role/Organization

Which of the following best describes your organization or place of work?

- K-12 Education
- Higher Education
- Nonprofit/Not-for-Profit Organization (e.g., community program, after school program)
- For-Profit Company (e.g., educational services, products)
- Media Organization
- Policy Organization
- Other

Which of the following best describes your role in your organization?

- Principal/Administrator
- Teacher
- Librarian
- Media Specialist/Trainer
- Pre-service Teacher Educator
- Director
- Facilitator
- Community Organizer
- Project Manager
- Faculty/Professor
- Volunteer
- Other

Media Literacy Practice

Next, we are going to ask you questions about your media literacy educational practice. Please think about your practices as they relate to the primary job/role you selected in the first set of questions.

Which of the following describes your media literacy educational practice? Select all that apply.

- ▢ Creating educational resources (e.g., curricula, lesson plans)
- ▢ Teaching media literacy
- ▢ Training others
- ▢ Distributing educational resources (e.g., curricula, lesson plans)
- ▢ Organizing/hosting workshops, webinars or other events
- ▢ Distributing an e-newsletter or other e-resources (e.g., social media)
- ▢ Working in communities
- ▢ Creating or producing media
- ▢ Researching media literacy
- ▢ Pre-service or teacher education
- ▢ Other _____

Which of the following best describes the focus of your media literacy educational practice? Select up to 3 options.

- ▢ Information Literacy
- ▢ News Literacy
- ▢ Digital Literacy
- ▢ Media Production
- ▢ Critical Media Literacy
- ▢ Entertainment Literacy
- ▢ Media Theories
- ▢ Media Ethics
- ▢ Advertising
- ▢ Propaganda

- Misinformation
- Health Literacy
- Media Representation
- Other _____

On a 1-5 scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, we asked the following question.

Next, we'd like to ask you questions about your media literacy educational practice in your professional capacity. Again, keep your primary role/job in mind. My media literacy educational practice:

- prioritizes individual development
- creates knowledgeable individuals
- empowers communities
- serves diverse communities
- encourages democratic participation
- supports democracy
- addresses issues that affect marginalized communities
- attempts to address structural inequalities
- focuses on deconstructing media messages
- focuses on media production

How much emphasis do you place on each of the following in your media literacy educational practice? Rank each item from the most to least emphasis by dragging the options into place.

_____ Promoting individual agency
_____ Supporting community empowerment
_____ Encouraging democratic participation
_____ Addressing structural inequalities
_____ Deconstructing media messages
_____ Producing media content

On a 1-5 scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, we asked the following question.

To what extent would you agree that the following statements describe your media literacy educational practice.

- Makes sure digital access is available to all

- Incorporates media representations from diverse populations
- Elevates marginalized voices through media production
- Provides a safe space for marginalized voices t be heard
- Provides opportunities for relationship building and collaborative learning
- Avoids difficult topics such as values, ethics, and discrimination
- Provides an atmosphere where individuals feel affirmed
- Fosters an environment that engages teamwork and collaboration
- Offers outlets for expressing individual ideas and perspectives
- Engages with elected officials and government organizations
- Cultivates media activism

On a 1-5 scale from never to always, we asked the following question.

To what extent are the following topics covered in your media literacy educational practice.

- Race/ethnicity
- Gender identity/sexual orientation
- Global inequalities
- Environment/climate change
- Income gap/poverty
- Healthcare
- Religion
- Hunger/food insecurity
- Politics/voting
- Disabilities
- Criminal justice system
- Immigration

Which of the following is **most** important to your media literacy practice?

- Promoting individual development
- Promoting community engagement
- Promoting democratic participation

On a 1-5 scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, we asked the following question.

Media literacy educational practice should encourage people to:

- Make a difference in their community
- Be actively involved in national, state and local issues

- Volunteer in their community
- Engage with others who are different from themselves
- Stay informed on current events and politics
- Raise awareness about a social cause that is important to them
- Collaborate with people who are different from themselves

Media Literacy and Equity

In the next section, we will focus on media literacy educational practices and equity.

Equity refers to fair treatment, access, opportunity and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that prevent the full participation of some groups.

On a 1-5 scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, we asked the following question.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the statements below as they describe your media literacy educational practice.

- I have noticed many biases in media literacy learning materials
- My organization's practices disadvantage students
- I feel confident to facilitate conversations on inequalities in media literacy education
- I prioritize historically marginalized communities within my learning environment
- I actively cultivate equitable media literacy practices in my learning environment
- I talk with my colleagues about inequities and biases in media literacy learning materials
- I proactively advocate against inequitable practices within my organization
- I have experienced backlash when I advocate against inequitable practices within my organization
- I am confident about sustaining long-term efforts towards equitable media literacy educational practices

On a 1-5 scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, we asked the following question.

Addressing issues of equity in my media literacy educational practice:

- is important to me

- is controversial
- is not supported at my organization
- is easy for me
- is challenging for me
- makes me uncomfortable
- has led t visible changes
- has caused me distress
- has led t important conversations
- has been more challenging than its worth
- has been welcomed by others in my organization
- is not something I have done
- is not widely understood by my organization
- is something I discuss with my colleagues

Select the response (True or False) that best describes your view on the following statements as they relate to your ability to teach about media literacy and equity.

- I have enough organizational support.
- I have enough resources.
- I have enough knowledge.
- I need more training.
- I need more resources.
- I need more time.
- I have support from my colleagues.

Professional Membership

Are you a member of any professional membership association that supports media literacy educational practice?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure/Do not know

Are you a member of any of the following professional associations? Select all that apply.

- American Association of School Librarians (AASL)
- International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)
- Journalism Education Association (JEA)
- National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

- National Association of Media Literacy Education (NAMLE)
- National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)
- National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
- National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM)
- National Science Teaching Association (NSTA)
- National Writing Project (NWP)
- PBS Education
- Young Adult Library Services Association
- Other

Demographics

Please enter your age.

In which state do you currently reside?

Which of the following best describes your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Do you personally consider yourself to be part of the LGBTQ+ community?

- Yes
- No

Which of the following is closest to your political viewpoint?

- Very conservative
- Conservative
- Slightly conservative
- Neither conservative or liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Liberal
- Very liberal

Which of the following describes your race or ethnicity? Select all that apply.

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Latino/a/x/Hispanic
- Middle Eastern/North African
- Other

Limitations During a Global Pandemic

This project was conceived just before the COVID-19 global pandemic swept across the world in early 2020. The initial design of this project was ended by the lack of ability to travel, to enter educational institutions, and to be present in community organizations. The pandemic continues to cause harm to communities around the world. Not surprisingly, it is the communities at the margins of society that have been hurt the most. We were able to shift our exploration, finding new ways to engage in the research questions. As the pandemic continues to damage our communities, our educational institutions, and our democracy, we acknowledge the impacts it has had on our ability to be with others and to engage in the human work necessary for this research.

We were limited by our inability to be physically together as a research community. This project has been conducted as we sit in our homes in Texas, Iowa, Maryland, New York, and Massachusetts. While we were able to achieve our research goals, we were unable to physically enter the communities and spaces that are central to this work. Despite these limitations, we found some advantages in this process such as using our resources to expand our research inquiry to cover more of the United States than would be possible with community-based research and supporting our team of student researchers who were essential collaborators in this work. Additionally, we were able to have more conversations with a diverse group of stakeholders in media literacy. We hope these developments lead to more insights and ideas for the media literacy community.

MEET THE TEAM

This project involved the dedicated efforts of several people from the research team to the advisory board and the designers. Each person has contributed their best efforts and expertise to make this project possible. This project brought together a diverse group of researchers, educators, professionals, and activists. You can read more about them below.

Lead Investigators

Paul Mihailidis - Principal Investigator
Paul is a professor of journalism and graduate program director of the Media Design program at Emerson College. He is the faculty chair and director of the Salzburg Global Media Academy. His research interests include media literacies, community activism, and civic engagement.

Srividya Ramasubramanian - Co-Principal Investigator
Srividya is Professor & Newhouse Endowed Chair at Syracuse University. She is the founding director of the Difficult Dialogues Project, Media Rise, and CODE^SHIFT initiatives. Her research interests include global issues of media literacies, anti-racism, activism, social justice, bias reduction, and data equity.

Melissa Tully - Co-Principal Investigator
Melissa is an associate professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at Iowa. Her research focuses on social media, global media with a particular focus in Africa, and news literacy.

Bobbie Foster Bhusari - Research Manager
Bobbie is a Ph.D. candidate in the Phillip Merril College of Journalism at the University of Maryland. Before graduate school, she worked as the Center for Ethics in Journalism assistant director at the University of Arkansas. Her research interests include Internet memes, digital culture, LGBTQIA media, and cultural heritage studies.

MEET THE TEAM

Research Team

The research team is made up of dedicated graduate students. This team was integral to data collection and analysis.

Emily Riewestahl
Emily is a doctoral student in the Newhouse School of Public Communication at Syracuse University. Her research explores how media is used to perpetuate and resist oppression systems through the lens of critical media effects, media literacy, and trauma-informed approaches.

Patrick R. Johnson
Patrick is a doctoral student in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Iowa. His research focuses on news literacy, media ethics, the evolving boundaries of journalism as they relate to deviant actors and issues. Patrick is a former high school journalism teacher and the former mentor program chair for the Journalism Education Association.

Sydney Angove
Sydney is a masters' student at Emerson College studying Media Design. Her research interests include media literacy, new media effects, and user experience with an emphasis on civic engagement and social justice.

Design Team

The design team consists of a group of professional graphic designers and developers. Many of the team members are also graduate students interested in using their professional talents to integrate social justice and media literacy initiatives within their respective fields.

Sumali Dey – Lead Designer
Sumali is a socially engaged multimedia artist and civic designer dedicated to using art to empower marginalized communities and creatively reimagining feminist frameworks to promote intersectionality and social justice. She graduated with a Master of Arts degree in Media Design at Emerson College and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from The City College of New York. She specializes in graphic design, visual arts, marketing, and branding.

Johnny Richardson - Lead Developer
Johnny is a web and games full-stack engineer. He is the Lead Developer at the Engagement Lab with previous stints at startups and a major marketing firm. Johnny is passionate about work centering around using games and web tech to help solve problems in democracy and governance, global health, media literacy, and equity and accessibility.

MEET THE TEAM

Design Team (cont.)

Mikaela Joyce - Designer
Mikaela is a digital creator specializing in technology design and the media arts. Her practice focuses on human-centered design, emergent media, and developing digital platforms for learning and community. She is currently a Master of Arts candidate in the Media Design program at Emerson College. She is also a fellow on the intersections project at the People's Collaborative Governance Network; an initiative developed in the MIT Civic Media Co-Design Studio.

NAMLE Team

The project is supported by the National Association of Media Literacy Education.

Michelle Ciulla Lipkin - Executive Director
Michelle is the Executive Director of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. As Executive Director, Michelle has helped NAMLE grow to be the preeminent media literacy education association in the U.S. She launched the first-ever Media Literacy Week in the U.S., developed strategic partnerships with companies such as Trend Micro, Nickelodeon, and Twitter, and restructured both the governance and membership of the organization.

Sherri Hope Culver - Project Manager
Sherri serves as Director of the Center for Media and Information Literacy (CMIL) at Temple University, USA where she is an associate professor in the Klein College of Media and Communication. Sherri's teaching and consulting focuses on media literacy and media institutions, with a particular focus on children's media content. She currently serves as vice-chair of the UNESCO International Steering Committee for the Global Media and Information Literacy Alliance (GAPMIL). Sherri was a 3-term president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education.

MEET THE TEAM

Advisory Board

Aaliyah El-Amin, Harvard Graduate School of Education
Aaliyah's research focuses on providing the tools and knowledge educators need to disrupt systems of oppression. Her specific research interests include liberatory education models, social justice schooling, critical pedagogy, and youth participatory action research.

Christopher Harris, Nevada State College
Christopher is a professor and department chair for social sciences and business at Nevada State College. His research interests include fine-de-siècle rap music and neo-soul, critical pedagogy, media portrayals of ethnicity and race.

Erica Scharrer, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Erica is professor and chair in the Department of Communication at University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Her research interests include media content, media effects, media literacy, and opinions of media. In particular, her work focuses on gender and/or aggression.

Lalitha Vasudevan, Teachers College, Columbia University
Lalitha is a professor of technology and education and director of the Media and Social Change Lab at Teachers College at Columbia University. Her research interests include new media, adolescent literacies, media literacies, multimodal storytelling, and anthropology of education.

Lynn Schofield Clark, University of Denver
Lynn is a professor and chair of the Department of Media, Film, and Journalism Studies at the University of Denver. She is also Director of the Estlow International Center for Journalism and New Media. Her research interests include the ways digital and mobile media change the lives of diverse adolescents, and work in the areas of family media studies, community-engaged research, and the mediatization of world religions.

Sangita Shresthova, University of Southern California
Sangita is the Director of Research of the Civic Paths Group based at the University of Southern California. Her work focuses on intersections among online learning, popular culture, performance, new media, politics, and globalization. She is also one of the authors of *Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination: Case Studies of Creative Change* (2020) and of B*y Any Media Necessary: The New Activism of Youth* (2016), both published by NYU Press.

Seth Ashley, Boise State University
Seth is a associate professor at Boise State University. His research interests include news and media literacy, media and democracy, media sociology, communication law and policy, media history, political communication, and civic engagement. In particular, his work examines the role of media in a democracy.

MEET THE TEAM

Advisory Board (cont.)

Kimberly Moffitt, University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC)
Kimberly is currently serving as interim dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at UMBC. Before assuming this role, she was director of the Language, Literacy and Culture doctoral program and a professor of communication/media studies, as well as affiliate professor of Africana Studies. A media critic whose research focuses on mediated representations of marginalized groups as well as the politicized nature of Black hair and the body, Her latest work explores the black body in Disney programming and the impact of colorism on Black teens.

Theresa Redmond, Appalachian State University
Theresa is an associate professor at Appalachian State University where she teaches in Media Studies and Teacher Education programs. Her scholarship comprises a hybrid research agenda that attends to complex intersections of multiple professional fields including communications, media studies, literacy studies, teacher education, curriculum studies, and the arts.

MAPPING IMPACTFUL MEDIA LITERACY PRACTICES

Acknowledgements

Research like this would not be possible without the support of institutions, universities, and private investors who have an interest in improving media literacy education.

We are grateful for their assistance and want to highlight a few of the institutions responsible for this opportunity.

LEAD PARTNER

NAMLE National Association for Media Literacy Education

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MAPPING IMPACTFUL MEDIA LITERACY PRACTICES

Acknowledgements

Many scholars have contributed to the project without a formal connection to the grant. Their work provided fresh perspectives and needed insight into the fields of media literacy and social justice.

Initial support for the research project is made possible through the National Association for Media Literacy Education and Facebook. To ensure the independence and integrity of this research effort, NAMLE maintains full authority regarding project strategy, budget, personnel decisions, or research activities. Facebook has no control over the research design, methodology, analysis, or findings. NAMLE and any research authors will maintain exclusive copyright over all products and freely disseminate those products to advance the media literacy field.

For inquiries with NAMLE, contact Michelle Ciulla Lipkin: mciullalipkin[at]namle.net.

For inquiries regarding the Mapping Impactful Media Literacy Project, contact Paul Mihailidis: paul_mihailidis[at]emerson.edu.

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