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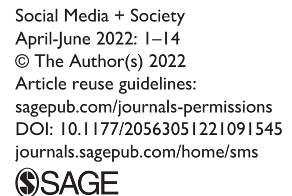

Social Media + Society
April-June 2022: 1–14
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DOI: 10.1177/20563051221091545
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"On My Head About It": College Aspirations, Social Media Participation, and Community Cultural Wealth

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Abstract

Given the widespread use of social media among adolescents, online interactions that facilitate high school students' college knowledge acquisition could have a transformative impact on college access patterns, especially for underrepresented students. Our study uses interview data collected from Black high school students in Detroit ($N=24$) to examine their experiences and perceptions as they prepare for the transition to post-secondary education. In contrast to traditional social capital perspectives that tend to dominate social media scholarship, we instead employ a Community Cultural Wealth framework to reveal how students access distinctive forms of cultural resources via online and offline interactions. Our findings suggest students used social media to access cultural wealth as they (1) developed post-secondary educational aspirations, (2) planned to navigate the post-secondary admissions process, (3) resisted stereotypes about youth from Detroit, and (4) engaged in platform-switching to cultivate their college information networks online.

Keywords

college access, community cultural wealth, educational technology, social network sites

Social media, and the social exchanges they enable, have important implications for both individual well-being and the health and vitality of communities more broadly. While a large corpus of work has examined the implications of social media use on individual well-being (see Valkenburg, 2022, for a review), less research has explored how social media use can shape people's educational lives—although a college degree plays a critical role in improving the material lived reality of historically marginalized groups (Perna, 2014). Much of the extant literature focuses on the potential for social media to help close gaps in education or professional achievement or outcomes—implicitly or explicitly suggesting that these communities are inherently and perpetually at a deficit. In contrast, this study explores the social media practices of low-income Black high school students from Detroit to understand how social media participation can support Black students' college-going activities by expanding the range of *assets* students access during their social media use, drawing on interview data collected from 24 students at three urban high schools. In doing so, we contribute to a growing body of work that builds on the idea that the *college access* context is particularly well-suited for exploring the social capital implications of social media (e.g., Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2018; Tierney et al., 2014).

Much of the scholarship on social media use has employed a social capital lens (see Stoycheff et al., 2017 for an overview); social capital offers a grammar for describing the informational and social benefits of drawing from and giving back to one's social network (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2002). Many prior studies theorize students' social media participation through the lens of traditional understandings of social capital in the sociological literature as asserted by Bourdieu (e.g., social and cultural capital). Scholars (e.g., Acevedo & Solorzano, 2021; Jayakumar et al., 2013; Stamps, 2021; Yosso, 2005) have critiqued applications of the Bourdieuan framework for their overemphasis on capital deficits that can fault and pathologize those who are purported to lack social and cultural capital. Thus, in this article, we deliberately de-emphasize the deficit framing sometimes associated with the Bourdieuan framework and instead explore alternative forms of capital, or community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), to understand

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the strategies that Black first-generation prospective college students from Detroit, Michigan, employ on social media platforms to engage with the college-going process. Our focus on Black first-generation, low-income students from this urban locale reflects our intention to move away from studying "under-resourced" students as a monolith, and in doing so, we hope to move toward a holistic understanding of how intersecting facets of identity and experience shape the resources one creates and accesses using social media platforms.

Prior work on the role of social media and college access has focused on research questions related to how social media impacts college-related information exchange (Jeon et al., 2016), the development of a college student identity (Morioka et al., 2016), and the development of traditional forms of bridging and bonding capital (Wohn et al., 2013). Based on this work, there is support for the idea that social media can promote college access, especially for first-generation students (Yang, 2020), but much of this work has (1) focused on first-generation and/or low-income students without disaggregating student groups by race and regional context, (2) focused on traditional forms of social capital, and (3) often elided the differences among platform technologies, underestimating the role of different affordances in facilitating students' information-seeking and aspirations. This study contributes to this conversation by considering the role of social media in college-going processes while (1) focusing on the experiences of Black students in an urban environment and (2) adopting the Community Cultural Wealth framework, which provides a more comprehensive portrayal of community resources that exist and persist despite long-standing histories of systemic inequality.

Social media might be particularly valuable for Black students' college access. Black students are less likely to attend college than White and Asian students (Hussar et al., 2020), are heavy users of social media (Anderson & Jiang, 2018), and have used traditional forms of media like television and films to develop understandings of and aspirations toward higher education (Brooms & Davis, 2017). In 2018, about 89% of youth aged 13 to 17 reported being online "at least several times a day," with nearly 95% of that age group reporting that they possessed a smartphone or had access to one (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Furthermore, Black teens report more social media activity than their white peers. For instance, 33% of Black teens report using Instagram almost constantly, compared to 19% of White teens (Tompson, 2017). However, little empirical work explores the extent to which social media participation by higher intensity users like Black youth might support college-going practices.

Black youth in urban environments may be especially well-positioned to benefit from social network site (SNS) platform interactions that help them connect with informational and social support resources not available in their immediate school, work, or household environment. This increased access to information could help address "the structural barriers that now limit the ability of students . . . to obtain the information they need to enroll in and complete college" (Perna, 2014, p. 62). In addition, access to college-related information might mitigate the effects of information disparities that have shaped college access for the last century (Perna, 2014).

Literature Review

To explore and prepare for post-secondary options, students engage in knowledge acquisition through seeking, encountering, and processing information about the college. Hossler et al. (2002) determined that students' social identities and precollege experiences inform their post-secondary information-seeking. For example, Black youth appear more likely to draw upon community members and non-family resources when seeking college information than their white peers (Mwangi, 2015). Therefore, platforms that facilitate access to these individuals, such as Facebook and other social media, might be particularly useful.

Students who seek information from multiple information sources are more likely to achieve their college aspirations (Hamrick & Hossler, 1996) with social media providing multiple pathways to connect with diverse informational resources. Students rationalize their educational aspirations within the context of what they see modeled in their social worlds (Espinoza, 2011), making diverse information networks crucial because their diversity may encourage students to consider a broader range of career and post-secondary options. Online experiences may assist in the development of diverse information networks. For instance, Ellison et al. (2014) found that online gaming helped high school students connect with diverse others and thus exposed them to different possible life pathways and information.

College Aspirations and Social Media

In addition to fostering diverse information networks, the features and affordances of social media may also allow students to experiment with prospective identities, including that of a future college student; seeing oneself in a particular role is often the first step toward actualizing it (see Espinoza, 2011). Students engage in identity work and play on social media during the post-secondary transition as they settle into their college identities. Morioka et al. (2016) found that profile elements like profile pictures and cover photos, in addition to technological affordances including the visibility and persistence of content, allowed students to observe their peers' identity work and engage in their own, with potential downstream implications for students' sense of belonging and success on campus.

In addition, the participatory culture of social media platforms may allow for "informal mentorship whereby what is

known by the most experienced is passed along to novices" (Jenkins et al., 2006, p. 40). Participation on social media can provide students a "quotidian window" into daily college life, allowing prospective students to imagine themselves on campus, see people who look like them participating in campus life, and ask clarifying questions about aspects of campus life that they do not understand (Brown & Ellison, 2021). Current college students frequently draw upon social media to access information and social support during their first year on campus, with much of that learning occurring through informal peer-to-peer interactions (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2018).

College Choice, Transitions, and Social Media

A growing body of research that focuses on students' transition experiences has identified some benefits from social media usage for new and prospective college students, highlighting the uncurated nature of these interactions and information (compared to marketing brochures, for instance). For instance, Gray et al. (2013) found a positive relationship between new college students' Facebook Friend counts and self-reported measures of engagement in collaborative behaviors with classmates, social support, and social adjustment. The ability to interact with a broader network of ties may also help high school students in the period before college: Being Facebook Friends with someone who could answer questions about college increased that student's expectation of success in college, but only for first-generation students (Wohn et al., 2013). In addition, learning about college from friends on social media increased first-generation students' confidence about navigating the college application process (Wohn et al., 2013). Once on campus, students who use Facebook to maintain relationships during the first year of college had a better social adjustment to campus life (Yang & Brown, 2013). Online interactions with friends in college discussing college access-related topics may also provide the opportunity for more personalized and culturally relevant information sharing, especially for first-generation students (Brown & Ellison, 2021).

Moreover, the prevailing approach to studies of college access uses human, social, and cultural capital frameworks to explain disparities in college attainment (Perna, 2006) and the benefits of social media use in this context (e.g., Wohn et al., 2013). Although social capital frameworks emphasize a range of theoretical mechanisms, taken together they consider how individuals access, cultivate, and exchange resources held within various social networks (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2002), with extensions that focus on the impacts of families, communities, and schools (Coleman, 1992; Dika & Singh, 2002). Researchers argue that informational and social support resources embedded in social structures significantly influence how students navigate the college choice process (Perna, 2006).

However, research that explores how students access social capital resources during the college choice process may underestimate crucial resources available to Black youth in urban environments. For example, collective understandings of racial identity can knit together expansive social networks that support Black youth's access to social capital resources (Ginwright, 2007). In addition, extended family and intergenerational advocacy networks supported urban Black youth's educational aspirations and persistence through high school (Ginwright, 2007; Williams & Bryan, 2013). Traditional models of social capital attainment presume that students from low-income communities or groups underrepresented in higher education have less access to informational and social support resources that support entry and degree attainment in higher education (Ashtiani & Feliciano, 2015). In research on college access and transition, where informational and social support resources play a central role, a more nuanced understanding of what resources Black youth can and do access, especially in the context of online interactions which reduce barriers to communication, could provide important insights for policy and practice.

Black Youth and Social Media

Racially minoritized youth from post-industrial urban environments like Detroit are often presumed to be limited by their circumstance, to the point where scholars suggest they are laterally denigrated by their affiliation with the city (Graham et al., 2016). Such an approach robs Black youth of their agency both to aspire and to navigate social institutions. Moreover, it ignores the resilient strategies that Black youth and their communities have developed to mobilize their community assets, like the development of mutual aid organizations and efforts at self-provisioning (e.g., Kinder, 2016). These strategies appear to extend to social media platform use, where Black communities in urban environments build on the affordances of networked technologies in distinctive ways to meet their needs. For example, research by Murthy et al. (2016) suggests that cities with large Black communities may use Twitter in fundamentally different and more active ways than other urban areas. This phenomenon was perhaps most visible in their data as Black communities used Twitter to initiate calls to action around racial inequality in the United States (Garza, 2014).

The use of public platforms like Twitter to mobilize and build Black community online reflects long-standing practices of self-articulation and expression as cultural resistance offline (Hay et al., 2018; Macías, 2010), a practice that includes Black youth (Hess, 2018). In addition to providing space for cultural resistance, social media may also offer an opportunity to connect with mentors and peers who share multiple identities. Participating in activism almost certainly builds social networks and informational resources that foster critical understandings of social inequality (Ginwright, 2007). Moreover, by leveraging key features of social media such as

the hashtag which affords association among users and between these users and their content, Black youth speak back to problematic popular narratives about them in media in a networked manner and demonstrate double consciousness, which refers to the internal conflict that Black Americans experience when viewing themselves through the lens of white institutions (Gross, 2017). As part of double consciousness, Black Americans may desire to remain connected to their communities *and* find success in social institutions that are exclusionary and racist. A contemporary expression of this double consciousness on social media can be observed in Black youth's use of the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown hashtag, where users placed two photos of themselves in juxtaposition asking which photos journalists would use (Gross, 2017). As this example illustrates, not only do Black youth resist oppressive images of themselves, but they also speak back to the characterizations media espouses about their local communities through their social media participation.

Black Youth, College Access, and Community Cultural Wealth

In this study, we build on Yosso's (2005) assertion that cultural wealth can take various forms, and respond to call for research that lays a foundation for developing abolitionist tools in socio-technical systems (Benjamin, 2019; Ogbonnaya-Ogburu et al., 2020). Prior models of social capital tend to align with historical legacies of inequality such that White, educated, industrialized, and affluent communities possess social capital. In terms of college access, this manifests in persistent inequality among racial groups regarding undergraduate admissions, especially in the case of selective institutions (Carnevale et al., 2016). To address this limitation, we draw upon the work of Critical Race scholars who have advocated for an expansive definition of cultural capital that considers the assets and strengths of Communities of Color—or Community Cultural Wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005). CCW is part of the tradition of Critical Race Theory, which centers scholars' focus on "often overlooked forms of cultural knowledge formed in a legacy of resistance to racism and other forms of subordination" (Yosso & Garcia, 2007, p. 154).

Community Cultural Wealth highlights the value and resilience that students draw from community assets (Liou et al., 2009). For instance, studies of CCW have identified the importance of out-of-school information networks for college-bound Latinos (Liou et al., 2009), the significant role spirituality and spiritual communities play in the persistence of Chicanas in higher education (Huber, 2009), and the powerful influence of out-of-school community mentoring programs on shaping the college pathways of Black youth (Jayakumar et al., 2013). Preparing adolescents for college requires schools and communities that can assist students as they go through the process of "developing and sustaining postsecondary aspirations" (Cooper, 2009, p. 64). Beyond out-of-school community mentorship, media can play a role in helping Black students develop various forms of CCW. For instance, Brooms and Davis (2017) point to the role of mass media and note that while mass media images of Black communities are often damaging and espouse anti-Blackness, some exceptions exist. For instance, they noted how movies like *School Daze* and television programs like *A Different World* helped young Black men develop aspirations toward higher education (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Despite growing attention to media as a mechanism by which Black youth develop Community Cultural Wealth, there is a critical need for scholarship examines how Black youth may use online tools to harness CCW, which the current study seeks to address. As part of our conceptual framework, we outline Yosso's dimensions of Community Cultural Wealth with a focus on investigating the online interactions of adolescents.

Community Cultural Wealth Framework

In this study, we employ Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework to move away from deficit framings and articulate particular ways in which social media use can support students' access to the array of resources embedded in their cultural groups. Below, we provide a brief overview of Yosso's definition and an illustrative example of how online relationships and interactions can animate these forms of capital.

- *Social capital* represents the networks of people and community resources that can provide instructional and emotional support as individuals navigate social institutions. For example, Yosso (2005) suggests that students may access informational and emotional support to complete a scholarship application. Similarly, students could mobilize their online networks to get questions about scholarship processes, institutions, or expectations answered.
- *Linguistic capital* reflects the reality that Students of Color arrive at educational institutions with a host of language and communication skills, including cultural traditions that provide proficiency in multimodal communication. In the online context, linguistic capital may allow students to capitalize on the affordances of different platforms for forming relationships and information-seeking.
- *Navigational capital* encompasses the specific skills that Students of Color develop to maneuver through social institutions. As part of navigational capital, students draw on social competencies and cultural strategies for thriving in social institutions set up for exclusion. For example, #BlackTwitter constitutes a counterpublic for resource and information sharing (Florini, 2014).
- *Aspirational capital* refers to the cultural artifacts and relationships that allow individuals to dream beyond their current circumstances, even when the means of

achieving an aspiration are not clear. Personal narratives circulated through social media may provide aspirational capital for students with shared identities and communities.

- *Resistant capital* refers to the knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior focused on challenging inequitable systems. Engagement through social change hashtags like #BlackGirlMagic can express and foster resistance through community building and reflection of students' experiences (Stewart, 2019).
- *Familial capital* refers to the broad conception of family and kinship in many communities of color that emphasize the importance of connection to community (and its attendant resources). As students transition to college, they may access social media to maintain extended family and kinship ties (Brown & Ellison, 2021).

As prior research on CCW suggests that Students of Color draw upon multiple forms of capital when considering their career and college options, our research question is thus:

> What forms of Community Cultural Wealth do Black high school students in Detroit access via their online interactions concerning college information and aspirations?

Method

Research Context

At the time of data collection, the three schools in our sample were all part of the Detroit Public Schools district. They were co-located in one campus, although each school has its own administrative leadership team. Most students at each school did not have parents who had earned a degree from a 4-year college. According to demographics from Detroit Public Schools, about 65% of students at each school received free federal lunch (Detroit Public Schools, 2014). The smallest of the three schools enrolled slightly less than 300 students, and the largest enrolled more than 350. The three schools enrolled, on average, 95% Black students with small populations of Latino, Asian, and White students according to district demographics. The average ACT score for all three schools was about 5 points below the state average.

Our analysis uses interview data collected from seniors and juniors at three high schools in Detroit, Michigan in the Fall of 2013 ($N=24$). All schools had been reopened within the last 3 years before data collection after a restructuring and re-staffing process. In addition, each school had redesigned their educational environment and programs to promote college-going. Each school was decorated with banners from various institutions (across selectivity and institutional types), posters, and flyers offering different scholarship programs, and reminders about applying for financial aid.

Sample

A college counselor who worked across all three high schools helped us recruit students for this study; our sample most likely overrepresents students who expressed interest and plans for college. Students' whose parents completed an informed consent document were invited to participate and were given a $20 Target gift card after the interview. Students were not selected based on social media usage. All participants described their plans for life after high school, and most of these plans involved college or military service. Interviews were conducted with 13 women and 11 men, all of whom self-identified as Black, except for one Asian American student not included in this data set. Participants were all 17 or 18 years old. Interviews continued until we reached saturation.

Data Collection

We interviewed participants in a private classroom using a semi-structured interview protocol, developed through conversations among the authors and guided by prior literature on post-secondary planning and social media use. Interviews were conducted by the first or third author and lasted approximately 1 hr. The protocol included questions about participants' school experiences, lives in Detroit, post-secondary plans, and family experiences. Students were asked to pull up their preferred social media platform(s) and guided us through their day-to-day activities on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or some combination thereof during the interview. Students chose what to share organically, most often showing us their profile pages and their activity feeds. During the interview, the interviewer referred to these pages when asking participants about various aspects of their social media practices, including how they decided what social media content to share and whether they used social media to learn about college. In some cases, students pulled up specific social media content to illustrate a point or example. We did not capture this content because interactions often included photos or text from unconsented minors.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and imported into ATLAS.ti for analysis. Two authors read through each interview and developed an initial code list. The coders had frequent discussions where they revised the codebook and reconciled differences as they emerged. The revised code list was then applied to the entire corpus of data. Students' online and offline experiences to foster Community Cultural Wealth were identified as a key theme during our coding and analysis process. The first author then created a meta matrix as described by Miles et al. (2013) to compare data points related to Community Cultural Wealth across the forms of capital and across respondents. This approach also allowed us to identify broad

themes around learning and online activities. Findings are reported using direct excerpts from interviews, only lightly edited for readability, to preserve student voice as best as possible.

Researcher Positionality

Our experience researching the social media use of first-generation college students informed our approach to this study. We share a commitment to scholarship that yields practical and theoretical implications for addressing inequality in access to post-secondary education. As white scholars, we approach this work as outsiders to the school community, and we expect that our outsider status shaped how students shared their use of social media and what facets of their lives they allowed us to see on their profiles. We shared early drafts of our results and drafts of this manuscript with Black scholars who had served as schoolteachers in Detroit and added relevant context based on their feedback.

Findings

Our research question asked how Black students from Detroit accessed Community Cultural Wealth through online interactions as they planned around their post-secondary options. First, we describe students' use of social media generally to contextualize our findings, and then we will explore more deeply their use with regards to the forms of CCW. All participants used social media, with Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as their primary channels for connecting with contacts. Most students (about 75%) reported that most of their social media participation was through only one site, with Instagram and Twitter more popular than Facebook, largely based on the affordances of the platform and the potential network of contacts available on the platform. Students with a preference for Twitter or Instagram generally reported that they disliked Facebook because family and teachers used the site. Twitter was seen as a useful venue for connecting with institutional accounts for colleges and universities. Students used Instagram to follow athletic teams, marching bands, and other campus organizations.

Our participants accessed social media in two primary ways: through a mobile phone or a computer at home. Fewer than 25% of students had access to a computer at home, and those that did generally shared the computer with other family members. Most students had cell phones that allowed them to go online using Wi-Fi, but the school's network blocked many social media platforms. As such, most of their social media participation happened outside school hours. A few students who had mobile phones with data plans reported using Snapchat, but no students described using that platform to learn about college.

With regard to our research question, students described using social media in ways that fostered social, linguistic, navigational, aspirational, and resistant capital. These five forms of capital are not mutually exclusive and influence one another. As students learned how to access and activate their Community Cultural Wealth from social media participation, they drew upon their social, aspirational, and linguistic capital. Likewise, as students learned strategies for resisting inequality through social media participation, they activated their navigational and (perhaps unsurprisingly) resistance capital. We discuss each form of capital related to students' learning through social media participation below.

As they explored their post-secondary options, their online participation enabled students to recognize new and diverse informational and social support sources. This informal learning is essential because it allows students to identify crucial forms of capital that they could draw upon when they begin their post-secondary transitions. The resources that students identified aligned with aspects of Community Cultural Wealth that, according to prior research, students often access in offline contexts and which facilitate post-secondary transitions (e.g., Jayakumar et al., 2013).

Social Capital

The first form of CCW we identified in our data set is *social capital*, composed of students' networks of people and community resources. As other scholars have noted, the information networks that help students understand their circumstances can inform students' college knowledge acquisition—a critical step toward transition readiness (Liou et al., 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Among our participants, social capital was fostered through information networks that provided them with information about the college, such as what daily college life was like or what kinds of questions to ask the financial aid office.

Social media participation expanded students' access to social capital by connecting students to weak and latent ties, not part of their immediate social network (e.g., Ellison et al., 2007). For instance, social media enabled students to access a variety of artifacts about college life from current college students. Notably, social media served as a window into quotidian college life for many of our participants (e.g., Brown & Ellison, 2021). For example, Jeremiah[1] described seeing images of college life posted by his peers:

> I know a lot of people on my Instagram, and they go to [Regional University], and they just put a tagline and then you can click on it and it's like their college life, there (are) just pictures of their college life, what they're doing at the (dorm) room.

Our participants, many of whom will be first-generation college students, reported that this exposure to daily life helped demystify the college experience. Kayla, a senior, believed that social media allowed her to develop a balanced perspective on what college life would be like: "[Facebook] gives me a glimpse of the struggle, but [also] the successes of being in college." Learning about the college through social

media potentially presented a counter-balance to institutional narratives of college life. Students did not report that they actively sought out connections with college students, but as they approached graduation, the number of college students in their online social networks naturally increased as these connections eventually graduated high school.

As their access to images of college life expanded, students developed college-going strategies for enrollment and persistence based on what they observed. For example, Martin, a senior, used social media as a benchmarking tool as he worked toward transition readiness, calibrating his academic activities to the college experiences he witnessed via social media:

> Now I see . . . how their college process is going. If I feel like maybe that person wasn't as prepared as me then maybe I'm like, "Okay, I might do a little better than them." Or maybe they were more prepared than me and I may go, "Okay, I need to work a little bit if they're having problems too."

This finding echoes other research describing high school students who use social media to help them develop an "outline of life," including post-secondary plans (Ellison et al., 2014). It is also striking that while much of the work on self-presentation and social media has identified a positivity bias (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014), our participants found social media to be a source for less uniformly rosy and more multi-dimensional representations of the college experience (in contrast to other sources).

Social capital (networks of people and resources) accessed through social media facilitated students' information-seeking activities. For instance, when Anna, a senior, shared her college acceptance over Twitter, she received feedback from her social network about what to do next:

> When I post my acceptance letters . . . [my Twitter contacts] told me to hashtag the college, because if I hashtag the college, whether it be Twitter or Instagram, . . . people who use social media that work for the college would help me.

By doing this, Anna was able to connect through Twitter with staff at the institution, who provided her with more information to facilitate her college choice process:

> [University representatives] used my Twitter name, and they told me to click on the page, and I clicked on the page and it was just like tons of information about campus visits and campus life.

Most of our participants were friends on social media with peers who graduated from their high school and were now in college. Undergraduate peers, made accessible via social media, served as "knowledgeable translators" of information about college life (Brown et al., 2016). Peers in college helped participants make sense of information encountered through the college choice process. Our participants noted that college peers' familiarity with a student's immediate context made these peer-to-peer knowledge exchanges especially effective, as college students essentially became "empowerment agents" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) that understood the unique challenges for students from Detroit as they transitioned from high school to college.

Linguistic Capital

Students reported preparing for these transitions by developing skills for communicating in various different cultural contexts. The second dimension of CCW, *linguistic capital*, was evident as students described everyday online interactions in which they switched between styles of communication based on their intended audience. Students identified how multiple audiences complicated their online self-expression on social media sites. For instance, many of the students in our study had long digital histories, which means they were likely to be connected to a wide range of people as Friends or Contacts: family, friends from throughout their school careers, past and current teachers, and undergraduate peers. This audience, composed of people from the many diverse aspects of a student's life, may have complicated their ability to engage in more narrowly constrained self-presentation with each of these diverse audiences—a phenomena social media researchers refer to as "context collapse" (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

For some students, managing their self-presentation regarding diverse audiences meant developing intentional strategies for messaging to specific audiences on certain platforms. Rather than code-switching (e.g., Hill, 2009), as they would in face-to-face communication with different audiences, these students engaged in platform-switching, using one social media platform to communicate with peers and another for family. For example, Beth, a female senior actively involved in her church and community service organizations through her school, described developing distinct networks for each platform. She explained that Twitter and Snapchat were for communicating with friends, whereas Facebook was for family and other peers from church. She posted photographs of her grandmother on Facebook so that family across the country could see them but did not share the same content over other platforms. These intentional strategies appeared to represent a kind of code-switching (or platform-switching), where platforms facilitated the use of different linguistic repertoires based on the audience (like slang with friends on Snapchat and formal vocabulary with family on Facebook).

Students' decisions about platform use were informed by their assessment of each platform's ability to afford visibility to institutional agents, like admissions and recruitment officers. Twitter allowed direct communication with admissions officers or institutional "accounts." Students sought these accounts out as part of their information-seeking or organically encountered them when they shared

their plans and accomplishments. Their ability to effectively participate on each platform and to use its affordances to capture the attention of institutional agents is a significant way in which social network participation has transformed' access to elite institutional actors among the students we interviewed.

Aspirational Capital

Our participants also embraced different linguistic repertoires as part of their online aspirational self-presentation. As students learned which networks and platforms were best for accessing different kinds of support, they also learned to cultivate online spaces for identity expressions and experimentation (Morioka et al., 2016). Part of exploring post-secondary options involved testing and exploring aspirational post-secondary identities. Despite significant economic and social barriers (what Ladson-Billings refers to as educational debts, 2006), students in our study maintained the third dimension of CCW, *aspirational capital*—hopes and dreams for the future (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Participants described one expression of these aspirations when they talked about their online self-presentational strategies. For instance, students expressed their college aspirations by constructing social media profiles that reflected their desired "future self." Although this kind of expression occurred largely on Facebook, where students can publicly claim affiliation with different organizations, very few of our participants identified their high school on their profile. Instead, they listed a college or university in their profile's "Network" section. One student, who listed one of the California State University campuses as his Facebook "network" in his profile, explained his long-term plan to attend that institution. We also observed this practice in the usernames selected on sites like Twitter or Instagram, where students used variations of the phrase "college kid" or incorporated institutional acronyms into their handles or biographies. Participants described themselves as "college bound," "a future college kid," or "on that college grind" in their online profiles.

Students identified several motivations for this practice. Primarily, it allowed them to share aspirational information (and the implicit requests for support they represent) with a connected community. For example, Allen described changing his Network affiliation based on whatever college he was most interested in at the moment as a way to signal to people in his network where he was leaning. "I had changed it because it was saying [State University]. Then it said [Religious College]. [Then] I didn't really know what college I want to go to so I just put 'college-bound.'"

Network affiliations also served as a motivational reminder. Students mentioned going online and viewing their profiles to remind themselves of the purpose behind the hard work of preparing for college. As one student put it, the constant reminder of his goal encouraged him to "push harder for my dream."

Aspirational self-expression primarily occurred on platforms where students' networks were composed of offline contacts like family, friends, teachers, and community members. Our participants used these aspirational self-expressions as a way to broadcast intention and cultivate support among their broader networks. It is important to note these expressions reflected already-existing aspirations–students had selected the high school they attended, in part, because it was a "college-going" high school–as opposed to creating them. Instead, engaging in aspirational self-expression allowed students to imagine their future and receive affirmation from strong and weak ties that this future was achievable and allowed contacts in their network to activate relevant resources and relationships. Students who engaged in this kind of self-expression did so, in part, because their perception was that their broader networks would assume they had no college-going intentions unless they explicitly stated otherwise.

In one particularly illustrative example, a student who referred to herself as "Dr. Smith" included her career aspirations in her Facebook and Twitter profiles. Her long-term plans, which included pursuing a doctorate in psychology, were part of her online self-presentation. On Twitter, she identified herself as a "dancer, writer, and psychologist, Dr. Smith" and would frequently tweet "The Doctor is in" to let her peers know that she was available to provide advice and social support, online or face-to-face. As Dr. Smith described,

> Well, Twitter is probably the only place I advertise it at, but everyone knows, in my circle of friends, they just know I'm really good at giving advice so they will always come to me. Or they'll hear it word of mouth and then they'll come to me.

Dr. Smith's peers, who provided encouragement and sought out her counsel, reinforced her aspirational online representation.

Navigational Capital

Maintaining aspirations through online self-presentational strategies could help students overcome real and perceived barriers in the inequitable process of applying to post-secondary institutions. Students learned to resist the inequality embedded in college access pipelines when accessing CCW online through their social media participation. For example, in addition to switching between styles and platforms, students nimbly switched among pathways when engaging in post-secondary planning. Students developed navigational strategies (or *navigational capital*, the fourth dimension of CCW) to access post-secondary education opportunities successfully.

One strategy for accessing post-secondary education for our participants was finding multiple pathways into the institution by discussing college access with knowledgeable resources online. Roger, an 18-year-old senior, had multiple contingency plans for gaining access. He identified what he

called “loopholes” in the system through his discussions with current students over social media:

> Or like say if I didn’t get into their School of Engineering, I could apply to the college of Arts and Sciences and still get in [and transfer]. So, there’s many side tracks. You don’t just have to go in through the front door, you can go in through the back or through the center even.

Students often arrived at these realizations by connecting with current students through social media. Roger, for example, sought out graduate students in his preferred field and engaged them with questions about their educational experiences. Anna accessed a cousin through Facebook who was completing her undergraduate education at a selective historically Black university. In both instances, these social media conversations helped Roger and Anna realize that there was no one “right path” for accessing college. Our participants’ recognition that college admission is an arcane process with multiple pathways—rather than the linear progression of application, admission, enrollment—reflects their understanding of the complexity of the college admission process and, as such, is an expression of navigational capital.

In some cases, our participants described coordinating peer groups to attend college as a cohort, enabling students to hold each other accountable (“stay on each other’s head”) either in person or through social media:

> But we all are trying to figure out what colleges we wanna go to ‘cause we kind of wanna go to one all together to stay on each other’s head, really, and to be there for support for one another.

Going to school with peers was one strategy for addressing the anxiety that transitioning to college may have generated while holding one another accountable in a new academic context. For students who attend different institutions, social media participation was part of their plan to maintain essential kinship ties at an institution that was otherwise perceived to be inhospitable (geographically distant, historically, and predominantly white).

Resistant Capital

The knowledge that institutions might not meet their needs and that they would require a proactive strategy for successfully navigating institutional environments was often connected to growing up in Detroit. Despite students’ fondness for Detroit and their intentional portrayal of the positive aspects of life and community in Detroit, our participants were pragmatic about the institutional failures they encountered in the city. They anticipated that other institutions—like colleges and universities—were susceptible to the same kinds of mismanagement.

Students commonly linked the development of aspirations (and the purpose of college-going) with plans for addressing and mitigating the inequality they witnessed in their community and the city of Detroit. Aspirations to give back to Detroit were reflected in students’ online self-presentation, especially in how they framed their post-secondary plans. For example, one student described himself as a “college-bound philanthropist” in his Twitter profile, connecting the role of post-secondary preparation with his future ability to create positive change. Similar to how students used the affordances of Twitter and Instagram to advertise their aspirations, our participants also described using social media to connect to broader networks of resistance, Black liberation, and social justice advocacy.

Many of our participants believed that growing up in Detroit helped them develop resilience, which the CCW literature frames as *resistant capital*. Students expressed their love of and dedication to Detroit, believing the city was capable of revival and that given the appropriate skills (gained through post-secondary education), they could be catalysts of that revival. However, many were frustrated with the pain narratives and negative images of Detroit they saw promoted throughout mass media, and students took it upon themselves to provide balance through their social media practices. For instance, Jeremiah, a senior, wrote he was “Instagramming for Jesus” in his Instagram profile, highlighting images of his faith community through social media. Another student developed specific social media accounts to foreground positive images of Detroit. He participated in Twitter conversations about structural racism and inequality through the #newjimcrow hashtag. Contributing to the discourse and public image of Detroit fostered resistance. As Karl lamented, “they talking about negative things about the city, but they will never see the positive things that go on. Like the news reporter come to a fight, but they won’t come to a get-together.” Students posted counternarratives and positive images on their social media profiles as an act of resistance to dominant media narratives.

Students engaged in these behaviors partly because they feared how the general perception of Detroit might impact their post-secondary options. Several students expressed concern that the admissions officers evaluating their applications had such substantially different life experiences that they could not reasonably assess the individual and community resources that our participants possessed. At the same time, as we noted earlier, students were communicating with admissions officers through Twitter and knew that these individuals were potentially part of their social media audience. Broadcasting counter-narratives through social media was one small way that students could address their concerns about admissions officers’ misperceptions of Detroit (and, by extension, students from Detroit).

Discussion

This research explored the role of online interactions in supporting various Community Cultural Wealth dimensions for a sample of Black high school students from Detroit who

were considering their post-secondary futures, revealing how students' use of social media enabled them to harness the cultural wealth of their community. Our study provides further evidence of how social media interactions, especially college-related content shared via social media, can shape students' post-secondary aspirations and planning.

We identified five intertwined forms of CCW that were salient for high school students regarding their post-secondary aspirations: social capital, linguistic capital, navigational capital, aspirational capital, and resistant capital. However, one dimension of CCW, familial capital, rarely surfaced in our data set. This omission may be because the CCW framework draws from the literature of Chicano/a studies (Yosso, 2005), so the current conceptualization of familial capital may not extend well to Black communities (e.g., Jayakumar et al., 2013). Moreover, this omission is both a limitation of the current study and an important avenue for future work. For example, future scholarship could explore other Black communities to identify if and how familial capital might be represented both broadly and in the context of social media platforms more narrowly. In doing so, it could potentially uncover whether another extension to the CCW framework is necessary to capture the nuances of Black familial support and/or how it shows up in online spaces.

Prior research on the role of CCW in post-secondary attainment has highlighted the importance of out-of-school community on adolescents' college aspirations and attainment (Huber, 2009; Jayakumar et al., 2013). Our participants also described how out-of-school online interactions enabled them to access their cultural wealth in various ways, including the maintenance of social ties with peers in college and the opportunity to explore college-going identities through profile self-presentation. As students drew upon their cultural wealth, they also developed and expanded information networks that supported their post-secondary explorations.

"Say Nice Things About Detroit"

Specifically, the cultural significance of the city of Detroit played an important role for many of our participants. As a geographic location, a vibrant popular narrative fomented and expanded via mass media, and interpersonal networks of places and people, Detroit had a gravitational hold on the students we interviewed. Detroit was a place to leave, but also a community to return to create positive change. For our participants, Detroit represented systems of networks, where students could communicate with peers, mentors, and family within the imagined community they constructed on and offline. This finding reflects prior research in education that suggests Black students stake and make claims for themselves and the communities that they are from as part of their developing literacy practices. They make themselves visible by complicating deficit narratives about their communities (Watson, 2016).

Our participants described Detroit's significant role in their lives, but this community's salience also highlighted a potential barrier to overcome in their post-secondary aspirations. Research on CCW has demonstrated the tension that results when students leave their community for college (Huber, 2009). When students leave home, they potentially lose access to the wealth of any community resources that are geographically bound. However, our participants reported strong ties to community resources, ties that were bolstered by social media participation. For example, students generally reported receiving positive feedback from their networks when they reframed public images of Detroit and when they shared their college-going identities online. Students, ideally, will receive the same levels of social support from these networks as they transition to college. Our data suggest that maintaining social connections through social media potentially expands the channels through which Community Cultural Wealth can flow, providing students with confidence about the future enhanced by their network of Detroit-based social ties.

Our participants used social media to highlight Detroit's cultural wealth, rejecting deficit framings of their community and providing a compelling example of resistance in action. Community narratives and imagery can reinforce Community Cultural Wealth by providing a "critical revisionist historical account of institutional racism, cultural resilience, and community resistance" (Yosso & Garcia, 2007, p. 146). We found that when our participants were given access to participatory social media to cultivate their own narratives about their community, they fore-grounded counter-narratives. For example, one student's Instagram account focused on images of positivity and uplift in Detroit, explicitly highlighting the community service he and his friends engaged in through school activities. The visibility and persistence that social media affords enabled these counter-narratives to be shared with a broader network, both across time (viewable to future audiences) and space (viewable by those outside the students' immediate networks). Furthermore, the technical features of platforms like Instagram, such as photo-sharing, assist in constructing powerful visual counternarratives. Rather than just noting that traditional media coverage would attend to a "fight" but not a "get-together," image-based social media platforms enabled students like Karl to do their own documentation and broadcasting.

More Than Bridging and Bonding

Traditional (i.e., Bordieuan) social capital frameworks examine two dimensions of social capital—bridging capital (which typically captures the diverse informational resources associated with weaker ties) and bonding capital (which captures the emotional and tangible resources often offered by closer ties; see Putnam, 2000, for an overview). While generative in many contexts, this framework may not fully capture both the

obstacles and the resources of this population. The salience of Detroit for our participants illuminates the need for a more holistic, assets-based framework such as CCW. A social capital lens may view Black students from Detroit as at a deficit, lacking information about college-going. However, moving to CCW as a guiding framework reveals how Detroit functions as a motivator and as a resourced community that students can draw from linguistically, aspirationally, navigationally, and in terms of resistance.

CCW not only illuminates assets that are underexplored in research about populations like Black students from Detroit but does so in a way that parses out forms of capital with more granularity while also acknowledging the intertwined nature of these forms. Thus, it is an apt framework for understanding minoritized populations' interactions with technology in contexts like college and career access. More broadly, the framework allows for reframing conversations around supportive technology use, such that technology is not limited to the role of filling a pre-conceived gap in a community but instead can be understood as a tool to harness resources that exist in the community already, but may not have been actualized. Rather than adopting a technologically deterministic ethos wherein the technology is lauded for its ability to ameliorate disparities, CCW allows scholars and practitioners alike to understand how technology broadly, and social media specifically, integrates with one's offline environment in a mutually constitutive process. While CCW is a promising framework for those working to understand technology use by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities, more work must be done to elucidate further how this framework extends to or may be challenged in a technologically-mediated context.

Future Directions for Research

While our data offer insights into how social media enables students to recognize and harness community wealth in the short term, they do not enable us to speak to how resource recognition and mobilization via social media occurs over the long term. Thus, future longitudinal work can more clearly elucidate how students mobilize community cultural wealth via social media over their college careers, which may bring additional challenges if students leave their home community for college. This recommendation for future work aligns with the call from Acevedo and Solorzano (2021) for scholars working with CCW to understand better how access to cultural wealth may (or may not) translate to activation of those accessed resources. For instance, future research can begin to uncover the socio-technical qualities of students' engagement with social media platforms that assist or possibly detract from their ability to recognize and harness CCW in the short and long term. A key component of traditional social capital perspectives is reciprocity—"expected returns in the [social] marketplace," as articulated by Lin (2002). Future work could explore how Black students like our participants think about how to "give back" to their community once they are at college and the role of social media in allowing them to do so.

Our work also identifies an overlap between how Black youth experience double consciousness and context collapse in their online interactions. Many students in our sample reported engaging in platform-switching because institutional agents, like admissions officers, were present in their intended audience. Students cultivated separate spaces to express different aspects of their aspirational identities and to connect to different resources (emotional support among family and friends on Facebook, informational support on Twitter among current college students and institutionally affiliated contacts). The extent to which context collapse influences double consciousness among Black adolescents online deserves more empirical attention.

Our findings suggest that effective community-based practices—the social interactions that help students access Community Cultural Wealth—occur online and offline, effectively contributing to a body of literature on Community Cultural Wealth that thus far has not substantially engaged with online spaces. We believe that the Community Cultural Wealth framework could be productively expanded by considering the online interactions that shape students' access to their cultural wealth. In highlighting the increasing importance of online interactions for understanding how communities can support youth development, our work identifies some productive avenues for developing and extending current empirical literature on CCW, which tends to focus on assets harnessed from face-to-face interactions (e.g., Jayakumar et al., 2013) and mass media (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Students' efforts to reframe Detroit through their social media usage are prime examples of how technological affordances and social action help individuals collectively mobilize around shared goals. Just a decade earlier, students would not have had access to channels of communication that enable them to broadcast counter-narratives about their community (and consequentially their own identities) to a global audience, with immediate feedback. Through online interactions, students can create digital artifacts of their civic engagement and promote narratives that reflect their communities, cities, and selves' cultural wealth while simultaneously reinforcing their own resilience and aspirational identity claims.

Although not a key focus of our initial inquiry, we believe this work also points to important theoretical and design considerations related to the psychological construct of *social comparison* (Burke et al., 2020). Social comparison, specifically negative upward social comparison triggered by social media use, can be harmful, particularly when it negatively impacts self-esteem and self-concept. However, our work shows that students can perceive social comparisons positively in their ability to convey informational and aspirational support. The ability for social comparisons to elicit informational support is evidenced by the participant who

engaged in strategic comparison as a benchmarking tool to gauge college-related progress and next steps. In addition, they can serve aspirational purposes, such as when high school students see others from their same school or neighborhood be successful in college. For example, students recounted watching older friends and siblings thrive and struggle in college as motivators to persist toward high school graduation. This notion is supported by recent experimental findings that suggest that social media use (specifically, looking at Instagram images of nature) can be inspirational and conducive to well-being, at least in the short term (Meier et al., 2020). Thus, a question for scholars and designers alike is: In what socio-technical contexts are upward social comparisons productive and inspirations, and when are they harmful (e.g., for self-esteem)? More specifically, are there design elements that can build upon CCW principles to support aspirational, positive upward comparisons? Within the context of Black high school students and college access, this could mean allowing them to express their college aspirations in a profile field that explicitly communicates this (as opposed to using the "current affiliation" field to do so) or capitalizing on how social media enables "back stage" insights into quotidian college life (see Morioka et al., 2016 for an extended discussion).

Implications

Moreover, this work raises additional questions around how the visual modality of a platform (e.g., Instagram) may interact with the visibility of a marginalized identity to inform platform use broadly and marginalized students' actions on social media to harness Community Cultural Wealth specifically. For instance, for Black first-generation students from Detroit, posting on visual-based social media platforms about themselves and their lives renders particular identities (e.g., Black and Detroit resident) more visible than others (e.g., a first-generation student). While the salience of visible identities on visual-based social media platforms may result in negative outcomes like harrasment, conversely, this can also potentially bolster students' ability to harness CCW from Black Detroiters who share similar identities and wish to give back to folks holding similar identities. Future work may wish to parse out the various implications of the intersections between image-dense social media platforms and visible identities as it relates to outcomes ranging from community development, CCW, and information-seeking for other important life outcomes.

Conclusion

Given our findings, as well as other research that identifies the increasing importance of social media in the lives of adolescents (e.g., Anderson & Jiang, 2018), we propose an expanded CCW perspective that intentionally incorporates (and investigates) the role of online interactions for accessing (and fostering) CCW. This framework would explicitly acknowledge that the post-secondary transition process is increasingly shaped by information exchanges and other interactions that occur through and across a wide range of online communication channels, including social media.

In summary, this work illustrates how Community Cultural Wealth accessed through online interactions is an important resource for students in environments where access to offline information about college might be limited, such as first-generation students, those with less access to "bridging" ties (Ellison et al., 2014), or those constrained by geography or structural inequality (e.g., students in post-bankruptcy Detroit). Social media connections may serve as a critical connection to those that possess useful college knowledge and are willing to share it. As students learned about college, they also were exposed to the wealth of cultural and community resources available in their social network(s). Our participants reported benefiting from the increased access to the institutional actors, college-going peers, and supportive adults that social media provided. The ability to 'stay on each other's heads' through social media represents one strategy by which participants accessed the cultural wealth of their community to support their post-secondary explorations. For example, one student recalled her undergraduate peers and family messaging her on Facebook to ask, "what schools have you been applying to or what scholarships you applying for?" The expanded conception of CCW we propose here, which explicitly considers the affordances of online communication tools in fostering CCW, highlights the potential value of social media for students from Communities of Color as they consider their future educational pathways. We believe future research explicating how online interactions inform the development of CCW could assist system designers, educators, and community organizers in developing interventions to promote various educational outcomes. Moreover, this work can contribute to theory building that more explicitly considers the role of social media tools and online practices in fostering and accessing CCW.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This study was supported by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

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Note

1. All participants have been assigned pseudonyms.

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