

Social Media and College-Related Social Support Exchange for First-Generation, Low-Income Students: The Role of Identity Disclosures

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First-generation, low-income (FGLI) students face barriers to college access and retention that reproduce socioeconomic inequities. These students turn to social media for college-related social support. However, while students can reap benefits from social media, it is crucial to investigate under what conditions social media interactions facilitate or hinder students' access to college-related social support. We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 FGLI students in the United States who applied for college in the 2020-2021 application cycle. Our findings illustrate how FGLI identity disclosures on social media can facilitate access to college-related social support when met with supportive or neutral responses while stigmatizing reactions can disrupt access to these benefits. We draw from the lenses of the "doubly disadvantaged" and "privileged poor" used to describe FGLI students in post-secondary education to argue that engaging in FGLI identity disclosures on social media can help students become academically and psychosocially prepared for collegiate environments. Finally, we discuss the implications of this work for theoretical frameworks centering social media and social support, consider when stigma might lead to support space abandonment and describe the potential implications for social media design.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in HCI**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: social media, disclosure, identity, stigma, education, college access, social support, Reddit, Discord

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1 INTRODUCTION

Historically, a complex combination of socioeconomic phenomena and higher education policies and practices have merged to discourage first-generation, low-income (henceforth referred to as FGLI) students from accessing and navigating post-secondary institutions in the United States [136]. Barriers to college access and persistence represent a glaring equity issue, especially among public universities whose mission is to make knowledge available as a public good [28]. Starting but not completing a degree can harm students who do not benefit from attaining the degree but invest time and money into pursuing it [114]. Moreover, financial and informational barriers to access and retention for FGLI students can lead to the social reproduction [24] of poverty by ensuring that only students with sufficient familial resources, including money and social capital, have the opportunity to gain an education that can propel them into high-paying jobs. Additionally, these barriers can lead to an under-trained U.S. workforce that is unable to compete in an increasingly competitive global economy, as FGLI students make up a significant population of students throughout the country [78]. With growing numbers of FGLI students seeking access to university education, it is important to investigate both successes and barriers they may face in college access and persistence.

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53 Social support, or “everyday behaviors that...communicate to an individual that she or he is valued and cared for by
54 others” [27], is integral to FGLI students’ successful transition to and through college [63]. However, this same student
55 population often experiences challenges accessing relevant college-related support because they typically lack access to
56 individuals in their networks [136], especially family members, that can provide them with relevant support in this
57 domain. For instance, FGLI students tend to lack the kinds of informational and tangible support that would help them
58 navigate the college application process [64], while financial stressors and not knowing the “hidden curriculum” (i.e.,
59 the tacit norms, values, and beliefs of higher education) can impede persistence through college [93, 100]. In addition,
60 the institutional agents (e.g., high school teachers and counseling staff) that could provide the forms of support most
61 relevant to these students are not always well-equipped to do so [94]. For example, they may not know what support is
62 needed and may assume that students know certain information unless they specifically state otherwise. Stigmatization,
63 a social process involving 1) the labeling and stereotyping of difference, 2) the physical and/or social separation of the
64 stigmatized and non-stigmatized, 3) status loss, and 4) discrimination [90], also impacts FGLI students. For instance,
65 stigmatization of FGLI students’ socioeconomic status and their parents’ levels of education [138] may stymie these
66 students’ ability to safely disclose their circumstances to those in their immediate in-person networks, potentially
67 leading students to turn to social media interactions with a broader audience of known and/or unknown ties to replace
68 or supplement in-person resources.

73 Indeed, social media can serve as spaces where people facing stigma or other forms of marginalization can exchange
74 social support [8, 12, 17, 47, 59, 117]. Specifically, FGLI students use social media to reap support in the form of
75 information, mentors, and college aspirations, to name a few [81, 137, 139]. Notably, studying contexts outside of the
76 educational domain, social media scholars (e.g., [51, 52]) posit that online requests for support are intrinsic to successful
77 development and activation of support. Scholars generally categorize acts of social support-seeking as direct (i.e.,
78 explicit requests for support around a stated problem) and indirect (i.e., hinting that a problem exists without explicitly
79 describing it) [11, 16]. Sometimes, people disclose relevant identities and experiences when seeking support online [8, 9].
80 Disclosure or the revelation of aspects of one’s true self to others [82] can aid support-seeking by providing necessary
81 context to support providers. Yet, disclosures can also be met with adverse or hostile reactions that may adversely
82 impact the health and well-being of the support-seeker [33]. Taken together, prior work suggests that students may
83 invoke and disclose their FGLI identity when making explicit or tacit requests for college-related social support on
84 social media to maximize the relevance and helpfulness of the support they receive.

88 To investigate under what circumstances students disclose their FGLI identities on social media and how this may
89 play a role in college-related social support exchange, we conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with FGLI
90 students (N=20) from across the United States who applied to college in the 2020-2021 application cycle. We centered
91 the interview protocol around whether and how students disclosed their FGLI identity on social media platforms to
92 better understand how such disclosures could serve as a conduit or barrier to relevant forms of college-related social
93 support exchange.

95 We found that many students did disclose their FGLI identity, both to unknown (i.e., not in their pre-existing
96 networks) and dissimilar (i.e., not FGLI) others in college-going communities on platforms like Reddit as well as to
97 similar others (i.e., fellow FGLI students) on insular Discord servers. Whether students perceived social support-related
98 outcomes of their disclosures as positive or negative hinged upon their social media audience’s responses to these
99 disclosures. Received support encompassed a range of support types identified in extant social support typologies,
100 including informational, emotional, and esteem support [44]. However, when students experienced negative and/or
101 stigmatizing reactions to their disclosures on social media, they reported adverse psychological effects (e.g., lowered
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sense of belonging in conversations about college and, by extension, post-secondary institutions) and a tendency to abandon these online support spaces, which could be harmful to their future support-seeking as they transition to college.

Our work contributes to college access and social media research in two ways. First, in his book, *The Privileged Poor*, Jack [80] notes that FGLI students' access to preparatory institutions can propel them from "doubly disadvantaged" students with little knowledge of collegiate environments to the "privileged poor" who, while still low-income, are academically, socially, and psychologically prepared for colleges and universities. Based on our findings, we suggest that social media disclosures of students' FGLI identities can serve a similar role, facilitating greater access to the kinds of online college-related social support (primarily informational and emotional) necessary to access and persist in higher education institutions. Second, we argue that FGLI students' social media identity disclosures represent an extension of the "social transition machinery" framework [66]. This framework argues that social media platforms can work in tandem to facilitate identity transitions by affording discrete, yet complementary forms of self-presentation in the forms of disclosure and identity work. This study's findings extend that framework by demonstrating that platforms can serve a similar role in facilitating students' transition to the "privileged poor," but that the same disclosure behaviors that facilitate this transition can also disrupt it. Finally, we highlight how improved forms of content moderation, such as content warnings, may reduce some of the concerns surrounding disclosure and stigma in college-related online spaces on social media, rendering platforms – and the college-going online communities housed within them – safer for college-related support exchange for FGLI students.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This interdisciplinary investigation draws from the education, communication studies, human-computer interaction (HCI), and Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) literature to describe how FGLI students use social media platforms for identity disclosure and college-related social support during the college application and selection processes.

2.1 First-Generation, Low-Income Students & the College Application Process

Initially developed by U.S.-based higher education administrators in the late 1970s to determine student eligibility for outreach programs geared toward disadvantaged students, the term "first-generation college student" has skyrocketed in usage in the past few decades [136]. The term provides students and their families with language that enables conversations around college access barriers and resilience. Educators and higher education administrators leverage the term to gather data on the needs and obstacles experienced by these students in order to develop interventions that support their college access and persistence. While the precise definition of a first-generation student varies slightly across institutions, students are typically considered first-generation if neither parent has completed their bachelor's degree in the United States [136]. As of 2016¹, 56% of college students in the United States were first-generation [78]. Moreover, about 20% of dependent U.S.-based undergraduate students are low-income, defined as meeting the federal poverty threshold² [58].

Research involving this student population has historically focused on disparities between first-generation students and their continuing-generation counterparts in college access and retention [31]. According to the Center for First-Generation Student Success, gaps remain between first-generation and continuing-generation students in terms of

¹These are the most recent set of statistics available, to the authors' knowledge, that explicitly quantifies the number of first-generation students in higher education institutions.

²Pew Research Center measured poverty using the income-to-poverty ratio, a common measure that accounts for income given family size.

157 full-time enrollment rates, dropout and persistence rates, and degree attainment rates [79]. Moreover, additional factors
158 like student employment can impact low-income students' focus on their post-secondary education goals.

159 In addition to difficulties in post-secondary access and retention, this student population also confronts intrapersonal
160 and interpersonal challenges as they face stigma associated with their first-generation and low-income identities.
161 Warnock and Hurst's ethnographic investigation notes that these students possess an "invisible and stigmatized identity
162 in flux" [138]. As their social class identity is often invisible, these students may face stigmatization in the form of
163 alienation as their identity's relative invisibility prevents them from organizing and gaining support around it, in
164 contrast to more (but not always) visible identities like race or ethnicity. In addition to these forms of stigma, they may
165 face secondary stigma [41] or stigma by association [103]³ due to their parents' educational background. FGLI students
166 of color who face classed and racialized microaggressions may experience compounded, intersectional [129] forms of
167 stigmatization. For instance, Sarcedo et al. [111] documented microaggressions (a type of stigmatizing interaction),
168 including microinvalidations against FGLI students of color that had emotional and academic impacts. These interactions
169 made it more challenging to envision success in the collegiate context and communicated to these students that they
170 did not belong in post-secondary education. Importantly, stigma is not only enacted (i.e., directly experienced by an
171 individual), but also *anticipated*, meaning that individuals expect that others will stigmatize them if they know about
172 their stigmatized identity [105]. This is significant because, like enacted stigma, anticipated stigma is also linked to lower
173 psychological well-being [105]. Finally, FGLI students, like other underrepresented populations in higher education
174 institutions, could experience stigmatization when their college acceptances are reduced to their identities instead of
175 their achievement. Prior work, including experimental work, has articulated a "stigma of incompetence" [73] around
176 those who are thought to benefit from various affirmative action policies.

182 During the college application process, all college applicants, regardless of socio-economic background, face myriad
183 challenges. The college application process is rife with competitiveness, resulting in stress, sleep deprivation, and
184 negative consequences to applicants' mental and physical well-being [42]. The various components of the college
185 application, namely applying for financial aid and crafting the personal essay, are stress-inducing and may even serve as
186 barriers to college access. Applying for financial aid can be cumbersome for students who lack networks to guide them
187 through the process and provide necessary documentation [30, 36]. Moreover, students may have trouble accessing
188 the required technology to complete the federal aid application (FAFSA)⁴ and may deal with technical glitches that
189 they are ill-equipped to resolve [36]. Thus, it is not surprising that many students, *especially* low-income students
190 and students of color, do not submit their federal aid applications at all or submit them late [30, 95]. Even after one
191 manages to submit the federal aid application, they may fail to properly complete tedious verification processes [38],
192 exacerbating the stress of the application process. Additionally, crafting the college essay can be stressful as students
193 navigate how to convey themselves "authentically" while highlighting the challenges they have faced. Some scholars
194 argue that this facilitates "competitive victimhood" by incentivizing students to play up their trauma for admissions
195 teams which can be harmful and degrading for applicants [125].

199 Importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many of these stressors, especially given the changing landscape
200 in institutional policy (e.g., test-optional admissions) and uncertainty about how to set oneself apart as an applicant
201 when many extracurriculars were paused due to stay-at-home orders [3]. COVID-19 also complicates college selection
202 once a student receives a decision from a college. This selection process was made more arduous throughout the

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205 ³Secondary stigma" and "stigma by association" are similar terms that refer to the negative consequences faced by those associated with a stigmatized
individual via meaningful relationships, voluntary associations, or close proximity [41, 103].

206 ⁴FAFSA, or the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, helps determine one's eligibility for federal, state, school, and private aid opportunities [1]

209 COVID-19 pandemic's early phases, as many students were not able to tour university campuses and attend in-person
210 information sessions [83].

211 Social media platforms provide opportunities for students to supplement the offline social support resources they
212 can access or cultivate resources they cannot access in their offline environments. Prior work has demonstrated the
213 immense potential of social media to help mitigate college access disparities. For instance, social media can serve as a
214 conduit by which first-generation students develop college aspirations [139]. Additionally, social media can facilitate the
215 provision of informational support [81] and mentoring [137] as they apply to and transition to college. After applying,
216 social media can serve as a space for identity work fundamental to students' college transitions [96]. Even after arriving
217 on campus, FGLI students can harness the resources embedded in social media platforms to better adjust to college [65],
218 particularly when they use social media platforms to connect with on-campus friends [141]. However, it is less clear
219 what kinds of social media interactions best facilitate or detract from students' ability to cultivate college-related social
220 support as they apply to and select a college to attend – which this study seeks to address.
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224 2.2 Features and Affordances of Reddit, Discord, and Instagram

225 “Social media” operates as an umbrella term used to describe social technologies that enable self-presentation and
226 connection to others. A subset of “social media” platforms are social network sites (SNS). One commonly-accepted
227 definition of SNS considers them to be “networked communication” platforms “in which participants 1) have uniquely
228 identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data; 2)
229 can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or
230 interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site” [50].
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234 Carr & Hayes [29] define social media as “Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and
235 selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value
236 from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others.”
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238 What these definitions have in common are their respective emphases on one's ability to use the features and
239 affordances of internet-based platforms (i.e., properties that emerge in the interaction between a technology's features
240 and users' perceptions of what that technology enables) [55, 56, 61] to present oneself to a variety of audiences and to
241 consume, generate, and engage with others' content. As the present study primarily focuses on the platforms Reddit,
242 Discord, and Instagram ⁵, we describe these platforms' features and affordances in relation to self-presentation and
243 sharing and/or engaging with user-generated content next. We note that each platform houses constellations of smaller
244 topical or identity-based online communities that are relevant to the current study.
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247 2.2.1 *Reddit*. Boasting 52 million daily active users and over 138,000 active topical communities, or ‘subreddits’ [102]
248 ranging from those that discuss television shows to those that house college application advice, Reddit serves as a
249 public discussion forum combining pseudonymity and community-based moderation. Users adopt pseudonyms – both
250 persistent usernames and ephemeral “throwaway accounts” to engage on the platform, though their participation
251 histories within the platform are publicly available [87], with throwaway accounts affording more anonymity which
252 can be useful for discourse about sensitive and stigmatized topics [8, 9]. Reddit's approach to content moderation
253 relies on two levels of moderation: 1) higher-level, site-wide moderation (i.e., banning entire subreddits dedicated to
254 hate speech), and 2) volunteer moderation within individual subreddits. Volunteer moderation consists of appointed
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257 ⁵While we focus on Reddit, Discord, and Instagram because these were mentioned most by our participants, we emphasize that we did not set out to
258 focus on these platforms in particular when designing this study.
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members of a given subreddit working together to moderate content, both through direct moderation tools and through the community's "upvoting" and "downvoting" of content to promote or demote its visibility [102, 120]. Reddit also allows its subreddits to develop their own community guidelines, and deploy polls to survey the community in order to govern and moderate more effectively.

2.2.2 Discord. Originated to support online gaming communities and popularized during the COVID-19 pandemic, Discord combines text, voice, and video chat functionality and enables users to create their own "servers" to which they must invite others to join [116]. These servers span purposes ranging from discussion of video games to support groups for specific identity groups. Within servers, users can create "channels", or chat rooms, to discuss relevant topics [116]. Users assume particular platform governance 'roles' including owner, administrator, moderator, and member [107]. Moreover, server owners, administrators, and moderators can integrate "bots" and other tools to moderate content produced and distributed within the server [60]. While originally developed and utilized in the context of gaming, the platform has become increasingly used in K-12 and post-secondary education contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic [133].

2.2.3 Instagram. Instagram is a visual image-sharing platform involving networks of "followers" and those whom they follow [119]. Unlike platforms like Facebook which rely on reciprocated networks of "Friends", Instagram does not require relational reciprocity – one user may follow a user who does not follow them back [119]. In addition to persistently available "posts", Instagram enables users to share ephemeral "Stories" that disappear after 24 hours, enabling some users to engage in less restrained, more "authentic" self-presentation [85, 128]. Instagram also allows users to create multiple accounts, and some users leverage this ability to create "Rinstas" ("real" Instagram accounts where they engage in selective self-presentation) and "Finstas" (so-called "fake" Instagram accounts where they engage in less restrained self-presentation to smaller, presumably trusted audiences) [76, 140].

2.3 The Promises and Perils of Social Media Use: Self-Disclosure for Social Support-Seeking

Social media's affordances have the potential to shape perceptions of visibility and safety or exchanging social support, to name a few. For example, elements of social media platforms like the profile, direct messages, and the stream lend themselves to divergent uses and ultimate outcomes, both positive and negative, like social capital accrual and (in)authentic self-presentation [19].

On the one hand, reported benefits of self-presentation and self-disclosure include identity work, self-expression, and social support exchange. Social media platforms allow users to create and curate visible profiles wherein they can reveal (and conceal) various aspects of themselves to others, a process called self-disclosure. Self-disclosure describes revelations of aspects of oneself to others [82]. The CSCW community has long examined self-disclosure practices, decisions, and outcomes on social media (e.g., [84]), including for marginalized individuals (e.g., [11, 54, 109]). For example, when engaging in self-disclosure, social media users can experiment and receive feedback on provisional selves (i.e., desired "possible selves" that people explore and experiment with) [77, 89, 96]. Much of what people choose to portray about themselves is positive [106], especially in social media spaces that connect people to their networks of known ties (e.g., family, friends), enabling them to engage in selective self-presentation [135] and enforce legal name policies [20, 71]. Yet, social media users can also express more stigmatized identities and experiences via self-disclosure processes which can lead to gaining various kinds of social support [8, 12, 14, 118] such as emotional, informational, networked, esteem-boosting, and tangible [44]. Moreover, disclosure processes can aid in destigmatizing experiences and identities [4, 17, 59] and fostering a sense of community [4, 17].

313 On the other hand, self-presentation and self-disclosure via social media platforms may create, perpetuate, and/or
314 enable harm, including but not limited to online harassment [132] or intra-community harm steeped in uneven
315 power relations [134]. A 2021 report from Pew Research shows that 41% of U.S. adults have personally experienced
316 online harassment, and 25% have experienced severe harassment online [132]. While harassment is widespread, it
317 disproportionately impacts individuals from historically marginalized communities, such as women, people of color,
318 and queer individuals [21, 130]. Moreover, online harassment uniquely impacts those who embody multiple historically
319 marginalized identities, such as Black women who experience *misogynoir* or “anti-Black racist misogyny...in US visual
320 and digital culture” [15]. Those who face stigmatization and harassment online sometimes opt to change the ways they
321 engage with platforms via self-censorship or deletion of their digital traces [35]. Some choose to disengage with or
322 depart from platforms entirely [35].
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324 While support can be attained more passively on social media (i.e., through lurking to activate passive appraisal
325 support [117]), prior work suggests that disclosures can help social media users attain relevant forms of social support
326 [92]. This phenomenon is especially pertinent when social media users embody one or more marginalized or stigmatized
327 identities, as these individuals may feel safer or freer making disclosures online compared to disclosures to their offline
328 networks. For instance, social media disclosures helped those with stigmatized illnesses (e.g., depression) exchange
329 support [45] and those who have undergone stigmatized experiences (e.g., sexual abuse) [8]. Disclosures on social
330 media can impact both users’ perceptions of social support as well as enacted support, which has positive downstream
331 influences on well-being [92]. Yet, while disclosures are linked to beneficial forms of social support as well as social
332 capital, privacy concerns [53, 123], fear of stigmatization [5], positivity bias (i.e., the favoring of positive forms of
333 authentic self-presentation over negative ones) [5, 106], and perceiving difference from one’s audience [5] are among
334 factors that may inhibit users’ disclosure behaviors posing barriers to actualize potential benefits.
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336 Taken together, prior work suggests that social media can be beneficial to marginalized groups, including in the
337 context of college access for FGLI students. Work outside of the FGLI and educational context argues that disclosure
338 acts as a key mediator between social media platforms and benefits like social support [92], while work that considers
339 FGLI students’ social media use has not explicitly considered disclosure decisions and behaviors. Yet, the transition to
340 college is a major life event involving considerable social readjustment and is typically shared online both with broad
341 and insular audiences [69]. Given that many of the reported benefits of social media use hinge upon one’s ability to
342 share or disclose their identities and experiences, it is relevant to examine the social media disclosure decisions and
343 behaviors of FGLI students as they apply to and select a college or university to attend. Moreover, work on adverse
344 outcomes of social media use (e.g., online harassment, stigmatization) raises questions about how these phenomena
345 may play a role in FGLI students’ social media experience during this pivotal life stage. Thus, we ask the following
346 research questions:
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- 348 • **RQ1:** *How do FGLI identity disclosures on social media platforms facilitate or disrupt students’ access to college-*
349 *related social support during the college application and selection processes?*
 - 350 • **RQ2:** *How do FGLI students describe characteristics of ideal social media environments that would allow them to*
351 *find needed support during the college application and selection processes?*
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3 METHODS

3.1 Methodological Approach

This project investigated how students disclosed their FGLI identities on social media during the college application and selection processes and how (if at all) these disclosures were associated with outcomes related to college-related social support exchanges. We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty students ($N = 20$) who had completed the college application and selection process in the last academic year (2020- 2021 at the time of data collection). We used a qualitative approach to elicit a rich understanding not only of the disclosures themselves, but the contextual factors (e.g., attitudes toward social media, general usage of social media, and motivations behind their use) in which these disclosures were rooted, which may have implications for the outcomes students perceive because of these social media experiences. While we did not measure the positive or negative effects of these disclosures per se, we asked participants their perceptions of what the implications of these disclosures were regarding social support. Our research took an inductive approach wherein presented themes were derived from gathered data, not a priori frameworks [127].

3.2 Researcher Positionality

The research team comprises insiders and outsiders to the population of interest. The first author identifies as FGLI and relied heavily on YouTube to understand what it meant to be a college student before transitioning to college. They have experience studying social media, identity, stigma, self-disclosure, and FGLI students. The second author has studied and implemented interventions to address college access issues for low-income, first-generation, and minority students. The last author has examined social media, identity, disclosure, and marginality. They did not have the terminology to refer to first-generation students growing up outside the US, but their mom went to college when the second author was in elementary/middle school, shaping their relationship to education.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Recruitment. We recruited participants via the social media platforms Instagram and Discord to ensure that participants were active social media users in diverse geographical locations. We chose Instagram as a recruitment site because of its popularity among adolescents [13]. On Instagram, the first author posted the recruitment flyer containing a QR code linking to the screening survey, accompanied by relevant hashtags (e.g., #FGLI, #ApplyingToCollege). While we initially pursued Reddit as an avenue for targeted recruitment of students applying for college, tight moderation efforts prevented recruitment directly from the r/ApplyingtoCollege community. Instead, we recruited in public Discord servers promoted within the relevant subreddit r/ApplyingtoCollege. The first author joined the server and obtained server moderators' permission to post the flyer and a link to the screening survey within one of the server's channels. Students were eligible to participate if they were 1) age 18 or over, 2) self-identified as being a first-generation student (low-income students were preferred, but it was not a requirement to participate), 3) applied to an undergraduate program in the 2020 - 2021 application cycle.

3.3.2 Screening Survey. We invited interested participants to fill out a screening survey that asked about their demographics (including whether they identified as a first-generation student and/or a low-income student)⁶, how important the first-generation identity was to them, their general social media use, whether they disclosed their first-generation

⁶We opted to rely on self-identification to determine low-income status, as opposed to basing identification on income thresholds, because these thresholds may not account for family size and location which can determine students' lived experience with poverty.

identity on social media during the college application and/or selection process, and on which platforms they did or did not disclose this information. The full screening survey and interview protocol can be found in Appendix A. In total, and over the period of one month, we received 104 complete responses to the screening survey. We excluded 42 survey respondents because they were 1) under 18, 2) not first-generation students, or 3) applied to an undergraduate program before 2020, and thus were ineligible to participate in interviews. From there, we engaged in purposive sampling, inviting 32 of the 62 eligible participants to schedule an interview. Purposive sampling, or judgment sampling, “involves selecting a sample of participants who are most likely to address the research question efficiently” [22]. Because there are documented differences among first-generation students’ experiences based on factors like race/ethnicity [37, 111], and gender [37], we purposively selected 32 participants to invite who varied along these dimensions to ascertain how a variety of FGLI students experienced identity disclosures on social media. We continued to schedule and conduct interviews until we no longer discovered new themes, signaling saturation [98]. In total, 20 invited participants scheduled and completed an interview. Interviews ranged from 45 to 65 minutes (average = 55 minutes) and took place via the online video conferencing platform Zoom in May and June of 2021. Interviews covered how participants used social media when applying to and selecting a college, why they did or did not disclose their FGLI identities during this process, and what outcomes they perceived because of their (non)disclosure. All participants were offered \$25 USD gift cards. Our institution’s IRB determined the study exempt.

3.3.3 Participants’ Socio-Demographic Information. Table 1 includes additional information about participants’ self-reported socio-demographic information ⁷. To summarize, participants reflected a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, with nearly 50% of participants identifying as Latino/a/x and over 25% identifying as Asian. Approximately half of the participants identified as men, with about half identifying as women. Table 2 includes additional information about the salience of participants’ FGLI identities, their perceptions of being judged based on FGLI identities, and their social media FGLI identity disclosure behaviors. Generally, most participants felt that their first-generation identities were at least moderately important (95%), disclosed on at least one platform (80%), and perceived judgment of their first-generation identities at least once (80%). Identity salience may have influenced participants’ disclosure behaviors, as those who identified more strongly with being FGLI may have also been more willing to disclose this identity on social media platforms.

3.4 Data Analysis

The automated transcription service Otter.ai transcribed all twenty transcripts, which the first author then checked manually by listening to the audio recordings of each interview and writing descriptive memos. Next, the first author engaged in first-cycle coding ⁸ of all twenty transcripts using ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. In this first-cycle coding process, the first author engaged in a combination of provisional coding and open coding, analyzing data by assigning codes based on knowledge of the literature on social media disclosures, stigma, and social support (e.g., [2, 4, 9, 11, 33, 39, 87, 92, 131]) (provisional coding) while remaining open to new themes that may surface inductively (open coding) [110]. This first-cycle coding process resulted in an initial codebook, which was revised in an iterative process as the first author collapsed, condensed, and specified codes throughout the second-cycle coding ⁹ process. In

⁷The screening survey included demographic questions that offered multiple pre-defined answer options (e.g., man, non-binary) and allowed participants to select multiple options. Each question included an open-ended text box for students to share identities that they felt were not represented within the pre-defined answer options (e.g., Trans-Male, P4).

⁸The first cycle coding process refers to the beginning stages of data analysis in which data is split into individually coded segments [110].

⁹The second cycle coding process refers to the process of filtering and highlighting salient data to generate broader categories and themes for theory-building [110].

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P#	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Low-Income?
1	Asian	Man	Yes
2	Latino/a/x & Indigenous	Man	Yes
3	Latino/a/x & White	Woman	Yes
4	White	Trans-Male	Yes
5	Latino/a/x & White	Woman	Yes
6	Latino/a/x	Man	Yes
7	Black	Woman	Yes
8	Asian	Man	Yes
9	Latino/a/x	Woman	Yes
10	Middle Eastern & White	Man	Yes
11	Latino/a/x	Man	No
12	Asian	Woman	Yes
13	Asian	Man	Yes
14	Latino/a/x	Woman	Yes
15	Latino/a/x	Woman	Yes
16	Asian	Man	Yes
17	North African	Woman	Yes
18	Latino/a/x & White	Woman	Yes
19	Asian	Woman	Yes
20	Asian	Man	Yes

Table 1. Participants' Self-Reported Socio-Demographic Information

P#	FGLI Identity Salience	FGLI Judgment Perceptions (Y or N)	Disclosed FGLI Identities on at Least One Platform?
1	Very Important	Yes	Yes
2	Extremely Important	Yes	Yes
3	Very Important	Yes	Only on certain platforms to certain people
4	Very Important	Yes	Yes
5	Moderately Important	Yes	Yes
6	Very Important	Yes	Not directly/for public information
7	Extremely Important	No	No
8	Very Important	No	Yes
9	Extremely Important	No	Yes
10	Slightly Important	No	No
11	Very Important	Yes	No
12	Very Important	Yes	Yes
13	Very Important	Yes	Yes
14	Extremely Important	Yes	Yes
15	Moderately Important	Yes	Yes
16	Extremely Important	Yes	Situational/Depending on the context
17	Very Important	Yes	Yes
18	Extremely Important	Yes	Yes
19	Extremely Important	Yes	Yes
20	Extremely Important	Yes	Yes

Table 2. Participants' Self-Reported FGLI Identity Salience, Judgment Perceptions, and Social Media Disclosure Behavior

P#	Social Media Platforms Used
1	Facebook, Twitter, Discord, Reddit, Instagram
2	TikTok, Twitter, Discord, Reddit, Instagram
3	Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, Discord
4	Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, Reddit, Instagram
5	Discord, Reddit, Instagram
6	TikTok, Discord, Reddit, Instagram
7	Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Discord, Reddit, Instagram
8	LinkedIn, TikTok, Discord, Reddit, Instagram
9	Facebook, Discord, Reddit, Instagram
10	TikTok, Reddit, Instagram
11	Facebook, Instagram
12	Facebook, TikTok, Discord, Reddit, Instagram
13	Facebook, TikTok, Discord, Reddit, Instagram
14	Facebook, Discord, Reddit, Instagram
15	Facebook, TikTok
16	Facebook, TikTok, Discord, Reddit, Instagram
17	Snapchat, TikTok, Discord, Reddit, Instagram
18	Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Instagram
19	Facebook, Discord, Reddit, Instagram
20	Discord, Reddit, Instagram

Table 3. Social Media Platforms Used by Participants During the College Application and Selection Processes

this phase of analysis (after two rounds of coding), the first author determined that they reached theoretical saturation [57, 74], meaning they ceased seeing new themes surface in the analysis process, and generated the themes that animate this paper.

4 FINDINGS

Overall, participants varied in their experiences disclosing their FGLI identities on social media. While many did disclose their identities, these participants acknowledged both anticipated and enacted experiences of stigmatization on social media related to their FGLI identities. Anticipating these reactions, some participants opted for indirect disclosures [11] made to audiences of similar others. Although participants reported widespread anticipated [33] and enacted [113] stigma in response to their identity disclosures, many participants also described experiences with identity disclosures that facilitated long-term social support exchanges, albeit in insular first-generation student online communities housed within platforms like Discord. However, stigma related to one's first-generation, low-income identities and college acceptances sometimes compromised or disrupted support exchange processes by influencing students to abandon certain online support spaces. In the following sections, we elaborate on these findings and describe participants' ideal social media spaces for social support exchange as they prepare to navigate post-secondary institutions. Table 3 lists the social media platforms used by participants when they applied to and selected a college.

4.1 FGLI Identity Disclosures Facilitated College-Related Social Support Exchange

Participants often described disclosures of their FGLI identities on social media platforms (mainly Reddit, Discord, and Instagram) in favorable terms. Specifically, participants noted that these disclosures helped them receive the kinds of

573 social support (e.g., informational, emotional, esteem) critical for successfully maneuvering through higher education
574 institutions. Students primarily reported receiving this support in two ways: through interactions with non-similar
575 others along the FGLI identity dimension (e.g., continuing-generation students on college-related subreddits) and
576 through interactions in more insular online communities consisting of students who shared the FGLI identity dimension
577 (e.g., in FGLI Discord servers).

579 Interactions with non-similar others (i.e., a wider audience of primarily continuing-generation students) typically
580 took place on Reddit, usually within one of the myriad subreddits devoted to discussing college applications and results.
581 Several participants described these subreddits' general demographic composition, noting that FGLI students were not
582 particularly well-represented. For instance, P17, who used Snapchat, TikTok, Discord, Reddit, and Instagram, notes:

584 The applying to college Reddit does a census every year where they basically poll all the members about
585 their experiences, and they get a lot of data from there... race, income. The majority of people there are
586 extremely rich. And it shows in all the posts... a lot of people talk about tutoring for standardized testing
587 or something. I didn't get any tutoring, I had to pirate textbooks to be able to study for the ACT ¹⁰. A
588 lot of people talk about struggling with having parents who are overbearing and are really insistent
589 about them getting into top schools to maintain a social circle, [but] my parents don't even know the
590 names of the majority of the schools I applied to. So those experiences are very different from mine.
591 Definitely very rich, concentrated, generally, and that's proven in the census.

594 Participants like P17 knew that the network of latent ties (i.e., ties that are technically possible but have not yet
595 been socially activated) [72] they could access on this subreddit was unlike themselves socioeconomically, and thus
596 these latent ties could not necessarily relate to their experiences as FGLI students. This lends support to the notion
597 that supportive spaces online are not necessarily supportive to everyone or in an equitable way. Multiply marginalized
598 users tend to face additional barriers to finding support or at the very least, representation, a finding identified in prior
599 work (e.g., [10]).

602 While this online community was technically supportive for those with college-going aspirations, the demographics
603 of the community and the kinds of topics they discuss are, according to many participants, steeped in experiences of
604 privilege, rendering this community less supportive for FGLI students. Additionally, the racial/ethnic and socioeconomic
605 composition of the Reddit r/ApplyingtoCollege community led some participants to believe that they would not be
606 welcome. For instance, P8, who used LinkedIn, TikTok, Discord, Reddit, and Instagram, noted:

608 So, I've seen a demographic survey of the subreddit I talked about and it tends to skew towards
609 white, Asian... white and Asian males. And I think their average income, like, the median income was
610 like \$230,000, which is more than 10 times my family income. So, um, I kind of knew that like, the
611 environment was not going to be like the most inclusive.

614 Most participants were both Latinx and low-income students who could not necessarily identify with the lived
615 experiences of the more affluent white and (east) Asian students that they were exposed to by browsing popular
616 college-related subreddits. Moreover, although P8 was an Asian young man, he could not identify with his Asian peers
617 within the subreddit because of their perceived stark socioeconomic differences. Thus, aligned with prior work [6, 10],
618 knowing in aggregate who is and is not represented in an online community has implications for perceptions and
619 anticipations of that space's utility for exchanging support.

621 ¹⁰The ACT is a standardized test used for college admissions in the United States which covers English, mathematics, reading, and scientific reasoning
622 skills.

625 While some participants experienced real barriers to gaining support as described above, several participants noted
626 receiving informational and emotional support within these college-related subreddits despite these demographic and
627 identity differences. For example, P1, who used Facebook, Twitter, Discord, Reddit, and Instagram, described disclosing
628 his identity on Reddit, saying, *“I was debating whether I should apply to the Questbridge process or if I should apply to the
629 regular process. So I posted a Reddit post saying, ‘Hey, like, here are my demographics. I’m first gen, I’m low-income. Do you
630 think I should apply to Questbridge?’”* In response to his disclosures, P1 discovered a college preparation program on the
631 platform, noting, *“Like the [college access program] through the [college outreach office], I saw on Reddit and I applied, I got
632 in, I did that, it was awesome.”* This program helps underserved students engage in online courses and research projects
633 and brings students to a prestigious university to ask questions of admissions counselors and financial aid officers. P1’s
634 r/ApplyingtoCollege Reddit interactions, specifically his identity disclosures, served as a critical bridge between himself
635 and this opportunity, which provided him with a sense of what academic life was like at a post-secondary institution
636 and help him accrue relevant forms of social support, including instrumental/tangible support in the form of college
637 access programs geared toward FGLI students. Thus, the ability to reap informational, emotional and even instrumental
638 support benefits was particularly salient for those able to safely (i.e., without anticipated or enacted stigmatization)
639 disclose their identities in support spaces within overarching platforms such as Reddit with broader audiences of
640 non-similar others. Unfortunately, as described in the next section (Section 4.2), this was not always the case.

641 In contrast to many participants’ experiences disclosing their FGLI identities on college-related subreddits, most
642 participants described highly supportive responses to sharing their identities within Discord servers specifically made for
643 FGLI students. While the prevalence of Discord use was possibly a function of our recruitment routes, we nevertheless
644 found that FGLI students reported feeling more comfortable sharing their experiences as FGLI students with similar
645 others in these kinds of insular, invite-only spaces. According to P3, who used Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter,
646 and Discord:

647 I think having that baseline, [the] same background, makes it so much easier to talk about it. If I’m so
648 confused about something or I’m not really sure what a certain term means or how to research certain
649 things or how to respond to certain emails for interviews for colleges, things like that. I can definitely
650 ask them and I feel so confident.
651

652 College-related subreddits and Discord servers both provided some participants with the informational support that
653 they needed to effectively navigate the application processes for universities and mentally prepare for what life would
654 be like at post-secondary institutions. However, FGLI-centric Discord servers more often provided students with the
655 emotional and even esteem support (or, as P3 notes, confidence) that was intrinsic to their persistence and psychological
656 well-being. As P2, who used TikTok, Twitter, Discord, Reddit, and Instagram, notes, participants felt it was *“a little bit
657 easier to be more vulnerable”* and to disclose among peers with shared socio-economic backgrounds. While the relevance
658 of Discord to our participants could have been a result of our social media-based recruitment strategy, these findings
659 nonetheless highlight the ways that insular online communities for FGLI students helped encourage disclosures that
660 were met with emotionally supportive responses.
661

662 Participants tended to extract relevant information from online communities whose membership consisted of non-
663 similar others and then recirculate it within FGLI online communities that were already rich with emotional support.
664 For example, P5, who used Discord, Reddit, and Instagram, described the QuestBridge Discord server, a server for FGLI
665 students, as a space where *“a lot of people use the pins to share information or share scholarships, or other opportunities,
666 like fly-in programs. And that was really helpful. Because my school doesn’t provide a lot of those resources.”* Features
667

677 like pins and bots thus facilitated the recirculation of informational support content obtained from college-related
678 subreddits to Discord servers, making it easier for the FGLI community to organize and keep track of resources most
679 relevant to their community. By recirculating information they had learned from more affluent students with fellow
680 FGLI students, participants were able to more effectively find relevant information without the potential for distressing
681 or stigmatizing interactions. For instance, P5 learned about fly-in programs (i.e., programs hosted by a university that
682 allows students to “fly in” and visit the campus) and other FGLI-specific resources. Broadly speaking, students reported
683 that interactions in FGLI-specific online communities housed within popular platforms, in which identity disclosure
684 played an intrinsic role, helped them accrue the college-related social support necessary to familiarize themselves with
685 institutions.
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687
688

689 **4.2 Stigmatizing Responses to FGLI Identity Disclosures Disrupted Access to College-Related Social** 690 **Support** 691

692 When identity disclosures on social media platforms like Reddit, Discord, and Instagram were received positively (or
693 even neutrally), participants reported being able to cultivate the kinds of college-related social support necessary to
694 become familiar with and prepared for collegiate environments. However, most participants did describe situations
695 in which their online FGLI identity disclosures resulted in what they perceived as stigma, particularly when their
696 college-related accomplishments were attributed to their identities as opposed to their efforts. The stigmatization of
697 FGLI identities and experiences can disrupt the exchange of social support, as students may decide to forgo participation
698 in online support spaces on Reddit, Discord, and Instagram to protect themselves psychologically.
699

700 Participants described experiences of stigmatization most commonly on the platform Reddit, within college-going
701 subreddits like r/ApplyingtoCollege, r/ChanceMe, and r/CollegeResults. In many cases, FGLI participants’ identity
702 disclosures led to conflict and stigmatization, mainly around the time of year in which universities release admissions
703 decisions. Often, stigmatizing responses to FGLI identity disclosures harbored anti-affirmative action sentiment. For
704 example, P1, who used Facebook, Twitter, Discord, Reddit, and Instagram, noted that *“sometimes you would just post a*
705 *college result and they would say, ‘You only got in because you’re poor. You only got in because you’re Hispanic’, that kind*
706 *of thing.”* P1 describes his experience disclosing in r/CollegeResults, a subreddit that asks students to post their college
707 acceptances and rejections along with relevant statistics and demographic characteristics to give readers a sense of
708 how their applications compare and what kinds of decisions they can expect. The heightened emotional environment
709 after decisions are released makes this subreddit prime territory for the indirect stigmatization of FGLI students like
710 P1, who reported feeling scapegoated for the rejections of more affluent students. P5, who used Discord, Reddit, and
711 Instagram, described a challenging experience on Reddit’s r/CollegeResults where, according to her, *“once I posted*
712 *on Reddit, I was like, ‘Oh hey, I got into this school,’ and there is a person that responded to me and they said, ‘Congrats*
713 *on being an underrepresented minority and first gen because I doubt you would have gotten in otherwise.’ And that was*
714 *very discouraging.”* Describing the impact of stigmatizing responses to her identity disclosure in the context of her
715 college acceptances, P5 noted, *“it made me feel like I didn’t really deserve my acceptance to that school.”* Thus, this
716 participant recalled responses to her identity disclosure in a college-specific subreddit that led her to doubt herself and
717 her accomplishments.
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723 Experiences of stigmatization in general college-related subreddits were not just emotionally frustrating, according
724 to participant reports, but also ostracizing. Participants described discounting these subreddit support spaces entirely in
725 response to experiences with *“toxicity,”* a term used by nearly all participants to describe Reddit and/or the college-
726 going community housed within the platform. For example, P5, who had a particularly negative experience with
727
728

729 anti-affirmative action rhetoric and stigmatization, noted, *“And when I started to see those posts more and more, I’d stop*
730 *going on that subreddit, because it just made me very uncomfortable...it just made me want to delete the app and never open*
731 *it again.”* P5, who noted that she received informational support from browsing college-related subreddits earlier in the
732 interview, reported abandoning them as support spaces for her transition to an institution because of the increasing
733 pervasiveness of stigma directed at FGLI and students of color. P8, who used LinkedIn, TikTok, Discord, Reddit, and
734 Instagram, described a similar experience, saying, *“The way they treat females and underrepresented minorities was also*
735 *kind of weird as well. But mostly just microaggressive. So that’s why I didn’t want to use Reddit, it’s just not the most*
736 *comfortable space, I’d say.”* While not directly reporting on stigma aimed at FGLI students, P8’s experience reflects how
737 consumption of content that stigmatized underrepresented students (e.g., non-white or non-East Asian women, people
738 of color, and low-income folks) within the support space influenced his subsequent college-related support-seeking
739 experiences within that space.
740

741 Broadly, experiences of stigmatization on Reddit in response to identity disclosures compromised students’ ability to
742 reap college-related social support within online support spaces. First, it disrupted their perceptions of belongingness
743 within conversations around college that took place online. Second, it influenced participants to change their behavior
744 by ceasing participation in college-related subreddits, and by abandoning (or considering abandoning in some cases)
745 these subreddits altogether. Abandonment effectively barred these spaces from serving as sources of support in their
746 subsequent transitions to higher education.
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750 4.3 FGLI Students’ Reddit Content Moderation Preferences

751 Above, we described participants’ experiences with and perceptions of various existing social media spaces vis-a-
752 vis FGLI identity disclosures and the receipt of social support. But what might an online environment specifically
753 designed to facilitate these kinds of support exchanges look like? RQ2 asked about FGLI participants’ ideal social media
754 environment, or one that would effectively provide them with the social support needed to successfully complete the
755 college application and selection processes. In their responses, participants consistently emphasized improvements to
756 content moderation on Reddit that could render college-related subreddits more ideal social media environments, as
757 they acknowledged that college-related subreddits were rich in informational resources and that, with effective content
758 moderation, they could also be rich in emotional support for FGLI students. In this section, we describe these responses,
759 focusing specifically on content moderation and Reddit as participants consistently narrowly focused on college-related
760 subreddits and content moderation when describing desired improvements and ideal social media environments.
761

762 Specifically, participants pointed to incidents where they experienced stigmatizing or painful remarks on social
763 media based on their FGLI identities, and primarily referred to content moderation practices and policies as ways in
764 which stigmatization of the FGLI identity (as well as other identities underrepresented in higher education) on Reddit
765 could be curbed, making Reddit a more efficacious space for college-related support-seeking. P5, for example, who used
766 Discord, Reddit, and Instagram, explicitly stated: *“I feel like moderation should be improved. And people that have these*
767 *racist or elitist thoughts should be shamed for thinking that way.”* While improved content moderation was a shared goal
768 across participants, there was little agreement on exactly what measures should be put in place.
769

770 Some students, referencing experiences with perceived stigmatization on Reddit, suggested auto-moderation tools.
771 For instance, P5 wanted auto-moderation to tackle identity-based stigma on Reddit *“because I know one of my friends*
772 *got called the N-word on one of these subreddits. And he was very hurt by it.”* At the same time as they advocated for
773 automated moderation, P5 recognized its limitations, noting, *“you also can’t ban words like underrepresented minority or*
774 *low income, first-gen, because these are words that people use to have conversations about their challenges.”* This quote
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781 highlights a central tension associated with curbing socio-economic stigmatization on Reddit. While moderation “bots”
782 could be implemented in subreddits to possibly detect and eliminate more blatant identity-based discrimination (i.e.,
783 slurs like P5 mentioned), users may invoke proxy terms to discuss affirmative action without detection by automated
784 moderation tools. As not all discussions of affirmative action are stigmatizing, it is similarly challenging for automated
785 moderation tools to understand the intent and impacts of these kinds of comments well enough to respond accordingly. The fact
786 that affirmative action comments may be innocuous or stigmatizing suggests the need for a multi-pronged approach
787 involving some degree of human moderation.
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789

790 Human moderators on college-related subreddits who are also FGLI community members could perform a broader
791 range of actions to render Reddit a safer space for support and support-seeking amongst FGLI students. For instance,
792 they could institute and update subreddit-specific community guidelines, as described by P5, who says, “*I feel like maybe*
793 *having something in the rules about just being friendly to people if they are from an underprivileged background.*” Noting a
794 possible limitation to this platform governance strategy, P7, who used Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Discord, Reddit,
795 and Instagram, elaborated:
796

797 But other than the guidelines...I don’t think people read that. Maybe it’s like they could insert a banner
798 when they know that this might be like a hateful community or something like before you go on the
799 Chance Me Reddit ¹¹, maybe a banner could come up that says, “Please be aware that some of these
800 things might be hateful” or something. “So please take caution and be cautious of your mental health
801 and don’t take what they say as truth.”
802
803

804 Rather than focusing on punitive (as described by P5, for example), top-down, community-specific guidelines, P7
805 noted that one potential intervention could involve proactively taking advantage of Reddit’s features, like banners, to
806 set expectations and norms among members of a given subreddit community. This may be a more effective short-term
807 intervention, as calibrating new community members’ expectations might be easier than trying to enforce pro-social
808 behavior, especially given the entrenched nature of other norms.
809

810 Beyond community-specific human moderation, some participants emphasized the importance of human-driven
811 platform-wide moderation tactics on Reddit. P12, for example, who used Facebook, TikTok, Discord, Reddit, and
812 Instagram, explained:
813

814 I assume it would just take a lot more moderation from Reddit [itself]. But I know there are a lot of
815 problems with that. Because you don’t want to get into censoring people, so I think it’s very tricky,
816 but probably more careful moderation from Reddit, especially in communities where there are a lot of
817 teenagers and people applying to college and children.
818

819 While P12 explicitly notes additional considerations around censorship, she recognized the importance of content
820 moderation on Reddit, especially when communities germane to marginalized adolescent populations are involved. We
821 return to this point later in the Discussion when we consider how content warnings on Reddit may allow platforms to
822 engage in forms of content moderation that move away from censorship while providing FGLI students with more
823 agency and control over their exposure to potentially stigmatizing content.
824

825
826 ¹¹This quote refers to the subreddit r/ChanceMe, an online community where students seek feedback from community members regarding their chances
827 of acceptance at a particular university.
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5 DISCUSSION

Our findings suggest that participants' FGLI identity disclosures on social media, particularly Instagram, Reddit, and Discord, can serve as facilitators and disruptors of college-related social support exchanges. Supportive online conversations around these disclosures enabled some students to accrue valuable college-related social support. However, enacted stigmatization [113] in response to disclosures disrupted access to support on these platforms by making them feel unsafe and psychologically harmful for FGLI users. In interpreting our findings, we make the following contributions:

- Bridges the privileged poor framework [80] with social media research to argue that social media interactions and perceptions can also help FGLI students become one of the privileged poor
- Transposes the social transition machinery framework [66] to the college access context and introduces the concept of social transition disruptors
- Describes how stigmatization on social media carries implications for online support space abandonment and reflects on implications for long-term support seeking
- Provides design considerations related to addressing stigmatization in college-related subreddits via content moderation mechanisms, including content warnings

5.1 Social Media, Social Transition Machinery, and the Privileged Poor

Our findings indicate that identity disclosures could play prominent roles in facilitating access to primarily informational and emotional forms of college-related social support, corroborating past work on online identity disclosures and social support receipt (i.e., [8, 34, 39, 67, 104]) and extending past works' findings to the college access context for FGLI students. Identity disclosures can help support providers give more tailored informational support, as evidenced by participants who received recommendations for college access programs after sharing their FGLI status on platforms like Reddit. Moreover, identity disclosures can help engender affiliations between individuals who share the FGLI identity, making space for longer-term support exchanges, as evidenced by participants who engaged in-depth with fellow FGLI students in college-related Discord servers. Taken together, the stories shared by participants indicate that informational and emotional support helped them feel not only informed about what college life would look like but also psychologically prepared, similar to how other work has documented the role of social media in demystifying the college experience for FGLI students [96].

Considering these findings, we argue that identity disclosures on platforms like Instagram, Reddit, and Discord can help FGLI students attain forms of informational and emotional college-related social support that position them to access and possibly persist in higher education environments, representing a shift from a "doubly disadvantaged" student to a member of the "privileged poor" [80]. This terminology stems from Anthony Abraham Jack's [80] book, which describes how some FGLI students attend preparatory high schools that help them become one of the "privileged poor", or a low-income student that is exposed to "an early introduction of the world they will enter in college" [80]. According to Jack, other FGLI students occupy the role of "doubly disadvantaged," meaning that they are both low-income and lack familiarity with the environments of many post-secondary institutions. We argue that the doubly disadvantaged/privileged poor framing gives updated language to an extant body of work on social media and college access for first-generation, low-income students (e.g., [26, 47, 81, 96]) and conceptualizes the relationship between social media interactions and students' development of the kinds of capital that help them shift between the "doubly disadvantaged" and "privileged poor" categories [80].

885 These findings have several implications for researchers working with FGLI populations. Notably, our work suggests
886 that scholars should study students' social media interactions and ecologies [142] to ascertain how the use of multiple
887 social media platforms (and the kinds of activities students engage in across these platforms) can facilitate myriad forms
888 of support exchange. By focusing on FGLI students' social media ecologies rather than their use of a single platform,
889 we were able to derive findings that demonstrate that FGLI students engaged on social media with both those similar
890 and non-similar to them on the FGLI identity dimension, including peers they may not typically access in their offline
891 networks, echoing prior work on social media social support exchange both in the context of college access (e.g., [47])
892 and in other contexts (e.g., [8]). Moreover, students were able to accrue informational support on Reddit (despite dealing
893 with stigmatized responses to their identity disclosures) and transfer this informational support to more emotionally
894 supportive FGLI-centric Discord servers. Future work can elucidate the strengths FGLI students possess and accrue in
895 online environments (e.g., Community Cultural Wealth, see [25]) and understand how engagement on social media
896 platforms may replicate or exacerbate some of the struggles FGLI students face offline as they seek social support.
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900 In addition to informing research with FGLI populations, these findings carry implications for social media research
901 in that they demonstrate the utility of the social transition machinery framework [66] in the college access context.
902 Social transition machinery "describes the ways that, for people facing life transitions, multiple social media sites
903 remain separate and serve different purposes yet work together to facilitate life transitions" [66]. For FGLI students,
904 transitioning from home communities to post-secondary institutions can be particularly difficult and stressful [86].
905 Students' ability to navigate this transition successfully (as a member of the "privileged poor") has consequences for
906 their later persistence and academic success. Findings from this study corroborate that social media interactions such as
907 identity disclosures can facilitate this transition. As such, this study extends the social transition machinery framework
908 to a new context of FGLI students and college access. Unlike the platforms Tumblr and Facebook, which in tandem
909 formed the social transition machinery for the transgender participants in Haimson's [66] work, participants in the
910 present study engaged in interactions on college-related online communities primarily within both Reddit and Discord,
911 but also on Instagram, to facilitate the eventual transition to college.
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915 Participants' experiences reflected Haimson's theorization of social transition machinery in several ways. For instance,
916 both Reddit's and Discord's college-related online communities provided participants with unique forms of social
917 support, typically informational support from Reddit and emotional and esteem support from Discord. Additionally,
918 participants were able to highlight different aspects of their identities in different communities on Reddit and Discord.
919 While the trans participants in Haimson's [66] work turned to Tumblr for in-depth, interactive identity work and
920 Facebook for broadcasting identity change as an event, participants in this study employed FGLI-centric Discord servers
921 for more profound and safer identity disclosures and discussions while maintaining college-related subreddits as a source
922 of valuable information around college-going. Yet, for both populations, one platform (Tumblr for transgender people
923 and Discord for FGLI students) served as a centrally important online space where participants could present aspects of
924 their marginalized identities that they may otherwise hide to audiences of similar others. The second platform (Facebook
925 for transgender people and college-related subreddits for FGLI students) afforded opportunities to broadcast disclosures
926 to and receive support from a wider audience of non-similar others (i.e., non-FGLI students). The differences between
927 the role that Reddit and Discord played as social transition machinery may have stemmed from the invite-only nature
928 of Discord and the prevalence of similar-others within FGLI-centric Discord servers as compared to college-related
929 subreddits which were broad and open to everyone.
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934 However, in other ways, the social transition machinery framework did not map neatly onto the experiences of
935 FGLI students making transitions from doubly disadvantaged to privileged poor. For example, rather than relying on
936

937 one platform for more intense and ongoing mid-transition identity work and the other for broadcasted disclosures of
938 one's identity to broader audiences, FGLI students turned to the same platform (Discord) for both identity work and
939 broadcasted disclosures within the context of FGLI-specific online communities, while college-related subreddits served
940 as spaces where disclosures were leveraged strategically for information-seeking purposes. This aligns with prior work
941 elucidating differences in social support provision between general online spaces (which typically provide informational
942 support) and those scoped to a particular identity facet (which typically provide emotional support) [10, 46].

944 Importantly, social media platforms such as Instagram, Reddit, and Discord not only serve as social transition
945 machinery but also as social transition disruptors. Many participants reported experiencing stigmatization in response
946 to their identity disclosures, particularly on the r/ApplyingtoCollege subreddit, which they reported stifled their ability
947 to effectively self-present their whole selves in this space. While some participants noted that they still sometimes
948 disclosed strategically to obtain necessary information, they also described engaging in more narrow disclosures
949 in the general college-related subreddits (e.g., disclosing only the requisite information about themselves needed
950 to obtain relevant information about college). Conversely, they reported feeling more comfortable presenting their
951 FGLI identities in insular Discord communities and described more robust and frequent disclosures that helped them
952 receive college-related social support. These findings suggest that stigmatization is emotionally harmful and directly
953 and indirectly affects students' ability to disclose their identities and accrue the support necessary to become part
954 of the privileged poor. Stigma sowed seeds of self-doubt for participants who questioned their sense of belonging in
955 post-secondary institutions, which could impact their ability to persist within them. Moreover, stigmatization likely
956 indirectly influenced the accrual of social support necessary for students to familiarize themselves with institutions
957 because stigmatizing reactions to identity disclosures pushed students away from using certain online support spaces.
958 These findings resonate with prior work in online health contexts (e.g., [7, 99]) which suggests that "supportive" spaces
959 online do not support members equitably, and that these spaces can even be harmful and invalidating. Moreover, our
960 findings provide empirical support for the notion [40] that expecting marginalized communities to completely opt out
961 of social media if they experience harm can be problematic insofar as it neglects the reality that these platforms often
962 house the kinds of resources that community members, including participants in our study, do not possess in their
963 offline networks and ignores the nuances of social media practices, especially across multiple platforms.

964 Taken together, the dual role of social media platforms such as Instagram, Reddit, and Discord (and the online
965 communities that emerge within them) as both social transition machinery and social transition disruptors aligns with
966 arguments of technology broadly, and social media specifically, as "double-edged swords" [49, 112, 121]. As this work
967 shows, the context of FGLI students preparing for the transition to college exemplifies the dual benefits and harms that
968 social media use can bring. Importantly, though, it also suggests (in accordance with [66]) that positive interactions
969 around identity disclosures on Instagram, Reddit, and Discord have the potential to serve a social transition machinery
970 function. In contrast, negative interactions around these disclosures tend to serve a social transition disruptor function.
971 Understanding social media as a social transition disruptor questions how platform design and affordances can influence
972 which role a platform plays in an individual's upwardly mobile social transition. As such, these findings may also be
973 representative of social media and social support dynamics for other populations experiencing life transitions.

982 5.2 Affirmative Action Stigma and Online Support Space Abandonment

984 Participants reported experiencing both enacted and anticipated stigmatization in response to their FGLI identity
985 disclosures, primarily on Reddit. Much of this stigmatization occurred in the form of comments about affirmative action
986 (e.g., "you only got in because you're first-gen, low-income" described by P5). Anti-affirmative action rhetoric, espoused
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989 since the 1960s by those opposing affirmative action policies, including organized labor advocates and groups (i.e.,
990 Students for Fair Admissions) interested in higher education administration and policy, frequently invokes assumptions
991 of “reverse discrimination” and colorblind ideologies [48]. Politicians, some higher education staff, and community
992 members alike balked, and continue to balk, at the idea of racial “quotas” for higher education admissions. However,
993 these mechanistic quotas were jettisoned in response to decisions in Supreme Court cases like *Gratz v. Bollinger* [108].
994 More specifically, *Gratz v. Bollinger* ceased admissions practices that relied on a points system to determine admission
995 and granted underrepresented minorities points for their underrepresented racial/ethnic identities, as this mechanism of
996 affirmative action was not considered narrowly tailored enough to be considered constitutional [108]. Nevertheless, our
997 findings suggest that discourse that associates marginalized social identities with “quotas” can be found on social media,
998 particularly pseudonymous platforms like Reddit. This discourse is problematic because it suggests that students who
999 embody marginalized identities are admitted to universities because of these identities instead of their achievements.
1000 By crediting their successes to their identities rather than their determination, these students struggle to feel like they
1001 deserve to be on a university campus and belong there, as reflected in our findings about hostile experiences on a
1002 college-related subreddit.
1003

1004 Stigmatizing comments referencing (often incorrectly) information about affirmative action policy was not only
1005 immediately disruptive to participants’ psychological well-being but also carried implications for the ways they
1006 anticipated using (or not using) online support spaces as sources of college-related social support in the future. Many
1007 participants reported either considering support space abandonment or actually abandoning support spaces on Reddit
1008 where they reported experiencing the most stigma in response to their identity disclosures. Abandoning support spaces
1009 on Reddit, where nearly all participants described experiencing the most stigmatization, could effectively curb some
1010 of the emotional hardships associated with these experiences. However, we argue that support space abandonment
1011 can also prevent FGLI students from accessing college-related social support, which many participants described as
1012 valuable outcomes of their experiences on college-specific subreddits.
1013

1014 Prior work on social media discontinuance and non-use suggests that social media abandonment practices take
1015 multiple forms, such as disengagement, disconnection, distancing, and departure [35], can be temporary or permanent
1016 [115], and can signify enactments of personal agency [18, 35]. Some scholars argue that marginalized populations also
1017 enact agency over their (non-)use decisions, but that these groups can nevertheless experience negative outcomes
1018 resulting from their (non-)use decisions [35]. Along these lines, Chib and colleagues [35] advanced the Mobile Media
1019 (Non-)use Typology, which conceives of (non-)use decisions along the dimensions of a) contextual vs. absolute and
1020 b) invisible vs. visible (non-)use. Our findings, similarly situated in the context of a marginalized group, highlight
1021 the former dimension by articulating how FGLI students engaged in contextual (non-)use by forgoing participation
1022 in college-related support spaces on Reddit. Yet, in contrast with Chib et al. [35], who consider disconnection and
1023 departure to be absolute (as opposed to contextual) non-use strategies, FGLI participants engaged in disconnection
1024 and departure as a contextual non-use strategy by abandoning specific support spaces within larger platforms (i.e.,
1025 college-going subreddits) as opposed to abandoning platforms (i.e., Reddit) as a whole.
1026

1027 Additionally, while (non-)use decisions themselves may be agentic responses to harm, they may ultimately be
1028 undesired since they involve giving up the benefits that can be reaped through engagement with a platform and/or a
1029 particular support space. For instance, while P5 reported experiencing stigmatization and engaging in support space
1030 abandonment, she also acknowledged the informational support available within college-related subreddits. Still, even
1031 agentic (non-)use decisions can culminate in negative outcomes for marginalized groups [35]. While not explicitly
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1041 examined in the scope of the present study, it is possible that support space abandonment could have long-term impacts
1042 on students' ability to harness college-related social support throughout their transition to college.
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1044 **5.3 Implications for Design** 1045

1046 In this section, we describe how designers may consider content moderation strategies such as content warnings to
1047 curb FGLI stigmatization and ensuing involuntary platform abandonment on Reddit. We note that future work can and
1048 should explicitly investigate issues of content moderation within college-related subreddits by eliciting experiences and
1049 perceptions of (in)effective moderation from FGLI students directly.
1050

1051 It is important to note that stigmatization of FGLI students, sometimes with references to affirmative action indeed
1052 exists offline, in conversations with peers, or overheard by students on campus. Warnock & Hurst's [138] ethnographic
1053 study revealed that FGLI students experience alienation and isolation both due to comments from others and the difficulty
1054 of finding other FGLI students on campus. Additionally, Sarcedo et al. [111] documented various microaggressions
1055 and microinvalidations that FGLI students of color experienced, such as counselors discouraging these students from
1056 pursuing graduate education or other students laughing at FGLI students for not knowing about office hours or about
1057 graduate school. Meanwhile, canonical experimental work has shown a stigma of (perceived) incompetence wielded
1058 against those thought to benefit from affirmative action [73].
1059

1061 Yet, key differences between offline stigmatization and stigmatization on Reddit make it important to address
1062 stigmatization that impacts this population within college-related subreddits. Two differences relate to the affordances
1063 of social media as opposed to face-to-face communication. While FGLI students can and do experience stigma offline,
1064 Reddit affords scale, pseudonymity, and persistence which can influence the degree to which stigmatizing comments
1065 remain visible and harmful to students. For instance, students may encounter a handful of students scapegoating FGLI
1066 students in their dormitories or classroom discussions. In contrast, on Reddit, they can be exposed to many students who
1067 espouse similar ideas. Moreover, these comments are typically persistent on platforms like Reddit, where they are visible
1068 over time. Conversely, passing conversations in dormitories and classrooms are ephemeral (although students can
1069 ruminate on them). Additionally, pseudonymity on Reddit can potentially encourage "disinhibition" [124], facilitating
1070 the declaration of more negative and stigmatizing comments than one might share in face-to-face settings.
1071

1073 The present study demonstrates that FGLI students experienced stigmatization in college-related subreddits despite
1074 existing community moderation and that they did not see content removal as a promising moderation strategy, likening
1075 it to censorship. Existing mechanisms for content moderation, particularly those that rely on content removal, may be
1076 insufficient for marginalized groups like FGLI students since marginalized social media users are disproportionately
1077 impacted by content removal [70, 126]. Furthermore, those who have the intention to share harmful content on social
1078 media can respond to content removals by reposting content or posting in a different online space [75, 97].
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1081 Alternatives to content removal-based moderation approaches often consist of reducing the visibility of potentially
1082 harmful content [62] and nudging users away from this content [97]. Content warnings, or labels placed on digital
1083 content, can be used to nudge users away from potentially harmful content [97] and/or enable users to express greater
1084 agency over whether or not to view or engage with potentially harmful content [68]. Typologies of content warnings
1085 [32] suggest that content warnings can include warnings for common triggers such as violence and sex but can also
1086 include warnings of potential race and class-based stigma and sociopolitical content related to class, both of which are
1087 relevant to the current inquiry.
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1089 We argue that content warnings represent one means by which designers can help curb socioeconomic stigmatization
1090 on Reddit and render subreddits safer spaces for FGLI college-related social support exchanges while avoiding censorship
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1093 and enabling FGLI students to enact agency and potentially build resilience to stigmatization. While some work suggests
1094 that the beneficial impacts of trigger warnings, a specific type of content warning, are questionable in face-to-face
1095 contexts, the efficacy of broader social media content warnings is less known. Promisingly, prior work has found success
1096 in deploying crowdsourced moderation in social media contexts [23, 91].
1097

1098 Deploying content warnings in college-related subreddits requires a mechanism for labeling content as potentially
1099 harmful. Content warning labels may be applied to subreddits via technological interventions, human (commercial)
1100 moderators, and/or users, including volunteer moderators. AI-enabled tools are increasingly being developed to
1101 automatically label and add content warnings to so-called “sensitive posts” [97, 122] as well as crowd-sourced labeling
1102 to determine which posts to accompany with which kinds of content warnings. While other forms of identity-based
1103 harassment can be more readily apparent or overtly toxic (i.e., when the harasser uses commonly recognized slurs), the
1104 circulation of anti-affirmative action rhetoric is more difficult to circumvent as it exemplifies “covertly toxic content”
1105 including microaggressions that necessitate subjective, contextualized judgment [88]. Without keywords and phrases
1106 to identify, AI-enabled content labeling tools may not be well poised to engage in the kinds of content moderation
1107 that can cultivate safer subreddits for FGLI students. Thus, designers may wish to turn to human-centered forms of
1108 moderation. Sometimes, this involves teams of centralized commercial content moderators adjudicating what counts as
1109 harmful or toxic content. However, this approach can lack scalability and commercial moderators may similarly lack a
1110 nuanced understanding of the context in which “covertly toxic content” is created and circulated [88].
1111

1112 Given the tension between automated and human-based approaches, “crowdsourcing” or “groupsourcing” is an
1113 increasingly popular approach for overcoming the various limitations of both automatic and centralized human-based
1114 approaches to content labeling and content warnings [97]. This may take the form of crowdsourced, voluntary labeling
1115 of content on Reddit wherein subreddit members and volunteer moderators can work together to classify content
1116 [97]. While this approach has primarily been applied to trust and credibility ratings in the context of misinformation
1117 detection (e.g., [101]), it may be similarly feasible in labeling content for potential triggers on Reddit.
1118

1119 It is important to note that there may be obstacles in implementing crowdsourced labeling of harmful content or the
1120 collaborative deployment of content warnings. First, those who are the least harmed by stigmatization on college-related
1121 subreddits (i.e., middle-class and affluent, continuing-generation students who are not a racial minority) may be the
1122 least inclined to contribute to crowdsourced labeling processes, creating a sort of “free-rider problem.” One way to
1123 combat this is to incorporate some of the gamification features that are already integrated into Reddit, like “karma” and
1124 badges. Currently, users receive karma for upvoting and downvoting content, which is already a form of collaborative
1125 content moderation by way of filtering. Users could also gain “karma” for labeling harmful content, and could even
1126 receive badges to display next to their posts as a reward for their pro-social contributions. FGLI students would likely
1127 be more inclined to label content for their fellow FGLI students who receive the most harm, but this would place an
1128 additional burden on them to remedy harms that they did not create in the first place.
1129

1130 In sum, Reddit could focus on content moderation efforts that balance the need to avoid censorship, promote
1131 user agency, and curb FGLI-directed stigmatization in college-related support spaces online. Crowdsourced content
1132 warnings may represent one means of balancing these needs, given that much of the stigmatizing comments participants
1133 referenced receiving and/or observing were “covertly toxic” microaggressions that both automatic AI-enabled tools and
1134 commercial moderators may not pick up on. Moreover, the emphasis on content warnings as opposed to removal avoids
1135 the kinds of censorship that participants remarked being weary of and which has been shown to disproportionately affect
1136 marginalized groups [70]. Finally, crowdsourced content moderation can render moderation work more visible, which
1137 is important because visible moderation can increase users’ awareness of injustice and oppression [126], potentially
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1145 leading to pro-social behavior change. These ideas may also apply to other contexts where apparently innocuous terms
1146 can be harmful, but simple strategies for banning or hiding specific words are not productive.
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1148 **5.4 Limitations and Opportunities** 1149

1150 This study focuses on U.S.-based students and their experiences with social media disclosures of their FGLI identities as
1151 they applied to and selected a college to attend. Because college application experiences differ from country to country,
1152 focusing on U.S.-based FGLI students provided a consistent context in which to analyze their experiences using social
1153 media during the college application process. Future work could explore national and cultural differences in disclosure
1154 practices on social media during this process. In addition, we focus on social media-based FGLI identity disclosure
1155 behaviors, not face-to-face identity disclosures to properly scope our study. Future work may ask questions that seek to
1156 compare face-to-face and online disclosures, since responses to face-to-face disclosures may relate to FGLI students'
1157 decisions to disclose or not disclose their identities online, or vice versa. Furthermore, we did not systematically gather
1158 or analyze data on which types of support students *deliberately* sought out as this was outside the scope of our research
1159 questions, so we cannot make claims about whether support received matched support sought. Future work can gather
1160 data that speaks more explicitly to the (mis)matches in support sought versus support received on social media for FGLI
1161 students, per optimal matching theory [43]. Moreover, this study was conducted amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
1162 This informed our decision to recruit via social media as well as our decision to conduct interviews virtually via Zoom,
1163 which may have shaped our findings. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically shifted how education is
1164 delivered to students and how students are able to find information about colleges. Thus, the results of this study may
1165 not be generalizable across space and time. Similarly, our qualitative interview-based approach is exploratory and we do
1166 not make claims about the generalizability of our findings to larger groups of FGLI students. Subsequent research could
1167 explore how these findings and their implications may shift over time and how they may (or may not) be applicable
1168 to a “post-pandemic” world. Finally, our recruitment routes could have influenced our findings. While we opted to
1169 recruit via social media platforms like Instagram and Discord to recruit a variety of students living across the U.S. and
1170 embodying diverse social identities, these recruitment routes could explain the kinds of platforms (namely Discord)
1171 emphasized in interviews. Moreover, while stigmatizing discourses around “quotas” were referenced by participants
1172 with respect to Reddit, it is possible that this discourse is prevalent on other platforms, but was not surfaced in our data
1173 in part because of our recruitment routes. Future work on this topic can recruit using other methods or examine online
1174 data to provide a more comprehensive picture of “quota” discourse. Finally, scholars may consider using alternative
1175 methods in related future work, such as surveys and appropriate sampling techniques to confirm the generalizability of
1176 our findings or participatory design sessions to elicit more granular understandings of participants’ ideal social media
1177 spaces for college-related support-seeking.
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1186 **6 CONCLUSION** 1187

1188 We investigated how first-generation, low-income students’ identity disclosures on social media could serve as a
1189 conduit or barrier to college-related support seeking during the college application process. Our findings suggest that
1190 FGLI students’ identity disclosures within college-related online communities housed within popular social media
1191 platforms could facilitate and disrupt their access to college-related social support. While supportive exchanges made
1192 in response to identity disclosures could prepare students academically, logistically, and emotionally for what they
1193 would experience in post-secondary environments, stigmatizing responses (e.g., those related to affirmative action) to
1194 FGLI students’ identity disclosures call into question the ways that platforms can (or should) intervene to promote the
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safety of these marginalized adolescents. We argue that 1) identity disclosures in college-related communities on social media can facilitate or disrupt students' access to college-related social support, 2) that researchers can and should study social media interactions across multiple platforms to more deeply understand college access and persistence for FGLI students, and 3) that social media design can play a role in promoting supportive interactions and disrupting stigmatizing interactions on social media, ultimately curbing the undesired abandonment of online support spaces and allowing FGLI students to more safely use these spaces to accrue support that may be integral to their access and persistence in post-secondary environments.

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1531

7 APPENDIX A

1532

1533

7.1 Screening Survey

1534

1535

(1) Do you use social media?

1536

- Yes

1537

- If ‘Yes’: List your three most used social media platforms [open-ended text box]

1538

- No (if No, not eligible)

1539

- If ‘No’: Not eligible

1540

1541

(2) Are you a first-generation student?

1542

- Yes

1543

- if ‘Yes’: How important is being FG to your identity?

1544

- * Extremely Important

1545

- * Very Important

1546

- * Moderately Important

1547

- * Slightly Important

1548

- * Not at all Important

1549

1550

- if ‘Yes’: Have you ever felt judged for being a first-generation student?

1551

- * Yes

1552

- * No

1553

1554

- No

1555

- if ‘No’, not eligible

1556

1557

(3) When did you most recently apply to college?

1558

- 2020 or 2021

1559

1560

- 1561 – If '2020 or 2021': Have you been accepted to a college?
 1562 * Yes
 1563 * No
 1564
 1565 – If '2020 or 2021': Have you made a decision about which college to attend?
 1566 * Yes
 1567 * No
 1568
 1569 – If '2020 or 2021': How did you learn about college? Check all that apply.
 1570 * Parents
 1571 * Extended Family
 1572 * Siblings
 1573 * Friends
 1574 * School
 1575 * Athletic Coaches
 1576 * Club Participation
 1577 * Religious Leaders
 1578
 1579 • Before 2020 (if Before 2020, not eligible)
 1580
 1581 (4) What is your gender? Check all that apply.
 1582 • Man
 1583 • Woman
 1584 • Non-Binary
 1585 • Prefer Not to Say
 1586 • Other [please describe]
 1587
 1588 (5) What is your race? Check all that apply.
 1589 • African-American/Black
 1590 • Latino/a/x
 1591 • Asian
 1592 • Middle Eastern
 1593 • Indigenous
 1594 • White
 1595 • Prefer not to say
 1596 • Other [please describe]
 1597
 1598 (6) How old are you? [open-ended text box]
 1599
 1600 (7) How would you describe the town in which you currently reside?
 1601 • Rural (below 50k residents)
 1602 • Urban (more than 50k residents)
 1603 • Prefer not to say
 1604
 1605 (8) Do you identify as low-income?
 1606 • Yes
 1607 • Maybe or Not Sure
 1608 • No
 1609 • Prefer Not to Say
 1610
 1611
 1612

- 1613 (9) What is your email address? [open-ended text box]
 1614 (10) Please confirm your email address. [open-ended text box]
 1615

1616 7.2 Interview Protocol

1617 7.2.1 Warm-Up Questions.

- 1619 (1) Tell me where you're at in terms of the college admissions and enrollment process.
 1620 (2) What kinds of places did you apply to? How many?
 1621 (3) What made you choose those places to apply to?
 1622 (4) Have you selected where to attend? If so, what made you choose that school?
 1623
 1624

1625 7.2.2 First-Generation Identity Disclosure Online.

- 1626 (1) You mentioned in the screening survey that you used [online platform(s)] as you were applying to/selecting a
 1627 college.
 1628
- 1629 • Did you ever share on these platforms that you're a first-generation college student or that your parents
 1630 didn't complete a four-year degree in the U.S.?
 1631 (a) If 'Yes': Could you describe that/those experience(s)?
 1632 (b) If 'Yes': On what platform(s) did you share?
 1633 (c) If 'Yes': What made you want to share this aspect of your identity?
 1634 (d) If 'Yes': Were there any other reasons you shared?
 1635 (e) If 'Yes': Who did you share with?
 1636 (f) If 'Yes': What made you choose to share with them?
 1637 (g) If 'Yes': When you shared, was it anonymous or connected with your real name?
 1638 (h) If 'Yes': What made you choose to share in that way?
 1639 (i) If 'Yes': Who do you think saw you share that?
 1640 (j) If 'Yes': Why do you think that?
 1641 (k) If 'Yes': Was there anything about [platform] that encouraged you to tell people this?
 1642 – If 'Yes': What was it?
 1643 – If 'Yes': How did it encourage you?
 1644 (l) If 'Yes': What kinds of responses did you expect when you shared about being first-generation
 1645 online?
 1646 (m) If 'Yes': What kinds of responses did you receive when you told people that you're a first-generation
 1647 college student? What responses stood out to you?
 1648 (n) If 'Yes': What did helpful or supportive responses look like?
 1649 (o) If 'Yes': Did you receive any unhelpful responses?
 1650 – If 'Yes': What made them unhelpful?
 1651 – If 'No': Why do you think that is? What would an unhelpful response look like?
 1652 (p) If 'Yes': Did anything else happen as a result of you telling people online that you're first-generation?
 1653 (q) If 'No': Have there been times you wanted to or considered sharing about being first-generation but
 1654 did not?
 1655 (r) If 'No': What reactions would you expect to get if you did share this?
 1656 (s) If 'No': Was there anything about [online platform(s)] that discouraged you from sharing this?
 1657
 1658
 1659
 1660
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 1664

- 1665 (t) If 'No': Is there anything about [online platform(s)] that would encourage you to share this?
 1666 (u) If 'No': Did not sharing about being first-generation online impact you in any way?
 1667 (v) If 'No': Have you ever seen any content online that made you feel like you might be judged for being
 1668 first-generation?
 1669 (w) If 'No': Have you seen any content online that made you feel like you might be supported for being
 1670 first-gen?
 1671 (x) If 'No': Have you seen other people post online about being first-generation?
 1672 (y) If 'No': Do you see yourself ever talking about being first-generation online in the future? Why or
 1673 why not?
 1674
 1675
 1676 (2) Did anyone online already know that you're first-generation?
 1677 • If 'Yes': How do you think they knew?
 1678 (3) Did you ever imply or hint at the fact that you were a first-generation college student when you looked for
 1679 information or support online during the application and school selection process?
 1680 • If 'Yes': What did that look like?
 1681 • If 'Yes': What made you want to hint at this aspect of your identity?
 1682 • If 'Yes': Were there any other reasons you hinted at this aspect of your identity?
 1683 • If 'Yes': When you hinted about being first-generation, who was your audience?
 1684 • If 'Yes': What made you choose to share with them?
 1685 • If 'Yes': When you hinted at being first-generation, was it anonymous or connected with your real name?
 1686 • If 'Yes': What made you choose to share this way?
 1687 • Was there anything about [platform] that encouraged you to hint at the fact that you're first-generation?
 1688 – If 'Yes': What was it?
 1689 – If 'Yes': How did it encourage you?
 1690 (4) Have you seen other people post online about being first-generation?
 1691 • If 'Yes': What did you think of that?
 1692 • If 'Yes': Why do you think those people posted about that?
 1693 • If 'Yes': Did that influence you to post or not post about being first-generation?
 1694 – If 'Yes': Was it the specific post that influenced you, or seeing content in general about being
 1695 first-generation?
 1696 – If 'Yes': What did responses to those posts look like?
 1697 – If 'Yes': Did you ever like, comment, or engage in any way with those posts? Why or why not?
 1698 – If 'No': Can you think of reasons why other people might not want to tell people about being
 1699 first-generation in online spaces?
 1700 (5) Have you ever seen any content online that made you feel like you might be judged for being first-generation?
 1701 • If 'Yes': What was that content like?
 1702 • If 'Yes': Who posted that content? (Someone you knew of or not?)
 1703 • Did that influence you to post or not post about being first-generation?
 1704 • Why do you think that content was posted?
 1705
 1706
 1707
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7.2.3 Applying to and Selecting a College.

1713
 1714
 1715
 1716

- 1717 (1) Walk me through the process of applying to colleges and selecting which college to go to, and how your
 1718 first-generation identity impacted these processes.
 1719 (2) How would you describe your high school environment?
 1720 (3) Was it expected that you would go to college?
 1721 (4) What kinds of schools did you end up applying to?
 1722 (5) How did you decide to apply to those?
 1723 (6) What school did you select?
 1724 (7) What made you select that one?
 1725 (8) What kinds of obstacles did you face, if any, as you applied to and selected a college?
 1726
 1727 • How did you respond to those obstacles?
 1728 (9) What kinds of help did you need as you applied to college and selected which college to go to? These could be
 1729 things like financial aid information or reassurance.
 1730
 1731 • Were you able to get what you needed?
 1732 – If 'Yes': How?
 1733 • Did any of the online platforms you mentioned in the screening survey help?
 1734 – If 'Yes': How did they help?
 1735 – If 'No': Why do you think you were unable to get what you needed? How did that make you feel?
 1736 – If 'No': Were any of the online platforms you mentioned in the screening survey unhelpful?
 1737 * If 'Yes': What made them unhelpful?
 1738
 1739
 1740

1741 7.2.4 Identity.

- 1742 (1) If I were to ask you to describe yourself in a few words, what would you say?
 1743
 1744 • You mentioned X. Would you say those are the most important parts of your identity? If not, what's
 1745 missing?
 1746 • Probe for first-generation identity: Is your first-generation identity important? Why or why not?
 1747 (2) Did any identities (like race or gender) impact your application/selection process in any way?
 1748
 1749 • If 'Yes': How? Could you give me an example?
 1750 (3) Which of these identities was most important to your application/selection process?
 1751 (4) Did your identities impact your use of [online platform(s)] while applying to or selecting a college?
 1752
 1753 • If 'Yes': How? Could you give me an example?
 1754 (5) Are there ways you think online spaces could have been more helpful to you during this process?
 1755

1756 7.2.5 Closing.

- 1757 (1) Is there anything else you would like to share about being first-generation?
 1758 (2) Is there anything else you would like to share about the role the internet and social media played as you applied
 1759 for and later selected a college?
 1760
 1761 (3) Is there anything you'd like to mention that hasn't come up yet?
 1762

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