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THE AGENTIC TECHNOLOGICAL SELF: IDENTIDADES ASPIRACIONAIS, ACADÊMICOS, E ATIVIDADES DIGITAIS

THE AGENTIC TECHNOLOGICAL SELF: ASPIRATIONAL IDENTITIES, ACADEMICS, AND DIGITAL ACTIVITIES

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Resumo: Neste artigo, buscamos compreender como a identidade aspiracional pode ser influenciada por atividades digitais. O estudo se baseia em dados originais de pesquisa com mais de setecentos jovens de baixo nível socioeconômico, matriculados em uma escola secundária agrícola na Califórnia, e em um subconjunto de entrevistas correspondentes, que geraram dados qualitativos. Nessa abordagem multi-metodológica, apresentamos duas perspectivas complementares. Na primeira parte, utilizamos análise comparativa qualitativa para realizar uma série de testes de suficiência para prever a ocorrência de dois desfechos relacionados ao desempenho acadêmico e dois desfechos associados à intensidade da pesquisa na internet. Na segunda parte, usamos dados qualitativos para investigar até que ponto esses padrões podem elucidar o nexo entre as atividades digitais e o trabalho de identidade aspiracional. Para melhor compreender as implicações das desigualdades digitais nesses processos, o estudo se apoia no conceito do *agentic technological self*, o qual fornece um paradigma de *selfing.*

Palavras-chave: Desigualdade Digital, Desempenho Acadêmico, Autoconstrução, Bourdieu, ACQ

Abstract: In this article, we seek to understand the how aspirational identities can be shaped by digital activities. We draw on our original survey data with over seven hundred youths attending a low-SES high school in agricultural California along with a subset of matched interviews producing qualitative data. In this multi-method analysis, we present two complementary approaches. In the first part of the analysis, we use QCA to perform a series of sufficiency tests to predict membership in two academic outcomes related to academic achievement and two outcomes relating to intensity of internet search. In the second part of the analysis we turn to our qualitative data to probe how these patterns shed light on the nexus between digital activities and aspirational identity work. We draw on the concept of the "agentic technological self" that provides a selfing paradigm to better understand the implications of digital inequalities in these processes.

Keywords: Digital Inequality, Academic Achievement, Selfing, Bourdieu, QCA

ISSN 2179-9938

Overview

The gaps generated by digital [dis]advantage have been the object of study for over a quarter of a century. Nonetheless, even in highly developed economies, digital inequalities are persistent even among young people who many assume to have "grown up digital." In this research, we push back against assumptions of digital ubiquity by considering the impacts of digital inequality on aspirational identities, as well as the relationships between digitally mediated activities and academic achievement, among disadvantaged students living in agricultural California. Based on an original data set from survey and interview data from over 700 graduating "seniors" in their final year of study, we present two complementary approaches in our analysis through csQCA and interviewing. Our dataset is ideally suited to this purpose as it serves a majority low-SES population, the majority of which suffers from digital resource inequalities, during an important developmental period the last year of high school as these students look to their aspirational educational and occupational futures. This conjunction allows us to theorize our findings by applying Bourdieusian concepts to better understand the aspirational selfing of socio-economically disadvantaged students in our study. Our findings shed light on the contours of aspirational selfing processes in which digital activities influence self-conceptions in tandem with academic achievement and track placement in light of the agentic technological self.

Bourdieusian Theory and the Agentic Technological Self

We take a Bourdieusian approach to unpack this selfing paradigm in which "the presence of positive digital engagements—even if they are aspirational—can serve as a role support" (Robinson, 2020, p. 968). In so doing, we add empirical underpinning to the concept of the "agentic technological self" relevant to larger selfing processes in highly digitized societies:

> Grounded in Bourdieusian theory, the agentic technological self is defined by a confident orientation toward digital technology and a sense of efficacy with respect to this technology. This agentic technological self is therefore distinguished from the "agentic self" by the inclusion of digital technologies as fundamental to the formation of self-identity in terms of class. Just as the agentic self writ large embraces the future as something it can control and

ISSN 2179-9938

> frames plans for the future requiring positive interactions with institutions and powerful individuals, the agentic technological self generates an aspirational future built around positive interactions with digital technology (Robinson, 2020, p. 969).

The concept of the agentic technological self allows us to illuminate the ways that class-based identities and digital identities are co-constructed in relationship with one another. Through its contribution to this theoretical perspective, this article contributes to the larger body of theory on role identity (McCall; Simmons, 1978), the concept of agentic self shaped by "middle-class achievement" (Silva; Corse, 2018), and Bourdieusian digital theory as it relates to digital activities and future planning (Robinson; 2009; Robinson; Schulz, 2013).

Bourdieu's work has been applied to digital inequalities along a number of axes. Early treatments of the "digital divide" detailed the importance of extending Bourdieu's concept of capital to the digital sphere (van Dijk, 2005). Later work made clear linkages between digital capital and economic capital (DiMaggio; Bonikowski, 2008). Applying Bourdieusian theory to digital activities, Witte and Mannon (2010) treat a series of "major moments" that reveal how access to digital resources and individuals' ability to use them effectively are the sine qua non of capital enhancing activities in the digital age. With reference to digital activities intrinsic to identify formation, Helsper (2012) employs a Bourdieusian approaches to identify four fields of offline resources (personal, social, cultural, and economic) must be considered when theorizing identity as it extends across online and offline domains.

Turning to young people, studies of students have incorporated Bourdieusian insights to make sense of digital inequalities and educational outcomes (Lareau, 2011; Micheli, 2015). With the diffusion of the internet in homes and schools, empirical research has found that academic achievement is connected to web-use skills (Hargittai, 2010) and perceptions of web-use proficiency on the part of educators (Paino; Renzulli, 2013). Longer periods of sustained usage – particularly at home - have been shown to correlate with higher grades even when students' curricular and class placement is taken into account (Robinson; Wiborg; Schulz, 2018). However, while academic achievement is also positively correlated with usage intensity regarding academically useful computing activities, it can be depressed when students use digital resources for

ISSN 2179-9938

excessive leisure activities rather than capital enhancing activities online (Zillien; Hargittai, 2009; Lei; Zhao, 2007; Huang; Russell, 2006; Judge, 2005). Establishing these linkages is critical to the study of digital inequalities as an arena for identify formation.

As these studies indicate, research is needed to better understand digital inequality and identity formation among students from a Bourdieusian perspective. To better understand these interrelated processes, Bourdieusian theory is an important intervening link in the chain connecting digital activities with a broad array of outcomes, particularly when digital activities shape self-perception among young people (Huang; Robinson; and Cotton, 2015). Connections between digital inequalities and processes of selfing are animated by Bourdieu's concept of the habitus which is the product of formative experiences including those associated with economic class:

> Importing a Bourdieusian framework into the digital realm allows us to grasp how individuals relate to IT resources, specifically how differently situated individuals' informational habitus emerges from long-term experiences of scarcity and abundance with respect to other primary goods (Ignatow; Robinson, 2017, p. 954).

Thus, we return to the concept of the agentic technological self that is rooted in the Bourdieusian notion of the habitus. In this research we extend employ the theoretical concept of the agentic technological self to better understand digital activities (search, social media, media streaming, email, and academic research) in relation to academic achievement and track placement. As we will show, the agentic technological self is the product of a forward-oriented Bourdieusian habitus informed by positive experiences with digital activities.

Context: Public High School in Agricultural California

In this article, we show how different digital activity profiles and digital experience profiles are structured, as well as how they are related to processes of identity formation within this group of low-SES California secondary school students. Located in a working-class town, the school serves a student body impacted by long-term economic disadvantage (Schulz; Robinson, 2016). Students in this study attend a Title 1 "high poverty" school. For readers outside of the U.S. Title 1, is a designation by the U.S. Department of Education based on a school serving a significant number of

ISSN 2179-9938

students whose families fall below the established threshold for low income. As this indicates, in this article, we focus on digital inequality and economic class (for analysis of other forms of disadvantage and additional detail on the larger study, please see Robinson, 2014a; Robinson, 2014b; Robinson; Schulz; Wiborg, 2018; Robinson, 2020).

Turning to the digital contours of the school where data was collected, numerous students at Rancho Benito found it difficult to gain material access to digitally mediated resources either at home or at school. Despite being chronically underresourced, Rancho Benito High's teachers strove to make a computer lab available to students. However, demand far exceeded supply, creating severe resource shortages for students relying on school-based internet access. Therefore, Rancho Benito is what Yin calls a "strategic" (1994) fieldsite allowing us to probe relationships between digital inequalities, digitally mediated activities, and identity work within a student population attending a public American high school marked by long-term socioeconomic disadvantage.

Situating the school curriculum for those outside of the U.S.,[1] American high schools belong to a system that does not channel students at an early age into college and non-college tracks. Unlike most secondary education systems in advanced economies, many American high schools offer both college and vocational preparatory courses in the same school setting. Thus, in American high schools like the ones in this study, students who are heading towards college share many of the same courses – such as "physical education" or PE, "government and civics," or "economics" - as those who are on a non-college trajectory and may attend a vocational program or conclude their education at the end of secondary school. Community colleges in the U.S. continue this convergence with both vocational degrees and two-year academic degrees being offered at the same institution. Animated by a cultural belief in "second chances," this means, that at least theoretically, all students may eventually pursue any postsecondary

[1] Readers already familiar with the American high school and university system will wish to skip all notes. In the U.S., the terms college and university are often used interchangeably to refer to "four year" college degrees (BA or BS), while the terms community college or junior college indicate two-year associate degrees (AA) that may be either a terminal degree or gateway to a BA or BS: "A community college is most often a local, public institution with few admission requirements that is open to the general public. Community colleges provide 1) general education requirements for the first two years of a four-year degree preparing students to transfer, 2) a terminal two-year degree, an Associate of Arts (A.A.), and 3) skilled occupational training and certification of varying duration" (Robinson, 2012).

educational paths—indeed many community colleges in California offer remediation coursework to render students eligible to pursue two and four-year academic degrees.

Data Collection and Research Methods

We make use of empirical data from a multi-method, long-term research project based on ethnographic observation, interviews, focus groups, and surveys from students at "Rancho Benito High School," a large public high school located in an agricultural belt of California. Regarding data collection, in this article, the data comes from 739 survey responses from waves of graduating high school seniors,[2] as well as qualitative QCA interviews (Robinson; Schulz, 2016) with a matched subset of these same senior students. Data collection occurred intensively from 2006 to 2014 with data supplemented through the time of writing. All graduating seniors were required to take an English course during their last year of high school; for this reason, data collection was conducted with all students enrolled in regular English classes. The survey and interviews contained both fixed-choice and open-ended questions that covered a wide range of topics including but not limited to background questions; duration of internet use at home and school; intensity of internet use for search, social media, media streaming, and academic performance measured by grades and tracking.

In order to analyze our data, we capitalize on set-theoretic techniques – specifically crisp set QCA – which allow for the identification of constellations of conditions which form a near subset of the "outcome" or consequent set in question. Such subsets can be said to be probabilistically sufficient for membership in the consequent set. Such techniques differ from standard correlational procedures insofar as they assume maximal complexity and treat each factor as an element in a multifactor bundle whose effects are impossible to sift out from the other conditions embedded in the bundle. Set-theoretic case studies marry cross-case analysis with within-case analysis and can be applied to data at any level of analysis. Set-theoretic methods are based on the premise that important processes can only be identified at the level of the

[2] For more information on the nuances of education in the U.S., readers may wish to consult Britannica (2024): "American high schools are generally four years but sometimes three beginning with either grade 8 or grade 9. High schools serve "…students approximately 13 (or 14 or 15) through 18 years of age. Often in four-year schools the different levels are designated, in ascending order, freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior. The most common form is the comprehensive high school that includes both general academic courses and specialized—commercial, trade, and technical—subjects in its curriculum."

ISSN 2179-9938

concrete case rather than the aggregate level, thus differentiating them from correlational analysis.

Set-theoretic techniques offer straightforward and intuitive interpretations of complex conjunctural causation and synergistic effects in terms of relative sufficiency and necessity for subsetness (Ragin, 2008). This family of approaches begins with the notion that cases can be characterized in terms of set memberships and their attributes can be defined in terms of set relations (Rihoux; Marx, 2013). Each condition used as a predictor is calibrated to represent its membership in a given condition and then combined with other elements to form an intersection of participating sets. Where correlational and net effects methods presume minimal levels of causal complexity, set-theoretic approaches suppose maximal causal complexity, regardless of the number of cases at hand (Schneider; Wagemann, 2012).

Conditions in combination with one another are jointly responsible for outcomes. Through set-theoretic approaches, one can compare multiple distinctive configurations or pathways with one another to see how they perform as predictive configurations with respect to both the presence of an outcome and the absence of an outcome. Through these procedures we not only pinpoint near-sufficient configurations or configurations with shared outcomes (Ragin, 2017). We also identify types of cases as defined by their membership in multiple paths entailing the outcome (Schneider; Wagemann, 2010). Finally, set-theoretic methods facilitate the application of case-specific knowledge at multiple points during the analytic process, including the point at which cases are assigned set membership scores as well as the interpretation of tests for subsetness (Schneider; Wagemann, 2012).

Inasmuch as they conceptualize cases as integral configurations rather than additive assemblages of independent variables operating independently of one another to generate outcomes, set-theoretic approaches differ from all types of regression techniques, including those techniques incorporating interaction effects. In set-theoretical approaches each case is treated holistically as a configuration of factors working in concert with one another. Thus, although QCA focuses on uniformities and regularities across cases, it also captures the interplay of the particular attributes defining each case as a case (Rihoux; Marx, 2013; Ragin, 2008). Adhering to the

presumption of "equifinality," set-theoretic approaches allow for multiple routes to the same outcome. Some routes or pathways may involve the presence of a particular array of factors, while others involve the absence of certain factors. Recent applications of set-theoretic methods have pushed the boundaries by applying them to large datasets including those consisting of individuals (Ragin; Fiss, 2017; Glaesser, 2015; Glaesser; Cooper, 2011).

Finally, in addition to treating the survey data with QCA, we complement the QCA analysis in two ways: the inclusion of visuals (Schulz; Robinson, 2022) and with interview data in the post-QCA process-tracing phase. Drawing from the interview data from students who correspond to pathways, we delve into the profiles of interview data from students who exemplify the pathways revealed through the QCA sufficiency tests. This multi-method approach allows us to flesh out the interplay of these "generative mechanisms" (Glaesser, 2015) in the different paths. We concentrate on so-called "typical" students, namely those which belong simultaneously to the solution set and the outcome set and therefore exemplify near-sufficient pathways (Schneider & Rohlfing, 2013). Because these typical students have membership in both the solution path and the outcome set, they serve exceptionally well to illustrate the subset relation under study. These targeted student profiles can reveal the multiple attributes characterizing strong or paradigmatic instances of various configurations (Rihoux; Marx, 2013). In instances of equifinality when there are multiple near-sufficient paths to an outcome, comparing the paradigmatic student profiles for each of the paths can reveal many of the processes driving the subset relation.

QCA Calibration and Sufficiency Tests

In the multi-method analysis below, we employ crisp set qualitative comparative analysis (csQCA) to analyze subset configurations for two academic outcomes related to academic achievement: GPA (grade point average) and academic track placement (college preparatory) and a highly consequential related digital activity: outcomes related to intensity of internet search.

In the following QCA analysis, we perform a series of sufficiency tests to predict membership in prespecified outcome sets; that is, we assess the degree to which cases

ISSN 2179-9938

characterized by given antecedent conditions exhibit a shared outcome. We use crisp sets rather than fuzzy sets per the calibration schemes for all conditions and outcomes that are standardized and detailed in Table 1. As Table 1 shows each condition or outcome is coded into crisp sets in which 0 signifies non membership and 1 signifies full membership.

Table 1 – Calibration Table for All Conditions and Outcomes

Academic Conditions	Crisp Set Membership	Digital Activities	Crisp Set Membership
GPA/Grades		**Internet Search Intensity**	
Under 3.0	0	Less Than 3 Hours Per Week	0
3.0 and Over	1	At least 3 Hours Per Week	1
College-Prep Track Placement		**Social Media Intensity**	
Non-College-Prep	0	Less Than 3 Hours Per Week	0
College-Prep	1	At least 3 Hours Per Week	1
Home Internet Usage Duration		**Media Streaming Intensity**	
0-12 Months	0	Less Than 3 Hours Per Week	0
More than 1 Year	1	At least 3 Hours Per Week	1
School Internet Usage Duration		**Email Intensity**	
0-12 Months	0	Less than 1 Hour Per Week	0
More than 1 Year	1	1 Hour Per Week or More	1
		Research for School Intensity	
		Less Than 3 Hours Per Week	0
		At least 3 Hours Per Week	1

Source: research data.

For each outcome, we detail the results of the QCA sufficiency analysis for our package of conditions. Each sufficiency test assesses to what extent cases with full membership in the relevant combination of antecedent conditions also exhibit full membership in the consequent (outcome) set in question (Ragin; Fiss, 2017). To put this in different terms, these tests evaluate the degree to which the intersection of the sets known as "X" is consistently a crisp subset of the outcome known as "Y."

We arrive at primary parameters of fit by performing truth table analyses and logical minimization with Adrian Duşa's QCA package in R. These parameters provide the tools to adequately judge the degree to which combinations of conditions form subsets of outcomes. We report the inclusion consistency scores, a measure which indicates the degree to which the truth table row conforms to a perfect subset relation. We also

ISSN 2179-9938

report both raw and unique coverage scores for all of the minimized solutions. Unique coverage scores are important, because they indicate the volume of membership in the outcome set that also uniquely belongs to the near-sufficient pathway in question apart from other near-sufficient configurations. We construct and logically minimize a number of truth tables corresponding to a number of outcomes and antecedent conditions. In all analyses, we apply a conventional consistency cutoff of .8 to perform minimizations and derive the solutions.

QCA Results: High Grades

We begin by examining a set of potential antecedent conditions that could form sufficient subsets for the outcome of high GPA or high grades[3]. We define high grades of at least a 3.0 GPA, as this is the threshold set by the University of California for admission eligibility (for the students in this case study admission to the University of California system is the gold standard for academic achievement). Our five antecedent conditions are as follows: long duration of home internet (A), long duration of school internet (B), high intensity of search (C), high intensity of social media (D), and college-prep track placement (H).

We now turn to the main findings from this sufficiency test. This test assesses to what extent the combinations of these five conditions are consistently a crisp subset of the outcome (the set of students with high grades). We find that two combinations meet the consistency criteria for quasi-sufficiency. These combinations cover a total of 136 cases with a solution coverage of 0.239 and an overall solution consistency score of .816.

In Path 1 we find the solution A*B*c*d*H meaning the presence of A (long duration of home internet usage), B (long duration of school internet use), and H (college-prep track placement), as well as the absence of c (search) and d (social media). These conditions combine into a second sufficient path to the outcome of high grades as specified in the analysis.

In Path 2 the solution changes to A*b*C*d*H meaning the presence of A (long duration of home internet usage), C (high intensity of search), and H (college-prep track

[3] Academic achievement is measured according to the grading system in the United States known as “grade point average” or “GPA” normally calculated on a 4.0 scale matching letter grades. For more information, see https://reslife.berkeley.edu/gpa-calculator/.

ISSN 2179-9938

placement), as well as the absence of b (school internet use) and d (social media). These conditions combine into a sufficient path leading to high grades.

The consistency score for Path 1 has a higher unique coverage score of .217 with a lower consistency score of .808, while Path 2 has a higher inclusion score of 0.909 with a unique coverage score of .022. The model as a whole has a consistency with sufficiency parameter of .839 and a coverage parameter of .239. Finally, the two paths of the solution can be factored into their common elements in the following form: A*d*H(b*C OR B*c).

QCA Results: Track Placement Outcomes

Our next academic achievement outcome is college preparatory track placement. We use four conditions to predict membership in this set: long duration of home internet (A), long duration of school internet (B), high intensity of search (C), and high intensity of social media (D). The sufficiency test reveals three paths to college preparatory track placement that meet the consistency criteria for quasi-sufficiency. Covering 92 cases, the consistency score is 0.902 and the solution coverage score is 0.153 for the three paths.

The first path (A*B*C*d) offers the highest coverage (.133), indicating the stronger empirical significance of the path vis-à-vis the second path. Path 1 indicates that long duration of home internet (A), long duration of school internet (B), and high intensity of internet search (C) combine with low intensity of social media (d).

Turning to Path 2, a*B*c*D tells us that high track placement may be obtained through the presence of B (long duration of school internet use) and D (high intensity of social media), as long as both the duration of home internet use is low (a) and low search intensity (c) are present.

In Path 3 we find the solution a*b*C*d. In this outcome, C indicates the presence of high intensity of search; the absence of a, b, and d shows that short duration of home and school internet use combine with low intensity of social media use to form a near-sufficient subset of the group with college preparatory track placement.

The first pathway consistency score of .9 accompanies a much higher coverage score of .133, suggesting that this pathway is the most empirically significant of the two.

Path 2 has a lower score of .889 but a higher coverage score of .015. The consistency score for Path 3 is the highest possible score of a perfect 1.0 with a coverage score of .006 covering fewer cases. The model as whole has the consistency parameter of .902 with a coverage score of .153.

QCA Results: Digital Activity Outcomes: High Intensity of Search

Next, we turn to internet search, our first digital activity outcome. For high intensity of internet search, there are four potential conditions: intensity of social media (D), intensity of media streaming (E), intensity of email (F), and research for school (G). One path emerges from the sufficiency test and meets the consistency criteria for quasi-sufficiency. The path covers 75 cases with a high inclusion consistency score of .920, and the solution coverage score is .232. Because there is only one pathway, the model as whole has the identical parameters of fit. This solution (E*F*G) indicates the simultaneous presence of high intensity of media streaming (E), high intensity of email (F), and high intensity of research for school (G).

QCA Results: Digital Activity Outcomes: Low Intensity of Search

Our next digital activity outcome is low intensity of internet search. This outcome is the negation of the prior outcome. For this sufficiency test, we test the identical four antecedent conditions: intensity of social media (D), intensity of media streaming (E), intensity of email (F), and research for school (G). The solution has only one path from the sufficiency test with a cutoff score of .8. With a consistency score of .945 and a coverage score of .506, this solution covers 237 cases. This path d*e*f*g is comprised of the absence of all factors social media, media streaming, email, and research for school. Because there is only one pathway, the model as whole also has the consistency parameter of .945 with a coverage score of .506.

QCA Summary of Solutions and Discussion of Typical Cases for Paths

In Table 2, we summarize our QCA results in the first part of our analysis with the aid of this summary table that lays out the results above and represents the solutions to our sufficiency tests. In addition to Table 2, we also provide Figures 1-4 that visualize

ISSN 2179-9938

the conjunctural pathways and the subset relationships across the conditions in our analysis: Figure 1: Subset Conjunctions for High GPA, Figure 2: Subset Conjunctions for College-Prep Track Placement, Figure 3: Subset Conjunctions for High Internet Search, and Figure 4: Subset Configurations for Not-High Internet Search.

In Figures 1 and 2, we observe equifinality, as there are multiple pathways which overlap with the outcome (represented by green-colored areas in the diagram). These academic outcomes are high grades and college preparatory (high) track placement. Where high GPA is concerned, we find two pathways which share a common conjunction of conditions, namely placement in a college preparatory track, long duration of home internet use, and low social media intensity. This conjunction is paired either with short duration of school internet use and high search intensity or the opposite, suggesting that these two conditions are to some extent substitutable.

In Figure 2, when it comes to college preparatory track placement, there are three distinct paths with no substitutable elements (represented by green-colored areas in the diagram). The sufficiency paths for this outcome are therefore the most complex out of all the outcomes under examination.

In Figure 3 and Figure 4, the subset relations appear in the single-path solutions for digital activity outcomes for high and low intensity of search (represented again by green-colored areas). Where low intensity of search is a near-superset of a three-set conjunction, high intensity of media streaming and high intensity of email and high intensity of school research, low intensity of search is a superset of the four-set conjunction. This four-set conjunction comprises the green-colored area representing students who do not frequently engage in any of the four digital activities included in the QCA test.

ISSN 2179-9938

Table 2 – Summary Tablet for QCA Solutions

Outcome	Number of Conditions Tested	Solution Sets	Inclusion Consistency	Raw Coverage Score	Unique Coverage Score	Number of Covered Positive Cases in Solution Set
				Parameters of Fit		
High GPA (3.0 ≥)	5	**A*B*c*d*H**	0.808	0.217	0.217	125
		Long duration of internet use @ home * long duration of internet use @ school * not-high internet search * not-high social media * college-track placement				
		A*b*C*d*H	0.909	0.022	0.022	11
		Long duration of internet use @ home * not-long duration of internet use @ school * high internet search * not-high social media * college-track placement				
		Factored solution set				
		A*d*H (B*c + b*C)				
			0.839	0.239	0.239	
College Prep Track Placement	4	**A*B*C*d**	0.9	0.133	0.133	80
		Long duration of internet use @ home * long duration of internet use @ school * high internet search * not-high social media				
		a*B*c*D	0.889	0.015	0.015	9
		Not-long duration of internet use @ home * long duration of internet use @ school * not-high internet search * high social media				
		a*b*C*d	1	0.006	0.006	3
		Not-long duration of internet use @ home * not-long duration of internet use @ school * high internet search * not high social media				
			0.902	0.153	0.152	
High Intensity of Digital Search	4	**E*F*G**	0.92	0.232	0.232	75
		High intensity of media streaming * high intensity of email *high intensity of research for school				
			0.92	0.232	0.232	
Not-High Intensity of Digital Search	4	**d*e*f*g**	0.945	0.506	0.506	237
		Not-high intensity of social media * not-high intensity of media streaming * not-high intensity of email * not-high intensity of research for school				
			0.945	0.506	0.506	

Source: research data.

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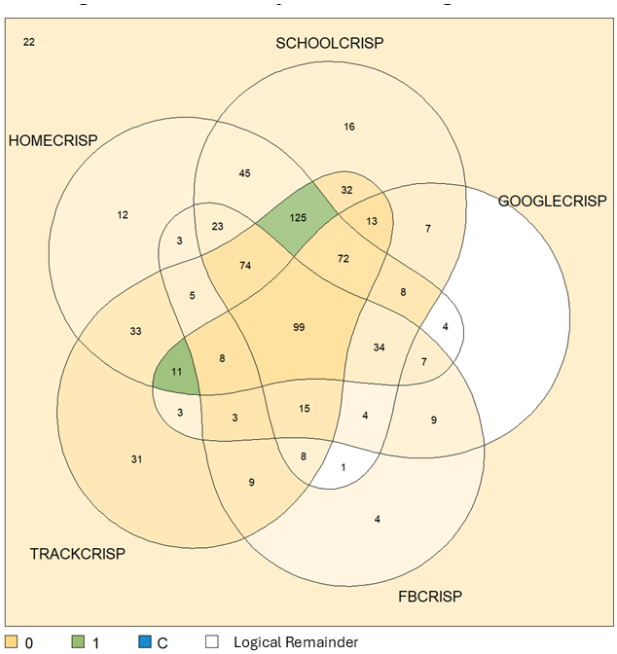
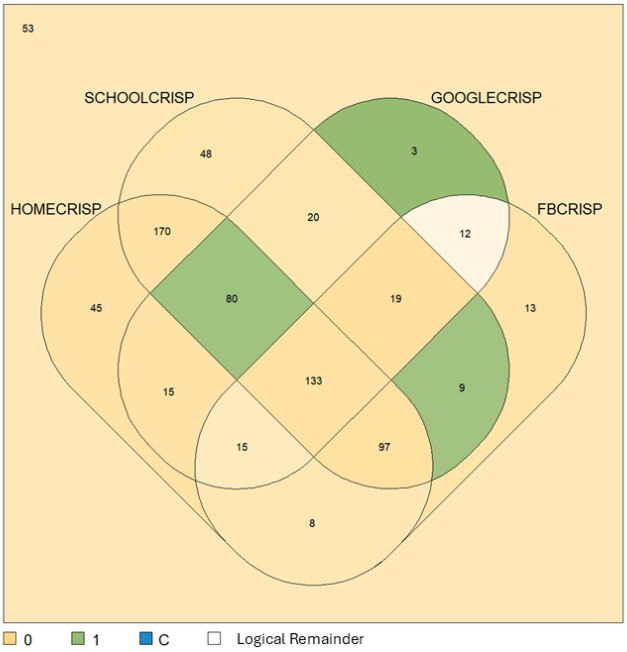
Figure 1 – Subset Conjunctions for High GPA



Source: research data.

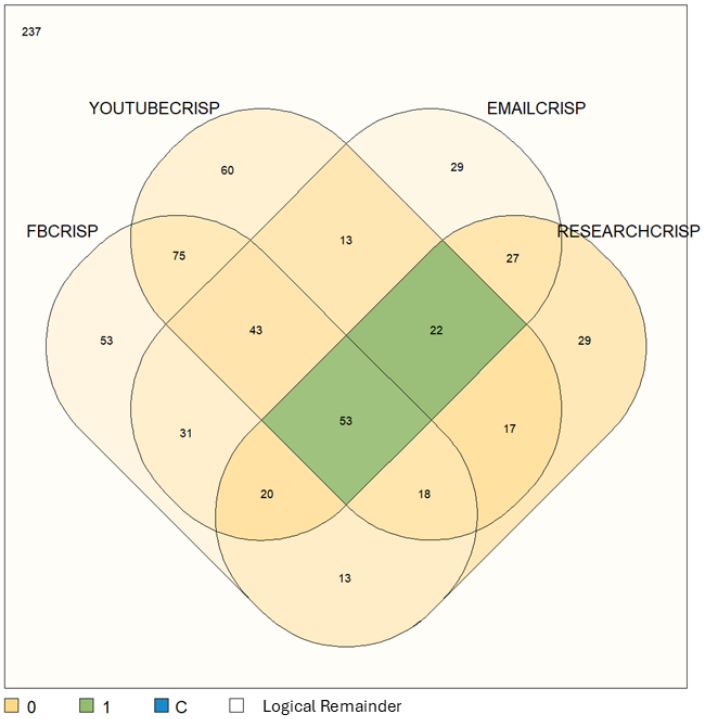
Figure 2 – Subset Conjunctions for College-Prep Track Placement



Source: research data.

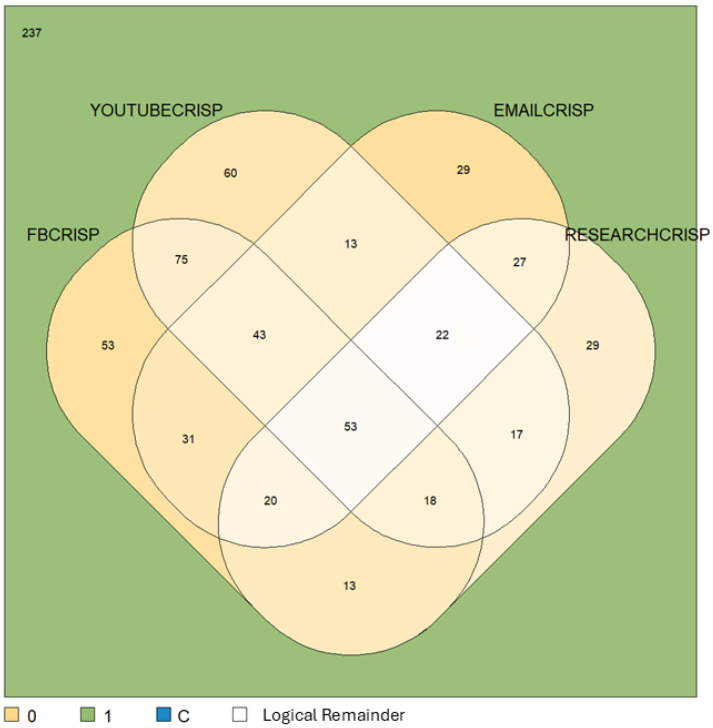
ISSN 2179-9938

Figure 3 – Subset Conjunctions for High Internet Search



Source: research data.

Figure 4 – Subset Configurations for Not-High Internet Search



Source: research data.

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Agentic Selfing in Matched Interview Data

We now turn to our post-QCA analysis with data gleaned from our interviews with students whose profiles correspond to each of the paths revealed by the QCA procedures. In this section, we explore student profiles for each outcome in question and exemplify each of the pathways revealed in the QCA sufficiency tests discussed previously. To reveal the underlying dynamics in play, we turn to the qualitative data gathered through interviews with typical students who belong simultaneously to the outcome and one of the solution configurations.

High Grades and Agentic Selfing

Our first outcome is high academic achievement with 136 students covered by the two near-sufficient pathways. Path 1 is more common (A*B*c*d*H) than Path 2 (pathway A*b*C*d*H). Both paths share college-prep curricular track, long duration of home internet usage of more than one year, and low intensity of social media of under three hours per week. Where they differ is that students in Path 1 have also enjoyed long duration of school internet use but eschew high intensity searching whereas those in Path 2 have not used the internet for more than a year at school but do engage in high intensity search of more than three hours per week. These typical students allow us to understand the relationships between how students curate their digital activities to further their aspirational selfing projects.

Rene exemplifies the empirically dominant path as a college preparatory student who has earned high grades hoping to attend college as a first-generation college student or “first in the family.” As Rene explains: “Good grades are super important for me to go to college.” Turning to the conditions of the pathway, Rene has used the internet for 6 years more at home: “Our parents got us a computer and internet when they could so we could do our school stuff.” Rene has also used the internet at school for several years: “All of my science classes seem to need the computer and email for assignments…one of my teachers has shown us all of the specialized sites so that we don’t have to search for them.” Rene does not engage in high-intensity search: “Gotta keep on track of work for school to get into a UC…need at least a 3.0 to even get in the

ISSN 2179-9938

door…" When Rene began to use the internet at home, Rene framed digital activities as "tools for school" based on parental explicit designation of their motivation in buying a computer for the family. As Rene shares that just looking "up stuff for fun" didn't sit right because "my parents work hard to give us what they can so I don't want to waste it."

Representing students in Path 2, by contrast Alex engages in search for more than three hours per week reflecting upward trajectory through the tracking system. Alex represents students in the second path who have not experienced long duration internet at school but do engage in high intensity search of more than three hours per week. Before moving into the college preparatory track, Alex was enrolled in lower-tracked courses that did not use digital resources at school as Alex explains: "I just started college prep this year…before that we never went to lab with our teacher." Therefore, all of Alex's long duration access to digital resources took place within the home until this move up the tracking ladder. Moving up the tracking ladder also meant that Alex engaged in high levels of auto-didactic search, which led to an appetite for self-directed learning or in Alex's own words has made him "a more curious person."

Turning to shared characteristics across the two paths to high grades, allows us to the linkages between digital activities and agentic selfing. In both paths, agentic selfing links together imagined future selves as college students and identity work as responsible custodians of temporal and digital resources. Students in both paths agree that teachers warned students not to fritter away their time on social media as a "time suck." When asked about use of social media, Alex explained that spending too much time on social media is to "waste time" because it is "playing around" instead of "doing work" which induces feelings of "guilt."

Rene also framed the appropriate uses of digital tools to exclude social media viewed by Rene as a "wasteful" leisure activity rather than "work." As Rene's goal is to be the first in the family to attend college, this mosaic of framings make sense: "…if I go to college, I can help my family so I gotta do everything for that…" For Rene avoiding social media as a "time suck" is a small price to pay in the present to invest in maximizing chances of attending college as the first step to helping younger siblings and parents "gotta be a role model for my sisters" and "be there for my parents" and someday "give

ISSN 2179-9938

my own kids more." For all of these reasons, these students frame appropriate use of digital tools in symmetry with future selfing as future college students aspiring to undertake the role of provider for Rene's natal family and his own future family alike.

College Prep Tracking and Agentic Selfing

Next, we hear from students who illustrate the characteristics covered by the solution paths for college preparatory track placement. These paths do not share any overlapping factors or antecedents across all three solution paths. Dani represents Path 1 (A*B*C*d) that includes 80 cases and joins together long duration of internet use at home and at school with high internet search and low social media activity. Path 2 (a*B*c*D), represented by Ariel, conjoins shorter duration of home internet use, long duration of school internet use, low search intensity, and high intensity of social media. Ricky sheds light on Path 3 (a*b*C*d) joins together long duration of home internet, long duration of school internet, high intensity of internet search, and low intensity of social media. Across these pathways to college prep tracking, students enact agentic selfing by deploying their digital activities in tandem with the identity work they do to enact their imagined future selves.

Exemplifying the first digital path leading to college-preparatory class tracking, Dani (A*B*C*d) is a representative exemplar of the first path for high-track placement. Dani observes: "…had the internet forever on my laptop and phone…with me all the time." However, Dani is less engaged with social media than many of her peers, characterizing social media as "for mean girls" and instead prefers internet search: "I can find anything I want anytime I want…just into my phone and go—voilà got the answer." As a representative student from the most resourced configuration, Dani represents a typical case, inasmuch as she can harness long-term home and school internet use alongside intense internet search activity in order to pursue future selfing: "I spend lots of time looking at colleges…majors…and all that college stuff…I like to go to each website and see what students have to say about their school." Dani's case represents the experience common to resourced high school students whose agentic selfing stems from deploying digital resources effectively thanks to digital skills to garner information to plan out their future college student selves.

ISSN 2179-9938

Turning to the second path, Ariel (a*B*c*D) differs from Dani in that her primary use of the internet occurs at school. Exemplifying the second path to high academic track placement, Ariel is also enrolled in AP classes and hopes to attend an elite liberal arts college with a big scholarship. Although she lacks long duration of home internet, Ariel has used the internet at school for a long time, as she reveals during the interview: "I'm so lucky I got Ms. Rideau my first year so that I can still use her computers before school." While she does not engage in heavy internet searching like Dani, she engages in intensive social media use. However, because she is not a long-time user of the internet at home, this experience has shaped her social media use to be less social and more oriented towards her academic achievement. As she reports, "I'm totally into Facebook and these social sites about college apps and campuses…get really good advice and ask questions…that's how I decided on a liberal arts." Here we see how aspirational identities and availability of resources influence how students act as goal seeking agents to maximize the digital resources at their disposal for their identity work associated with selfing projects.

Finally, Estrella (a*b*C*d) exemplifies the third highly consistent subset of those students who are placed in the college preparatory academic track. Estrella is a star student with her gaze locked on a full ride scholarship to pay for college as a first-generation college student after she becomes the first in her family to graduate from high school. Like others in this group, she has never had home internet access and, burdened by homework and heavy academic load, does not even have a social media account. Nonetheless, she does take every opportunity to use school computers for search. As she explained: "I was in Ms. Davey's business class my freshman year and she taught us how to use google for everything. I mean everything. Learning about money. Learning how to study better. Learning about college. Google. Google. Google. I got really good at it the more I did it." As this indicates, her high search activity has honed her ability to find information useful in pursuing her academic and occupational goals.

She considers search skills as invaluable in facilitating the level of academic performance necessary to maintain her high academic track placement in AP: "My family didn't finish school and can't help me. So when I want to know something I look it up. Every time. All the time. Whenever I can at the school lab or the library."

While limited in the resources at her disposal, Estrella exploits every opportunity to invest in her future self through intensive searching. As such, she represents a theoretically interesting case of the power of aspirational selfing through targeted digital activities. For example, when Estrella was "worried about fitting in at college," she turned to internet searches. According to Estrella, her worries were quieted when her intensive search activities led her to faith-based blogs for college students that offer visions of an aspirational self overcoming challenges and the opportunity to attend a faith-based university. Through internet searches, Estrella discovered different "Hispanic serving institutions,"[4] a number of which showcased an explicit faith-based mission she found attractive.

Finding these institutions online indicates the important role of high intensity internet search activities in fueling the aspirational selfing process. As Estrella explained, "When I found these colleges online it was like I knew that God would provide a way for me." Like other self-identified evangelical students in the school, Estrella's faith system animates her future selfing as a means to escape the grim realities of resource deprivation in the immediate environment.

The ability to see others online who model the success she hope to achieve unlocks Estrella's ability to imagine herself as part of a new community that shares her ethnic identity, faith, and educational goals. As a lifeline to an aspirational self, Estrella has adopted an absolute tunnel vision in her selfing project: "I can't look around at everyone around me and say huh I'm not gonna make it…No. I tell myself to think about what I saw on all those websites about those people like me that made it. Reading their stories helps me believe that everything will be alright." Estrella takes on a forward-oriented approach to her aspirational selfing by maximizing her access to scarce digital activities in service of her aspirational identity. As Estrella's case shows, searching can become a vehicle for agentic selfing that is future oriented.

High Intensity Search and Agentic Selfing

[4] For more information see: 1) https://sites.ed.gov/hispanic-initiative/hispanic-serving-institutions-hsis/ and https://www.usnews.com/education/best-global-universities/articles/us-colleges-with-religious-affiliations-what-students-should-know.

The qualitative data regarding typical cases also helps us understand pathways leading to more and less intense digital activities and how students engage in selfing through these digital activities. The next outcome is high intensity of search with one pathway covering 75 positive cases. This path combines high intensity of social media, email, and research for school. Carmen (E*F*G) represents a strong typical case of this pathway leading to high intensity search. Carmen revealed that a majority of her digital activities are related to her aspirational selfing as a soon-to-be college student. All of her digital activities in this pathway are intense and target her goal to begin college after graduating.

Carmen explains: “I am always on my phone or tablet….Homework is killing me on top of college aps and SAT prep…my eyes are totally red from all of the online practice tests and sample essays.” She is also active on email sending many queries regarding scholarships and completion of application packages: “I always send a follow up email so they say that they got it so I know it’s there.” Even Carmen’s media streaming has a capital-enhancing twist: “So into online university, I’m such a geek watching all those lectures when I’m not even in college yet!” In sum, many of the interviews with these respondents like Carmen show that these digital activities often form a capital-enhancing path to high internet search intensity that empower agentic selfing.

Low Intensity or No Search and Unrealized Selfing

Conversely, when we look at case students typical of the quasi-sufficient solution configurations for not-high intensity of internet search, we see that the membership of this pathway comprises students who do not do any of the other digital activities frequently. In the case of low intensity search, these respondents also shared absence of social media, the absence of media streaming, absence of email, and the absence of email covering a total of 237 cases. It should be noted that this pathway covered one third of the outcome set, which makes this group empirically significant and points to how digitally excluded students may suffer from unrealized selfing potential.

Given the sheer number of cases, there are many subsets who do not use these digital tools for different reasons. However, they are all alike in that they are digitally excluded; therefore we present data from multiple exemplars (d*e*f*g) . The financial

ISSN 2179-9938

costs of home computers, home internet access, and smart phones were cited as one of the main reasons students in this pathway do not use social media, search, media streaming, or email. As Paul explains: “My parents couldn’t pay the bill so we lost the internet at home…almost never use it now unless I’m at a friend’s house.” For Samantha, “…a computer is like so expensive…we don’t even have cable (TV) at home.” For both Paul and Samantha, immediate economic needs drive future selfing as both intend to join the labor market immediately after graduation.

For other respondents, both economic and temporal opportunity costs drive their lack of digital engagements. For JoAnne, working a part-time job to put food on the table for her family takes the place of digital activities: “I work every day after school and on the weekends since my dad lost his job…things are hard and so I help out as much as I can so I’m not on the internet much.” For Shelly, “I do all the meals and housework at home cause my mom has to work in the fields really early…I get my sisters ready for school and make sure there is hot food for my parents when they get home real tired.” It would be unthinkably “selfish” to Shelley to “fritter away” time to do “fun stuff” on the internet. Like Paul and Samantha, neither Shelley nor JoAnne can afford to delay participation in the labor force rather than immediately attending a four-year college.

Several respondents did not know how to use the internet at all. In our interviews in the computer lab they did not know how to open a browser, type, or perform basic computer or internet functions. As Bob said, “That is for girls. I don’t do that stuff.” Raul, whose family owned a local business, simply did not see the value for him: “My mom does all that stuff in the office for my dad…don’t need to know how.” Bethany stated: “I’ve never had a laptop or a smartphone…wouldn’t know what to do but it would be cool.” For Sarah: “I really hope that when I get into community college I’ll get to learn how to do stuff online.”

Conclusions: Agentic Selfing and Digital Inequalities

Our respondent pool provides a revelatory case in which to probe the relationships between digital inequalities, activities, and identity processes. Our analysis shows empirically significant or high coverage digital paths where digital activities contribute to the outcomes high academic achievement and track placement. These

ISSN 2179-9938

findings suggest that some digital activities are better adapted to support the self suited for “middle-class achievement” (Silva; Corse, 2018) than other digital activities, even as digitally agentic students tend to engage in multiple digital activities simultaneously as educationally agentic selves.

If we consider the positive cases covered by the solution paths for academic achievement, as see that these students possess a confident orientation towards their digital activities and a sense of efficacy when using them for aspirational selfing. These findings flesh out the ways that the formation of self-identity is key to how the agentic technological self engages with digital technologies. For these students, the aspirational futures are something over which agency can be exerted and digital engagements may be deployed.

There is also a stark contrast between the profiles of typical high-achieving students and those without resources in terms of their digital experience and their usage intensity as facets of aspirational selfing. As our analysis also makes clear, not only do students in the pathway for low-intensity search not enjoy the benefits of information seeking online, but they exhibit similarly low levels digital activity across all of the digital activities or even a complete absence of internet activities. Of all of the solution sets, the low-intensity (or no) search pathway shows empirically significant connections between digital inequalities and aspirational selfing in that these students do not build their aspirational futures through digital engagements.

The contours of the QCA low-intensity search pathway provides a very clear picture of the selfing processes of digitally excluded students. In tandem, the matched qualitative data reveals how a dearth of digital engagements can lead to unrealized selfing opportunities. In this way, different facets of digital disadvantage travel together in ways that shrink the universe of selfing opportunities. When students are denied the opportunity to develop their agentic technological selves as they near graduation from high school and chart their future plans, there are potentially lifelong impacts on aspirational planning that replicate social (dis)advantage.

Yet the data also provides vivid evidence of the power of digital resources to enable agentic selfing for exceptional cases such as Estrella above who offers a vivid example of the impact digital resources can have when used for aspirational selfing

ISSN 2179-9938

through targeted digital activities. Future work is needed on strategies to empower students who defy the odds despite inconsistent access to quality resources. Gaining an understanding of exceptional cases will help us to discern how students can build agentic technological selves through positive interactions with digital technology.

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