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USING COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH NARRATIVES OF LOW-INCOME HIGH
SCHOOL STUDENTS IN A RURAL NORTHERN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY

By

René Rodriguez Malamed

A Dissertation Submitted to the

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2019

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SCHOOL STUDENTS IN A RURAL NORTHERN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY

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By

René Rodriguez Malamed

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my students and colleagues who inspire me every day.

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I would like to extend my gratitude to my dissertation committee members first and foremost for their years of patience and guidance; to Dr. Serna for professional advice, and to Dr. McNair for her strong female leadership. I am deeply grateful for my advisor Dr. Hallett who, without his nudging, never would have thought I was capable of starting on this journey let alone finishing it.

Finally, none of this would have been possible without my husband who is my home and my adventure all at once.

Using Community Cultural Wealth Narratives of
Low-Income High School Students in a Rural Northern California Community

Abstract

By René Rodríguez Malamed

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2019

This study examined the experiences of white, low-income high school students completing their senior year in a rural community and earning their diplomas. The purpose of the study was to examine participants' stories during high school using a community cultural wealth framework and narrative methodological approach. Results showed that students utilized capitals such as social, moral, familial and resistant in their small communities. Multiple capitals interacted and influenced each other as rural youth draw on these for support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	10
 CHAPTER	
1. Introduction.....	12
Statement of the Problem	15
Purpose of The Study	16
Research Questions.....	16
Significance of Study.....	16
Study Overview	17
Preview of Chapters.....	18
2. Literature Review.....	19
The Rural Landscape	20
Capital	27
3. Methodology	36
Qualitative Research.....	36
Narrative Inquiry	37
Study Design.....	38
Participant Selection	39
Data Collection	41
Data Analysis.....	41

Trustworthiness43

Ethical Considerations.....43

Assumptions44

Limitations.....45

Summary45

4. Results.....46

 Participant Profiles47

 Social and Cultural Capital.....49

 Social, Cultural and Moral Capital54

 Familial and Aspirational Capital.....56

 Resistant Capital59

 Spiritual Capital.....61

 Summary62

5. Discussion and Implications63

 Relationships Matter.....64

 Perception Is Reality.....66

 Family Matters.....67

 Resist.....68

 Recommendations For Practice.....69

 Recommendations For Future Research.....72

Conclusions73

REFERENCES74

APPENDICES

A. RECRUITMENT LETTER84

B. INFORMED CONSENT85

C. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS87

LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. Community Cultural Wealth.....	28
2. Community Cultural Wealth Summary	46

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study explored the narratives of high school seniors who had two significant designations: rural and low-income. Rural is no small factor; twenty-five percent of students in the United States attend rural schools (United States Department of Education, 2012). Socioeconomically disadvantaged students continue to be at risk of low achievement and dropping out (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014). This makes the combination of rural and low income a significant grouping across the United States. The concentration of poverty in rural America is growing and tends to be clustered rather than spread out across the United States (Farrigan & Parker, 2015, p. 1); “Concentrated poverty contributes to poor housing and health conditions, higher crime and school dropout rates, as well as employment dislocations.” California, where this study takes place, ranks fourth in states with highest number of rural residents living in poverty (Housing Assistance Council, 2012). With the nature of poverty existing in clusters (Farrigan & Parker, 2015), it is imperative that educators understand the community and cultural dynamics that students experience.

The achievement gap between high-income and low-income students persists nationwide and “socioeconomic challenges, such as the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals or the adult unemployment rate, present the most persistent threats to high levels of student achievement” (Johnson & Strange, 2007, p. 1). Children living in poverty face higher rates of incarceration and pregnancy, behavioral problems, and lower levels of educational achievement than high-income students (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). In 2012, the United States high school graduation rates reached a historic high at 80%, yet in some states, as many as one-third of low income students did not graduate (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014). In 2016, economically disadvantaged students had a graduation rate of 79% in California (National Center

for Education Statistics, 2017). Clearly “a considerable research bank on students from economic disadvantage exists, [but] relatively little research has been conducted specifically with students of poverty in rural settings” (Burney & Cross, 2006, p. 16). The participants in the study were low-income rural students and successfully graduated high school. Because poverty is a strong factor affecting rural students, more research is needed to learn about sources of support in their schools and communities.

However, research on rural topics may be difficult when simply defining rural has been a challenge for researchers trying to determine whether it is population size, population density, or perhaps geographic isolation that truly defines rural (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008). It has been determined that the best strategy is to first identify urban areas with adjacent suburbs included in the urban territory, and then classify regions that are not urban as rural (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008). The United States Census Bureau (2010) outlines rural as all territory, population, and housing units located outside urban areas and urban clusters. An urban area is considered densely populated with 50,000 or more people, while an urban cluster is also densely populated, but less so with a population between 2,500 to 50,000 people. For example, in Northern California, San José and Stockton are classified as urban areas where Sonoma and Auburn are urban clusters.

While rural areas are spread across the United States, half of the nation’s rural students live in states that are also urbanized, such as California; as a result, the high numbers of rural students in California actually represent a small minority of the entire population in the state (Johnson & Strange, 2007; 2009). This misrepresentation can create an ‘out of sight, out of mind’ scenario where the rural student population is underperforming and worse off than reported and socioeconomic predictors suggest due to the large numbers of the urban schools

(Johnson & Strange, 2007). In addition, rural schools in the southeastern and southwestern United States are also more racially and ethnically diverse than in other states and have higher numbers of English Language Learners (Johnson & Strange, 2007). Again, many of these student subgroups live in rural areas within more urbanized states such as California; consequently, rural regions that need the most support are in states where they are likely to receive little attention (Johnson & Strange, 2007; 2009).

Although each rural community is unique, common themes of education and income attainment exist among them with financial differences between rural and metropolitan areas persisting. Median income rural families make about 75% of their peers in urban areas (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). Today, rural families in California continue to have lower median incomes than those in urban areas (Bishaw & Posey, 2016). Although these differences may be interpreted as negative for rural communities, one must also consider differences in values between non-rural and rural populations. A review of the literature on rural education (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999) is “almost devoid of negative images of rural life...many rural residents identify strongly with their place of residence” (p. 69). In relation to a sense of place, students, for the most part, view their rural places positively (Burney & Cross, 2006) and tell “good stories of country life” (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, p. 11). Formal education levels in rural populations are lower than in urban areas, including lower high school graduation rates; students who wish to attain high education often must leave their hometowns to move closer to colleges (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). Frequently, rural residents seek employment that enables them to stay close to family instead of careers that may take them away (DeYoung, 1995). Adults may earn less money, but they view their incomes as less important when compared to their being able to stay

close to those they love; being near family and friends is of more value than a higher-paying job (DeYoung, 1995; Meece, 2013), a value worth exploring in rural cultures.

Small, Harding, and Lamont (2010) argued that poverty scholars should turn their attention to the issue of culture for three reasons: to understand people's responses to poverty, to debunk "existing myths about the cultural orientations of the poor" (p. 10), and to define the meaning of culture or the way scholars use the term culture. This also relates to a major topic of this study, capital. Culture is defined as behaviors and values learned, shared, or exhibited by a group of people; capital is mostly recognized as knowledge that the wealthy and middle class, or dominant cultures, possess (Saathoff, 2015). This leads to some cultures viewed as lacking cultural wealth, or capital. In response, community cultural wealth framework formed out critical race theory, which identifies capitals of non-dominant populations rather than viewing them as deficient (Yosso, 2005). The six capitals—discussed in more detail in chapter two—are resistant capital, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and aspirational capital. While "a traditional view of cultural capital is narrowly defined by White, middle class values" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77), community cultural wealth framework recognizes many different skills, abilities and forms of knowledge used by communities of color (Yosso, 2005). For example, a bilingual student may assist his or her parent at home with translating documents that are written in English, but at school his or her fluency of two languages is not valued (Saathoff, 2015). My study does not focus on communities of color; however, "rural ways of living and being and knowing are devalued—literally marginalized" (Howley, 2009, p. 540). Using this framework to study another marginalized population—white, rural, low income students—will allow researchers to learn about the cultural wealth existing in their communities.

Statement of the Problem

Rural education of low-income students is an issue neither small nor rare; it is urgent. The number of rural communities enduring decades of persistent poverty is rising (Housing Assistance Council, 2012). With almost a quarter of the nation's students attending rural schools (United States Department of Education, 2012) and a very small percentage of research focused on rural schooling (Hardre, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2009), more attention is needed on students in rural communities.

Researchers have begun exploring cultural capital and the impacts on education in urban communities, as reflected in the community cultural wealth framework (Yosso, 2005) and should be extended and used to study student experiences in rural communities. Cultural capital, the knowledge of the upper and middle classes, is often measured by what privileged groups value while other forms of capital go unrecognized (Yosso, 2005). Values and cultural capital of non-dominant communities is understudied; more explicit inquiry into the implicit and explicit practices, inclusions, and exclusions of schooling is needed (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). It is also important to recognize forms of capital do not exist as separate entities, but rather they layer and build upon one another (Yosso, 2005). Low-income, rural high school students may have disadvantages, but examining their experiences through a community cultural wealth framework can reveal resources and supports.

This dissertation presents the relationship of community cultural wealth and youth within a rural high school setting. In this study, I explore how low-income rural high school students' experiences reflect non-dominant capitals in their school community. This concept is of importance because without this framework, cultural wealth of non-dominant populations is undervalued and limited by privileged groups.

Purpose of the Study

This study explores how community cultural wealth frames the experiences of low-income, rural high school students.

Research Questions

I plan to investigate this topic with the following research questions:

- 1) How do low-income high school students experience high school in rural Northern California?
- 2) How do low-income, rural high school students use community cultural wealth in their educational journey?

Significance of Study

As poverty persists in America, rural poverty consists of unique features and deserves further exploration as student enrollment and diversity in rural schools increases (United States Department of Education, 2012; Johnson & Strange, 2009). This narrative case study is critical as it focuses on White low income students attending a rural high school in Northern California—a state designated as significant on the Rural Education Priority Gauge, which ranks the need for policymakers to address rural education issues in the state (Showalter, Klein, & Hartman, 2017). My research will fill gaps in the literature as the amount of research into rural education, especially low-income students is dismal (Burney & Cross, 2006).

This study is also significant in that it pertains to cultural capital in rural communities. It utilizes a framework that has been used to study students of color to investigate the experiences of rural low-income white students, also a marginalized population. While it may be easy to examine struggles of poverty in simply economic terms, underlying forces and other forms of capital sustain and disguise social class divisions, which permeate educational settings as well. Capitals are traditionally arranged in a hierarchy with some capitals more valued than others (Yosso, 2005). In a social system, such as a school campus, capital affects students' access to

opportunities and resources (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). By investigating community cultural wealth of low-income rural students within their school community, educators can uncover possibilities in supporting them. Educators must recognize and place value on non-dominant forms of capital that students do have in order to encourage positive school outcomes; more research is needed to identify how schools can utilize and support non-dominant capital to support youth in achieving their goals (Meece, Hutchins, Byun, Farmer, Irvin, & Weiss, 2013). In order to support impoverished students, I plan to explore community cultural wealth at school and how youth utilize the capital components.

Study Overview

In order to capture high school students' experiences, I will utilize a qualitative research design. Furthermore, a narrative case study approach will allow me to collect and share student stories. A narrative approach allows voices of students to be heard on their own.

The students I propose to study will be current high school seniors in a rural Northern California school district. I intend on studying experiences of four low-income White students on the brink of high school graduation, therefore I will select respondents who have followed a traditional path of coursework at a comprehensive high school. Participants will also be 18 years or older so they may provide consent for themselves.

Finally, I present data analyzed in terms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). This framework will be discussed in detail in chapter two.

Preview of Chapters

Rural communities and education will be shared in chapter two, strengths and challenges, as well as descriptions of capital and finally community cultural wealth. Chapter three introduces a qualitative approach and outlines a narrative study design to answer the research

questions. Participant data—students’ stories—are shared in chapter four presented in emerging themes of capital. Finally, in chapter five, I present findings including recommendations on how to support rural youth.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Bourdieu expands the definition of capital beyond monetary assets and includes social or cultural assets such as education level or style of dress; capital can create or reproduce inequality with some capitals more valued more than others (Bourdieu, 1983). School systems reflect the experiences of the dominant class; what is valued by privileged groups carries over to school making non-dominant capitals, such as moral or aspirational, less valuable than others (Yosso, 2005). However, students of color for instance, build their cultural capital with family supports, spiritual beliefs, or their moral practices adding layers of support in the form of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). People who live in poor rural areas may lack economic capital; however, community cultural wealth and other forms of capital are strong forces in these communities (Sherman, 2006; Yosso, 2006). Educators may be able to capitalize on these other types of wealth, expanding students' opportunities and academic experiences in high school. This study explores how community cultural wealth frames the experiences of low-income, rural students. I plan to investigate this topic with the following research questions:

- 1) How do low-income high school students experience high school in rural Northern California?
- 2) How do low-income, rural high school students use community cultural wealth in their educational journey?

The purpose of this literature review is to present an understanding of rural poverty, non-dominant capital and culture, and how the two respective topics are related, especially in terms of youth and the educational system. The chapter begins with an illustration of the rural landscape, poverty, schools, and values followed by an explanation of the community cultural wealth framework. The chapter concludes with a discussion on rurality further connecting how dominant cultures marginalize not only less mainstream capitals, but also rural ways of living.

The Rural Landscape

To understand poverty in one place is not to understand it in every place. As culture, populations, policies, and geographies vary across the United States, so do the faces and experiences of communities and students; “rural communities across the United States are so diverse that it is difficult to define a set of universal characteristics” (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999, p. 68). This section describes rural poverty, schools, students, and values to provide an overview of life and education in a rural community.

Poverty. Nationally, rural poverty differs from urban poverty and need further exploration. In rural areas, poor children are more likely to be White than in urban regions (O’Hare, 2009) and overall the majority of people in poverty in the United States are white (Housing Assistance Council, 2012). California is one of ten states with the highest number of rural and small town residents in poverty, ranking number four (Housing Assistance Council, 2012). The poverty rates in some rural regions remain stubbornly high and the number of communities with persistent poverty is increasing (Housing Assistance Council, 2012).

In examining rural poverty, it is important to understand different types of economic circumstances that can exist in rural communities. For example, rural regions are often classified as playgrounds, dumping grounds, or unseen grounds (Lawson, Jarosz, & Bonds, 2010). Rural areas defined as playgrounds are communities where the wealthy and middle class invest in tourism or gentrification based on the natural resources and attractiveness of the region (Wilcox, Angelis, Baker, & Lawson, 2014). For example, in Guerneville CA, located in Sonoma county and near the Russian River Valley, many residents have been forced to living in their cars due to high rent prices (Abramsky, 2016). As a result, the wealthy and middle class may not actually live in the area and jobs related to tourism industry may not include salaries above minimum

wage (Wilcox et al, 2014). Therefore, the poor do not necessarily benefit from the financial investments and gains in their community because they cannot afford to. Areas viewed as unsuitable for tourism or new developments in turn are perceived as dumping grounds, that is, they compete for industrial or governmental projects that are unwanted by other communities. These projects include prisons—Pelican Bay for example which became Del Norte county’s largest employer (Tamaki, 2000) or food processing plants; both projects provide jobs to the community members, but are often low paying, high risk and include disadvantages such as looser environmental or labor restrictions. Rural regions, such as Clipper Gap, CA, also become invisible, or “unseen grounds” (p. 667) such, in that they attract no major investments and are often excluded from opportunities and resources, deepening poverty (Lawson et al., 2010).

Although rural populations and areas are ultimately unique from one another, there are common themes of rural poverty, such as agricultural communities, declining industries, and persistent poverty (Duncan, 1992; Flora, 1994; Lawson et al., 2010). The following descriptions emerged from research centered in Appalachia and the southern United States, however, are characteristic of other impoverished rural regions (Duncan, 2000; Wilcox et al., 2014). Poverty is high in strong farming counties (Lawson et al., 2010). On the other hand, in single industry areas that also have high land ownership, high school dropout rates and poverty are lower than single industry areas without much land ownership (Duncan, 1992; Flora, 1994; Wilcox et al 2014). Two characteristics of persistent high poverty areas include a focus on a single industry (such as a natural resource or single manufacturer) or a rigid class structure with power in the hands of a few (Wilcox et al. 2014). The latter characteristic involves using reputation and political connections and often results in an oppressive environment (Duncan, 1992; Flora, 1994; Wilcox et al, 2014).

Despite these fiscal circumstances, poor White families in rural communities are frequently devalued by better-off families and their poverty is seen as a lifestyle choice rather than the result of economic circumstances (Jarosz & Lawson, 2002). This vantage point not only provides for stereotypes, but also focuses the responsibility on the individuals, thus removing responsibility from the community and the reasons for persistent poverty (as discussed earlier). In a less negative light but still assigning personal responsibility, self-reliant and rugged are also descriptors of poor individuals who are working to provide for their families (Lawson, Jarosz, & Bonds, 2008). In actuality “the poor living in areas where poverty is prevalent face impediments beyond those of their individual circumstances” (Farrigan & Parker, 2012, p.1). While there exists a social stigma that poverty and homelessness is a lifestyle choice or consequence (Hallett, 2012), homelessness is more likely due to economic reasons rather than personal choices (Cohen, 2007). The majority of homeless in rural regions are due to inability to make rent (eviction); they were often on waiting lists for subsidized housing or unable to come up with initial upfront costs needed to obtain a rental unit (Cohen, 2007). People who were homeless in rural communities were likely to live with friends, doubled or tripled up with family members (Cohen, 2007), which is typical in urban areas too (Hallett, 2012).

In impoverished areas, local leaders often do not mention poverty. Instead, they describe the positive quality of life and other aspects of the community. The recreational activities that are often highlighted in rural areas are not even accessible to the poorer residents (Lawson et al, 2008). Rural poverty seems to be either ignored altogether, or stereotyped, by those wealthier in economic or dominant capital and is “often forgotten or hidden from mainstream America” (Housing Assistance Council, 2012, p. 4).

Limitations of rural schools. Rural schools can face disadvantages too, mostly related to finances. In 2013, California passed legislation to fund schools using the Local Control Formula (LCFF). School districts now receive base funding per student, but also extra funds for disadvantages or low-income students to support academic achievement. The extra funds provide additional assistance, but often not enough to cover all spending gaps across districts in California when comparing suburban, rural, or wealthy districts. School budgets are often limited, making it difficult to provide equal amounts of resources as schools in metropolitan areas (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Showalter, Klein, & Hartman, 2017). Reeves (2003) studied the impacts of previous legislation, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) on rural schools in the U.S. noting geographic distances, lack of transportation, limited access to technology, teacher shortages, low student achievement, and limited finance. Furthermore, highly qualified teachers – those credentialed in a specific subject matter – are difficult to attract to rural communities due to lower salaries and benefits (Bursuck, Robbins, & Lazaroff, 2010). Johnson and Strange (2007) report that rural student enrollment is increasing, with the number of minority students also increasing in rural America adding more needs. The states identified with the most underperforming rural schools are also those that are highly urbanized, such as California and Florida. In highly urbanized states, rural communities remain in the shadows of the big city schools while local political and school leaders have little influence advocating student services (Johnson & Strange, 2007).

Due to the limited finances and teachers available in rural schools, there are generally fewer opportunities for students to take advanced placement courses and participate in co-curricular activities (Meece et al, 2013; Singh & Dika, 2003). This can impact access to courses and even post-secondary plans as enrollment in honors and advanced courses is positively

correlated with college enrollment and degree completion (Adelman, 2006). Rural brain drain is a concept that is described as schools being agents which prepare the community's best and brightest students to leave the rural area for better opportunities (Carr & Kefalas, 2009); researchers posited that small towns recognize their most talented youth and are especially good at nurturing these youth (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Students deemed as most talented received extra attention and resources, but this perception was also dependent on the child's moral fortitude and the deservingness of their family (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). This means some students may be receiving more access or opportunities in their school community than others based on moral capital (explained in later section).

In the most recent study of rural students' attitudes about their education and high schools, participants report some examples of negative experiences identified as related to socioeconomic status (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). A few students feel that it is harder for poor students to get into advanced classes and that the school counselors assume that poor kids are losers (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). Facilities in poor condition are acknowledged as problematic by students, who describe their schools as being run-down; several also use negative stereotypes, such as hick school (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). Despite these challenges recognized by students, a college aspiration survey given to rural high school students in Appalachia shows that school belonging and comfort—strengths discussed in next section—are strong influencers on student aspirations (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004).

Positive aspects of rural schools. A strength of rural populations and school is a sense of community (Bauch, 2009; Meece et al, 2013). Rural high school students experience a greater sense of belonging and close community-school relationships (Meece et al, 2013). Pupils attending smaller schools also have more positive attitudes about their schools, higher rates of

school attendance, and less disciplinary incidents than those at large schools (Burney & Cross, 2006). Rural parents are more likely than urban to attend a school event during the year (Provasnik, Kewal Ramani, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, 2007). Furthermore, teachers in rural schools are able to form special bonds with their students more commonly than in larger, urban schools (Hardre, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2009); supportive teacher-student relationships are an asset of rural high schools (Meece et al, 2013). Fostering a sense of place among students is advantageous in that separating schooling from students' context has negative effects (Budge, 2006). Research suggests social networks and the close knit community in rural areas supports students in their learning and further research about this connection is needed (Hopkins, 2005).

Values. While many of the comparisons between rural and urban schools tend to paint a bleak picture of the rural educational setting, it is important to note the role that values play in these communities (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999). Rural students are encouraged by parents to follow their own interests, instead of what is valued by others (Hardre, 2009), which may explain the lower levels of college attendance. For instance, a high school graduate may pursue an interest that does not follow a traditional college path, and is supported by family in doing so. Similarly, researchers find rural community members tend to value staying near friends and relatives (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004, Meece et al, 2013), which means they often choose occupations that allow them to remain in their communities even while this results in lower salaries; “for even though wage labor is considered important, it may not be important enough to leave family, friends, and home” (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999, p. 69).

In rural communities, nonacademic and extracurricular activities are valued just as much, if not more, than academics (Nachtigal, 1982). Students who had high respect for and positive relationships with their parents were less likely to have college aspirations (Meece et al., 2013).

Values of hard-work, family, and discipline are commonplace in rural America (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Nachtigal, 1982). While rural educators, many of whom were raised close to where they teach (Lemke, 1994), may see the role of the school to educate and prepare students for the world outside of rural America in an academic sense, parents view the school as instilling academic skills as well as community interests, and value keeping their children close to home (DeYoung & Lawrence, 1995). In a less dominant culture (rural), less dominant capitals such as moral are present (Sherman, 2006). Lower post-secondary rates of rural students may have less to do with rural financial deficits and more to do with high levels of other forms of capital (Howley, 2009).

When given the Rural Attitude Survey, students paint a mostly positive picture of rural experiences (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). Youth use words such as nature, community, caring, close-knit, and peaceful when describing their rural communities. “Students used images that, taken together, told good stories about country life...images associated with a healthy society...They emphasized the importance of relationships and relatedness” (p. 11). Students also describe their high schools as feeling like a close knit family (Herzog & Pittman, 1995) naming their peers and even teachers as friends (Hoffman, 2005).

Despite economic stressors, rural students find strength and resources even in impoverished communities. From this setting follows a description of capital and its role in rural locations.

Capital

Bourdieu (1986) described capital as “a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures...the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world” (p. 1). Capital is mostly recognized as knowledge that the wealthy and middle class, or dominant cultures,

possess (Saathoff, 2015). This leads to some cultures viewed as lacking cultural wealth, or capital. Capital is not just about financial worth and how much money families may have; when studying issues of poverty, one must not just examine the worth of financial capital as “capital involves oppression that functions in a covert and natural way which privileges those in the dominant group” (Musoba & Baez, 2009, p. 152).

In the school setting, some cultures and capitals are valued more than others; this critical race lens “calls into question White middle class communities as the standard by which all others are judged” (Yosso, 2005, p. 82). For example, European American culture generally expects students to wait until called upon in a discussion and speak one at a time, while children from African American families may be encouraged to assert themselves into conversations (Gay, 2002). Or a student in poverty who helps to support his or her family, may not have time to study and thus earn lower grades or test scores, affecting college admittance. This lack of financial capital can affect students’ access to other opportunities.

However, lack of financial capital does not have to mean exclusion from all capital; other forms of capital, such as moral and spiritual, are also critical and visible in rural and poor communities (Flora & Thimboumery, 2005). Students utilize various forms of capital to navigate the school system named as community cultural wealth (Flora & Flora, 2008; Yosso, 2005). See Table 1, a framework specifically for poor rural areas which challenges dominant frames or mainstream interpretations of cultural capital. While not specifically in the model, I also included moral and spiritual capital (Sherman, 2006; Huber 2009) in Table 1.

Table 1
Community Cultural Wealth

Type of Capital	Educational Context
Aspirational	Students and their families have hopes and dreams beyond their current situation or in the face of challenges
Linguistic	Students and families communicate in multiple languages or modalities
Social	Students and families receive support through community networks and resources
Familial	Students' feelings of kinship where histories and traditions are passed down through generations
Resistant	Students' self-worth despite inequality; oppositional behavior as a response to adversity
Navigational	Students' abilities to navigate systems which are not set up for them to succeed
Moral	Students' or their family's moral or lifestyles which affect access to school or community opportunities
Spiritual	Students' skills or practices which are engrained from a spiritual connection

Note. Capital descriptions collected from Huber (2009), Sherman (2006), Yosso (2005).

Traditionally, cultural capital “has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor” (Yosso, 2005, p.76). Cultural capital consists of cultural goods, such as attitude, skill, knowledge and basically how a person sees the

world (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1984) defines cultural capital in three forms. The first was embodied, dispositions of the mind and body. Flora and Thiboumery (2005) described this as being passed down from generations including the ways people act and speak. The second form was objectified, cultural goods (Bourdieu, 1984). Lastly, institutionalized cultural capital is defined as education in the form of academic credentials (Bourdieu, 1984). In poor, rural spaces, those with power often devalue the cultural capital of others (Flora & Thiboumery, 2005) with cultural capital measured by what is valued by privileged groups (Yosso, 2005). This assessment of cultural capital is essentially what maintains social systems and hierarchies (Lareau, 1987). The status signals of dominant cultural capital are valued and rewarded in school, benefitting the higher class (Winkle & Wagner, 2010). The community cultural wealth model takes into account many kinds of capital that students may bring with them to school.

Aspirational capital creates a “culture of possibility” because families “allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals” (Yosso, 2006, p.78). In the stories of undocumented women, aspirational and familial capitals were strongly tied to one another (Huber, 2009). Students’ families or memories of past can be a source of motivation during times of struggle in school (Huber, 2009).

Linguistic capital refers to communication skills including multiple languages or styles and skills that Students of Color bring to school and recognizes that many have engaged in storytelling traditions; “this repertoire of storytelling skills may include memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme” (Yosso, 2006, p. 78). It also values students’ ability to communicate with different audiences (Yosso, 2006).

Social capital consists of a person's social ties and networks, including institutional agents, that is, individuals who transmit information regarding resources and opportunities (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). These ties provided both practical and emotional support such as assisting in locating and completing a "scholarship application...while also reassuring the student emotionally that she/he is not alone in the process of pursuing higher education" (Yosso, 2006, p. 79). Their power was also in their ability to act as "gatekeepers," giving or withholding knowledge, as well as empowering students (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011). While some individuals within the network transmitted negative or wrong information, others simply do not provide any information (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). If a student was not interested in college or applying for scholarships, this information is not of value to them. For example, rural young people often did not receive information about options for their futures outside of the mainstream dominant culture idea of 21st century professions and pathways (Howley, 2009). This would require educational professionals to discuss an alternative to the "one-best way of living" (Howley, 2009, p. 547). While there are social capital strengths in rural communities, schools can do more to support youth who choose to stay close to home (Burnell, 2003).

Familial capital is a form of knowledge nurtured by family and "engages a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). It can be fostered by immediate and extended family or even friends which are considered kin and also through school, church, sports and other activities (Yosso, 2005). Rural students described their high schools as feeling like a close knit family (Herzog & Pittman, 1995).

Resistant refers to knowledge and skills, including oppositional behavior in response to structures of inequality (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). "Parents of Color are consciously

instructing their children to engage in behaviours and maintain attitudes that challenge the status quo...to be oppositional with their bodies, minds and spirits in the face of race, gender and class inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 81). In high school settings, students’ resistance may take form in self-defeating or conformist behaviors if students do not recognize the oppressive structure or become motivated to transform it (Yosso, 2005). Another example is college refusal by qualified rural high school students who had desire to stay in a rural place, refusing the “one-best way” (Burnell, 2003; Howley, 2009).

Navigational is comprised of students’ ability to navigate institutions which were not created for them to succeed (Yosso, 2006). Resiliency (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000) and individual agency have been recognized in playing a role in students’ navigational capital while also intertwined with social networks which aid in community and institutional navigation (Williams, 1997).

While not included in Yosso’s framework, moral capital and spiritual capital are also important. Moral capital is one such capital that is present in the absence of financial capital where the low income communities create their own hierarchy and discern among each other based on moral choices (Bourdieu, 1983). Swartz (2009) defines moral capital as:

Those qualities, capacities, intelligences, strategies, and dispositions that young people acquire, possess, and can “grow” in the pursuit of moral maturity, and where moral maturity (with its goal of “being a good person”) is related to educational, career, and financial success (p. 148).

This moral capital can affect access to jobs and community level charity because within close-knit communities, choices low-income persons make affect not only their material survival but also their community standing (Sherman, 2006). Low income, rural parents often felt that their students’ opportunities in school were limited based on educators’ views that their poor circumstances meant their families were less deserving (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Students also

perceived this and felt that poor students did not have access to advanced courses (Herzog & Pittman, 1995).

Spiritual capital, identified among undocumented Chicana college students, is defined as “a set of resources and skills rooted in a spiritual connection to a reality greater than oneself” (Huber, 2009, p. 721). This form is comprised of “religious, indigenous, and ancestral beliefs and practices learned from one’s family, community and inner self” (Huber, 2009, p. 721). Again, these capitals are not mutually exclusive but rather overlap and build upon one another.

Finally, I present Bourdieu’s view on educational impacts of class and capital as it relates to his social reproduction theory; this theory challenges the notion that America’s public education system supports upward mobility and instead states that school “is in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides and apparent justification for social inequities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a social gift treated as a natural one” (Bourdieu, 1974, p. 32). As long as educators continue to measure all students by a White middle class norm, improved school outcomes are unlikely. I instead acknowledge the relationship of a dominant metropolitan culture, and subordinate rural culture, and employ a lens of community cultural wealth to explore hierarchies among social class. Rather than viewing students in rural communities from a deficit model I seek to learn more about capitals that rural populations bring to the table.

The value of rurality. In connecting rural poverty to non-dominate capital, it is important to also note that within rural education research, there is dialogue that rurality—a term used to describe a rural way of being, including physical land features as well as lifestyles (Cloke, 2006)—is devalued by the dominant (metropolitan) culture. Rural lifestyles are undervalued making rural ways of life subordinate to the dominant, urban culture (Johnson &

Strange, 2009). Rurality is “yet another allegation of inadequate variation from an idealized Anglo standard...suburban and professional norm” (Howley, 2009, p. 540). Furthermore, this idea that the middle class professional way is the best way is promoted in schools (Howley, 2009; Wilcox et al, 2014). Researchers (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995; Meece et al 2013) argue that rural educators—with fewer resources—are challenged to prepare students with skills and knowledge useful primarily in metropolitan areas. Recent shifts in education towards 21st Century skills and the corporate entities supporting these standards reflect “the aims of schooling in distinctly corporate terms” (Howley, 2009, p. 541). Additionally, DeYoung and Lawrence (1995) state,

it may be difficult, if not impossible, to convince the American elite and the private sector that metropolitan living is not the ultimate human experience. After all, their very way of life depends on skills less frequently required in the countryside and on values consistent with careers and consumerism (p. 113).

While educators may focus on providing students with academic skills, college preparatory prerequisites, access to opportunities in job and career markets, one should not ignore the local values that exist which may also offer prospects for young people. With this marginalization of rural communities, where non-dominant capitals exist, community cultural wealth should be recognized and valued.

This overview of poverty, schools, students, and values provides a backdrop to begin understanding rurality and its unique features. Poverty remains an ongoing threat to educational success in rural areas (Johnson & Strange, 2007), as does rural deficit framing (Howley, 2009).

Chapter Summary

There are capitals valued by privileged classes, such as cultural and economic, and there exists little research on non-dominant cultural capital (Winkle & Wagner, 2010). “Whereas people with darker skins feel the immediate outrage of being judged inferior...the affront to rural

people is based on the fundamentals of bourgeois economic and cultural power” (Howley, 2009, p. 540) with urban and middle-class lifestyles seen as the “one-best way.” This study explores some of the ways alternative capitals are visible within the social dynamics of high school student communities and how educators can utilize community cultural wealth to improve high school outcomes.

Students use many types of capital to maneuver throughout the educational system and all overlap and intertwine with one another (Yosso, 2005). Educators must stop measuring students by the standards of the dominant class and assuming that “schools work and that students, parents, and community need to change to conform to this already effective and equitable system” (Yosso, 2005, p. 75.) and instead place value on forms of capital that the neediest of students do possess.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate how community cultural wealth frames the experiences of White, low-income, rural high school students. This qualitative study is intended to show reflections and to tell the stories of students' high school educational experiences in order to understand their community cultural capital. This chapter explains the methodology of the study and the narrative case-study design. Furthermore, I detail qualitative research, narrative inquiry, study design, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis, and trustworthiness. I also share ethical considerations, assumptions, and limitations.

Qualitative Research

Educational and social issues often require deep exploration and extended inquiry in order to fully gather and evaluate the experiences under inquiry. Qualitative research involves of “issues of gender, culture, and marginalized groups. The topics about which we write are emotion laden, close to people, and practical” (Creswell, 2012, p. 51). This kind of probing and depth of investigation also calls for open-ended types of questions, and follow-up questions to further understand the experiences (Creswell, 2012). I used an open-ended process for collecting stories as this “permit[s] one to understand the world as seen by the respondent” (Patton, 2002, p. 21). After collecting information from participants, I looked for themes or patterns to address research questions, support theory, and add to existing research (Creswell, 2012). Conducting a survey, or another quantitative measure of capital among high school students would not provide the depth of this study seeks to provide; “A qualitative case study provides access to changes occurring over time, highlights how youth navigate barriers that arise, and empowers youth by allowing them to explain their lives using their own words” (Hallett, 2012). This study captured

the stories of students and understand how youth make sense of their experiences as they cope with economic challenges and school.

Narrative Inquiry

Everyone has a story. As Reissman (1993) posits, people lead storied lives; narratives are how we make sense of the world. Narrative is essentially a person's reality and identity coming together to create their story (May, 2011). Researchers can examine how stories shape and reflect social context (May, 2011) as well as how policy affects lived experiences (Connelly, 2010).

Narrative research "honors people's stories as data that can stand alone on their own as pure description of experience" (Patton, 2002, p. 115). A narrative research design consists of individuals' stories as data; the lives of the individuals studied are researched and described through stories (Creswell, 2012). Characteristics of narrative design include chronological form, re-storying, and context and place (Creswell, 2012). There are different types of narratives and terms related to narrative, but all narratives generally take one of three different shapes: a short story about a specific topic or incident, an extended story about a significant event or stage in one's life, or a narrative of one's entire life (Chase, 2005). Additionally, interviewing may be the main form of data collection, narrative research design can also include observation, artifact collection, and other sources (Creswell, 2012). In this study, student interviews were the main source of data and took the form of extended stories about their experiences in high school.

Narrative is more than simply reporting a series or sequence of events (Rudrum, 2005). Researchers must also address the context of the story, addressing why and how events occurred to capture someone's story. In contrast, phenomenology focuses on studying a concept or idea with an importance on identifying themes (Creswell, 2012). The researcher produces a "highly

constructed text structured around a cultural framework of meaning and shaped by particular patterns of inclusion, omission, and disparity” (Casey, 1995, p. 234). Within the stories told may be epiphanies, turning points, or disruptions which change the storylines (Creswell, 2012).

Narrative research is as much about product as it is process (Colyar & Holley, 2010). A story element such as plot, can impact the audience depending on how it unfolds, while portraying the subject’s point of view also conveys the personal experience; another aspect I must consider is authorial distance, or how I position myself within the stories (Colyar & Holley, 2010). Narrative researchers

address questions of voice – theirs and those of participants. Thinking about character brings researchers to think about their roles in the inquiry and writing process, but also the roles of various participants, and whether or not they are central or noncentral to the telling” (Colyar & Holley, 2010, p. 74).

Keeping these elements in mind will help me make deliberate choices in my writing.

By capturing the stories of low income high school students, I can best frame their experiences within the community cultural capital framework. Casey (1995) described some of the reasons narrative research design is particularly appropriate when studying educational and social issues, providing various examples of narrative studies involving teachers, and both younger and older students. She concluded that in today’s world, and ever-changing circumstances, the stories available to study are endless; “What better way to grapple with making sense of our rapidly changing world than through the study of stories?” (Casey, 1995, p. 240).

Study Design

Toulmin (1990) identified four tendencies of qualitative research which make this social science an advantageous: a return to oral tradition, the particular, and the local. A narrative study design meets these needs. Studying narratives allows a researcher to return to oral tradition

while studying the particular—high school youth at a small school. I also engage in knowledge and experiences of rural students, and describe in this context, also local as each rural community is unique.

Participant Selection

The setting of this study was a rural county in northern California. The United States census guidelines for rural consists of three categories: fringe (less than or equal to five miles from an urbanized area), distant (more than five miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area) and remote (more than 25 miles away from an urbanized area). In this particular county, towns were scattered with no less than five miles between, with the largest community consisting of a population of 7,000 (distant rural), and the smallest containing just 475 residents (remote rural). The area had historical significance along with towns attracting tourism, and also areas that have little economic growth. The school district area selected was located in a part of the county that is rich in natural resources such as lakes, rivers, hiking trails, and could be considered playgrounds (Lawson et al., 2010) but lacked a strong industry. The area would not be considered dumping grounds but does have unseen grounds as discussed in chapter one (Lawson et al., 2010). Furthermore, this area of the county was recently scarred by wildfire resulting in great loss to hundreds of residents. While individual communities were spread out by distance, there was a unifying factor of solidarity in the region, partly supported by the middle and high schools which all students in the district eventually attend during their school career. The high school served students grades nine through 12 and had a consistent enrollment of between 850 and 900 students.

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit current general education seniors, ages 18 or older, who attended the rural northern California comprehensive high school. The superintendent of the district granted permission for me to conduct the study.

I reached out to the administrators and student advisory staff of the comprehensive high school in the district through email (Appendix A) and informed them of my dissertation plans and asked for referrals and support in referring students. I also chose participants who were at least 18 years or older so participants provided their own consent. I chose participants who are White and considered low-income students as determined by their qualification for the free or reduced lunch program. I recruited five candidates, three female and two male students; one of the female students declined leaving four participants as planned. My small sample size allowed me to gather rich data and portray a deeper analysis of students' experiences, focusing less on sample size and more on adequacy (Bowen, 2008).

I met with students who were referred to me and informed them about the nature of the study and what I would require from him or her, and chatted informally to get to know the individuals and make sure they were comfortable with me. The study was reviewed with participants who were asked to sign an informed consent document (see Appendix B). The student who declined to participate shared that she was facing many obstacles in completing high school, but was too embarrassed to share any more about her experience and did not want to be a part of the study. Four participants signed the informed consent agreeing to future dates and times. I also assigned a pseudonym to each participant to help ensure anonymity.

Data Collection

Two individual face-to-face interviews, designed to be conversations to invite stories, were conducted lasting 50 to 60 minutes each with time and location mutually agreed upon by

participant and researcher. I interviewed students from January to March at their high school in a conference room. The conference room was located in the school office but offered privacy and I reserved the room in advance for each date and time to avoid interruptions. Interviews took place during study hall times so students would not miss instructional time. Interview questions were open ended and focused on school academics and communities (see Appendix C); the questions were not provided ahead of time to participants. The purpose of the first interview was to learn how the participant views the school community and how he or she identified within this social group, while the second interview explored how the student identified with his or her community. In a narrative study, interpretation begins during the interview process (Riessman, 2008). Immediately after each data collection event, I wrote a memo to provide a summary of what was gathered. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. I offered non-verbal cues during the interview such as nodding, smiling, and making eye contact. A third meeting was agreed upon to allow for member checking and any follow up questions. I reviewed notes and asked follow up questions during and after formal interview questions.

With narrative design, the researcher must work at inviting stories (Chase, 2005). This kind of probing and depth of investigation also calls for open-ended types of questions, and follow-up questions to further understand the experiences. In this process, data is “co-created in interviews...participants have trusting relationships with the interviewer and openness to sharing detailed storied experiences” (Lehman & Berghoff, 2013, p. 17). I was an active participant in this process as I sought “to collaborate with participants, privileging their voices and experiences” (p. 38) and work with them to understand their narratives and connect their stories to critical theory” (Bickerstaff, 2010 p. 38) and the community cultural wealth model.

My own written reflections were another source of data. After the interview concluded, I wrote down any thoughts, reflections and important points that struck me during the interview, keeping a reflexive journal during data collection as well as analysis.

Additional documents for data collection included field notes when attending meetings with school leaders and participating in community events; articles in the local and school newspapers when I visited the campus; and school or community meeting agendas. I also asked for school transcripts for the purpose of seeing what classes the student took during high school.

I also explored websites relating to students' school communities as part of their "habitat" with participant permission (Hallett & Barber, 2013). Participants granted permission when reviewing the consent form (Appendix B). Access to Digital spaces, such as Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and Facebook also provide social stories and are significant forms of data (Hallett & Barber, 2013). While students signed for permission to access their private social media accounts, none actually provided access to the online sites for me to view.

Each research question was reviewed after an interview and I considered how the data at that point informed the questions. I identified emerging themes and ideas to be considered and listed follow up questions for the next data collection. I reached theoretical saturation when new insights stop emerging from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Data Analysis

Lebov (1997) states, "most narratives are focused on a most reportable event. Yet reporting this event alone does not make a narrative: it only forms the abstract of a narrative. For a narrative to be successful, it cannot report only the most reportable event" (p. 5). A researcher is not to simply report events but also analyze what led to events, who had what role, and how the overall experience affected the individual. The community cultural capital framework guided

the data collection and analysis as narrative strands were identified as reflecting forms of capital in the students' experiences and lives. I attempted to categorize narratives and findings according to the community cultural wealth model (Luna & Martinez, 2013; Yosso, 2005) to portray how students experience school and what forms of capital are identified in their journey. For example, narratives were marked as to which community capital, such as social or familial, was most evident in the students' stories. A student's story about an instance in which her family supported her was grouped as familial capital. However, the capitals overlap and interact with each other rather than being separate so I instead focused on the interactions of the capitals rather than as stand-alone pieces.

After interviews were transcribed, I engaged in several readings of the transcripts to identify distinct narratives (Lehman & Berghoff, 2013). After storylines and passages are recognized, I started to organize stories and memories into chronological order but more meaningful was the organization by capitals and their overlap and interactions with each another. The stories remained intact, and in long quotes, rather than divided into words or themes in order to preserve the narrative data. While themes were explored in terms of community cultural wealth, "the aim is to preserve fuller portions of narrative accounts and the messy, multiple themes and multiple readings offered in these stories" (p. 19, Lehman & Berghoff, 2013). I analyzed and presented a selection of narratives categorized within a framework of the community cultural wealth model (Luna & Martinez, 2013; Yosso, 2006).

With all the transcripts, long quotes, notes, and reflections, I needed to really see it all and engage with it. This required that I have my hands free so I utilized the Google voice typing tool in Google docs to put my analysis on paper and write my findings.

Trustworthiness

For the narratives themselves, traditional standards of accuracy were not employed because these are constructed stories with the participant making sense of their experiences (Lehman & Berghoff, 2013). I did not offer my analysis to the participant to allow him or her to review responses due to the potential consequences of member checking (Hallett, 2013). I instead employed a form of member checking that allowed me to provide the narrative for clarification, but without analysis. I summarized at the end of each interview to verify my understanding or interpretations of their responses during that meeting, previous meeting or other source of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I provided participants with their narrative text only at our last interview meeting and they briefly scanned it. This along with intensive contact and persistent observation will support credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I also returned to my field notes and transcripts to look for other relationships within the context of the stories. A reflexive journal was utilized at the end of each interview and during data analysis to express my insight and reasoning as I navigate through the various sources of data to support credibility and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This researcher reflection on observations, actions and feelings also became part of the data and interpretation (Flick, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

My role as an alternative education principal must also be addressed within this study. I was concerned about the issue of a possible perceived power imbalance. I could not hide the fact that I am an administrator in the school district because I want to be transparent with the students. I navigated this by inviting the student to participate just once. I did not want the student to feel pestered or pressured. My role was to act as an active learner while I attempted to

set aside any preconceived notions and refrain from passing judgment, I was not completely neutral as a researcher; my interest is in rural education and poverty, as well as social justice. My ideas not only played a factor in how I interpreted data, but guided the questions I asked. My research choice of rural education is driven by the fact I grew up and now live and work in a rural setting. When I conducted research in the county where I live and work, this was an advantage because I have experienced acceptance of being a resident and know first-hand the dynamics of the various communities within this area. Because I am insider and am so familiar with the students and community, I also have to be aware when I may be stereotyping certain students or families based on assumptions on the rural populations in the county. Plus, education laws, technologies, student needs, and challenges change frequently in education. I have to ensure that I use my wide experience of service in the school system to inform what questions I should ask—not assume I know all the answers. Ultimately, I feel that these factors benefitted my research and the population I studied because I have built trusting relationships among those I work with and serve.

I offered thanks to the participant in the form of a gift card to a local business in the amount of \$20 once all phases of the data collection were complete.

Assumptions

Creswell discusses four philosophical assumptions in relation to qualitative inquiry—ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological (2012). With a narrative research design, I took an epistemological approach by learning as much as I could about my respondent in this short time and relied on stories and quotes as my evidence. I also took a critical approach in that I was seeking to emancipate students by providing educators with insights about non-dominant capitals on school campuses.

Limitations

This narrative case study focused on individual experiences which cannot be generalized to all high school students in rural poverty as each person has their own story and each rural community is distinct from another. However, the existence of themes of community cultural wealth and how students utilize non-dominant capitals can be beneficial to other educators and communities.

Summary

This qualitative study focused on low-income rural high school students. I explored stories then analyzed experiences and community cultural wealth in relation to struggles with socioeconomic status and high school completion. Through this narrative inquiry, I developed opportunities for educators to support low-income students in high school.

Chapter 4: Results

This study explored how community cultural wealth frames the experiences of low-income, rural high school students. It took place in a rural Northern California community with four White low-income high school seniors. During the course of their senior year, participants of this study discussed elements of community cultural wealth within their high school experience to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How do low-income high school students experience high school in rural Northern California?
- 2) How do low-income, rural high school students use community cultural wealth in their educational journey?

I first describe student demographics, interests, and plans after high school graduation.

All participants are 18 years old, low-income, and in their senior year at the same rural high school. Results are presented as narratives describing students' educational experience and interactions of the following capital: social, aspirational, resistant, moral, and spiritual. Below is a table with short descriptions of the community capitals:

Table 2
Community Cultural Wealth Summary

Type of Capital	Educational Context
Aspirational	Hopes and dreams
Linguistic	Communication in multiple languages or modalities
Social	Community networks and resources
Familial	Kinship, histories and traditions are passed down
Resistant	Self-worth or oppositional behavior as a response to adversity

Navigational	Ability to navigate institutional systems
Moral	Moral or lifestyle choices
Spiritual	Beliefs or practices from a spiritual connection

Note. Capital descriptions collected from Huber (2009), Sherman (2006), Yosso (2005).

Themes of cultural community capital emerge as student narratives detail the overlap, interaction and layers of capital in this framework.

Participant Profiles

Four students of the same graduating class at a small rural high school in Northern California's foothills participated in this study. The population of the county is less than 50,000, with 82% of residents being White. The county has economic differences from one side to the other. One side of the county is rich in business, has a state park, wine country, and is a popular area for retirees from the San Francisco Bay Area. The high school in this study, with enrollment range between 800 and 900 students, is situated on the other side of the county which does not have the same popular tourist and business attractions, but is located in the county seat near community supports and the hospital. Healthcare and construction are the largest industries in the county. The government center, a neighboring county casino, and the local school district are also large employers in the area. Parts of this area were burned by a large fire in 2015 affecting many residents in the school district. There is also federal land—an impoverished Native American reservation—located within the school district boundaries.

The students lived in similar small towns within a 25-mile radius of their current high school. Each of them attended different elementary schools in their small hometowns, joined up at the same middle school in seventh grade and now experience high school alongside each

other. None of the participants had special education services. Before they go their separate ways after graduation, each of them shared their perspective on growing up in the close-knit community.

Billy. Billy, easily the most eager to share, lived with his grandparents in a town 15 miles away from school, population of 570, where all properties consist of five acres or more. While there is little commercial development in his town, he lived closest to the next major metropolis area. His grandparents were awarded custody of him after his parents struggled with their relationship and ability to care for him. His mother is no longer a part of his life but his dad and younger sister also moved in with the grandparents. He is an Eagle Scout and air soft sportsman (team members shoot each other with replica guns that project small plastic pellets). He aspires to join the military and sees school as more of hoop to jump through to start working on his life goals.

Sarah. Sarah lived in a more populated area about 12 miles from the high school with her parents and two sisters. This town has almost 7,500 residents and many amenities as compared to the rest of the county, such as some fast food restaurants, a grocery store, and even a Starbucks. She takes her studies very seriously and is in her fourth year of the high school automotive program; she looks forward to attending an automotive college in a city about an hour away. She enjoys spending time with her boyfriend and is applying at local businesses for part-time employment to save money to buy a car.

Garrett. Garrett lived 18 miles away from school on the very outskirts of the most populated area in the school district. He lived with his mom and younger brother. While his residence is in the largest town within school district boundaries, it is located furthest from local amenities in town. He struggled with the distance he had to travel on the school bus in high

school and even opted for homeschooling in tenth grade due to motion sickness. He eventually went back to school the following year and got back in physical shape after taking a year off from sports—something he takes much pride in. Garrett is tall and broad with a large physical presence, but has a soft and gentle demeanor. He plans on joining the military as a career path.

Anna. Anna lives in the most remote location within the school district boundaries, about 26 miles away in a small town of 475 residents. Her trek to school is a 40-minute car drive—even longer by bus—up and down a narrow winding road. The elementary school she attended is the smallest in the district with an enrollment of less than 65 students at times; her community has fought an ongoing battle for the last six years to keep its doors open. She lives with her father, step-mother, and siblings; her mother passed away when she was in fourth grade. Anna plans on attending the closest small community college in a neighboring rural community.

Social and Cultural Capital

Social capital refers to support from community networks and resources. For students, school community is the majority of their social and community ties. All participants described the small town nature of their school and community. The close-knit nature of this setting requires everyone get along or risk social networks and access to cultural assets. Billy described

that small town feeling. Everyone here puts on a happy face even though we may want to murder each other. It's like, oh, there's the neighbor, their car's broke down—I'm going to go see if they need jumper cables or a tow truck. And other places, hey their car broke down—let's go rob them. Small town versus big city. Small town, you can't get away with crap. That's why we're all nice to each other. You can't get away with anything.

Anna describes her high school as

smaller than normal high schools in the big city. You can't necessarily walk off the campus and just go ahead at McDonald's with your friends. You have to drive at least 15 minutes to go anywhere decent. It's pretty comfortable. You're not really pressured by a lot of people. You're not pressured to be in clicks because it's small and you know everyone so it's more of a family than separate groups.

Anna offers a more positive description than Billy on the small town feeling, but acknowledges that everyone knows each other. Anna also describes her band class as expanding her horizons,

I was almost out of high school and I needed to do something else so I joined and I'm really glad I did. I wish I would have done it sooner cuz it did help me with my social skills and being part of something bigger. It helped me open up to people more because when you're in band you're working with the team to make a piece of art together. We went to Disneyland that year and it opened up a new world. I grew up in a small town, probably why I wasn't very social.

While everyone may know each other and be forced to get along, the small community may allow students to be less open to new social situations unless youth participate in classes or clubs that expand their horizons.

Sarah describes the school as a place where everyone is usually really friendly and helpful, with the exception of some interactions between students with families of varying incomes.

I feel like there's a lot of kids but there's room for everyone. There's room for everyone to fit in. Everyone has their own group so that they fit into. But there are groups that just tease people—always messing with people. They usually mess with girls that they know they'll get a reaction like if they throw something at them. I wouldn't say popular kids but there's like kids that think they're better than anyone else so they pick on others. Maybe because they have like more stuff. They're more privileged. I know people that if they're not wearing like super nice clothes they're going to make fun of them cuz they don't have nice clothes like they do. Or if they wear the same jacket two days in a row they'll make fun of them cuz I think they don't have another jacket to wear something. They just kind of pick little things that they can brag about because they have more than other people might not have. Like if you have a nice car—I see that a lot. People will make fun of each other for not having a nice car; they think their car's better.

Sarah says it goes both ways though.

The guys with their big trucks—they'll make fun of some of them and say their daddy bought it, like their dad got their truck for them cuz it's super expensive. A lot of kids have to work for their own car so people will make fun of those with daddy trucks saying their parents bought it for them.

Anna shared her perception as well, “we have the hillbillies and what you might call the Stoners and the chill people and the kind of normal people and then the very popular people with

families have more income and they usually all hang out together. All in all we're pretty nice to each other." My analysis is that low-income students in this small setting have to get along with each other or risk their social capital, while those with more income may be able to afford not being kind to everyone.

These social interactions also influence access to information. Each participant reports the career center being integral in their college and career awareness and access to information. Billy did not visit the career center primarily for his career interests; rather that is where he and his friends spent time in their gaming club. The information and his presence benefitted him.

I rarely leave the career center besides to get food and stuff. That's one reason I hang in there, because I hear all the questions that kids ask her and I know what she responds with and because it's one of the questions I have. So I never have to ask.

Billy knows that he can learn a lot of information simply hanging out in his club, in the career center, without having to formally engage with the director herself. Because the director allows clubs and groups to socialize in the center, it is likely that she too recognizes this aspect.

Anna highlights the career center as well saying

all the meetings at the career center, those help me a lot. Really help me find a college that I want to go to and at least got me motivated about going to a college. The presentations gave me an overview of what was available.

Garrett, too, visited the career center. "I took the ASVAB. I went to the career center and signed up for it after hearing about it on the morning announcements. We also have career day with all the different careers like police and different colleges coming."

Participants credit their teachers for being positive influences during their high school years as well. Billy enjoyed his police science teacher very much, and felt he could talk to his English teacher when he was stressed. Sarah also had teacher support; "The teacher I assist, she's really nice and she asks me how my day is and I feel like I can talk to her." Anna felt

The teachers are motivating. Sometimes they stray from the lesson and just give us talks about life and how to get where we need to be and they're all very helpful. My econ class teacher had a very good advice about loans and stuff. He was very helpful. My pre-calculus teacher would always tell us about college and how it would help us if we do it even if we got into that a little bit we could pull ourselves out and it would get us better jobs.

These informal conversations with teachers whom students have trusting relationships with have a positive impact.

Anna spoke about the loss of her mom and the school support she received from her network of school staff:

My mom got sick and she had to go to the hospital and she ended up dying. I was in the 4th grade and she died of leukemia. The school stepped in and got us a counselor. It didn't really help me then I think I was just wanting to cope with it on my own and everything she suggested I do I'd already done on my own. My teachers are there pulling me aside and they would talk to me. I had two younger siblings. We would support each other it was a mutual thing we'd all step in and help each other when we needed it.

Participants look to the community for college and career resources as well as to give back. Billy is head of his off-campus airsoft group, as well as an Eagle Scout in the local Boy Scouts of America chapter. Garret was able to find work through his ties; "I got a job, not officially, but I work with a friend and he's a contractor." Anna is hoping for "community scholarships. Where I grew up the community wasn't very involved with children, they're just trying to keep themselves up." She volunteered at her local elementary school.

I painted their bathrooms and the kids would say hi to me and say oh it's the artist and it made me feel really happy and I wanted to help more. I'll always look back on that. I painted a mural of clouds and the girls and the boys wanted sports so I painted decals. I did whenever spring break and went over summer break. The teachers would tell them that's John's daughter since my dad was the custodian there. I'm going to look around and think I'm going to miss all these people. I think they're going to miss me.

Anna does not view her community as being supportive, as most of the residents are impoverished; however, the opportunity to put her artistic talent to work and the recognition they give her is a form of support here. She feels valued and recognized by this connection.

Sarah also performed community service and recognizes that her social networking can benefit her social and cultural capital,

working at the polling booths for voting and the junior fair board all four days. Getting to know new people who are also involved in the community and knowing people who have big roles...schools done its job. It was supportive helping me find colleges and scholarships. I applied for twenty-five community scholarships. There's an automotive scholarship so I think I have a pretty good chance of getting those because on two of them I was the only one who applied for it, so I'm really hoping I get this. All the other ones were based on things I've done in the community.

Finally, all participants rely on school transportation to and from school which is noted as a possible barrier in their social and cultural capitals. All four students expressed that it was difficult or impossible for them to take part in anything after school, including sports practices and after-school tutoring as noted by Sarah. Garrett participated in extracurricular activities but regrets he did not do more. He also opted for homeschooling his sophomore year due to motion sickness after an hour long bus rides to and from school, as well as over a mile walk to the bus stop.

I played football freshman year I wish I kept on playing. It was fun and I was really good I guess. But then I went on homeschool and then came back and I was overweight so I didn't want to play then. Senior year I just thought it was too late even though I wish I would have played.

Rural students' social and cultural capital can be affected by transportation hurdles. Anna is the only other participant who joined a school group, music, but most of the commitment was within school hours and unaffected by travel arrangements, while Garrett's sports participated was limited by how far he lived from the school.

While participants provided narratives describing a positive, close-knit community and school where everyone mostly gets along with each other, students also do not really have a choice if they want to have a social network. As Billy put it, "you can't get away with crap." Students' social and cultural capital are impacted by social interactions with staff and each other,

participation in extracurricular activities, and access to transportation. For these participants who rely on transportation and can really only attend school activities during school hours, their social capital becomes limited to their relationships with their teachers and peers. Students are attending the only public high school option in their district; they do not have a choice but to get along in their community or risk not having a social network at all.

Social, Cultural and Moral Capital

These capitals also overlap, influencing students' access to opportunities. Students describe access to social networks, their moral values and also reveal their awareness that public perception can limit or expand their community's support.

Billy has a strong anti-drug stance based on what he witnessed in his community circles,

One of my old friends that I used to hang out with turned into being a really big druggie so I stopped hanging out with them. He started doing drugs. I know from experience for my other friend and that their parents have died and other people have died. I've learned not to do any sort of drugs or alcohol.

Part of his position also comes from his observation of family. "My actual grandfather—he would drink a beer and he was really abusive to my grandmother. So I'm not going to drink I'm not going to do drugs just because of that. I'm actually nice and respect women." He also has strong views on his peers' sexual relationships. "Why have sex? Why violate yourself at such a young age? When you can wait till you actually have someone you want to be with for the rest of your life to do that?" Sarah also brings up the topic of sex and points out the unfair judgments related to gender:

Sex wise, if a girl was to have sex with a guy she gets called terrible names and put down for it but if guys go off and do that their friends are like oh good job and they get praised for it basically. I don't think that's right.

Another topic that Billy is passionate about is his love of animals.

I really don't care much of anything unless it's animal cruelty. What comes to mind is our neighbor Dave. I don't know his last name we just call him tweaker Dave. Most of my neighbors are tweakers and potheads. Our family loves horses. We love animals. We don't want to see them getting mistreated. He has two horses up at his house and we haven't seen the horses in a couple weeks. We went up there to check on them and we found Dave on the floor of his doorstep halfway inside of his house. He was crying his eyes out because his wife had left him. We had to take care of him because if we didn't feed those horses they were going to get abused and we don't tolerate that. Animals don't do anything wrong. We're the ones that help everyone and we don't really need help. It kind of gets to be a pain. I see myself as decent. That's the Golden Rule. Treat others as you want to be treated.

Despite Billy's rough go in childhood, he sees himself as a helper to those less fortunate than him and values his strong character and moral values. Anna described the moral judgments faced living in a small town.

Sometimes they know too much about someone and it's not something so much you want to know about and sometimes it's too close. This one girl's ex was leaking her nudes to everyone and selling them and he got in big trouble but it really hurt her a lot. I think it just makes them start to lose respect for each other cuz they see what kids and people our age are capable of doing. Our community is really small and sometimes we could be connected and other times it's like people talk smack about each other so it's a really close yet divided community. When my mom died and my dad was getting remarried that was the talk of the town. It's almost like here at school and couples break up and you hear about it. My mom was a big part of the community. She helped out at the school a lot so that impacted everyone.

This "close yet divided" community is quick to help in times of hardship, but also does not hold back judgment reflecting a tight-knit, familial environment.

Billy, while priding himself on being helpful, does recognize that community support can come with certain conditions. "Everyone knows each other but not everyone helps each other. Like if your life does not interact with my life in a certain way, nope I'm not going to help you." Sarah can see both the pros and cons of living in small community too; "If I get a scholarship I know sometimes they put it in the paper so everyone who reads the paper might know who I am so that is a positive. Because we're such a small community and everyone knows each other and

knows everything about everyone else's business...you could use stuff that gets people too I guess."

Moral capital adds another layer to community cultural wealth in that it impacts students' social and cultural capital. Students are aware that in their small community, members judge each other on moral choices and these judgements either limit or expand opportunities and social connections. The close knit nature of a small town can mean community members know too much about each other, withholding or offering supports depending on their judgement of lifestyles and moral choices.

Familial and Aspirational Capital

Familial and aspirational capitals are also not exclusive from one another. Familial capital appears in the form of family values being passed down, while aspirational is the hope and dream of a better future. Participants share that their families and feelings of kinship have supported them in high school. The students' aspirations are grounded in their family's values, hopes and dreams.

Billy is an Eagle Scout and airsoft team competitor aspiring to enter the Navy, the same branch as his step-grandfather served.

I want to go into the service or just do something besides sit inside a stuffy office all day. I have enough of that here. I'm going into Navy military police. With the Navy you're just patrolling the boat or an aircraft carrier or whatever they put you on. I'm trying for CHP academy so I can become a CHP after I get out of the Navy.

He also feels very independent and proud when it comes to his goals saying,

my own personal drive...if there's a job that needs to get done and you need it done I'm going to get it done and I'm going to get it done right. I won't leave a job site fast. I know people that do that and it really make me mad because I have to clean up after them and do their half of the work.

Anna describes thinking about the future and her aspirations.

Just the thought of the future motivates me because I want to be around a lot of kids and support them, so I think that's mainly what motivates me. Teachers see I'm already self-motivated. I still kind of have anxiety but I'm getting over it. I register for classes for college and getting all my stuff prepared for graduation. I'm planning on going to community college for 2 years and then transferring to University. I'm still exploring being a teacher for science. I've been saving up for a car and I must have enough so once I get that I'll be able to get a full-time job.

Anna credits her rural upbringing and family chores for her ambition and aspirations.

I have a big property so hard work and endurance helps me with mental endurance too.

We have to go out in the heat all the time and work. Weed whacking cutting down small trees because they get too close to the house. Have to have dedication to get a job done.

Sarah is encouraged by her parents, and also self-motivated, putting her hopes and dreams down in writing.

I have a list of goals on my phone for senior year. Get my permit, get my license and get a car. Get a job. Do scholarships. Pick the school I want to go to and get accepted and start being on my own I guess. I know my parents are proud of me for taking all the AP classes and the Community College dual enrollment class. I'm proud of myself for that one too cuz I am technically a high school student and a college student right now. I like to challenge myself like I know I can push harder and if I were to take like a normal English class I'm moving at a super slow pace.

Sarah, a four-year auto student, will be attending an automotive college after high school. She aspires to stay in school and finish her degree, which would make her the first college graduate in her family.

My parents push college but with my sister, she applied, and was going to community but when she applied to transfer she didn't have the right classes. Now she's a manager at Taco Bell so her job is right in town; she is not in school and she works full-time. At the college they give you a job placement before graduation. They'll help me get a job there if you finish school and then you get certified. They don't give you a guarantee for a job after schooling but it's pretty close to a guarantee that you'll get a job.

Sarah's "parents are a big motivation. They always pushed me to do my best. I've always done my best on everything. I was just stressing about my math class and we have a test coming up and I thought I was going to do really bad on it." She also credits her family members for challenging her in school.

My parents, they're like we know you can do the AP classes. My sister had just graduated my sophomore year and she was telling me the good classes to take and also saying she wished she took AP classes so I wanted to try it.

Her family's encouragement impacts her beyond academics too.

My parents were just proud of me and were like you can do it. They talked highly of me and make me feel good about myself. How my parents raised me—treat others the way you want to be treated. Be respectful, pay attention, listen, be able to understand what others say to you...things like that.

Garrett's family is influential in his career aspiration.

My sister always encouraged me to get good grades and ever since middle school I wanted to join the Air Force...I've always had that mindset of the military. My grandpa and brother encouraged me. They're both in the Air Force and I want to be in the Air Force. They're good people to look up to like how they did things. Home schooling my sophomore year really taught me to self-discipline, and also going to the gym every day to lose weight. Having a plan, that's from my mom and growing up that way.

Billy draws from his family member's strong will as strength.

My whole family is, like, tough. You mess with me, I mess with you but if you don't mess with me, I'm not going to mess with you kind-of-people. Most people think intelligence is book work. I say intelligence is street smart. My stepbrother's from Stockton. I've learned a couple of things from following him around. My parents, grandparents—especially since he was military intelligence—he was raised don't back up, don't stand down, solve your problems head-on.

He has learned from his family to face his challenges and not to shy away from difficulties.

For these participants, their hopes, dreams and postsecondary goals go hand in hand with their family's support. Participants all had family members whether parents, grandparents acting as parents, or siblings who influenced their career aspirations or simply encouraged them to follow their dreams. Students also learned the value of hard work challenging one's self from their families as well. Narratives did not reflect capital in the form of parent volunteering or attendance at their school functions, but rather their family's values and encouragement in their character development and post-secondary goals.

Resistant Capital

Billy's narrative reflects resistant capital—oppositional behavior or attitude in the face of adversity—when sharing about his family. He uses these struggles as motivation not to repeat his parents' choices.

I really don't like living with my dad cuz he's a jerk. He's lazy as hell. His license is suspended. His truck tags are suspended. He doesn't work. He's even lazy enough not to find a job...supported by my grandparents. My dad can go die in hell. My mother is Satan. There's a reason she lives in Stockton and I don't. There's a reason my dad and mom got divorced. My parents were fighting constantly. My mom was cheating. When I was living at the inn she practically broke the door down trying to get to me. That was where my house was at the time. I finally called my grandparents and said you guys need to come down here. I can't live here anymore; this is going to tear me to bits. And they did. I'm not going back to the inn.

He is also resistant to social pressures and prefers to be independent.

I never really cared about fitting in, be yourself. Get thick skin if you don't have thick skin around here. You really shouldn't care. What if someone likes you; let them like you. What if someone hates you; let them hate you. It's their decision to do so. I normally exclude myself—cancel my subscription to all your bull crap problems. One of my friends said their parents aren't getting them an iPhone 7 and I'm probably going to run away. I look at him like you really that stupid? You have it great compared to what I have to deal with. I have it a lot worse. You have a mother and father that love you dearly.

Billy's life experiences have given him a different insight than peers who have more advantaged circumstances and backgrounds. He resists the “normal” teenage social angst and dramas that other high school students commiserate about.

While Billy has good school attendance and is on track for graduation, he is resistant to the structure of school but not learning. He feels that school should teach more of what he values.

I'm not one of those people who loves school; it's a place to get away from my house. There are so many things that don't need to be in school. They teach you how to do mental math instead of doing taxes—like you won't have a calculator with you every day? Paying taxes, how to raise a child...they'll teach you how Henry the 8th killed wives but they won't teach you how to file for bankruptcy or do a job. Stuff like that you

have to figure it out. They'll tell you about the Hippocratic method but won't teach you basic first aid. Should be practical things like finance and sex education. Start focusing on career goals and what they want to do with their life. Common sense—that's another class I should have.

Billy expressed his views of inequity in school through analogies.

School's like a boxing match. Like if the ref doesn't see a cheap shot, you still have fight. I've learned to bite my tongue and roll with the punches. Make you do it just to get an A, a letter that determines product quality, hence grade A meat. School is the prison of society. They tell you what to do for eight hours a day, what to think. A short break to eat. You're in straight rows, nice, neat, raise your hand if you want to speak. That sounds like a factory. I've survived 18 years. I think I can survive one more before I go out into the service.

Billy's average grades and minor behavior issues throughout high school show more of a compliance with school than engagement, but his resistance is towards school mandates and social pressures rather than being a learner or a thinker, saying, "If we could bring the spirit out of each individual kid, there would be no need for school spirit."

Beyond Billy's individual resistance exists a larger resistance by participants to the idea of rural lifestyle being inferior to a big city lifestyle. Students endearingly described their school and community as small and comfortable, pointing out mostly positives of having a close-knit circle, resisting the narrative that small-town living has less value than suburban or metropolitan. Billy explained, "Big city...millions of people...you can get away with a lot. We have it a hell of a lot better here. We have internet and 10 acres...I'm good." Anna also shares this insight when talking about her community stepping up in a time of need. When her mother passed away, she felt support for herself and father,

Everyone supported him and everyone in the community checked on us and made sure we were okay. My dad was getting money from the government to help take care of us. I think in bigger communities when someone dies it's overlooked; people aren't as connected.

While none of the participants have experienced a suburban or metropolitan living experience, they all imagine their small communities to be more caring and connected.

Two strands of resistance emerge in this data with Billy in opposition to the inequities he has experienced in life and subordination in school, and participants' beliefs that their small-town way of life is more beneficial than what a city can offer. Billy's defiant attitude does not keep him from passing his classes and earning his diploma but he resists that formal educational standards and courses have more value than practical life skills. He also uses the challenges of his parents' dysfunction as a motivating force, working hard and valuing self-reliance, resisting his dad's lazy traits. The second layer of resistance emerges in narratives as rural living being better than urban. Participants share challenges of transportation, living a distance from school and amenities, yet believe their community offers a better lifestyle, resisting that any other way is superior.

Spiritual Capital

While little data emerged in this area, the last capital recognized in student narratives is spiritual which are skills or practice from a spiritual connection. Garrett "went to Catechism from when I was really little until I graduated in 8th grade. It taught me, like, commitment towards something other than school." While Billy attends church, it is only because his grandparents force him to and he does not share that he has his own spiritual connection. "I really don't. As long as you keep it to yourself, that's my kind of stand on it. You're allowed to believe whatever you believe but keep your beliefs to yourself. I don't identify with anything."

I expected this capital would have a more significant role in the study given there's a Catholic church, Church of the Latter Day Saints, and many community churches in the students' neighborhoods. Church youth groups, summer camps are popular as are Halloween harvest fairs.

However, spiritual capital appears to matter more to the adults in participants' lives than the youths'.

Summary

Initially I planned to analyze each capital separately but the stories and data are not clear cut. Students' various forms of capital overlap and influence one another in school and community. Four themes emerged from the data. Within social and cultural capital, students in their small community had to interact with each other positively, or will find themselves without social ties. Adding on to that is moral capital, in which students recognize that their choices and public perception affects access to opportunities too. Familial and inspirational capitals are also not mutually exclusive with students' goals and plans often grounded in their family's encouragement and traditions. Lastly, students demonstrate layers of resistance in opposing local social pressures and also denying the narrative of a lesser value of rurality. Overall these low-income students draw on multiple forms of community cultural wealth and the resulting interactions of capital for wealth and resources. These findings as related to literature practice and policy will be discussed in chapter five.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

Rural education continues to grow in the United States and deserves more attention. One fourth of students in the United States attend rural schools yet research on rural education is lacking. Combining this percentage with increasing poverty in rural communities, low-income high school students often lack economic capital and dominant forms of cultural capital as valued by middle class, metropolitan society. Rather than viewing rural school communities as deficient however, the community cultural wealth recognizes layers of non-dominant forms of capital that students from non-dominant cultures possess, such as social, familial, aspirational, moral, spiritual, and resistant. By using this framework, educators can support rural education and address the issues youth face, as well as understand and value the alternate capitals utilized within rural, low-income high school student communities.

This study explores how community cultural wealth frames the experiences of low-income, rural high school students.

- 1) How do low-income high school students experience high school in rural Northern California?
- 2) How do low-income, rural high school students use community cultural wealth in their educational journey?

In this study, it became evident that capitals do not emerge individually but rather intertwine. The capitals in community cultural wealth overlap, interact and reinforce one another and four themes emerged. The first theme is that relationships matter as students grow up in close-knit communities with social and cultural capitals interacting with each other. Secondly, perception becomes reality as students' moral choices in high school affect access to social capital. The third theme that emerged is that families and aspirations go hand-in-hand. Participants' relationships with family members had a positive impact on high school success and post-secondary plans. The last theme was one of resistance as students expressed their rural

way of life as positive and reflecting the best values of living. The four themes are discussed in more detail below with details characterized as rural, low-income or compounded as both. Next I discuss recommendations for practice and finally recommendations for research.

Relationships Matter

Over 20 years ago, students painted a mostly positive picture of rural living (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). In studying students today, rural youth in my study still described their high school and community as close-knit and like a family. The interaction of students' social and cultural capital impacted students' access to school opportunities as their relationships with their peers and teachers are part of integral to their social network. While relationships are important in both rural and metropolitan high schools, social capital is significant due location especially because rural students do not have a choice of networks. Participants are attending the only comprehensive high school in the entire school district. There is not a selection of schools for them to choose from where they live, whereas students living in suburban or urban areas may have multiple high schools to choose from. Rural students have no choice but to function in their small environment.

Low-income rural parents often feel that their students have less access to advanced courses in high school due to their economic circumstances (Sherman, 2006), however, the female participants were encouraged by teachers to challenge themselves and take rigorous AP courses. The male students both had goals of joining the military and did not highlight rigorous coursework. Billy enjoyed his police science class, a career technical education (CTE) class, and Garrett spoke of taking the ASBAB and attending the military presentations at the career center. Sarah however, attended both AP classes and completed a four-year automotive program (CTE course). This may not be related to rural location however. Narrative data showed that the

female students' families valued the rigorous courses while the male student's families had military backgrounds, touching on familial and aspirational capitals which are discussed later. The female students had family members and teachers encouraging them advanced courses; Billy spoke of a positive relationship with his English teacher and overhearing information from the director of the career center, but Billy also showed resistance, also a capital discussed later, to traditional coursework which may account for him not taking advanced courses. With three participants noting positive and informative teachers and staff members on campus, this confirms that supportive student-teacher connections remain an asset of rural high schools (Meece et al, 2013).

One issue these rural students face that affects the development of social and cultural capital is after-school activities or even attending school, as participants noted that they rely on school transportation with long distances, confirming previous research (Reeves, 2003). Garrett struggled in high school with motion sickness, at one point making the long bus rides intolerable and transferring to home school for a year and Sarah expressed that after-school tutoring was not a realistic option due to needing a ride home. There may be homeschooled students who do not access public school due to geographical and financial challenges, however these pupils are not necessarily identified if they are not or have never been enrolled in the school district. While greater participation in extra-curricular activities is noted as a strength of rural high schools (Meece et al, 2013), participants struggle in taking advantage of these due to living a long distance from school and lack of transportation. Lack of transportation prevented Garrett from playing more sports; Anna joined band but all of her activities were during the school day. This challenge is related both to income and rural life. The students live long distances from the

school, making travel difficult. However, if they were not economically disadvantaged, they may have been able to afford a car and the gas to drive these distances.

With these challenges and lack of school and network choice, students are limited by both their rural place and low-income circumstance. Long distances are a challenge that can be overcome or compounded by economic status. Even so, their small community and close-knit environment requires that they get along with each other or they risk losing their social network with or without financial resources.

Perception Is Reality

During their high school experience, participants learned that public perception of their morality can increase or decrease community support. Students recognize that their access to resources can be affected by perception of their moral choices confirming previous research in rural education (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). While most of the participants' experiences in high school are positive, there are some negative peer interactions that happen to be tied to their socioeconomic status consistent with the Rural Attitude Survey from two decades ago (Herzog & Pittman, 1995), such as students judging each other on whether or not they worked to pay for their car, or had their parents buy one for them. Not a rural issue, but rather income related, the wealthier students judged the low-income students on their less than luxury cars, and the low-income students judged the wealthier youth who drove cars that were given to them by their parents. This is seen by low-income students as a moral issue as they worked hard to buy what car they could afford and earned it, while their financially better off peers were just handed theirs. The "daddy trucks" as described by Sarah are more specific to the rural location as urban and suburban students of different incomes may discern among each other by a different vehicle type.

Much like how low income communities discern among each other based on moral choices (Bourdieu, 1983), participants point to moral and social capital interactions affecting their opportunities in high school, such as community support and scholarships. Sherman's research (2006) explored capital in rural communities as related to adults with moral capital existing in areas where adults lacked economic capital. This study demonstrates that in a less dominant culture, less dominate capitals exist for youth as well.

Family Matters

For low-income rural students, family relationships and aspirations are closely intertwined. All the participants had positive relationships with their parents or guardians (except for Billy although he did have a positive relationship with his grandparents who are actually raising him) and plan to attend a post-secondary training or college, challenging previous findings that rural students with positive relationships with their parents are less likely to have college aspirations (Meece et al, 2013). Sarah's parents encouraged college and "were just proud of me and were like you can do it. They talked highly of me and make me feel good about myself." Garrett's sister encouraged him to earn good grades and Anna knew her parents were proud of her. Anna's family also taught her the value of hard work through family chores on their ranch such as property clearing, unique to rural life. Also noted as a rural component was Billy's placement of value on spending time with his step-brother from the city and learning street smarts from him. Students credited family members for learning skills, as well as their encouragement and support in their education and guidance in their post-secondary goals.

The study does confirm that rural students stay close to home, choosing career paths that allow them to stay in or near their communities (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999). Participants chose local community college (Anna) or nearby trade programs (Sarah) to attend and value

staying close to home rather than going too far away for college or careers. Although not uniquely rural, Sarah was a first generation college student while Billy planned on entering the military which was passed down as a family tradition. Those leaving home and going a farther distance (Billy and Garrett) plan on entering similar institutions or armed services which may already be familiar to navigate due to small size of college or family tradition of military service.

Resist

Lastly, students exhibit capital in the form of resistance to deficit views of rurality in their stories of small town living. Participants have a greater sense of community and belonging and feel fortunate to have a rural high school experience rather than growing up in a big city. Despite rurality being undervalued—making rural ways of life subordinate to the dominant—urban culture (Johnson & Strange, 2009) participants resist notions that metropolitan living is the best way or as Billy put it, “we have it a hell of a lot better here. We have internet and 10 acres.”

Similar to students of color (Yosso, 2005), these rural white students recognize an oppressive structure and are motivated to transform it. By challenging the relevance of the coursework required in high school, Billy demonstrates a form of resistance compounded by both income and rural location. He resists the middle class professional way promoted in schools (Howley, 2009) and skills and knowledge useful primarily in suburban or urban areas (DeYoung & Lawrence, 1995). He still completes all of his coursework successfully because he is motivated to do well by his parents’ lack of achievements; his resistance is more in the form of attitude and questioning. In relation to the rural strand, Billy is critical of cities and the high population of people, valuing the vast acreage in his hometown. Anna also feels that people are more connected in rural areas and receive more community support.

Interestingly, the last study of high school youth and their experiences in rural life was over twenty years ago (Herzog & Pittman, 2005). Like today's students, "their responses were overwhelmingly positive, indicating a sense of home, family, community, and smallness of scale that represent the best qualities of rural life." Furthermore, that Rural Attitudes study pointed out while rural communities "have been marginalized by the dominant culture, [they] have precisely the qualities for which the critics of American schools are now looking." This was many years ago and while this current study parallels those findings, still the community cultural capitals that rurality offers remains undervalued in public education.

Recommendations for Practice

Overall, educators should familiarize themselves with community cultural wealth of non-dominant cultures such as students of color, low-income, or special needs students. Relationships are noted as a significant strength in small, rural schools and teachers and administrators can learn about their students' community cultural wealth through these connections. School leaders can use their knowledge about students' skills and values to better shape learning experiences for their pupils. By using this lens in serving low-income rural students, a strengths-based attitude is utilized rather than a deficit approach and professionals will recognize the alternate capitals, such as moral and aspirational, that co-exist in non-dominant cultures. The recommendations I offer involve future-driven approaches to teaching and learning, increased access to extra-curricular activities, investment in relationships, and redefining parent engagement.

Rigor and relevance. Rural schools should offer coursework with local relevance or classes that students find meaningful in the context of their community. If students are only being prepped for living in metropolitan areas, or the middle-class way, those not interested

receive the message that their local values are less significant and may resist school altogether. College-prep and a-g coursework is valuable and opens doors for admittance to four year universities, but youth need more post-secondary options considering many students value staying close to home. If rural high schools offer career pathways that can lead to employment locally, students are able to make a valuable living while remaining in their community.

While states require educational standards, minimum coursework and subject areas, schools can tailor classroom lessons or elective classes to address local topics that teach students character skills needed throughout their lives in any career setting. The International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) provides professional development in designing both rigorous and relevant instruction to students. The center highlights the need for “more emphasis on applying that ‘Googleable’ information—across disciplines, to real-world predictable situations and real-world unpredictable situations—is a fundamental shift we need to make to properly prepare learners to be successful in the 21st century” (Daggett, 2016, p. 6). In other words, teaching kids how to think instead of what to think, and teaching them skills not just for a specific job, but any job.

Access. As schools work to offer more opportunities for rural students, the issue of transportation must also be addressed. Schools should offer late buses with reduced bus routes in order to support students’ access to after school tutoring, clubs, sports and other activities. In communities where small-scale public transportation does exist, perhaps free passes can be issued to low-income high school students.

Culture trumps strategy. Investing in a school’s culture and climate and building positive relationships should be every administrator’s top priority. Staff and students alike should feel that they are in a supportive and safe learning environment. Dr. Bill Daggett,

founder of ICLE studies the most rapidly improving schools and consistently finds that these schools have strong cultures based on trusting and respectful relationships. Schools that invest only in instructional strategies lack this culture. Administrators should promote positive culture in climate by providing staff development and collaboration time to work with each other and promote shared leadership. Schools can implement relationship-building initiatives such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Simple gestures such as greeting staff each morning as well as students as they arrive to campus—a quick human connection—can go a long way. Actively investing in building trust and meaningful connections should be modeled by school principals for staff, students and families.

Family engagement. Finally, I encourage school officials to redefine measurements of parent involvement. Currently, parent involvement tends to be defined and measured by parent and guardian attendance at school functions and meetings. Notice that none of the participants in the study mentioned parents' presence at school as a support. With rural low-income parents who work and may not live close to the high school, their support may only come in the form of instilling the value of education at home. Meeting parents where they are, such as social media apps or via text message, may increase communication with families. Additionally, in a rural area, parent communication may also involve chatting in the grocery store or at a local event. Building relationships with parents and guardians is a worthwhile investment. Making time to call, text, or email parents with positive feedback promotes trust especially when staff may need to make contact for a negative reason. Administrators should not allow the first family contact to be for the purpose of reporting a problem. As evidenced in this study, parents are able to provide support in the form of encouragement, expectations, and aspirations. If schools can collect more information on how parents support their students, this would debunk the assumption that parents

who do not physically attend school campuses are not involved in their children's education and redefine parent engagement.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is much data collected by schools, states, and government on student attendance, achievement scores, suspensions, and more all in the name of improving educational outcomes. What educators do not collect enough data on is students' stories, goals, values, or interests. With this study limited to four participants, further study is recommended with a large sample size for extensive data. If themes of community cultural wealth can be identified in just four students, these experiences are most likely widespread.

In learning more about family supports, more can be learned about familial and aspiration capital and in turn, how these contribute to positive student outcomes. How do grandparents support their students? How does the parent who works nights support their child? What does that look like? How can schools recognize and value this?

Another aspect of future research could involve in what ways schools help students use moral and social capital. For instance, how schools promote programs and students in local newspapers or community events, or recognize students by giving them opportunities to engage in activities which allow them to build positive community recognition and build social networks.

In attempting to discern which elements of themes related to income and which related to rural life, it became evident that there needs to be research on how low-income and high-income students experience school in rural communities. This would provide more information and allow researchers to see differences and similarities in rurality.

Lastly, researchers could explore how high schools in more populated areas could draw on the strengths of rural school's sense of community. Are there strategies or approaches from small-town youth experiences that could be implemented in public education and have positive impacts?

Rural students experience school differently. There needs to be research that gives this understudied population the attention it deserves. It is absurd that many rural researchers, including myself must rely on citing articles twenty years old in order to explore this topic.

Conclusion

In non-dominant communities, non-dominant capitals exist; non-dominant forms of capital remain understudied and undervalued in schools (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). The community cultural wealth framework has been used to frame the experiences of students of color; this study reveals that low-income, white, rural high school students also utilize community cultural wealth. This framework provides us the rare opportunity to see the rural educational landscape as a place wealthy in alternative capitals and supports for students.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear fellow administrator,

I am asking for your assistance in conducting a study as a part of my dissertation for completing my doctorate at University of the Pacific. I need your help in identifying possible interview candidates in a study which will take place from October 1st, 2016 to March 1st, 2017. This form details the purpose of this study.

The purpose of this study is:

- To gain insight into socioeconomically disadvantaged high school students' experiences growing up in a rural community

The benefits of the research will be:

- To better understand the social structures in place in high school communities
- To identify significant components that could help support student success

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose include:

- One-on-one interviews
- Written reflections
- Observations
- Online/website viewing
- Document collection

I am seeking high school graduates who are 18, full-time general education students, and socio-economically disadvantaged. I would appreciate if you could extend an invitation to the students for me to contact him or her using the attached flier.

I also request permission to visit senior government classes in the event that I do not gather enough participants through referrals.

You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods I am using. Please contact me at any time at the e-mail address rmalamed@gmail.com or telephone number (209) 210-8784.

Thank you for your assistance,
René Malamed

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

Rural High School Students

You are invited to participate in a research study which will involve studying impoverished, rural students. My name is René Malamed and I am a doctoral student at the University of the Pacific, Benerd School of Education. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of you are successfully graduating high school and coped with economical disadvantages.

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into socioeconomically disadvantaged high school students' experiences growing up in a rural community. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in 3 sixty minute interviews. You may also grant permission for access to various social media profiles. Your participation in this study will last up to 3 months.

There are some possible risks involved for participants which are minimal. These are risks associated with travel to and from the interview, minimal psychological risk in reflecting on interview questions and experiences, and minimal risk in loss of confidentiality. There are some benefits to this research, particularly that you are contributing to a better understanding of the social structures in place in school communities and the identification of significant components that could help support student success.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call me at 209-210-8784, or dissertation chair at UOP, Dr. Hallet, 209-946-2265. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Research & Graduate Studies Office, University of the Pacific (209) 946-7367. In the event of a research-related injury, please advise us, and then contact your regular medical provider and bill through your normal insurance carrier.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Measures to insure your confidentiality are the use of pseudonyms. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time with out penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

You will be offered a copy of this signed form to keep.

Signature

Date

I also grant the researcher permission to access to my school attendance, academic, and behavior records.

Signature

Date

I also authorize the researcher to view my social media accounts, however, I realize I can withdraw this consent at any point during the study.

Please circle any accounts you give permission to the researcher to view.

Twitter Facebook Snapchat Instagram

Signature

Date

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The interview would start with informal conversation, my explanation again of the study, and an invitation to the participant to ask me any questions.

Interview One

How would you describe your high school to someone who has never been here?

Describe the student population.

Describe to me how students got along with each other.

What were the best parts of your school?

What are your least favorite parts of attending this school?

How might school be different if you attended elsewhere?

What challenges did you have during school?

How have you worked through those challenges?

Tell me about your favorite classes.

Tell me about your proudest moment in school.

What experiences have stood out the most to you?

Interview Two

How is your community different or special from others?

How might things be different if you lived elsewhere?

If you could invite someone from your community to attend class with you, who would you choose and why?

What do you learn at home that helps you at school?