

Analysis of rural students' pursuit of community college using community cultural wealth: Not everyone has a yellow brick road

by

Jenna Leigh Gannon

A.S., Butler Community College, 2012

B.G.S., University of Kansas, 2014

M.S., Kansas State University, 2016

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2023

Abstract

Rural students' college attendance rates continue to lag behind their non-rural counterparts (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2015; Byun et al., 2017; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Hlinka et al., 2018; Longhurst, 2014; McDonough et al., 2010; Morton et al., 2018; Tieken, 2016). While the body of research surrounding the pursuit of college for rural students is expanding, much of it focuses on deficit perspectives or in a few select geographic regions of the United States (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Harris, 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015; Howley et al., 2013; Morton et al., 2018; Sharp et al., 2020; Theodori & Theodori, 2015; Tieken, 2016; Wright, 2012). This research utilized creative nonfiction to give voice to underserved populations in rural Kansas, building from Yosso's (2005) strengths-based community cultural wealth. The research documented that aspirational capital was directly linked to college knowledge. Rural cultural wealth facilitators were key to the development of community cultural wealth and especially aspirational capital within that construct. The participants operationalized their aspirations to seek out college knowledge. The study concludes with practical implications for community colleges as well as suggestions for further research.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Royce Ann Collins

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Acknowledgements

First, I want to thank and acknowledge my mom, Mable Howard. Mom, you have supported and encouraged me through my entire college career, starting with the time and resources you spent getting me to athletic camps on college campuses when I was a kid. Thank you so much for everything you have done; without you, none of this would have been possible.

I would also like to thank the volunteer participants for their time and honesty. Thank you so much for taking time out of your schedules and for sharing your stories so openly and honestly. Your stories are the backbone of this research.

I would also like to thank my major professor, Dr. Royce Ann Collins. Thank you for your patience and encouragement as I figured out how to navigate this crazy world that we call graduate school. Thank you for believing in me and pushing me to stay on track and finish.

Lastly, there have been so many people along the way that have encouraged me and pushed me to do more. I cannot acknowledge everyone individually but thank you for giving me the push I needed along the way, for being supportive of the time and resources I needed to pursue this, and just for being there.

Dedication

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my mom; your actions laid the groundwork for me to get where I am.

I also want to dedicate this work to every rural student in Kansas who has ever been discouraged from attending college because you are from a small town or lived in the country. Where you are from makes you strong, it does not limit you.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

College attendance rates for rural students are lower than their urban and suburban counterparts (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2015; Byun et al., 2017; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Hlinka et al., 2018; Longhurst, 2014; McDonough et al., 2010; Morton et al., 2018; Tieken, 2016). In an economy that increasingly relies on a college-educated workforce it is important for communities as well as colleges to better understand the factors that influence rural student college aspirations and therefore enrollment and completion. While current literature has explored how cultural capital affects rural student college aspirations, a strengths-based approach is needed. Furthermore, much research with rural students has been centered in Appalachia (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Harris, 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015; Wright, 2012), the rural south (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Howley et al., 2013; Morton et al., 2018; Theodori & Theodori, 2015), and the rural northeast (Sharp et al., 2020; Tieken, 2016) demonstrating that more work is needed in other areas of the United States such as the great plains and the Midwest.

Researcher Positionality

In 2010, I graduated from a rural high school with a class of around 40, situated in a small town in Kansas. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, it was expected that I would be involved in extracurricular activities. These activities are what kept me motivated and made high school not only bearable, but exciting and they encouraged me to do well in the classroom as well. A first-generation student, I had committed to play volleyball at the local community college while starting my educational career towards a degree in chemistry and the hopes of one day attending school to become an optometrist. I believed that many of my life-long classmates would also be attending the same local community college, pursuing educational

paths that would lead to careers in agriculture, teaching, and the trades. This did not end up being the case for many of my peers as most did not pursue a post-secondary education.

A college education was always the step I assumed for myself after completing high school. So, I asked: What was it that set my expectations and experiences apart from my peers that did not pursue a college education, or those who started five or ten years later? Was it my involvement in all those extracurricular activities that gave me the drive to succeed? Was it because I had already had experiences on college campuses that made me feel like I had a right to go, and that I already belonged? My identity as a rural, working-class, first-generation student has a large impact on my research interests. As I progressed through my associate's, bachelor's, master's, and now through my doctorate, I wondered why my college expectations differed so drastically from my peers. What is it that motivated me to pursue advanced degrees?

Background

While about 60 million people live in rural areas (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.), rural has been difficult to define, most research using population-based definitions comparing rural communities against what they are not. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau (2022) defines rural as, “all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area” (para. 1). So, using this definition to define rural, one must understand what is meant by an “urban area”. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.), urban areas include two categories: Urbanized Areas (50,000+ residents) and Urban Clusters (2,500 to 49,999 residents). They go on to state that just because something is rural, does not mean that it cannot be part of a metro area, as metro areas are defined at the county level and include both urban and rural areas.

Pulling from the U.S. Census Bureau's definitions for urbanized areas and urban clusters listed above, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) breaks down rural areas into three categories: rural fringe, rural distant, and rural remote (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). The NCES definitions are as follows:

- Rural Fringe – Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to five miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an Urban Cluster.
- Rural Distant - Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urban Cluster.
- Rural Remote - Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an Urbanized Area and also more than 10 miles from an Urban Cluster (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

While maybe practical for some purposes, the classifications from the U.S. Census Bureau and NCES leave “rural” as the left-over places and people that just do not fit. Researchers such as Tieken (2014) wrestle with this distinction in search of a definition that is more wholistic and not only defined by boundaries. She writes that, “[Rural] constitutes one's identity; it shapes one's perspectives and understandings; and it gives meaning to one's daily experiences. This identity, this shared and place-dependent sense of rural belonging, gives rural its significance.” (Tieken, 2014, p. 5).

Rurality is a difficult concept to define and often depends on who you are talking to. Even when one can define it, it often comes coupled with stereotypes of all varieties. Rural places and people are either personified as backwards and crude or idyllic and peaceful, and

honestly in my experience, we are a little bit of both. But these are one of the things that make rural places and people so important, so captivating. It is the magic of a sunset on a summer evening... living in town, but “racing” the stallion in the pasture across the street on your bike... sitting on round bales with your best friend talking about life... In contrast, it is also having to drive at least 20 or 30 minutes just to get a loaf of bread let alone go shopping for shoes or clothes... or dealing with school consolidation and the loss of valuable resources and identities... it is sometimes not knowing where your next meal is going to come from... it is a loss of jobs and livelihoods... it is knowing which houses to stay away from because they sell drugs... It is simultaneously so much more and so much less than everything the stereotypes make it out to be. In research, rural communities are often defined by what they are not; defined by the number of people who live in an area. But these definitions fail to see the real spirit of what makes rural communities and people unique and valuable.

Rural College Students

Rural places and rural students are much more than what they are not and are much more than just a place. Tieken (2014) looked for a definition that is more than just place-based; for something that better describes the heart and soul of what it means to be rural. “It constitutes one’s identity; it shapes one’s perspectives and understandings; and it gives meaning to one’s daily experiences” (Tieken, 2014, p. 5). This rurality is often found connected to the concept of habitus, which:

is generated by one’s place in the social structure; by internalizing the social structure and one’s place in it, one comes to determine what is possible and what is not possible for one’s life and develops aspirations and practices accordingly (Dumais, 2002, p. 46).

Barr (2018) offers that rurality is more of a culture, focused on traditional values including religion, respect for one another, and a strong sense of family and community. One of the notable findings in Howley et al., (2013) was that students' perception of rurality was subjective to their experiences. Barr (2018) goes on to state that "rural" and "farm" are not one in the same, as many people in rural areas no longer live or work on farms, but rather small towns or communities scattered across the landscape.

Just as rural places have been cast in a negative light, so have rural students who are "often evaluated by normative definitions and standards that view their forms of knowledge and capital as deficient" (Ardoin, 2018, p. 29). Tieken (2014) stated that negative stereotypes and assumptions about rural places and people are prevalent in society, even reaching into educational research and reform. These stereotypes often depict rurality in one of two ways; as backwards and deprived or as idyllic and peaceful (Tieken, 2014). Stereotypes aside, rural students continue to lag behind their urban and suburban counterparts in when it comes to college aspirations, enrollment, and completion often because they are less prepared and do not have access to the same resources or capital (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2015; Byun et al., 2017; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Hlinka et al., 2018; Longhurst, 2014; McDonough et al., 2010; Morton et al., 2018). Rural students are also more likely to attend a community college due to their affordability and proximity among other factors (Ardoin, 2018; Byun et al., 2015; Byun et al., 2017; Jaeger et al., 2015; Koricich et al., 2018; McDonough et al., 2010). In addition, rural students are less likely to pursue college directly after high school, be geographically isolated, and have family responsibilities such as parenting or marriage (Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2015; Byun et al., 2017; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Sherman & Sage, 2011). Furthermore, rural students are more likely to be

from working-class or low-socioeconomic status families and to be first-generation college students (Ardoin, 2018; Byun et al., 2015; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; McDonough et al., 2010; Sherman & Sage, 2011).

Barriers to College

According to recent literature, rural students face several barriers to college including geographical isolation, academic preparation, socioeconomic challenges, and lower educational aspirations stemming from a lack of information, cultural capital, and parental education levels (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2015; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Garcia, 2020; Jaeger et al., 2015; McDonough et al., 2010; Morton et al., 2018; Sharp et al., 2020; Tieken, 2016). Students facing the reality of needing to leave home to pursue higher education are subject to the phenomenon known as out-migration or brain-drain (Ardoin, 2018; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Hlinka et al., 2015; Koricich et al., 2018; McDonough et al., 2010; Sherman & Sage, 2011; Theodori & Theodori, 2015; Tieken, 2016; Wright, 2012). Barr (2018) found that parents and other family members feared that if their students went away to college that they would never come back; some families choosing to move to be closer to their children regardless of their ability to afford them leaving or not. In addition, communities fear that their towns will die out if their children go away to college, but many rural students indicate that they intend to return after completing their degrees (Barr, 2018). Research in this area is contradictory; some studies finding that schools prepare and encourage their bright youth to leave while others have found that students either choose to stay close to home or plan to return if they do leave (Barr, 2018; Burnell, 2003; Byun et al., 2012; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Sherman & Sage, 2011; Wright, 2012). Regardless of their intentions, perceived distance from home is a major deciding factor for rural students, and they

select community colleges or less selective schools (Ardoyn, 2018; Barr, 2018; Cohen et al., 2014; Davis Dietz, 2011; Day, 2017; Howley et al., 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015; Jaeger et al., 2015; Jensen, 2003; Koricich et al., 2018; Longhurst, 2014; McDonough et al., 2010; Tieken, 2016; Wright, 2012).

Rural students must also navigate the transition from smaller, rural schools into college life. The size of rural schools can be seen as a double-edged sword; student-teacher ratios are often lower in rural schools and there is often a tighter feel of community, but rural schools often cannot afford the same resources as schools in the city – including counseling services as well as honors, International Baccalaureate, and Advanced Placement courses - and thus the students are less academically prepared for college (Ardoyn, 2018; Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2015; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Garcia, 2020; Harris, 2013; Jaeger et al., 2015; McDonough et al., Morton et al., 2018; Tieken, 2016). Barr (2018) concluded that rural students' concerns about being academically underprepared were, "either supported or unfounded, depending on the measure of student performance being examined" (p. 180). Hlinka et al. (2015) added that students often lacked confidence in their abilities thus limiting their college aspirations. Whether the students are underprepared academically or not matters less if the student perceives that they are not prepared because that perception, in itself, is a barrier that causes rural students to self-eliminate more selective colleges out of their college choice process (Barr, 2018; Morton et al., 2018).

Not only do rural schools struggle with funding, but so do rural students. According to current literature, rural students face greater economic hurdles and are more likely to be working-class than suburban and urban counterparts (Ardoyn, 2018; Byun et al., 2015; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Garcia, 2020; Harris, 2013; Jaeger et al., 2015; McDonough et al.,

2010; Tieken, 2016). Literature also suggests that other factors including low SES and lower educational attainment in the community and within families also contributes to rural students being underprepared academically for college (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, Byun et al., 2015; 2018; Harris, 2013; Morton et al., 2018; Tieken, 2016). The traditional jobs historically available to rural students are becoming more and more scarce, leaving students to reevaluate how important pursuing a college degree is to their future (Sherman & Sage, 2011; Tieken, 2016).

Furthermore, rural students seem to lag behind nonrural students in their educational aspirations as “rural students, it seems, do not hope or plan for college to the extent that nonrural students do” (Tieken, 2016, p. 204). College knowledge, or the information that students need to pursue and navigate a college education, is a considerable barrier for rural students that can drastically affect educational aspirations (Ardoin, 2018; 2018; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Jaeger et al., 2015; Morton, 2018; Vargas, 2004). Lack of college knowledge, like the Federal Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), types of colleges, or types of degrees, etc. can lead to rural students feeling “othered” and alienated by institutions of higher education, not only making it more difficult for them to access a college education, but also making it more difficult for them to feel comfortable in their new environment once starting college (Ardoin, 2018; Jaeger et al., 2015). According to Ardoin (2018) this alienation is often related to college jargon which many rural students have difficulty deciphering. Furthermore, rural students must cross a cultural and linguistic divide between their colleges and their support networks at home, who are typically less experienced with college knowledge (Ardoin, 2018). According to Dunstan and Jaeger (2016) rural students may also feel stigmatized or stereotyped because of their linguistic differences, limiting their ability to pursue and maintain connections on campus. Both Ardoin

(2018) and Vargas (2004) discuss the need for college knowledge, stating that it is imperative that underserved students get the information and guidance they need and deserve to address the gaps in college access and completion.

Students who do aspire to attend college have to make the decision on where to attend and there is often a push and pull that students must navigate. This push and pull can come from family members' perceptions of the value of higher education, the requirement to move away from their communities to pursue a degree (or career), along with the cost of higher education (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Morton et al., 2018; Sherman & Sage, 2011; Tieken, 2016). Parental involvement and support have been found to have a large impact on students' educational aspirations (Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Jaeger et al., 2015; Morton et al., 2018; Sharp et al., 2020). Parental inexperience with higher education along with parental distrust of higher education contribute to the push and pull that rural students feel (Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Morton et al., 2018; Sherman & Sage, 2011). Parental perceptions and support along with rural school culture shape students' educational aspirations both positively and negatively. These perceptions are deeply engrained in rural habitus and traditionally give "a higher value [to] employment than [to] education and a stronger expectation for one to make money and start a family after high school rather than pursue degrees" (Ardoin, 2013, p. 37). Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) also stated that female students in their study may have seen college as their only option to pursue a career and secure financial independence when the traditional alternative was to start a family. The participants in Gannon's (2022) study indicated that they felt that college was their way to something "more than getting married and having babies" but college does not represent a choice not to have a family to all rural students.

Furthermore, according to Ardoin (2018), colleges' interest in recruiting students varies depending on their location stating that, "institutions of higher education, particularly those of the four-year variety, often send less information to rural schools and conduct less recruiting in rural areas" (pp. 14-15). Because of budget and time constraints colleges tend to focus their recruiting efforts on where they can have the highest return on investment, leaving rural students left out of valuable college resources and often feeling less important to local colleges (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; McDonough et al., 2010; Morton et al., 2018). Participants in Gannon's (2022) study demonstrated this when they discussed how they seemed to get more information from military recruiters than from local colleges. Whether the lack of information was because of the colleges or their high school counselors was not explored. Literature suggests that underrepresented populations, such as rural students, receive less information about college choices, college preparatory programs, and financial aid information (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; McDonough, 1997; Morton et al., 2018; Vargas, 2004).

Persistence

According to Ardoin (2018) many of the barriers that rural student face could be addressed by high school counselors, but public rural schools do not have the resources to provide students with that level of support. Thus, other interventions such as Federal TRIO and GEAR UP programs as discussed in Chapter Two, have been developed and can be facilitated through colleges and universities. Unfortunately, these interventions are often centered in larger, urban areas and are generally only for students who have already gained access into higher education (Ardoin, 2018; McDonough et al., 2010).

While the pull of family and location can be seen as barriers for rural students, they should also be considered as a factor in their persistence. Barr (2018) found that most rural

students talked at length about the support of their family members during their college choice process. Rural students' "family" is not only made up of biological family members but also members of their "schools, their churches, their friends, the other students at their high schools, the faculty members of their high schools, members of the community or the community itself" (Barr, 2018, p. 193). While the type of support varies by "family", rural students benefit from a connectedness both geographically and emotionally as the families want to continue to support and encourage their students (Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Morton et al., 2018; Sharp et al., 2020; Tieken, 2016) similarly to familial capital discussed by Yosso (2005).

Hlinka et al. (2018) and Jager et al. (2015) discussed rural students' need for a transition into the higher education world, stating that community colleges often serve as a steppingstone for rural students seeking bachelor's degrees. Hlinka et al. (2018) went on to state that community colleges represent a friendlier and less intimidating atmosphere, providing students with positive and responsible relationships and flexibility, which are connected to retention for students at rural community colleges. One such way that Hlinka et al. (2018) found that faculty were supporting student retention a progression from "coddling" to "cutting the apron strings" by helping students develop academically, increase self-confidence, and help them understand how to navigate college directly relating to Ardoin's (2018) college knowledge concept. Howley et al. (2013) also found that faculty and staff responsiveness along with the small community positively contributed to student persistence and retention.

In addition to faculty responsiveness, dual or concurrent enrollment – or enrolling in college classes while still in high school – increases the likelihood that students will enroll and complete college (Taylor, 2015). Johnson and Brophy (2006) and Garcia (2020) suggested that

dual credit enrollment helps students learn how to navigate the college atmosphere and balance academics with other responsibilities. Dual credit coursework can also help rural students cut down on the cost of higher education as they are often free or have reduced costs for enrolled students (Garcia, 2020; Johnson & Brophy, 2006). Since many rural schools do not have the resources like honors courses, International Baccalaureate, and Advanced Placement dual credit courses with the local community college can fill this gap and allow students to increase the rigor of their high school curriculum (Garcia, 2020; Harris, 2013; Johnson & Brophy, 2006).

Johnson and Brophy (2006) suggested that social capital is important to encourage dual credit enrollment in rural schools, as informational channels within different socioeconomic groups will share dual credit and college information differently. Thus, it is important to note that not all rural students will have equal access to dual credit options, even within the same high school (Gannon, 2022). Sherman and Sage (2011) supported this stating that local schools and communities often made assumptions about a student based on their family's traditions or socioeconomic status and determining who were the "treasures" and who weren't before students had an opportunity to begin school. The researchers found that these distinctions were made through a combination of socioeconomic and moral considerations, and those deemed as "treasures" benefitted from increased expectations and support (Sherman & Sage, 2011). Furthermore, Taylor (2015) noted that while dual credit experiences increase the likelihood that low SES and minority students will enroll in and complete college, the positive correlation is not as pronounced as it is within primarily White and upper- or middle-class students.

Community Cultural Wealth

Traditionally, researchers have examined educational attainment through a Bourdieuan lens both supporting or arguing against cultural and social capital's connection to college enrollment, retention, and ultimately completion (e.g. Anderson & Hansen, 2012; Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997; Ardoin, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; De Graaf et al., 2000; DiMaggio, 1982; Dumais, 2002; Dunstan & Jaeger, 2016; Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Kingston, 2001; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; McDonough, 1997; McDonough et al., 2010; Mitchell, 2007; Wildhagen, 2009). While it is important to consider how cultural capital has affected the field, this study will instead approach rural student college access through a strengths-based approach. Specifically, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth is appropriate because it allows for culturally specific forms of wealth to be examined. This is increasingly important with underserved populations who may not have the resources or need for traditional cultural capital (Adsitt, 2017; Ardoin, 2018; Button, 2017; Kingston, 2001; Leibrandt, 2016; O'Shea, 2015; Sims & Ferrare, 2021; Vasil & McCall, 2017; Yosso, 2005).

Yosso (2005) describes an alternative to Bourdieu's deficit model of cultural capital with community cultural wealth (CCW). O'Shea (2015) argues that CCW, "transforms the implicit deficit nature of Bourdieuan capital, foregrounding experiential knowledge in order to displace white middle-class cultural as the standard" (p. 63). CCW builds from critical race theory (CRT) acknowledging that oppressed communities possess valuable alternative forms of capital. Yosso (2005) discusses six forms of capital contributing to CCW: aspirational, resistant, linguistic, familial, social, and navigational capital.

Referring to, “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77), aspirational capital is manifested as students dream outside of their current circumstances such as pursuing post-secondary education when it is not the family or cultural norm (O’Shea, 2015; Sims & Ferrare, 2021; Yosso, 2005). O’Shea (2015) stated that aspirational capital can also be developed in resistance to current or perceived limitations, directly connecting aspirational capital to Yosso’s (2005) resistant capital.

Similarly, resistant capital challenges inequality and refers to the “knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). According to O’Shea (2015) resistant capital, “nurtures attitudes that challenge status quo” (p. 63). Resistant capital is often developed in response to perceived norms including outside limitations placed on subordinate ethnicities, genders, and social classes as demonstrated by the women interviewed in studies such as O’Shea (2015). Sims and Ferrare (2021) found that rural students’ mothers exhibited resistant capital by, “purposefully training their children to build skills and expectations which would challenge existing inequities” (p. 9). Thus, resistant capital may manifest itself as perceived stubbornness in the face of adversity or stereotypes.

As students learn about and prepare for college, picking up college jargon - such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) – they are building their linguistic capital. “Linguistic capital includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Underserved students often have one foot in two different worlds - those from homes where English is not the first language, or even those where college jargon is not used - creating opportunities for the creation and strengthening of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). Specifically, Ardoin’s

(2018) work focused on university jargon and college knowledge as a function of cultural capital and how they relate to rural student college aspiration and access. Higher education's jargon represents one of the most elusive aspects in cultural capital and those who feel inadequate in this area often feel alienated from college culture, thus affecting their college aspirations (Ardoin, 2018; Bourdieu, 1977; White, 2005; Whiting, 1999).

Linguistic capital can be developed through families and communities, connecting it with familial capital. Yosso (2005) describes familial capital as, "those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (p. 79; emphasis in original). It is important to note that "familia" is more than just immediate family, but can look different for each student including grandparents, godparents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, or even between families through churches, sports, or other community-centered settings (Yosso, 2005). This familial capital thus creates social capital.

Social capital builds upon the aforementioned forms and "can be understood as networks of people and community resources" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Social connections with community leaders and mentors (like those in positions similar to the students' career aspirations) provide guidance and support as students attempt to navigate the college atmosphere. For example, a rural student interested in optometry may build a relationship with a local Doctor of Optometry to learn more about majors, schools, and the career as well as secure recommendations or other social resources. Essentially, social capital boils down to networking.

Aspirational, resistant, linguistic, familial, and social capital - learned through family members, friends, community members, or institutional staff at high schools or colleges

(Bejarano & Valverde, 2012; Leibrandt, 2016, O’Shea, 2015) - contribute to navigational capital. Navigational capital refers specifically to the “skills of maneuvering through social institutions” such as the unfamiliar college context while considering individual agency as it works within external limitations (Yosso, 2005). In this way, navigational capital can be evidenced by first-generation students who have built the skills to navigate college jargon and protocols which are not part of their habitus.

While CCW literature focuses on Latinx and other communities of color (e.g., Bejarano & Valverde, 2012; Yosso, 2005), more recent literature suggests that expanding the use of the framework to other underrepresented populations including rural, first-generation, and low socioeconomic status (SES) or working-class individuals should be explored (Adsitt, 2017; Ardoin, 2018; Button, 2017; Leibrandt, 2016; O’Shea, 2015; Sims & Ferrare, 2021; Vasil & McCall, 2017). O’Shea (2015) acknowledges that utilizing a framework, “rooted in cultural contexts needs to be done cautiously and sensitively” going on to say that it is necessary to explore, “how a strengths based model, such as Yosso’s, can enable data to be unpacked in order to re-envisage what is assumed to be a weakness or lack in terms of strengths” (p. 60). While not citing CCW specifically, McDonough et al. (2010) discussed the importance of a culturally driven framework to consider alternative forms of capital to promote underrepresented students’ access to higher education.

Rural Cultural Wealth

Rural cultural wealth builds from this idea that community cultural wealth must be applied to other underserved populations. Specifically, rural cultural wealth recognizes the tenacity of rural people, showcasing their strengths instead of looking for their shortcomings. Four tenets – rural resourcefulness, rural ingenuity, rural familialism, and rural community

unity – comprise the framework by Crumb et al. (2022). Rural resourcefulness, “refers to the capacity of rural students and residents to overcome socio-contextual adversities that threaten their livelihood and well-being through taking actions to mitigate limitations” (Crumb et al., 2022, p. 129). Rural ingenuity builds from this and refers to inventiveness that rural residents possess collectively (Crumb et al., 2022). Rural familism and community unity look at kin and non-kin relationships and assets held by rural communities which may provide rural students with the skills and knowledge needed to pursue and persist in college (Crumb et al., 2022). Rural cultural wealth equips this study with an additional level of specificity when considering strengths-based frameworks through which to consider rural student college access.

Problem Statement

Rural students are more likely to be first generation students, come from working-class or low-socioeconomic status families, to attend community colleges, and have family responsibilities such as parenting or marriage (Ardoin, 2018; Byun et al., 2015; Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2017; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Jaeger et al., 2015; Koricich et al., 2018; McDonough et al., 2010; Sherman & Sage, 2011). These factors contribute to the fact that rural student college attendance rates are much lower than their nonrural counterparts, thus rural students make up a large, underrepresented group in higher education. Even when rural students are considered, much research is based in cultural capital, focusing on rural students’ shortcomings rather than their strengths (e.g., Ardoin, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Dunstan & Jaeger, 2016; McDonough et al., 2010). Therefore, it is imperative that other perspectives such as Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth are considered as a strengths-based approach (Azano et al., 2022; Bejarano & Valverde, 2012; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Gofen, 2009;

Leibrandt, 2016; Orphan & McClure, 2019; O'Shea, 2015; Sims & Ferrare, 2021; Vasil & McCall, 2018).

Purpose Statement

Most previous research approaches rural education through deficit models viewing rural students and rural places as a problem, rather than considering their unique strengths. Recently, researchers have suggested utilizing strengths-based frameworks such as Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth to address this gap in college access with underserved populations including rural students (Azano et al., 2022; Bejarano & Valverde, 2012; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Gofen, 2009; Leibrandt, 2016; Orphan & McClure, 2019; O'Shea, 2015; Sims & Ferrare, 2021; Vasil & McCall, 2018). The purpose of this research was to investigate rural student college access utilizing a strengths-based approach to explore how rural students build and apply community cultural wealth to pursue college.

Research Questions

There were three research questions for this study:

1. How do rural students describe how they develop community cultural wealth?
2. How do rural students describe how they apply community cultural wealth to their pursuit of college?
3. How does community cultural wealth contribute to college knowledge for rural students?

Research Design

Qualitative inquiry is necessary when the research purpose seeks to better understand process or reasoning behind decisions especially when working with underrepresented populations (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Bhattacharya, 2017; Harris, 2016; Howley et al., 2013;

Kim, 2016; Morton et al., 2018; Sims & Ferrare, 2021). A strong emphasis on case study exists in current literature (e.g., Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Harris, 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015; Howley et al., 2013). To set itself apart, this study engaged in narrative inquiry to explore the deeply personal and unique stories of rural students and college access (Kim, 2016).

Narrative inquiry was the best fit for this study as it focuses on the meaning making process each participant engages in during their unique experiences. According to Kim (2016) research itself should seek to improve the human condition and make the world a better place. Paired with Yosso's (2015) concept of CCW, narrative inquiry is a perfect fit when working with underserved populations such as rural students. While there are many subgenres of narrative inquiry, creative nonfiction allowed the researcher to delve deep into the experiences of her participants while still emphasizing the need for participant privacy. Creative nonfiction allows researchers to build a factual and engaging narrative that pulls in readers while lending a strong voice to underrepresented populations (Crotty, 2015; Kim, 2016). For example, Gannon (2022) utilized creative nonfiction to depict emotionally charged conversations that her participants had with their high school counselors without compromising their privacy in their rural communities. Data is represented through creative vignettes or scenes within creative nonfiction, allowing the researcher latitude to weave together unique and moving stories that protect the integrity of the data as well as the participant (Kim 2016).

Population

Narrative inquiry calls for a small sample size, thus this research sought to interview five participants provided that there was thematic redundancy (Bhattacharya, 2017; Kim, 2016). Convenient sampling was used to select participants utilizing the following criterion (Creswell, 2013; deMarrias & Lapan, 2004): self-identified as from a rural community or town;

located within the state of Kansas; attending a community college in Southeastern Kansas; pursuing a CERTA, CERTB, CERTC, or associate's program at the community college; at least 18 years of age at the time of the study; have completed high school or GED at the time of the study; and not currently incarcerated at the time of the study.

Data Collection

Qualitative data consisted of semi-structured interviews, artifacts, and researcher analytic memos (Bhattacharya, 2017; Kim, 2016; Saldana, 2021). This study utilized Kim's (2016) method of semi-structured interviews, as guardrails to keep interviews on track rather than a script by which the interviews were controlled. The interview protocol is included in Appendix A. In addition, this study allowed for artifacts such as flyers, emails, or other resources to add contextual depth to the study (Bhattacharya, 2017). Participants were asked to email self-determined meaningful artifacts that were important to building their college knowledge or community cultural wealth, to the researcher during the interview process since interviews took place via video call.

Data Analysis

Due to the nature of creative nonfiction within narrative inquiry, this study worked across both qualitative and arts-based research to combine inductive analysis with narrative analysis (Bhattacharya, 2017; Kim, 2016). Inductive analysis is a coding process that allows the researcher flexibility as she moves through the study (Bhattacharya, 2017). Following the guidance of Bhattacharya (2017), this study implemented inductive analysis throughout the coding process by utilizing a variety of coding methods, code mapping, and researcher reflective memos. This process allowed the researcher to construct narratives utilizing both direct quotes (In Vivo coding) and writing techniques such as narrative smoothing (Kim,

2016). The researcher then used narrative analysis to further analyze the data. Narrative analysis focuses on understanding “why and how things happened the way they did, and why and how our participants acted the way they did” (Kim, 2016, p. 197). Thus, pairing these two data analysis techniques allowed the researcher to explore the research questions on a deep and unique level.

Significance of the Research

This study is significant because it examined college access for an underserved population, in a rarely examined part of the country, by utilizing a unique conceptual framework. Rural students’ college attendance rates lag behind their non-rural counterparts, thus more work is needed to better understand the how and why they prepare for, and pursue college (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2015; Byun et al., 2017; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Hlinka et al., 2018; Longhurst, 2014; McDonough et al., 2010; Morton et al., 2018; Tieken, 2016). Even when rural students are considered, it is typically in culturally different regions of the United States such as Appalachia (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Harris, 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015; Wright, 2012), the rural south (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Howley et al., 2013; Morton et al., Theodori & Theodori, 2015), or the rural northeast (Sharp et al., 2020; Tieken, 2016). Thus, it is important to consider rural students in the Midwest and plains states. Furthermore, much of the research regarding rural student college access utilizes deficit models such as Bourdieu’s cultural or social capital (e.g. Anderson & Hansen, 2012; Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997; Ardoin, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; De Graaf et al., 2000; DiMaggio, 1982; Dumais, 2002; Dunstan & Jaeger, 2016; Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Kingston, 2001; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; McDonough, 1997; McDonough et al., 2010; Mitchell, 2007; Wildhagen, 2009). It is

important to utilize a strengths-based model such as Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth when exploring educational access with underserved populations including rural students (Adsitt, 2017; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; O'Shea, 2015).

Not only is this study significant because of the uniqueness of population and conceptual framework, but because of the methodology. Utilizing creative nonfiction allowed the researcher to delve much deeper into each participant's unique and personal story without jeopardizing their privacy. Through these unique features, this research provided an opportunity for educators to reconsider how they approach rural students as well as their college aspirations and enrollment patterns. Thus, applying a strengths-based approach when working with these students in the hopes of increasing their likelihood of college attendance, retention, and graduation.

Limitations

Limitations in this study included:

1. Participants self-selected into the study, meaning that this sample will not represent all rural students at this community college, nor rural students at all community colleges.
2. Narrative inquiry faces methodological limitations because there is no one widely accepted method. While this presents the researcher with flexibility throughout the study, it was imperative that research standards such as rigor, validity, and integrity were addressed (Kim, 2016).
3. Creative nonfiction utilizes writing techniques such as narrative smoothing, drawing into question the data's fidelity. To address this limitation, coding included In Vivo – or direct quotation – codes within both analysis and data representation.

4. Kim (2016) warns about backyard research which are studies conducted in connection with the researcher's daily life. The main concern being that researchers may not be complete strangers with their participants and that it can affect the researcher reflexivity or that the study may reveal "dangerous" information. Thus, it was important for the researcher in this study to pay special attention to any pre-established connections that she had with participants. Creative nonfiction helps to address the concern of "dangerous" information as it will allowed the researcher to fictionalize personally identifiable data to best protect the participants.
5. Lastly, consistent with qualitative research, this study focused on a specific, small population at one community college in Southeastern Kansas. These results are not generalizable to other populations.

Definitions of Key Terminology

Associate's – "An award that normally requires at least two, but less than four, years of full-time equivalent college work." (Kansas Board of Regents, 2022, p. 103).

CERTA – "Postsecondary Technical Certificate A. Requires completion of an organized program of study in a technical area of at least 16 but less than 30 credit hours in length, at the postsecondary level (below the baccalaureate degree)." (Kansas Board of Regents, 2022, p. 102).

CERTB – "Postsecondary Technical Certificate B. Requires completion of an organized program of study in a technical area of at least 30 but less than 45 credit hours in length, at the postsecondary level (below the baccalaureate degree)." (Kansas Board of Regents, 2022, pp. 102-103).

CERTC – “Postsecondary Technical Certificate C. Requires completion of an organized program of study in a technical area of at least 45 but less than 60 credit hours in length, at the postsecondary level (below the baccalaureate degree).” (Kansas Board of Regents, 2022, p. 103).

College knowledge – Knowledge about the colleges including college jargon, applications, and financial aid among other concepts (Ardoin, 2018; Conley, 2005; Perna, 2013).

Community college - Any publicly funded (not-for-profit) institution, who offers associates of arts or associates of science as their highest degree, including a broad range of education and training to meet community and workforce needs (Cohen et al., 2014; Fink & Jenkins, 2020).

Community cultural wealth – A conceptual framework built from critical race theory to “challenge traditional interpretations of Bourdieuan cultural capital theory” consisting of six forms of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant (Yosso, 2005, p. 70).

- Aspirational capital – “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77).
- Linguistic capital – “the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78).
- Familial capital – “those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition” (emphasis in original, Yosso, 2005, p. 79).
- Social capital – “networks of people and community resources” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79).
- Navigational capital – “skills of maneuvering through social institutions” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80).

- Resistant capital – “those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenge inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80).
- Rural college student – a current college student who self-identifies as being from a rural community.

Chapter Summary

Rural students attend and graduate college at lower rates than their non-rural counterparts. As more and more of the workforce requires a college education, it is important for colleges to better understand the strengths that rural students bring with them in an attempt to better support their college aspirations and completion. Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth builds from critical race theory as a strengths-based alternative to cultural and social capital which focuses on the shortcomings of students. Using creative nonfiction, this study investigated how rural students build and apply community cultural wealth to pursue college.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The purpose of this research was to investigate rural student college access utilizing a strengths-based approach to explore how rural students build and apply community cultural wealth to pursue college. This chapter offers a summary of the literature relevant to this research purpose. First, a review of community colleges including their open access admissions policy, rural community colleges, and TRIO and GEAR UP programs. A summary of cultural capital, college knowledge and its related college-going capital, as well as community cultural wealth follows. Then, a review of rural student college access provides insight into this study's population. Lastly, this chapter will conclude with an overview of the conceptual framework for this study.

Community Colleges

The American community college emerged in the early twentieth century to increase access to higher education. According to Cohen et al. (2014) the demands placed on schools were expanding rapidly with the hopes that formal education would address issues such as equality, unemployment, and public safety. These needs were answered by the community college as it was more flexible and responsive to the quickly changing needs of society (Boggs, 2011; Boggs & McPhail, 2016; Cohen et al., 2014). Over the years, the definition of a community college has changed and once included junior colleges acting as branch locations for universities offering the first two years of study along with general education and vocational training (Boggs, 2011; Button, 2017; Cohen et al., 2014). Currently, the definition of community college across the United States could include junior, county, and city colleges as well as vocational or technical colleges depending on the state where they are located and their accrediting bodies (Cohen et al., 2014). The most common definition for a community

college is now any publicly funded (not-for-profit) institution who offers associates of arts or associates of science as their highest degree, including a broad range of education and training to meet community and workforce needs (Cohen et al., 2014; Fink & Jenkins, 2020).

As the demand for community colleges grew more colleges opened, and a greater proportion of students enrolled in college for the first time. Cohen et al. (2014) and Day (2017) described increased access (through improved roadways, the desegregation of schools, and the GI Bill), increased proximity, higher birthrates, and open access admissions policies as the most influential causes driving enrollment growth in the community college sector. With increased demand came broadened missions, and now the community college is expected to prepare students for academic transfer to four-year colleges and universities, prepare students to enter the workforce, address gaps in education with remedial or developmental education, and facilitate continuing education as well as community service initiatives (Boggs & McPhail, 2016; Button, 2017; Cohen et al., 2014; D'Amico et al., 2017; Jensen, 2003; Mitchell, 2007).

Over the course of their history, the American community college has weathered eight mission generations (Boggs & McPhail, 2016). According to Boggs and McPhail (2016) the first mission generation (1900-1930) characterized the community college as an extension of the high school curriculum, while the second generation (1930-1950) was considered the junior college phase (Boggs & McPhail, 2016). Moving into the third generation (1950-1970) two-year colleges made the shift to community colleges at the hand of the Truman Commission Report in 1947 (Boggs & McPhail, 2016). From 1970 to 1985 the fourth generational mission focused more on the needs of the community, as community colleges acted as “comprehensive community colleges” (Boggs & McPhail, 2016, p. 18). The contemporary community college generation was very short (1985-1990) focusing on responding to the changing needs of their

communities (Boggs & McPhail, 2016). During the 1990s and 2000s the sixth generation of community colleges shifted to focus on student learning, often using the term Learning College to describe their mission and commitment to the community (Boggs & McPhail, 2016). The shift this focus on student learning was encouraged by the Reagan Administration's call to improve teaching and learning outcomes (Boggs, 2011). Starting in the 2000s, community colleges have moved into what Boggs and McPhail (2016) refer to as the "entrepreneurial community college" (p. 20) because colleges have had to embrace entrepreneurial thinking in their practices as economic support has been restricted.

Since 2010, Boggs and McPhail (2016) state that the current mission generation has had to answer, "the call for colleges to move beyond just providing access to accepting responsibility for the success of their students" (p. 20) to address the "Completion Agenda" (p. 21). This eighth mission generation was fueled by Former President Obama's challenge in 2009, that the U.S. would again lead the world in college graduates; an announcement that was met by a variety of reactions and emotions (Boggs & McPhail, 2016; National Archives and Records Administration, 2009). Some community college leaders felt that the push for completion would undermine the open-door policies that community colleges embrace, while others such as the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) used the announcement as a springboard to launch completion programming (Boggs & McPhail, 2016). According to Boggs and McPhail (2016) the AACC was not alone in its efforts as, "the Associate of Community College Trustees, the Center for Community College Student Engagement, the League for innovation in the Community College, the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, and Phi Theta Kappa" partnered with them to encourage completions at the community college level (p. 22). In addition, organizations such

as the Lumina Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation joined in to support community college efforts to increase both access and completion through student success (Boggs, 2011).

Since Former President Obama's call to action in 2009, community colleges worked to strike a balance between access, success, and completion. This is evidenced by a renewed and continued push towards affordability in community colleges and increased initiatives to ensure student success. One such push was to increase the affordability of community college education to underserved populations. While the free community college agenda has stalled, under the Biden Administration efforts have passed to increase the amount of Pell grants as well as the reinstatement of Second Chance Pell for formerly incarcerated individuals (U.S. Department of Education, 2022a). Other initiatives pushing community colleges to focus on access, success, and completion come from state and federal reporting measures such as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System or IPEDS (IPEDS, n.d.).

Open Access Admissions

Access has been at the center of the community college mission for years as, “they maintain open channels for individuals, enhancing the social mobility that has characterized America, and they accept the idea that society can be better, just as individuals can better their lot within it” (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 43). Community colleges seek to serve students who may not typically have access to more traditional post-secondary options including those who are non-traditional, part-time, low SES, women, minorities, and less academically prepared through open access admissions policies (Mitchell, 2007; Umbach et al., 2019). It was the third mission generation that focused on expanding opportunity as, “students were admitted to the community college with little or no attention to their level of academic preparation” (Boggs &

McPhail, 2016, p. 17). This policy of admitting any student regardless of their preparation – or open access admissions policies – has been at the center of what sets community colleges apart from four-year and private institutions.

Some researchers fear that as the demands placed on community colleges expand, that their open access mission will take a back seat (Mitchell, 2007, Vaughan, 2004). Vaughan (2004) stated that community colleges cannot continue to provide open access to all students who want to attend, arguing that doing so without state funding is fiscally irresponsible. Instead, Vaughan (2004) argued that community colleges must, “serve all segments, but not all members” (p. 54). As mentioned above, it is important for the modern community college to balance students’ needs for open access with sufficient support, to help them succeed and complete their educational goals.

Rural Community Colleges

Just as all community colleges serve an increasing percentage of displaced workers, rural colleges also feel the challenge to do so, especially in the wake of the farming crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as increased consolidation and globalization of agribusiness (Davis Dietz, 2011; Howley et al., 2013; Theobald, 2005). Rural communities have been portrayed in a negative light for much of the 20th and into the 21st century (Longhurst, 2014; Theobald, 2005; Tieken, 2016). Much educational research has focused on urban and suburban populations, or has depicted rural culture and education as disadvantaged, primitive, marginal, backwards, or the “other,” in contrast to city life as the center for vitality and progress (Longhurst, 2014). Unfortunately, the anti-rural narrative has only been strengthened by school consolidation and other school reforms that, “suddenly re-categorized many rural schools as underperforming” (Longhurst, 2014, p. 8; see also Tieken, 2016). According to Eppley (2009)

policies like No Child Left Behind, as well as standardized testing cannot accurately measure the importance of culturally aware educational practices and often detract from teaching practices that are beneficial to underserved populations, like rural students. Rural citizens and community colleges may view the mission of higher education, “as serving the community by providing an education to local people who are place-embedded or, conversely, as arming its students with mobile capital so that they, too, can become leavers” (Longhurst, 2014, p. 9) further complicating the rural community college narrative.

Rural community colleges face increased challenges due to lack of funding and difficulty recruiting qualified faculty and staff (Howley et al., 2013; Miller & Tuttle, 2007). Community colleges are typically funded by a combination of student tuition, local, and state sources (Davis Dietz, 2011; Mullin et al., 2015). As state funding decreases, rural community colleges are faced with the challenge of relying more on their local tax base and their students for funding (Davis Dietz, 2011; Howley et al., 2013). Often, rural schools and community colleges have a smaller tax base consisting of community members from working-class backgrounds who may not agree with the local mill levy or have the means to comfortably support it, often leaving college leaders at odds with their communities and sometimes boards (Ardoin, 2018; Davis Dietz, 2011; Howley et al., 2013; Jensen, 2003; Miller & Tuttle, 2007; Orphan & McClure, 2019; Theobald, 2005). Furthermore, rural community colleges serve more students from working-class backgrounds who face greater barriers to academic success than their urban and suburban peers (Howley et al., 2013; Jensen, 2003).

Rural community colleges also face challenges in recruiting and retaining a talented workforce. While most literature specifically discusses the difficulty of finding qualified faculty, rural community colleges also struggle to find qualified staff including accountants,

student services professionals, and campus health professionals (Ardoin, 2018; Davis Dietz, 2011; Howley et al., 2013; Miller & Tuttle, 2007). These staffing and budget constraints place a limit on the academic programs as well as services - such as childcare, transportation, and distance education - that rural community colleges can offer although they may be the only resource for students within a reasonable driving distance (Davis Dietz, 2011; Howley et al., 2013; Miller & Tuttle, 2007). Lastly, rural colleges also struggle to provide comparable access to technology as their urban or suburban counterparts (Cejda, 2007; Davis Dietz, 2011; Miller & Tuttle, 2007). Technological struggles include students' access to reliable internet, demographic factors that affect internet usage, and limited internet choices, along with other barriers such as availability and cost of reliable hardware and technology training which all limit the number and type of online programming that rural community colleges can offer (Cejda, 2007).

Although rural community colleges face obstacles, they also have unique strengths that help them to serve their populations over suburban and urban peers, such as close community ties and less complicated organizational structures (Howley et al, 2013). Furthermore, rural community colleges often serve as community centers, providing their public with support for civic groups and social and entertainment opportunities in addition to educational and economic opportunities (Davis Dietz, 2011; Howley et al., 2013; Jensen, 2003; Miller & Tuttle, 2007; Longhurst, 2014). According to Longhurst (2014), "rural community colleges are themselves, often the lynchpins in small communities" (p. 42). Miller and Tuttle (2007) found that rural community colleges are seen as adding value to their community through a sense of inclusiveness and pride. Researchers have also found that some communities see their community college as the lifeblood of the town, often defining their community as a "college

town” appreciating the economic, social, and cultural benefits the college brought to their communities (Miller & Tuttle, 2007). Lastly, Howley et al. (2013) found that students and staff members believe the flexibility and responsiveness of community colleges to be a positive attribute in contrast to larger colleges and four-year institutions. Howley et al. (2013) suggested more research with larger samples would be beneficiary to the field, especially with rural community colleges.

Not only do rural colleges often serve as some of the largest employers in their communities, they often partner with local businesses to provide customized training and workforce development (Howley et al., 2013; Miller & Tuttle, 2007). Rural schools also cultivate lasting relationships with local middle and high schools and other community partners to provide students with increased opportunities (Howley et al., 2013). Rural community colleges are in a unique position to help students balance the push and pull felt between educational/career opportunities and the desire to stay connected to their homes and families (Day, 2017; Hlinka et al., 2015; Wright, 2012). According to Longhurst (2014), “the rural community college can provide rural students who wish to [pursue higher education] with the opportunity to remain in place and work toward a degree” (p. vi). Their proximity to students, relatively low cost, smaller size, increased ability to adapt, ability to build lasting relationships, and less complex organizational structure allow rural community colleges to address the wide range of educational needs their community members require (Davis Dietz, 2011; Howley et al., 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015; Jensen, 2003; Koricich et al., 2018; Longhurst, 2014; Wright, 2012). Miller and Tuttle (2007) summed up the importance of rural community colleges by stating, “they are socially enabling institutions that improve and help form the identity of rural

America, both in terms of individual communities and in terms of individuals themselves” (p. 126).

TRIO and GEAR UP Programs

Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) include eight grant-funded programs that are designed to help low-income students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities progress from middle school to graduate level programs (United States Department of Education, 2022g). The seven student-focused programs included in TRIO are Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC), Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement (McNair Scholars), Student Support Services (SSS), Talent Search, Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science, and Veterans Upward Bound (United States Department of Education, 2022g). EOC, Talent Search, and Upward Bound programs focus on students before they get to the college level while McNair Scholars and SSS work with students after they begin their college careers. Outside of the seven student-focused programs TRIO also provides a training program for their staff (United States Department of Education, 2022h).

EOC programs seek to increase the number of non-traditional students who pursue college by providing college counseling including information on admissions requirements and financial options as well as career and major opportunities (United States Department of Education, 2022c). EOC programs are typically housed at college or university but operate as their own entity so that that can help non-traditional students choose a college that best fits their needs regardless of affiliation with the host institution. There are three EOC programs in the state of Kansas housed at the University of Kansas, Wichita State University and Barton Community College (Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.).

Talent Search programs also focus on educational attainment through financial, career, and academic counseling but differ from EOC because they focus on the youth and individuals who have not completed secondary education (United States Department of Education, 2022d). According to the United States Department of Education (2022d) Talent Search programs include the counseling mentioned above as well as, “tutorial services, career exploration, aptitude assessments, counseling, mentoring programs, [and] workshops” (para. 2). There are currently six institutions with Talent Search programs in Kansas: Dodge City Community College, Wichita State University, Emporia State University, Neosho County Community College, Labette Community College, and the University of Kansas (Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.).

Upward Bound prepares high school students who are first-generation or from low-income families for secondary success and entry into college (United States Department of Education, 2021). Similarly, to EOC and Talent Search programs, Upward Bound also includes programing such as financial and academic counseling, mentoring, tutoring, and cultural enrichment (United States Department of Education, 2021). Within the state of Kansas there are Upward Bound programs housed at eight institutions: Barton County Community College, Kansas State University – Salina, Wichita State University, Cowley County Community College, Emporia State University, Independence Community College, Neosho County Community College, and the University of Kansas (Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.).

Upward Bound also includes to related programs including Upward Bound Math-Science and Veterans Upward Bound. Upward Bound Math-Science focuses on the math and science skills of its participants by providing:

summer programs with intensive math and science training; year-round counseling and advisement; exposure to university faculty members who do research in mathematics and the sciences; computer training; and participant-conducted scientific research under the guidance of faculty members or graduate students, who are serving as mentors.

(United States Department of Education, 2022h, para. 2),

in addition to the services provided in regular Upward Bound. In contrast, Veteran's Upward Bound programs focus their services specifically on Veterans. According to the United States Department of Education (2022i):

All Veterans Upward Bound projects must provide instruction in mathematics through pre-calculus, laboratory science, foreign language, composition and literature. Projects may also provide short-term remedial or refresher courses for veterans who are high school graduates but have delayed pursuing postsecondary education. Projects are also expected to assist veterans in securing support services from other locally available resources such as the Veterans Administration, state veterans' agencies, veteran associations, and other state and local agencies that serve veterans. (para. 2).

There are currently only two each of Upward Bound Math-Science and Veterans Upward Bound programs in Kansas located at Wichita State University and the University of Kansas (Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.).

Once students are accepted and begin their college careers, they can participate in TRIO programs that focus on college completion rather than entry. Student Support Services (SSS) is the most common TRIO program in Kansas with 20 different institutions housing the program (Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.). Eligible students at the following colleges can utilize SSS services: Colby Community College, Seward Community College, Garden City

Community College, Dodge City Community College, Barton County Community College, Kansas State University, Kansas State University – Salina, Cloud County Community College, Wichita State University, Wichita State University – Campus of Applied Sciences and Technology, Cowley County Community College, Emporia State University, Independence Community College, Neosho County Community College, Labette Community College, The University of Kansas, Haskell Indian Nations University, Highland Community College, Fort Scott Community College, and Donnelly College (Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.). According to the United States Department of Education (2022b), SSS programs seek to increase student retention through required programming such as tutoring, academic advising, financial aid counseling, and scholarships. SSS programs can also provide eligible students with mentoring and cultural programming as well as academic, career, or personal counseling (United States Department of Education (2022b)).

In addition to TRIO programs, the United States Department of Education also houses another grant-funded program called Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs or GEAR UP (United States Department of Education, 2022e). GEAR UP – like EOC, Talent Search, and Upward Bound programs – focuses on preparing students for college and helping them succeed (United States Department of Education, 2022e). GEAR UP works specifically with students in high-poverty districts and provides a cohort format through which students progress through from seventh grade until the end of high school (United States Department of Education, 2022e). Wichita State University and the University of Kansas are currently the only two institutions in the state of Kansas with GEAR Up programs (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, n.d.).

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's scholarship (e.g., 1973, 1977, 2002) shaped the historical perspective of cultural capital and reflects a narrowly defined interpretation of the concept including attributes or knowledge that are deemed favorable to upper-middle class and upper-class culture.

Bourdieu (2002) described three types of capital including economic, cultural, and social. He further explained that cultural capital can be converted into other forms, "and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications" (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 281). In his 1977 work, Bourdieu discussed two types of cultural capital: static and relational. Static cultural capital includes "highbrow" activities like opera while relational cultural capital focuses on relationships and communication within families. Ardoin (2013) further explains that relational capital "speaks to the competitive nature of the educational system in the United States, because cultural interactions between children and parents give some children an advantage and create barriers for others as they proceed through their educational process" (p. 36). Bourdieu (2002) went on to describe three different forms in addition to his two types of cultural capital:

In the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics etc.; and the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee" (p. 282, emphasis in original).

According to Bourdieu (2002) the first form, the embodied state, rests within the person and cannot be transferred or accumulated instantaneously, rather, it must be accumulated over time. In contrast, the objectified state consists of material goods often of value in higher social classes, and thus is transferable (Bourdieu, 2002). Lastly, institutionalized cultural capital includes academic qualifications that can be readily transformed into economic capital (Bourdieu, 2002).

In all three forms, Bourdieu's classical operationalization emphasizes the importance of high cultural activities such as opera and other forms of fine art (Andersen & Hansen, 2012; De Graaf et al, 2000; Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Kingston, 2001). Cultural capital can be leveraged often with or in place of economic capital, to make progress towards a certain goal or status. Literature suggests that school systems reward cultural capital and students that bring cultural capital into the formal school system are better adapted to formal learning than those from lower SES upbringing (Day, 2017; Dumais, 2002; De Graaf et al., 2000; Mitchell, 2007; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Dumais (2002) suggested that, by this logic:

lower-class students tend to self-select themselves out of the college-going track on the basis of their views of what is possible and what is not... [while] exceptional students from the lower class may see the accumulation of cultural capital as a way to overcome the obstacles that are typical for those in their class position (p. 47).

This self-selection is explained through the theories of social reproduction and cultural reproduction.

According to Button (2017), social reproduction theory is, "the analysis of different mechanisms in the social structure that reproduce inequality in a society," (p. 39) while cultural reproduction is, "the transmission of existing cultural values and norms from generation to

generation and refers to the mechanisms by which continuity and cultural experience is sustained across time” (p. 39). Recent literature explains that social and cultural reproduction both examine how social inequality is continued or broken often through formal education (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). According to Lareau and Horvat (1999), “the social reproduction perspective has proved especially useful in attempts to gain a better understanding of how race and class influence the transmission of educational inequality” (p. 37) but “[has] not advanced knowledge of the process whereby social and cultural resources are converted into educational advantages” (p. 37).

Cultural capital can be built through a variety of avenues but is most often gained through one’s upbringing through cultural reproduction (Ardoin, 2018; Bourdieu, 2002; Mitchell, 2007). Parents pass along the values and knowledge that they see as important thus building upon the capital that was passed down to them (McDonough, 1997). Cultural capital is also learned through formal education such as arts or other cultural programs that are more widely available to upper-middle class, and upper-class schools. In contrast, schools that are not as well funded may focus on other areas such as the trades that seem more practical for working-class and low SES families. Current literature is divided about cultural capital’s relation to parental educational levels, while Vasil and McCall (2017) indicated that first-generation students have less access to cultural capital, DiMaggio (1982) did not find a strong connection between cultural capital and parental educational background.

Some researchers critique classical cultural capital stating that it is problematic that they view cultural capital in a static manner; instead, it is important to consider the whole decision-making process (Adsitt, 2017; Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997). Other critics of the classical definition state that it often marginalizes underserved populations as they may not

have the time or financial capabilities to encourage the building of cultural capital (Ardoin, 2018; Kingston, 2001; Leibrandt, 2016; Vasil & McCall, 2017; Yosso, 2005). In addition, Dumais (2002) critiques Bourdieu for ignoring factors outside of social class, especially race and gender, when considering how people are distinguished from one another. Furthermore, Garcia and Guerra (2004) as well as Adsitt (2017) argue that classical cultural capital encourages deficit thinking which leads students with different sources of capital as at risk based on their demographics alone. O'Shea (2015) supports this, arguing that through this deficit thinking, colleges and universities devote their time to "filling up" gaps rather than leaning into their students' strengths, "essentially focusing on removing students from familial and social contexts in an attempt to acculturate them into the university" (p. 60).

While Wildhagen (2009) utilized a traditional Bourdieuan definition of cultural capital, she found that cultural capital had a positive connection with students' educational aspirations. Wildhagen (2009) also found that educational aspirations had a positive relationship with academic performance and thus students were more likely to pursue experiences that increased their cultural capital. This illustrates that there is a positive correlation between student experiences, aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005), and educational success. Furthermore, this educational success would lead back to increased access and involvement in capital-building experiences.

While there is a wealth of literature that considers cultural capital's effect on school success and attendance in the primary and secondary levels there is also literature that examines cultural capital in the college context. Button (2017) examined the effects of cultural capital specifically considering completion of an honors program at a two-year college. Their study found a connection between cultural capital and successful completion of the honors

program as well as transfer rates to four-year institutions (Button, 2017). In contrast, Mitchell (2007) explored first-generation community college students and their cultural capital facilitators. Through this research Mitchell (2007) was able to identify the types of information transmitted from facilitators to participants, the characteristics of facilitators, and how participants identified these facilitators. The implications from this study are important as they exemplify the importance of facilitators for community college students, as well as a need for further exploration.

Literature suggests that cultural capital should be considered flexible over time, and that not all cultural capital is valuable in every circumstance (Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Proponents of the broader interpretation argue that it is more useful in modern research, and that it is also more consistent with Bourdieu's original intentions (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Edgerton and Roberts (2014) stated that the broader conceptualization of cultural capital, "invites a much richer conception... viewing culture as the situated frame through which we meet our world rather than the more limited notion of culture as a marker of class position" (p. 197). By this argument, cultural capital is more of a toolkit including cognitive and behavioral skills needed to move through differing cultural experiences (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Farkas, 2003). According to Lareau and Weininger (2003), individuals who do not possess traditional cultural capital may possess other forms that are more practical to their upbringing. A lack of cultural capital will not prevent someone from pursuing college, but it can make the road to a college degree more difficult. Andersen and Hansen (2012) rejected both narrow and broader views of cultural capital, arguing that the classical interpretation puts too much weight on high-brow activities without considering how they influence academic achievements. In contrast, Andersen and

Hansen (2012) stated, “this broader understanding of cultural capital is that it prevents the disconnection of judgements that are considered legitimate from judgments based on illegitimate evaluation criteria” (p. 609).

Considering the broader operationalization of cultural capital, middle- and upper-class populations are still more advantaged especially when it comes to institutional knowledge needed to navigate higher education (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Lareau & Cox, 2011; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Marginalized populations, including rural and working-class students, are typically evaluated against a cultural capital framework that dismisses the unique strengths that they bring, as deficient. This practice of “othering” aims to reproduce social and cultural inequality among marginalized groups (Ardoin, 2018; Schwalbe et al, 2000; Yosso, 2005). No matter the operationalization of cultural capital, there have been conflicting conclusions regarding its connection to educational attainment, although that may stem from the broad and varied definitions of the term or the fact that very little literature has considered all of Bourdieu’s concepts (e.g., Aschaffenberg & Maas, 1997; De Graaf et al., 2000; DiMaggio, 1982; Dumais, 2002; Edgerton & Roberts, 2014).

College Knowledge

Ardoin (2018) utilized college knowledge – as a function of cultural capital – to examine college access in working-class, rural populations. Her study utilized qualitative case study to interview high school sophomores and high school counselors and examining college knowledge related documents. Ardoin (2018) found that the rural community in her study had lower educational attainment than the national average, suggesting that individuals lacked cultural capital and a local habitus that either does not see education as a viable option, or may not value it. She also found that the rural communities in her study gravitated more towards

technical or “practical” over theoretical knowledge, participants discussing the market value of a skill (Ardoin, 2018).

College knowledge includes information and concepts about college and financial aid and has been found to be one of the most influential factors influencing college aspirations and access (Ardoin, 2018; Chenoweth and Galliher, 2004; Heller, 2013; Vargas, 2004). Research suggests, since there are many different manifestations all individuals hold some type of cultural capital, but institutions of higher education, “place the highest value on the cultural capital of the White, middle and upper classes who have collegiate experience” (Ardoin, 2018; p. 27; see also: Bourdieu, 2002; McDonough, 1997; O’Shea, 2015 Schwalbe et al., 2000; Yosso, 2005). According to social reproduction theory (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997), students with the “correct” cultural capital, “are better able to decode the implicit ‘rules of the game’... and are hence better able to negotiate their way through the highest educational levels” (p. 573). O’Shea (2015) stated that institutions struggle to, “work effectively with what learners have rather than expect them to change or disregard [their] strengths” (p. 75).

College knowledge thus represents the hidden curriculum in higher education, where one must have knowledge about what is important on a college application or even what college options are available. Prospective students who possess a high level of college knowledge are often guided by their parents and professionals in their school systems such as teachers and college counselors. Students with less access to the hidden curriculum must work harder to gain this knowledge or may forgo college as an option all together.

Literature suggests that rural students have a more difficult time obtaining college knowledge than their urban and suburban peers because of limited exposure to higher education caused by geographical isolation, parental inexperience, and limited school resources

(Ardoin, 2018; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Ganss, 2016). Although some programs like GEAR UP and TRIO's Upward Bound and Talent Search have been implemented to increase college knowledge among underserved students, the programs are often centered in larger communities far from rural schools and have strict funding and participation resources limiting the number of students who can utilize their services (Ardoin, 2018). In addition, rural students often receive less information from colleges, especially four-year institutions, as they tend to focus their recruiting efforts on where they feel they will yield the highest number of potential students often leaving rural students feeling like they matter less, but also cutting them out of valuable college knowledge resources (Ardoin, 2018).

College-Going Capital

Leibrandt (2016) argues that there is a need to combine dominant forms of capital such as cultural and social capital, with a strength-based approach such as Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth, to provide a more holistic picture of the college-going process for underserved students. Leibrandt (2016) defines college-going capital as, "the aspects of social capital and community cultural wealth as they relate to the college-going process" as well as "activation of these resources" (p. 14). Furthermore, Leibrandt (2016) states that it is imperative that research look outside of the formal school system to incorporate non-dominant forms of capital brought by families and communities to move away from the deficit perspective operationalized in traditional cultural and social capital models. While Leibrandt (2016) breaks down Yosso's (2005) concepts of community cultural wealth, Leibrandt's more specific categorizations fit within Yosso's conceptualization.

Community Cultural Wealth

Considering the broader operationalization of cultural capital, middle- and upper-class populations are still more advantaged especially when it comes to institutional knowledge needed to navigate higher education (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Lareau & Cox, 2011; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Marginalized populations, including rural and working-class students, in higher education are typically evaluated against a cultural capital framework that dismisses the unique strengths that they bring as deficient. This practice of “othering” aims to reproduce social and cultural inequality among marginalized groups (Ardoin, 2018; Schwalbe et al, 2000; Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) describes an alternative to Bourdieu’s deficit model of cultural capital with community cultural wealth (CCW). CCW “transforms the implicit deficit nature of Bourdieuan capital, foregrounding experiential knowledge in order to displace white middle-class cultural as the standard” (O’Shea, 2015, p. 63). Building from critical race theory (CRT), community cultural wealth acknowledges that oppressed communities possess valuable alternative forms of capital. There are six forms of capital contributing to CCW: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance capital (Yosso, 2005).

Aspirational capital is “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Aspirational capital is revealed as students aspire to a future outside of their current circumstances or encourage others to pursue similar opportunities such as pursuing post-secondary education when it is not the family or cultural norm (O’Shea, 2015; Sims & Ferrare, 2021; Yosso, 2005). O’Shea (2015) stated that aspirational capital can also be developed in resistance to current or perceived limitations, directly connecting aspirational capital to Yosso’s (2005) resistant capital.

Resistant capital challenges inequality and refers to the “knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). According to O’Shea (2015) resistant capital, “nurtures attitudes that challenge status quo” (p. 63). Resistant capital is often developed in response to perceived norms including outside limitations placed on subordinate ethnicities, genders, and social classes as demonstrated by the women interviewed in studies such as O’Shea (2015). Sims and Ferrare (2021) found that rural students’ mothers exhibited resistant capital by, “purposefully training their children to build skills and expectations which would challenge existing inequities” (p. 9).

One such way to develop resistant capital is to build linguistic capital by encouraging the use of college jargon. “Linguistic capital includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Other research supports the idea that the ability to communicate with diverse people in diverse settings contributes to linguistic capital (Leibbrandt, 2016; O’Shea, 2015). Underserved students often have one foot in two different worlds - those from homes where English is not the first language, or even those where college jargon is not used - creating opportunities for the creation and strengthening of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). Specifically, Ardoin’s (2018) “specific focus on university jargon and college knowledge – as a function of cultural capital – addressed a gap in the literature and emphasized the relationship between jargon, college knowledge, aspiration, and ultimately, access.” (p. 88). Higher education’s jargon represents one of the most elusive aspects in cultural capital and those who feel inadequate in this area often feel alienated from college culture, thus affecting their college aspirations (Ardoin, 2018; Bourdieu, 1977; White, 2005; Whiting, 1999).

We learn linguistic cues from those around us, linking linguistic to familial capital. Yosso (2005) describes familial capital as, “those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition” (p. 79; emphasis in original). It is important to note that “*familia*” is more than just immediate family, but can look different for each student including grandparents, godparents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, or even between families through churches, sports, or other community-centered settings (Yosso, 2005). This extended family concept is especially important for rural students whose family may have been in the area for generations and where neighbors become family. Bejarano and Valverde (2012) stated that, “familial capital can be described as community history, memory and cultural intuition” (p. 27). Gofen (2009) examined how first-generation students utilize family capital to pursue and graduate from college. Related to Yosso’s (2005) familial capital and habitus (Dumais, 2002; Edgerton and Roberts, 2014), Gofen (2009) defined family capital as “the ensemble of means, strategies, and resources embodied in the family’s way of life that influences the future of their children. Family capital is implicitly and explicitly reflected through behavior, emotional processes, and core values” (p. 115). Sims and Ferrare (2021) also noted that rural students leverage familial capital, by expanding upon their families’ career traditions and legacies as well as by returning and contributing to their communities.

Furthermore, Bernal (2002) adds that it includes familial knowledge extending outside of formal education including, “culturally specific ways or teaching and learning” (p. 110). This concept, thus, is related to the concept of habitus, “the learned set of preferences or dispositions by which a person orients to the social world” which is “rooted in family upbringing... and conditioned by one’s position in the social structure” (Edgerton & Roberts,

2014, p. 195). Dumais (2002) stated that, “habitus, or one’s view of the world and one’s place in it, is an important consideration in trying to understand how students navigate their way through the educational system” (p. 45). Dumais (2002) goes on to say that habitus has a larger impact on educational success such as grades, than cultural capital alone.

Leibbrandt (2016) further explains that familial capital may manifest itself through familiarity with certain majors or schools, developing a sense of value for education, advice, technical support, or even practical support like transportation or time and space to complete academic work. O’Shea (2016) and Gofen (2009) also that familial support often provided students with the motivation to attend college as well as emotional support that contributed to their success, especially for students from marginalized groups. Garcia and Guerra (2004) found that when school leaders lacked a cultural framework, they were more likely to view diverse types of parental involvement as deficient and nonexistent. Instead, Garcia and Guerra (2004) argue that schools need to consider different types of parental involvement as valuable by understanding the cultural significance of their norms and actions.

For rural students, familial and social capital build from one another; often who you are related to – or not – impacts the social resources one has access to. Social capital consists of networks of people who can, “provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society’s institutions” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). These networks can help students prepare for and navigate the higher education landscape including college and scholarship applications. Social connections also increase access to resources that help rural students build navigational capital.

Navigational capital refers specifically to the “skills of maneuvering through social institutions” such as the unfamiliar college context while considering individual agency as it

works within external limitations (Yosso, 2005). Navigational capital can be learned through family members, friends, community members, or institutional staff at high schools or colleges as well as the programs they support (Bejarano & Valverde, 2012; Leibrandt, 2016, O'Shea, 2015).

Recent literature suggests that expanding the use of CCW to other underrepresented populations including rural, first-generation, and low socioeconomic status (SES) or working-class individuals should be explored (Adsitt, 2017; Ardoin, 2018; Button, 2017; Leibrandt, 2016; Morton et al., 2018; O'Shea, 2015; Sims & Ferrare, 2021; Vasil & McCall, 2017). O'Shea (2015) acknowledges that utilizing a framework, "rooted in cultural contexts needs to be done cautiously and sensitively" going on to say that it is necessary to explore, "how a strengths based model, such as Yosso's, can enable data to be unpacked in order to re-envision what is assumed to be a weakness or lack in terms of strengths" (p. 60). While not citing CCW specifically, McDonough et al. (2010) discussed the importance of a culturally driven framework to consider alternative forms of capital to promote underrepresented students' access to higher education.

Sims and Ferrare (2021) utilized community cultural wealth to examine how first-generation urban and rural youth chose college majors. By sampling students at a university in the southeastern United States, Sims and Ferrare (2021) found that both rural and urban first-generation students used aspirational, familial, or resistant capital much like racially minoritized students. While their research was similar to this study, Sims and Ferrare (2021) considered first-generation students at one university to examine differences between rural and urban populations. In contrast, this study focused on rural students at one community college.

Furthermore, Sims and Ferrare (2021) utilized case study design to look for trends, while this study engaged in narrative inquiry to focus on individual student experiences.

Rural Cultural Wealth

The concept of rural cultural wealth is an asset-based framework that builds on suggestions to apply CCW to other underserved populations by acknowledging, “the strength and resilience of rural people” (Crumb et al., 2022, p. 126). The framework is comprised of four tenets: rural resourcefulness, rural ingenuity, rural familism, and rural community unity (Crumb et al., 2022). Rural resourcefulness is related to Yosso’s (2005) resistant capital as it, “refers to the capacity of rural students and residents to overcome socio-contextual adversities that threaten their livelihood and well-being through taking actions to mitigate limitations (Crumb et al., 2022, p. 129). Rural ingenuity builds from this, and refers to inventiveness that rural residents possess collectively, directly relating it to Yosso’s (2005) navigational and social capitals. Rural familism and community unity connect directly to familial, navigational, and social capitals as defined by Yosso (2005). According to Crumb et al. (2022), these concepts look at kin and non-kin relationships and assets held by rural communities which may provide rural students with the skills and knowledge needed to pursue and persist in college. Rural cultural wealth thus provides another level of specificity when considering strengths-based frameworks through which to consider rural student college access.

Rural Students and College Access

Much research on rural students focuses on Appalachia (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Harris, 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015; Wright, 2012), the rural South (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Howley et al., 2013; Morton et al., 2018; Theodori & Theodori, 2015), or the rural Northeast (Sharp et al., 2020; Tieken, 2016). Furthermore, there is little research conducted on rural students in the Midwest, Great Plains, or Southwest. Several authors have encouraged more work to be done in other geographical regions to examine cultural differences and increase generalizability (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2017; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Morton et al., 2018).

Several studies (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Harris, 2013; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016) approach rural student college access through a college choice model. Ardoin (2018) utilized Hossler & Gallagher's (1987) model, while Barr (2018) and Harris (2013) applied Perna's (2006) nested model. Conversely, Friesen & Purc-Stephenson (2016) proposed their own nested model to explain the factors that influence rural students' decision to pursue college. Other studies approach rural student college access through a social capital lens (Morton et al., 2018), by examining out-migration (Corbett, 2007; Theodori & Theodori, 2015; Sherman & Sage, 2011), or by analyzing patterns through large quantitative data sets (Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2015; Byun et al., 2017) among other perspectives. Researchers suggested several overarching themes affecting rural student college choice including college-going resources or experiences, family and community perceptions, location, and economics.

College-Going Resources or Experiences

Research has found a connection between college-going resources or experiences and increased college aspirations for rural students (Ardoyn, 2018; Barr, 2018; Harris, 2013; Morton et al., 2018). Extracurricular activities, dual credit courses, and college visits were specifically mentioned by Ardoyn (2018) and Barr (2018), as experiences related to increased college aspirations. Harris (2013) suggested that, to increase college completion and thus access, attempts must be made to strengthen college-going resources in families, high schools, colleges, and communities including programs like GEAR UP. Ardoyn (2018) also discussed how important high school teachers and counselors were to rural students' college aspirations, noting how little time counselors and teachers must spend with students to discuss college options or help students prepare to take the next step. Morton et al. (2018) found that communities, families, and high schools are often the most important channels through which rural students gain college knowledge. Specifically, high school counselors along with family perceptions of education had substantial influence on the educational aspirations of the participants (Morton et al., 2018). Sometimes these burdens are taken up partially by college coaches at local community colleges such as one in Ardoyn's (2018) study.

Family and Community Perceptions

Researchers also found that parental and community perception of higher education affected the college choice process for rural students (Ardoyn, 2018; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Hlinka et al., 2015; Tieken, 2016). Often, rural students hear mixed messages from their families, schools, communities, and peer groups regarding the value of higher education (Ardoyn, 2018). These conflicting messages stem from the community's previous experiences, shaped by local economic, cultural, and social forces. The lack of

potential role models, paired with the fact that they may have to leave their communities for good if they choose to pursue a college education further complicate rural students' college aspirations. Ardoin (2018) acknowledged that families (specifically parents/guardians), schools (teachers/counselors), and experiences with colleges as key sources of college knowledge for rural students. Providing practical and theoretical suggestions for how each cultural capital facilitator can better support rural students, Ardoin (2018), concluded:

It is apparent that rural students are not receiving college information as early as is suggested in college access literature and rural students, their public high school counselors, higher education institutions, and state policymakers are all responsible for narrowing the gap between rural students' acquisition and comprehension of college knowledge and university jargon (p. 92).

Other researchers have confirmed that parental education, family support, pre-college experiences, and support from teachers/counselors were connected to increased college aspirations and attendance (Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2017). The concepts of family and school social capital suggested that the raised expectations of these key stakeholders encouraged students to think about college as a viable option. Byun et al. (2012) found that these factors were more important in predicting college aspirations than socioeconomic and demographic factors. The findings of Byun et al. (2012) suggest that a strengths-based lens such as Yosso's (2005) may be more beneficial than deficit models going forward. The research conducted by Sims and Ferrare (2021) is one of few that utilizes community cultural wealth to examine the strengths of rural students. Rural students were more likely to pursue and utilize informal mentoring opportunities with high school faculty/staff, community members, or extended family or friend networks than their urban peers who utilized formal

programming more often to build forms of capital (Sims & Ferrare, 2021). Additionally, rural students built familial and resistant capital as they sought to challenge hometown norms as well as expand on their family's traditions (Sims & Ferrare, 2021).

Similarly, Sharp et al. (2020) examined, "how the sociocultural contexts of rural young people shape their future aspirations and expectations and how these future orientations are associated with their educational and work attainment and future residential aspirations in emerging adulthood" (p. 534). Using quantitative data centered in rural New England, Sharp et al. (2020), found that rural men had lower future expectations and aspirations than their female peers. In contrast, Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) found no significant difference in the college aspirations of rural male and female students from rural West Virginia. Instead, they found differences in the factors that encouraged and discouraged college attendance between the two sexes (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004). While academic factors were cited by both female and male students, the researchers found that male students were more likely to cite parental education levels and their father's occupational status, while female students' academic preparation including GPA and curriculum were stronger indicators of college aspirations (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004).

Location

Furthermore, it was suggested that colleges be aware of how location, especially proximity, is for rural students and their choice to pursue college (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Harris, 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015). Community colleges represented a viable option for the students in Ardoin's (2018) study, most notably because of their proximity to the communities in which the students live. Byun et al. (2015) indicated that even while controlling for SES, high school resources, and demographics, rural students were

still less likely to enroll at selective colleges. For these rural students, community colleges represented a steppingstone to help ease the transition to a four-year college or university, allowing them to balance their needs to be both supported and to move into the next phase of their life (Hlinka et al., 2015).

Research has also specifically looked at the effects of education on out-migration for rural students (Corbett, 2007; Theodori & Theodori, 2015; Sherman & Sage, 2011). Studying a rural population in Canada, Corbett (2007) utilized resistance theory to examine the out-migration patterns of citizens finding that higher levels of education did contribute to migration. Theodori and Theodori (2015) found Texas students who felt a stronger connection to their rural communities and a stronger sense of belonging at home were more likely to aspire to stay close to home for college or return after pursuing post-secondary education. In contrast, at-risk students and those who did not feel a sense of attachment to their rural communities are more likely to leave their hometowns (Theodori & Theodori, 2015). Sherman and Sage (2011) studied a rural community in California and found that local school systems along with the community either promote or discourage out-migration depending on perceived moral and socioeconomic distinctions. For those deemed as local “best and brightest” or “treasures” college was seen as either an opportunity out, or a way to return and contribute to the community (Sherman & Sage, 2011). In contrast, those who were deemed as morally, socially, or economically less-than were not afforded the same encouragement and support, suggesting that all they could do was stay and perpetuate local stereotypes and family legacies of reliance on welfare and drug use (Sherman & Sage, 2011). Corbett (2007) as well as Theodori and Theodori (2015) suggested that communities, schools, and businesses work together to help their youth develop a sense of place and connection to their communities.

Ardoin (2018) noted that students in her study did not believe that they must leave their communities to pursue college or obtain a better life, but rather looked for ways to obtain their dreams at institutions within close proximity to their homes. Furthermore, the ability to return home after college played a large role in the decision process for rural students (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018). The opportunity to secure a higher wage and stay connected to their communities was the overwhelming motivating factor for Wright's (2012) participants. She stated, "though they knew their degrees might have better economic traction in urban places, their commitment to the local was a dominating influence in their pursuit and application of post-secondary degrees" (Wright, 2012, p. 9). Conversely, Sharp et al. (2020) found that the students with the highest aspirations were least likely to return home after college and most likely to be in college full-time.

Lastly, Hlinka et al., (2018) found that students felt the need to decide between staying in their communities or leaving to pursue their bachelor's degrees. Reasons for staying were deeply connected to sense of self and place in their rural settings along with wanting to be close to family (Hlinka et al., 2018). Participants also voiced that they believed degrees would help them be able to find jobs in their communities after graduation, and that they believed they needed to give back to their communities through public service such as teaching or nursing (Hlinka et al., 2018). Not all students wanted to return to their hometowns, citing conflicting points of view and limited growth opportunities (Hlinka et al., 2018). Similarly, Wright (2012) conducted a study with rural community college students in Appalachia to examine, "how a commitment to place informs and shapes rural students' decisions around post-secondary education, career, and residence" (p. 1). In the study, students articulated the push and pull of higher education and their home environments; students seeing advanced

degrees as both a way out and a way to return and serve their communities (Wright, 2012).

While researchers such as Carr and Kefalas (2009) approach place-attachment and out-migration from a deficit point of view, Wright (2012) found rural students' place attachment as a strength, and an area in which to help rural students pursue higher education.

Economics

Tieken (2016) found that discussions of college with rural students centered around the economic usefulness of college. Economic factors such as cost and the ability to secure a sustainable career are often linked to the aforementioned themes (Hlinka et al., 2015).

According to Tieken (2016), school stakeholders such as guidance counselors and college admission representatives focused on "higher education as the pathway to a career" (p. 210), how the rural economy has changed, and college affordability versus a degree's economic utility. In addition, they worked with students' parents to encourage college-going values and help develop college knowledge within the students' support system. Tieken (2016) urged that we move beyond measuring aspirations and instead work on helping students realize those dreams.

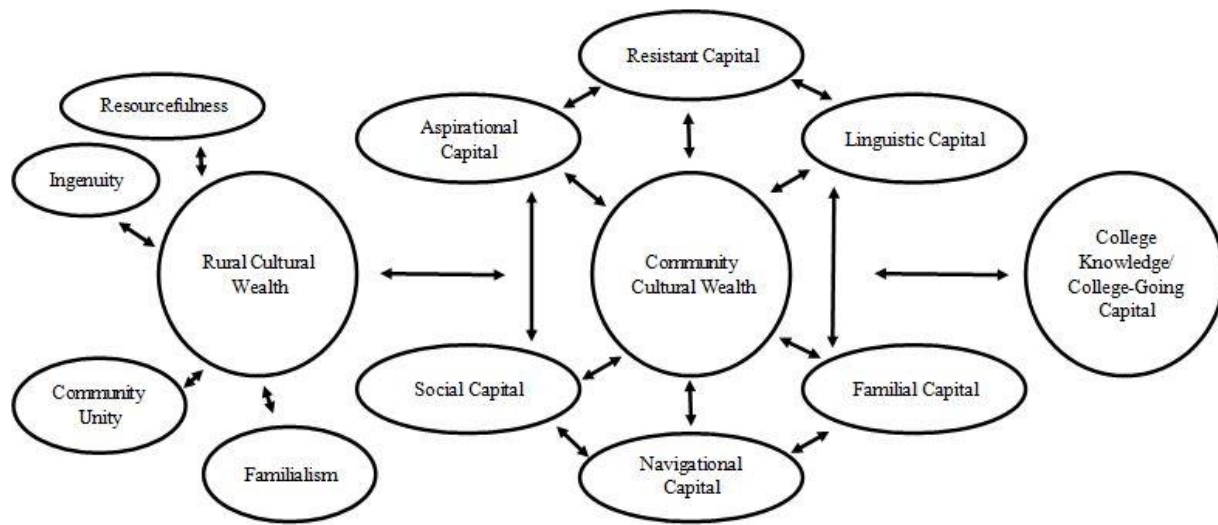
Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) discussed gender differences, finding that male students had more career options that did not require a college education than their female peers. Labor-intensive employment was more accessible to males and provided a viable income, where female students may have viewed college as, "the only option for obtaining financial security and independence" (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004, p. 12). Gannon (2002) also found that the women in her study discussed that college was their route to financial stability and open doors to other options rather than starting a family directly after high school. Hlinka et al. (2018) also found that pursuing a good career was one of the biggest motivating

factors for their students' choice to pursue a bachelor's degree. Lastly, rural students commonly sought out terminal degrees allowing for the most economic gain and the flexibility to return home and give back to their communities (Sims & Ferrare, 2021).

Conceptual Framework

Rural students are an underserved population in higher education and continue to lag behind their non-rural counterparts in college aspirations, attendance, and completion. It is well established that college knowledge is one of the most influential factors affecting college aspirations, attendance, and completion especially for underserved students (Ardoin, 2018; Chenoweth and Galliher, 2004; Heller, 2013; Vargas, 2004). It is also well established that varying types of capital have an impact on student college choices, but it is necessary to expand on the existing literature by incorporating a strengths-based framework (Ardoin, 2018; Crumb et al., 2022; Leibrandt, 2016; McDonough et al., 2010; Morton et al., 2018; O'Shea, 2015; Schwalbe et al., 2000; Sims & Ferrare, 2021; Yosso, 2005). The conceptual framework for this study investigated Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth as well as rural cultural wealth (Crumb et al., 2022) and how they contribute to college knowledge (Ardoin, 2018) and the related college-going capital (Leibrandt, 2016). Figure 1 below is adapted from Yosso (2005) and demonstrates the interconnectedness of the frameworks that were used for this study.

Figure 2.1. *Rural Cultural Wealth, Community Cultural Wealth, and College Knowledge*



By examining rural students' pursuit of college through this conceptual framework, this research considered the unique strengths that rural students bring with them to college instead of looking for their weaknesses. This strengths-based approach is important for underserved populations because it equips educators with practical knowledge of rural students' experiences as well as an alternative to deficit frameworks such as cultural capital.

Chapter Summary

As community colleges have weathered many changes to their missions and continue to play a vital role in the educational landscape for many underserved populations including rural students. In the current mission generation, it is imperative for community colleges to strike a balance between access through policies and success through resources such as TRIO, GEAR UP, and other support services. Specifically, rural community colleges often face their share of obstacles but play a vital role in the educational landscape for rural students and communities.

Rural students continue to trail their non-rural counterparts in college aspirations, attendance, and completion. While rural students and communities have been cast in a negative

light, they are much more than stereotypes and deserve culturally appropriate exploration.

Research on rural student college access has gained traction, but there is still a lack of literature studying students in the great plains or Midwest in particular suggesting that more work needs to be done. This study utilized rural cultural wealth, community cultural wealth, and the concepts of college knowledge or college-going capital to investigate rural students' pursuit of a college education.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The purpose of this research was to investigate rural student college access utilizing a strengths-based approach to explore how rural students build and apply community cultural wealth to pursue college. This chapter introduces the researcher's positionality as well as the theoretical perspective through which the research questions are approached. In addition, this chapter addresses the appropriateness of qualitative research, namely narrative inquiry, for the research purpose and questions at hand. The remainder of the chapter will introduce the study population; how the human subjects will be protected; the pilot study; as well as procedures for data collection, management, and analysis. Lastly, this chapter will discuss the trustworthiness of the study including procedures to insure dependability.

Subjectivity Statement

Participants in this study may see me as both an insider – someone from a rural Kansas town who also attended a community college as a first-generation student – as well as an outsider because I work for a community college but am also a graduate student at a state university. These intertwined pieces of my identity color my perception regarding the value of higher education, but also push and pull on each other. Thus, giving me a unique perspective regarding this research but also a unique opportunity to deeply connect with the participants and the stories at hand.

Due to my deep connection to rural education, I must also pay close attention to my subjectivities, both negative and positive. As a person from a rural community near a community college as well as a community college alumna, I must be careful to set aside my preconceived notions of people and places that I may already be familiar with. As a firm believer in the value of higher education, I was careful to balance cultural perceptions with my

own as I constructed participant narratives. While my familiarity with rural students as well as the area could have increased the likelihood of bringing my preconceived subjectivities with me into the research, they facilitated quicker relationship building and fast-tracked rapport with participants who could have been leery of researchers, viewing them as outsiders from large communities or organizations.

Theoretical Perspective

Kim (2016) describes three levels of theory which she believes must be understood and articulated as a qualitative researcher: macro-level (holistic), meso-level (methodological), and micro-level (content). According to Kim (2016) macro-level theory includes big picture ideas such as postmodernism, critical race theory, and poststructuralism which all shape how researchers approach their work through a philosophical lens. Thus, meso-level theories shape our methodological paradigm, while micro-level theories focus on content-specific paradigms such as student development or student involvement. This study's theoretical framework utilizes all three levels to further strengthen its rigor, including interpretivism (macro-level), narrative inquiry (meso-level), and community cultural wealth (micro).

Macro-Level Theory

Crotty (2015) defines epistemology as, “the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology” (p. 3). Essentially, epistemology speaks to how we know what we know, thus, a researcher's epistemology will shape how they conduct their research and approach their findings. Crotty (2015) describes three main epistemological stances: objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism. Throughout my doctoral studies, I struggled to pinpoint an epistemological perspective that I could wholeheartedly identify with, finding personal sticking points with each. Objectivist

epistemology states that a firm, and unchanging truth exists regardless of who and if anyone notices it (Crotty, 2015). To me, this ignores any personal experiences we bring with us to a situation and ignores culturally significant meanings. Conversely, according to Crotty (2015), constructionism states that all meaning comes from human interaction with the world and that, “meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (p. 9). While this constructionism considers individually constructed points of view, it seems to believe that without human interpretation, there is no meaning and that felt conceited from my perspective.

Lastly, Crotty (2015) states that in subjectivism, meaning is imported from an experience and that we impose it upon the object which has some negative connotations for me personally. My sticking point with subjectivism was less troublesome than with objectivism and constructionism because it considers individual interpretations but acknowledges that we bring meaning from other experiences like our culture or religion. To me, subjectivism allowed for individuals to make their own meaning without stating that humans *create* meaning, allowing for a better pairing with my personal religious beliefs. Thus, I approached this research through a subjectivist epistemology. So, then what theoretical perspective will consider the importance of individual meanings within the context of cultural significance? Crotty (2015), states that the interpretivist approach, “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world.” (p. 67). Because interpretivism considers individual experiences and meanings situated in culturally relevant circumstances, it is often a good fit when examining the experiences and meaning-making process for underrepresented populations.

Meso-Level Theory

Narrative inquiry as a meso-level or methodological level theory, builds from interpretivism through the building of individualized narratives for the participants. These narratives help the researcher to examine the meaning-making process for underserved or marginalized populations, lending them voice where they are often quieted.

Micro-Level Theory

Micro-level theories are thus content-level lenses that are specific to the research discipline and topic. This study focused on community cultural wealth as its micro-level theory as well as rural cultural wealth, college knowledge, and the related college-going capital. This micro-level theory is appropriate for this study because it considers marginalized populations and allows for the research to examine how those participants make meaning from their experiences. Furthermore, it allowed for a strengths-based approach rather than a deficit mindset, which is imperative when working with participants whose voices have been quieted or negatively stereotyped historically.

Research Questions

There were three research questions for this study:

1. How do rural students describe how they develop community cultural wealth?
2. How do rural students describe how they apply community cultural wealth to their pursuit of college?
3. How does community cultural wealth contribute to college knowledge for rural students?

Research Design

Building from the subjectivist epistemology and interpretivist lens, this study's research purpose and questions sought to better understand rural students, making a qualitative research design necessary (Bhattacharya, 2017; Kim, 2016). Current literature discusses the importance of utilizing qualitative studies such as case study, phenomenology, and narrative inquiry to better capture the perspectives of underrepresented students like those from rural areas (e.g., Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Gannon, 2022; Harris, 2013; Howley et al., 2013; Morton et al., 2018; Sims & Ferrare, 2021). Much of the current literature on rural students utilizes case study methodology (e.g., Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Harris, 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015; Howley et al., 2013). Case study research is a good fit while working with rural students, as it allows the researcher to examine culturally specific settings, but it does not allow for a focus on individual subjects' perceptions. Other studies have utilized phenomenology (e.g., Morton et al., 2018; Friesen & Perc-Stephenson, 2016) which focuses on a particular event and how participants experience the said event. Phenomenology was not a good selection for this study as it focuses on the phenomenon rather than the unique experiences of the participants. Therefore, narrative inquiry was the logical choice as it focuses on the experiences of each participant and how they make sense of them.

While there is much diversity in the field of qualitative inquiry, the narrative is unique because it uses "the story as the basic unit of analysis" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 27). Narrative inquiry focuses on how participants build meaning from their unique experiences. "Because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out and share, narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others" (Kim, 2016, p. 8). While this research was

most firmly positioned in Kim's (2016) approach, the field of narrative inquiry was also developed by researchers such as Clandinin (2007) and Polkinghorne (1995).

Narrative Inquiry

Kim (2016) describes her love affair with narrative inquiry, discussing how approachable the discipline was when she was first introduced to it. To Kim (2016), narrative inquiry allows the exploration of complicated issues in a way that quantitative research cannot. According to Kim (2016), narrative inquiry utilizes diverse theoretical and philosophical approaches to best convey and analyze individual participants' narratives. Narrative inquiry should plant the seed of social justice, no matter which discipline is utilizing it. Kim (2016) states:

The ultimate goal of doing research, in my humble opinion, no matter what research purposes we have for our individual research, is to make the world a better place or to improve the human condition to the extent that we breath social justice just as we breathe air in our daily lives. (p. 237).

The disciplines utilize narrative inquiry in a variety of ways to reach this goal by promoting the perspectives of those whose voices have been quieted, improving relationships, and exploring lived experiences to further research. Kim (2016) goes on to describe how important it is in narrative inquiry to value the everyday experiences and stories of everyday people. In this way, we honor what Munro Hedry (2007) described as the sacred nature of humanity.

To best understand narrative inquiry as a method, Kim (2016) believes that one must first understand the difference between a narrative and a story. "A story is a detailed organization of narrative events arranged in a (story) structure based on time although the events are not necessarily in chronological order" (Kim, 2016, p. 8). Then, narratives are part

of each participants life story from their perspective, but not a full or complete picture. According to Kim (2016), one of the most important things about narrative inquiry is the concept of narrative thinking which she defines as, “a method of making a story out of experience” (p. 156). This story making, is a collaborative effort between the participants and the researcher; the researcher is responsible for pulling out, capturing, and retelling the lived experiences of the participant. The collaborative construction of meaning is central to interpretivism as discussed by Crotty (2015) and is typically done through a variety of interview techniques including semi-structured and open-ended interviews.

Narrative inquiry covers a wide range of methodological choices such as autobiographical, biographical, and arts-based forms including creative nonfiction. Narrative inquiry includes the less traditional methodologies such as arts-based narrative inquiry which includes literary-based and visual-based options. Literary-based narrative inquiry includes creative nonfiction, short story, fiction, and novel. In contrast, “visual-based narrative inquiry is storytelling research that uses visual methods such as images, photographs, drawings, paintings, collages, cartoons, films, video, signs, symbols, and other visual technology” (Kim, 2016, p. 143). This study used creative nonfiction.

Lastly, narrative inquiry utilizes a diverse range of data analysis methods such as paradigmatic and narrative. The paradigmatic mode examines, “the narrative data to focus on the discovery of common themes or salient constructs in storied data, and organize(s) them under several categories using stories as data” (Kim, 2016, p. 196). In contrast, the narrative mode of analysis constructs a story, “to help the reader understand why and how things happened in the way they did, and why and how our participants acted in the way they did”

(Kim, 2016, p. 197). Kim (2016) goes on to describe multiple models of the narrative mode of analysis.

Creative Nonfiction

Creative nonfiction is one of the most adaptable forms of narrative inquiry and gives the researcher flexibility in data representation through writing style. “In creative nonfiction, you would present factual information using the tools of the fiction writer, while maintaining fidelity to fact, and at the same time, openly communicating the writer’s subjectivity or personal feelings about the topic” (Kim, 2016, p. 140). According to Kim (2016) creative nonfiction requires the research to utilize both analytical and creative skills. It requires researchers to bring with them the writing skills of a fiction author such as narrative smoothing and the fictionalization of data (Kim, 2016). The fictionalization of data “provides researchers with the opportunity to work with raw data in order to speak to the heart of the reader’s social consciousness, while providing the protection of confidentiality to the research participants” (Kim, 2016, p. 140). This extra layer of protection which is especially important when working with populations from smaller, rural communities, where their stories may be easily identifiable even with names and places accounted for (Gannon, 2022).

It is imperative to build rapport with all participants, but even more so for underserved populations such as rural students. Through creative nonfiction, rural participants were given the freedom to collaborate with a rural researcher, establishing both rapport and greater dependability (Kim, 2016). Collaborative construction of stories incorporating the participants’ stories and researcher’s subjectivity is essential to both creative nonfiction and interpretivism as well as allowing for an open and honest writing process resulting in an engaging narrative that desires the reader and draws them in (Crotty, 2015; Kim, 2016).

Population

Narrative inquiry requires that researchers delve into each participant's individual narrative, thus a small sample size is necessary. Bhattacharya (2017) suggests at least five participants if completing a study in less than one year, or 15-20 participants if the study allows for a two-year or longer period. Furthermore, Kim (2016) suggests a sample size of six to 12 participants, emphasizing the idea that quality is more important than quantity. It was essential that I focused on the depth of the interview process, allowing for at least three rounds with each participant, adding more interview rounds and participants as necessary to gain appropriate saturation through breadth and depth of knowledge (Kim, 2016). Thus, this study sought to interview five participants provided that there is thematic redundancy at that time. Participants were from rural communities and were enrolled at a southeastern Kansas community college for the current semester. To be considered for the study, participants were required to meet the following criterion:

- Self-identified as from a rural community or town
- Located within the state of Kansas
- Attending community college in Southeastern Kansas
- Currently pursuing a CERTA, CERTB, CERTC, or associate degree program at the community college
- At least 18 years of age at the time of the study
- Have completed their high school diploma or GED at the time of the study
- Not currently incarcerated at the time of the study

Convenient sampling was used will be used to identify and gather participants for this study. This is a type of purposeful sampling often selected based on the ability of resources such as availability of participants, time, or money among other possible factors (Creswell, 2013; deMarrias & Lapan, 2004; Merrium & Tisdell, 2016).

There was significant difficulty securing participants for this study and multiple emails to the target population were sent to their campus email. To encourage the target population to check their campus emails and open said emails from an outside source, I began to reach out to faculty and staff at the college whom I was familiar with. These faculty and staff were asked to encourage their students to read their email from the researcher and reassure those students that it was not spam. I also encouraged the pilot and regular participants to encourage any friends that fit selection criterion to open recruitment emails. Lastly, I offered a \$25 gift card to the five students who participated. The gift card was sent as a thank you after the informed consent form was signed. The combination of these tactics resulted in recruitment and retention of all five participants.

Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of human subjects must be a top priority especially when working with underserved populations. Creative nonfiction provides one layer of protection as it allows for fictionalization of data adding to confidentiality for participants (Kim, 2016). Pseudonyms were used for each participant and the institution. In addition to these protections, prior to conducting research for this study, approval from the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. IRB approval through the research site was also obtained. An informed consent form (Appendix B) was reviewed and signed by each participant.

Participants were advised that they could withdraw from the research at any point without penalty.

Each participant reviewed the informed consent form before the first interview was conducted and they were enrolled in the study after it was signed. I retained the original signed form and provided the participants with a copy for their records. Interviews were conducted and recorded using Zoom (a video conferencing application). Interview recordings were transcribed in a timely manner and the videos were destroyed as soon as transcription was completed. Audio recordings and transcripts will be retained for at least three years in a secure password protected location. Electronic files were stored on a password-protected computer and backed up on an external hard drive. Each participant was debriefed at the conclusion of the research via the debriefing sheet included in Appendix C. Upon request, participants were sent a copy of the completed research.

Pilot Study

Pilot studies are necessary to discover possible roadblocks and hurdles the full study may encounter. This step is important because it allows the researcher to make corrective action and better the research process as well as add reliability to the study (Given, 2008; Persaud, 2010). After IRB approval was obtained, I conducted a pilot study with one participant meeting the same selection criterion defined above. There was one change to the proposed data analysis procedures; second round coding and the fourth analytic memo were planned to have taken place for each individual interview but as the pilot progressed it was evident that those steps needed to be modified to include all interviews for each participant as there was not enough data to develop themes from each individual interview. Those changes

were completed in the analysis section below. The following narrative will have a structure slightly different from APA 7 standards to increase the readability.

Logyn – Pilot Data Representation

At the time of the pilot, Logyn was finishing up her second semester at Tallgrass Community College, with the hope of completing an associate degree and maybe transferring to a local four-year institution. She grew up in a small town within the service area of Tallgrass before moving out of state for a few years. Later, her family moved back to a larger town within Tallgrass's service area a little closer to the main campus. She was home schooled during her primary and secondary educational career. Logyn lived at home with her mom and a younger sibling at the time of the pilot study. Logyn's story included many of the concepts of both rural cultural wealth and community cultural wealth.

In the Quad – Introducing her New Community

Am I really ready for this?

It had been a long week, my feet aching from hours and hours of practice.

Stealing a few minutes between classes on a warm spring day, I sat watching other students scurry to their next class.

Just one week before opening night...

As I pondered over my first leading role, a few of my castmates see me from across the quad and wave. I could feel a smile spread across my face as my new friends drew near.

If you had told me a year ago that I'd be here now, I would have laughed. Not that I didn't see myself in college, I never thought of not going... It's just I never

thought it could be like this. New friends, getting paid to do something I love... no, I never expected that to happen for me.

“Heeeey Logyn!” Cassie squeals as she blazes toward me. “Are you ready for our first dress rehearsal tonight?! I can’t believe that we open in just a week!” She nearly tackles me off the bench like she hasn’t seen me in a month, even though I studied all evening in her dorm yesterday after rehearsal.

“Hi Cassie” I laugh, trying to regain my balance. “I am so ready! I mean, I’m nervous... but like *good* nervous. You know?” She digs in her bag for something to snack on. “My mom told me last night that her and my uncle will be there on opening night. Did you get to talk to your parents after I left yesterday?”

In between bites Cassie spits out, “Yeah... they’re just not sure which night. It’s kind of a drive.” Remembering all of a sudden, she smacks me, “Oh! I was supposed to tell you! I ran into Ms. McCall this morning. She wants to talk to you about helping with the makeup before rehearsal tonight. Something about she remembered having you in class when you were in high school???” She takes another bite, “Anyways, she said to come in beforehand if you could get off work a few minutes early.”

“Oh cool, thanks! I’ll see if I can get out early.” I loved taking stage makeup with Ms. McCall before I started as a full-time student at Tallgrass Community College. “Oh crap, I’ve got to get to math class.” We both cringe at the thought and giggle. “I’ll see you at rehearsal tonight!” We hug, and I bounce off to the dreaded college algebra.

This first scene of Logyn's narrative introduces us to her as she meets up with her new best friend during the spring of her freshman year at Tallgrass Community College. We start to get a glimpse of her feelings and thoughts about college as well as her connectedness to her activity on campus as well as her new friends and her family. These themes will be important to the rest of Logyn's story they it showcase her rural community unity, rural resourcefulness, and rural resistance.

Isolation and Accounting – Familial Connections and a Sense of Community

Not only am I in my first leading role in a college musical, but I am also going to be assisting with stage makeup for the rest of the cast. My commute home after rehearsal is short but drags on and on! I can't wait to tell my mom the good news. I think of our home now... *This town is still small but has so much more life to it than where I grew up. There are so many more fun places to explore... to shop... just to be free... I feel so much more connected and at home here than in Cedar Grove. I've found my place in college... so maybe that's part of it, but Ashburg... Ashburg was different, less isolated... Less lonesome.*

Pulling into the drive, I can see my mom sitting at the kitchen table talking to someone across from her blocked by the curtains. Entering the front door, I'm greeted by my little rescue dog, Lilly. I bend down to scratch behind her ears as I hear my uncle's deep chuckle bellow from the kitchen.

Throwing my arms around his neck, he greets me with a laugh. I unwrap myself and hug my momma, "I'm so glad you're both here!" I bounce, "I'm going to be helping with the makeup for the production at school!" I can tell they're both excited for me even if they don't understand my fascination with it.

“So Logyn, how’s school going?” My uncle inquires over his mug.

“Oh, it’s going fine. I really like my musical theatre classes. And I’m doing fine in everything else.”

“Accounting going alright? I brought you some more books to read in your free time” He winks, remembering his time in college.

“Sweet! Thanks. It’s going well, just keeping me super busy with that and college algebra and show stuff!”

“Good! Keep it up and you’ll have a job at the firm as soon as you’re done with your degree. When you’re ready to transfer, I’ll get you connected with my old profs. They’ll be good connections when you’re at the university.”

Mom interrupts with family plans for their sister’s birthday. As they talk, we all sit around the kitchen table.

I can’t wait to work with my uncle at the accounting firm. He’s done so well and has really made something with his life. I can’t wait to provide for myself and my family that way.

In this second scene, Logyn’s excitement over her upcoming production spills over as she thinks about the community, and the sense of belonging she has built since starting college. She reflects on her current hometown and how it compared to the smaller community in which she grew up, focusing on the feeling of community or lack thereof. We are also introduced to her uncle who was a major source of rural familialism, contributing to several types of capital that will be discussed later.

Some Dreams Do Come True – Community Unity, Familialism, and Resourcefulness

That night, I dream of the day I opened my letter from Tallgrass...

I'm standing in our kitchen, staring at the envelope from Tallgrass on the counter. My heart in my throat, it's been two weeks since tryouts and crickets... I know I didn't get the scholarship for musical theatre. I can just feel it. Mom walks in, "Well, aren't you going to open it?" My hands shake as I tear open the envelope and pull out the folded parchment. She puts her hand on my shoulder as I unfold my fate...

Dear Logyn,

We are excited to congratulate...

I start to scream and sob at the same time, unable to speak I hand the letter over.

Taking a second to read the letter, she wraps me in her warm embrace, "Oh, baby I'm so proud of you! You got a full ride to Tallgrass!"

It feels like we are right in the middle of our favorite movie! I'm floating on air as she calls EVERYONE I know. It's just so surreal...

As my alarm wakes me from my peaceful dream, I start to think about how different this last year would have been if I hadn't taken my chance and tried out for Redbud at my pastor's urging.

Without his connection, I may not have even known about the scholarship.

I think about how so many people told me that community colleges weren't worth the time; that they were just for people who couldn't get into a university.

All the people online talking about how they were better off without college.

I don't know about all of that, but I'm sure glad I listened to my family and my pastor instead of them. I'm so glad I tried out and took the risk. I always thought about college, I just never imagined something like this would ever happen to me. I've found my people at Tallgrass. My place. My life.

Logyn remains introspective in this third scene as she dreams of the day she got word that she received a scholarship to Tallgrass. This was a pivotal moment in her narrative as it showcases how rural community unity contributed to her aspirations, which will be discussed in more detail later. She also reflected on the negative perceptions of community colleges that she encountered in pieces of her community. Using the scholarship as a resource, Logyn pushed against those negative stereotypes to pursue her dreams. Ultimately this scene depicts the importance of rural familialism and rural community unity to Logyn's development of community cultural wealth.

Is it Your PASSION? - Importance of Community and Familialism

Why did I sign up for an 8 am freshman seminar class?!

Mr. Lee strolls in singing one of his favorite show tunes. As the choir director, he teaches our seminar for all the performing arts kids. "All right class! Pack it up, we're going outside!" Everyone shoves their stuff in their bags and migrates out to the quad.

It's beautiful out... if not a little windy but it's Kansas so when is it not?

"Ok, everyone... Today we're going to do something a little different. I want you think about why you chose to come to Tallgrass. Why are you here? Why are you in this class? Why are you in your major? You've got fifteen minutes to jot down

some notes. Make up a song, or a skit, or a poem to answer those questions. If you need a partner, go for it. Aaaaand go!” Mr. Lee sings.

I catch Cassie’s glance as we both giggle under our breath. We’ll be partners, duh. I’ll sing harmony on her song, and she’ll support me in my skit. I can’t believe we’ve become so inseparable in such a short amount of time. Just a few months ago we met waiting in the hall for tryouts.

Why am I here...? Well, I always assumed I’d go to college... It was never something that wasn’t going to happen to me. I just couldn’t have imagined it turning out like this; this magical, this busy. But it’s the best way to get where I want to out of life. With this education, I’ve found my people and expanded my world from the seclusion of homeschooling in a tiny little town. This is my way to provide for myself and my family; a resource to make the changes I want to make.

Well... I’m in this class because I have to be, even though it’s been a lot of fun. I remember going in to enroll for the first time. It was so overwhelming. There was so much information! They told me I had to take this class to count towards something in my degree even though my major is accounting. Which is weird, but I’m not complaining. These are my people.

And accounting... Well... I can’t say that I love it, but my uncle has been so successful at such a young age. I want that for myself. For my mom and my little brother. I want to help her take care of him.

Mr. Lee drums out a beat as he tells us our time is up. Everyone takes their turn until we get to Cassie and me. We harmonize beautifully, her singing melody and

me harmonizing with her like we've been doing this for years. We act out my skit, playing off each other like we can hear each other think. And just as he did with everyone else, Mr. Lee asks follow up questions. "But is it something you're passionate about?" I sit, just looking at him. "I want you to think about why you're pursuing accounting as a major and a career." He moves on to the next presentation.

I'm reeling... *you can't just ask a person a question like that and leave them with it.*

As we start to part ways for our next classes, Cassie nudges me and asks if I'm OK. "Yeah... just thinking. See you at lunch?"

"Duh!" She winks as she trots off to join her boyfriend on the way to their next class.

This final scene, set in a freshman seminar, focuses on Logyn's reflection of her college choices while further developing her connection to Tallgrass and her new friends. This depiction further develops the importance of rural familialism and rural community unity to Logyn's development of aspirations and ultimately community cultural wealth. Logyn utilized these resources as she found her place and overcame obstacles that could have gotten in her way as she pursued a college education.

Pilot Analysis

The above narrative details the participant's point of view as they were navigating their college going process and into their first year of college. Through analysis it was evident that the tenets of cultural community wealth and rural cultural wealth were intertwined and connected throughout her story. The following themes and codes emerged in relation to the

including linguistic capital elements. Furthermore, the participant said that college represented how much one cared for themselves and their future. She said that it represented life to her, and based on previous comments about isolation, “life” was equated to meaning and purpose. Logyn’s aspirational capital moved her to pursue dreams of a college degree which required her to gain college knowledge.

Logyn and Resistant Capital

Logyn indicated that college represented a way to gain both freedom and connection, as well as a manifestation of self-care and self-value directly tying her aspirational capital to resistant capital. In this way, she utilized perceived barriers and negative talk as a motivator to attend college and catalyst in her thought process when considering choices. This specifically showcases that she developed resistant capital through her rural resourcefulness.

Furthermore, she utilized college to break out of mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression. It is important to note that some of these concerns were connected to traditional gender roles and expectations. Lastly, negative talk about community colleges in general encouraged her to think more deeply about her aspirations to attend specific colleges, namely community colleges. She resisted the opposition to community college by pursuing her degree there because of the opportunities it afforded her, regardless of the negative talk.

Logyn and Social Capital

While Logyn faced barriers connected to her community, she still exhibited a strong sense of rural community unity. In Logyn’s case rural community unity’s focus on the community relationships that develop skills and knowledge in rural students was connected to her development of social capital. The participant’s involvement in church growing up, both connected her with resources such as scholarships, but also information about college through

her pastor and other community members. Niche involvement within the church resulted in scholarship opportunities ultimately motivating her to pursue college. Furthermore, she indicated that she could have “real” conversations with similarly aged peers about college aspirations rather than the surface level support she got from adults such as family members, high school faculty or staff, and community members within the church. Once in college, she expressed that she was able to make new friends and build community. Lastly, media influence through sources such as YouTube and radio ads influenced her perceptions of college and where she considered going.

Logyn and Familial Capital

In addition to a strong sense of rural community unity, Logyn’s rural familialism was strongly connected to the development of community cultural wealth, specifically familial capital. Logyn’s relationship with her mother facilitated the support of college plans as well as providing familial support through difficult situations, arming the participant with the skills and aspirations needed to pursue college. This was equated to the movie-like experiences of opening a scholarship letter and sharing in the excitement. Furthermore, proximity – geographic closeness to family – contributed to her relationships that fostered college-going aspirations and skills. This was evidenced by a choice to enroll near family and live at home while attending college.

Family location contributed to a sense of community. Multiple family members went to college which encouraged positive college talk from family members as well as increased exposure to college content and colleges in general. Specifically, support was found in a family member who pursued a similar career. The participant’s aspirations were developed after watching that family member live through their own experiences and she hoped that their

support would help her navigate college and a career – directly tying familial capital to aspirational and navigational capitals.

Logyn and Linguistic Capital

Familial capital created a culture of college-going from an early age, also contributing to linguistic capital. College-going jargon fell under this tenet as she mentioned specific conversations about different types of college when she expressed interest in certain majors. This happened mostly at the hands of family but also through the media that was encouraged to consume as a homeschool student. This content, even in the form of popular culture, often referenced college-going or college-level topics or concepts. This helped expose her to college jargon but also normalize college-going, directly relating her linguistic and aspirational capitals.

Logyn and Navigational Capital

While the pilot did not identify themes within rural ingenuity there was a strong presence of navigational capital. Connection to campus helped facilitate the building of navigational capital once the participant was already in college. Namely, her on-campus job connected her with the available college resources as well as a community. Additionally, her connection with the performing arts, through a scholarship, helped facilitate the building of navigational capital through a community and direction to enroll and scholarship resources. Before attending college, she built navigational capital through connections with the performing arts as well. This was specifically through church-related activities which encouraged her to utilize those talents at the college level. Conversely, she did not take tours of campuses limiting her exposure to the campus atmosphere and thus decreasing navigational capital. She expressed that specific college attributes made it easier for her to transition to

college but also feel more at home and navigate the college atmosphere. Lastly, the main rural familialism and navigational facilitator was her uncle. She saw him navigating a similar major and then a related career. There was a clear lack of human facilitators on the college campus for her. Specifically, she talked about the amount of information during her first enrollment experience as well as the confusing nature of financial aid. She stated that she could go ask questions, but it was evident she had not forged a direct connection with a specific person. Furthermore, she felt comfortable discussing course-specific questions with instructors, but there was no indication that she felt the same level of comfort discussing general college concepts that would contribute to navigational capital.

Logyn's Summary

In summary, Logyn's story suggested that rural students utilize rural cultural wealth – namely rural resourcefulness, rural community unity, and rural familialism – to develop community cultural wealth. She applied all six capitals to her pursuit of college as she sought out an education at Tallgrass. These concepts contributed to her college knowledge directly through linguistic capital but also helped her to gain the information and skills she needed to pursue her dreams of a college education.

Pilot Conclusion

After the pilot study was complete, I assessed the following questions in order to adjust the full study as necessary: (1) How many rounds of interviews are appropriate? (2) What length of interviews are appropriate? (3) What are any issues regarding ethics or confidentiality? (4) Which interview questions need to be rewritten to elicit rich responses? (5) Are there any interview questions that need to be added? (6) What kinds of artifacts might participants identify? (Given, 2008; Persaud, 2010).

During the pilot, I found that the fourth interview was necessary to finish up two questions that were not addressed in previous interviews, but also to summarize and confirm the information obtained in previous interviews. Each interview during the pilot lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour, consistent with the planned procedure. No changes were made to the length of interviews for the full study. There was one potential issue regarding confidentiality; the site visit conducted during interview two, took place in a public space as chosen by the participant. This increased the risk of a breach in confidentiality, especially in a small town or rural community.

The interview questions proposed and utilized in the pilot elicited rich responses and do not need to be rewritten. Furthermore, no interview questions needed to be added to the interview guide as the style of interview allowed for natural conversation and follow-up as needed. Lastly, while the pilot only resulted in the example of a radio ad, the participant was able to identify that artifact as valuable while there was only an audio file that could be submitted as a tangible artifact. Radio, television, and other forms of electronic media were added to chapter three.

In conclusion, the pilot resulted in rich data collection directly relating to the interview questions, research questions, and research purpose. There were small modifications to the analysis procedure as well as the type of artifacts listed in data collection. It is important to note that themes identified in the pilot may or may not be the same as those identified by the participants of the full study.

Data Collection

Narrative inquiry is cyclical in nature and thus requires a flexible and iterative data collection model (Bhattacharya, 2017). In addition, due to the iterative nature of narrative inquiry, it is essential that data collection and analysis were interwoven throughout the study (Bhattacharya, 2017). Bhattacharya (2017) describes four main ways in which qualitative researchers better understand experiences through conversation: formal semi-structured interviews, in-depth open-ended interviews, informal open-ended interviews, and natural conversations. “In-depth open-ended interviews usually focus on digging deep into one’s experience with a few key questions prepared in advance” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 127). In contrast, informal open-ended interviews are more casual in nature focusing on “insightful probes that create a conversation between the researcher and the participant” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 127).

Interviews

Kim’s (2016) description of semi-structured interviews combines in-depth open-ended interviews and informal open-ended interviews; using prepared questions as a guide rather than to dictate the conversation during interviews. Therefore, this combination was appropriate for this study as it will provide for maximum flexibility, the ability to build rapport between researcher and participants, as well as an appropriate focus on topics relating directly to the research purpose and questions.

The researcher worked with each participant to find a mutually agreeable time to conduct each round of interviews. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to one hour ending at a natural pause in the conversation for that round. Participants were asked to participate in three to four rounds of interviews or until both the researcher and the participant

agree that they have sufficiently covered the participant's story (Bhattacharya, 2017; Kim, 2016; Terrell, 2016). During the second interview with each participant the researcher conducted an in-person visit. This in-person interview took place in each participant's hometown and focused on their experiences and important factors within that setting. The interview protocol is included in Appendix A.

During the interview process, the researcher conducted object solicitation with the participants. Participants were asked to share any documents or materials that exemplified their experiences and guide the interview process. According to Bhattacharya (2017), "documents are used regularly to offer contextual and deep understanding of the topic being studied" (p. 146). These materials could have included pictures, programs, letters or emails, brochures, or journals, among others. In addition, participants may have identified multimedia artifacts including television or radio ads or social media resources. For example, if a participant had access to a FAFSA information session, they may have decided to submit a flyer or email inviting them to participate. Such artifacts provide insight into how participants were exposed to such resources or capital.

Data Management

Data management is imperative in all research, but even more so in narrative inquiry due to the complex and overwhelming nature of the data. In fact, Kim (2016), argues that if one is not overwhelmed during data collection, they probably have not collected enough information. To assist with data organization, interviews were recorded via Zoom (a video conferencing application) and then transcribed. After transcription was complete, they were uploaded into NVivo (a coding software) for coding and analysis. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and color, and each interview was numbered in rounds to assist with

data management. During the interview process, handwritten notes were converted to electronic files in the form of analytic memos then any hard copies were destroyed. All electronic files including recordings, transcripts, analytic memos, or participant documents were password protected. Recordings were destroyed after transcription and coding was complete, while written files are retained for up to three years. Data was organized by participant then by interview round.

Data Analysis

As discussed above, narrative inquiry combines qualitative and arts-based research (Kim, 2016). Thus, data analysis in this study must also work across those genres to combine inductive analysis and narrative analysis. Inductive analysis is an iterative approach through which researchers concentrate on what the data is telling them rather than starting with a pre-established hypothesis (Bhattacharya, 2017). The flexibility of inductive analysis is essential in narrative inquiry because it allows the researcher to move back and forth between stages throughout the data collection process and encourages reflexivity (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Inductive Analysis

Current literature stresses that there is no one right way to approach the coding process in inductive analysis, but rather guidelines should serve as guardrails to direct the study:

1. Familiarize yourself with data (read and re-read your data several times).
2. Use writing as a form of inquiry for various questions that arise, for understanding data, for analyzing smaller chunks of data, for connecting various data pieces, etc.
3. Chunk data into manageable units of analysis (coding). You can do this by pulling out phrases, sentences, paragraphs that stand out to you. You then have the option of labeling what you have pulled out as your standout pieces. These labels could be

descriptive, theoretical, emotional, reflective of your subjectivities, etc. Or you can just leave the pieces that stand out to you as is, without labeling to write around those pieces.

4. Write about your chunking process, theoretical, topical and/or methodological ideas that are taking shape, things that are morphing for you in the study, further questions that are arising for you as a result of reflecting on your chunking process.
5. Cluster some of the analytical units into categories (broader groups with a descriptive label) based on whatever you consider is appropriate. Sometimes this clustering is based on meaning, critical incidents, theoretical constructs, or patterns from existing literature review.
6. Write about your clustering process, theoretical, topical, and/or methodological ideas that are taking shape, things that are morphing for you in the study, further questions that are arising for you as a result of reflecting on your chunking process.
7. Look across and within categories to identify patterns that arise to the surface for you. Ask methodological, topical, and theoretical questions of these patterns to analyze these patterns in depth.
8. Write reflexively about pattern identification and the connection you are making to other parts of your research (research purpose, questions, theoretical framework, methodology, research in your field). Look for silences, contradictions, and tensions.
9. Discuss your process and findings with a peer.
10. Discuss your findings with your participants.
11. Modify and revisit any of the abovementioned suggestions as many times as necessary.

(Bhattacharya, 2017, pp. 150-151)

Narrative Analysis

Kim (2016) suggests that there are two main types of analysis in narrative inquiry: the paradigmatic mode of analysis (analysis of narratives) and the narrative mode of analysis (narrative analysis). While related, analysis of narratives “attempts to fit individual details into a larger pattern” (Kim, 2016, p. 196). In contrast, narrative analysis seeks to, “help the reader understand why and how things happened in the way they did, and why and how our participants acted the way they did” (Kim, 2016, p. 197). Thus, narrative analysis was a better fit for the purpose of this study as well as creative nonfiction. Kim (2016) summarizes Polkinghorn’s (1995) narrative analysis:

- It focuses on the events, actions, happenings, and other data elements to put them together in a plot;
- It uses to-and-fro, recursive movement from parts to whole or from whole to parts;
- It fills in the gaps between events and actions using a narrative smoothing process
- It maintains that narrative analysis is not merely a transcription of the data, but is a means of showing the significance of the lived experience in the final story; it makes the range of disconnected data elements coherent in a way that it appeals to the reader
- It makes the final story congruent with the data while bringing narrative meanings that are not explicit in the data themselves; and
- It emphasizes connotation and sustains the metaphoric richness of a story. (p. 197)

I wrote researcher analytic memos which were conducted systematically throughout the research process, consistent with inductive analysis (Bhattacharya, 2017; Saldaña 2021).

Saldaña (2021) describes 15 types of analytic memos that serve as a way for the researcher, “to

‘dump your brain’ about the participants, phenomenon, or process under investigation by thinking and thus thinking even more about them” (p. 58). Regardless of the type of analytic memo, they encourage a flexible reflection process during analysis (Saldaña, 2021). By incorporating multiple types of data into the study, the researcher sought to provide rigor and triangulation to the project (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Combining Inductive and Narrative Analysis

Narrative inquiry, as well as inductive analysis and narrative analysis, require the researcher to move back and forth between data collection and analysis resulting in a cyclical process. Throughout this process, I considered the guiding conceptual and theoretical frameworks discussed above. The coding steps for this study were based on Bhattacharya’s (2017) description of inductive analysis, Kim’s (2016) explanation of narrative analysis, and Saldaña’s (2021) as detailed below.

Get to Know the Data

After each interview was complete, the researcher familiarized herself with the data while transcribing each interview, but also through reading and re-reading the transcription and interview notes (Bhattacharya, 2017).

First Analytic Memo

Using writing as a form of inquiry, the researcher incorporated interview notes into her first analytic memo for each interview (Bhattacharya, 2017). The first round of analytic memos allowed the researcher to reflect on the interview process itself including personal connections (and thus any subjectivities) to responses, follow-up questions, and reactions to the participants’ stories.

First Cycle Coding

As described by Bhattacharya (2017) I then, “chunk[ed] data into manageable units of analysis” (p. 150). In Vivo — or literal coding — which focuses on direct quotations from the participants themselves, was an appropriate as a first cycle coding process in this study because it prioritizes the voice of each participant (Saldaña, 2021). It is important to pay close attention to how the words are spoken as well as to the words themselves because the tone and vernacular used adds authenticity to each participants’ unique experiences as well as their meaning making process. Saldaña (2021) also stresses how important it is for the researcher to trust their instincts when using In Vivo coding; given my connection to and experience with rural students, this technique was also a good fit for me as a researcher.

Second Analytic Memo

After the first round of coding was finished, the researcher completed a second analytic memo focusing on code choices and themes (Bhattacharya, 2017). This process was supported by Saldaña (2021) as he suggested that researchers, “cycle back to [the] first coding efforts so you can strategically cycle forward to additional coding and qualitative data analytic methods (p. 280). Thus, this timely reflection allowed the researcher to process code choices as well as begin to analyze the participants’ stories for gaps that need to be filled in or clarified.

Between Cycle Analysis

During this between cycle analysis, I also engaged in code mapping to enhance credibility, trustworthiness, and organization. Essentially, code mapping consisted of an iterative process that organized codes from the first cycle into loose, logical categories (Saldaña, 2021). According to Bhattacharya (2017), “sometimes this clustering is based on meaning, critical incidents, theoretical constructs, or patterns from existing literature review” (p. 151).

Code mapping specifically considered the tenets of CCW, rural cultural wealth, and college knowledge to organize and categorize codes as they aligned with – or not – the conceptual framework for this study. During the code mapping process, I utilized electronic and tabletop methods as described by Saldaña (2021). The following figures illustrate the tabletop methods utilized during this step for each participant.

Figure 3.2 *Hannah's Code Mapping*

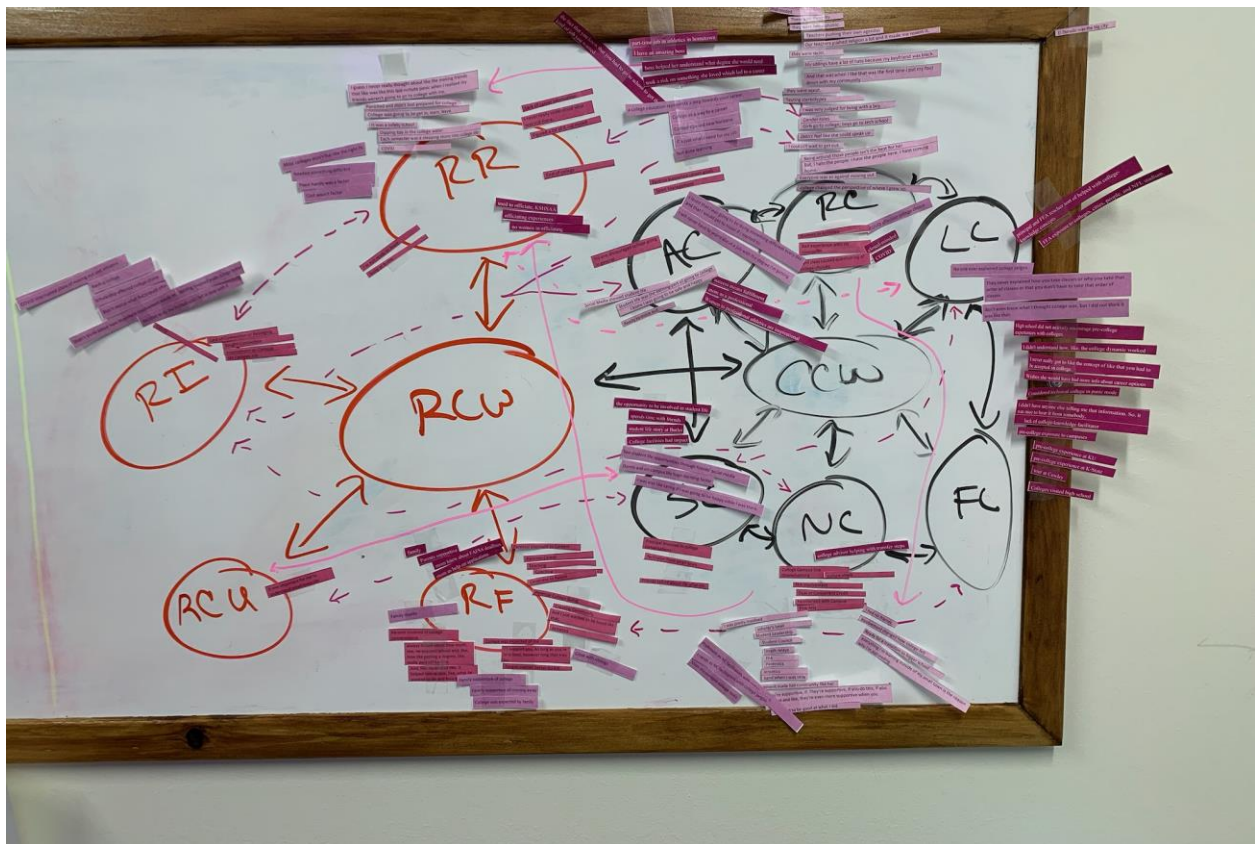


Figure 3.3 Joshua's Code Mapping

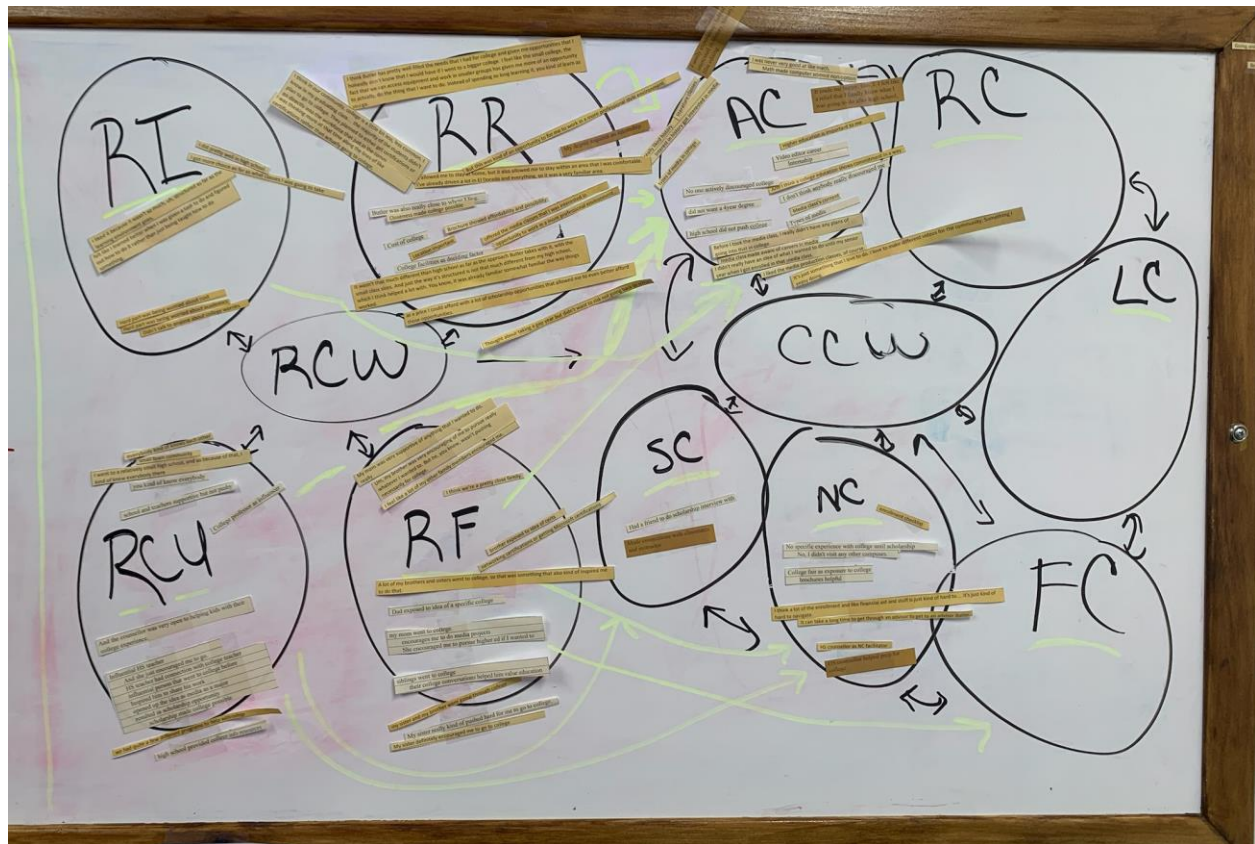


Figure 3.4 Mason's Code Mapping

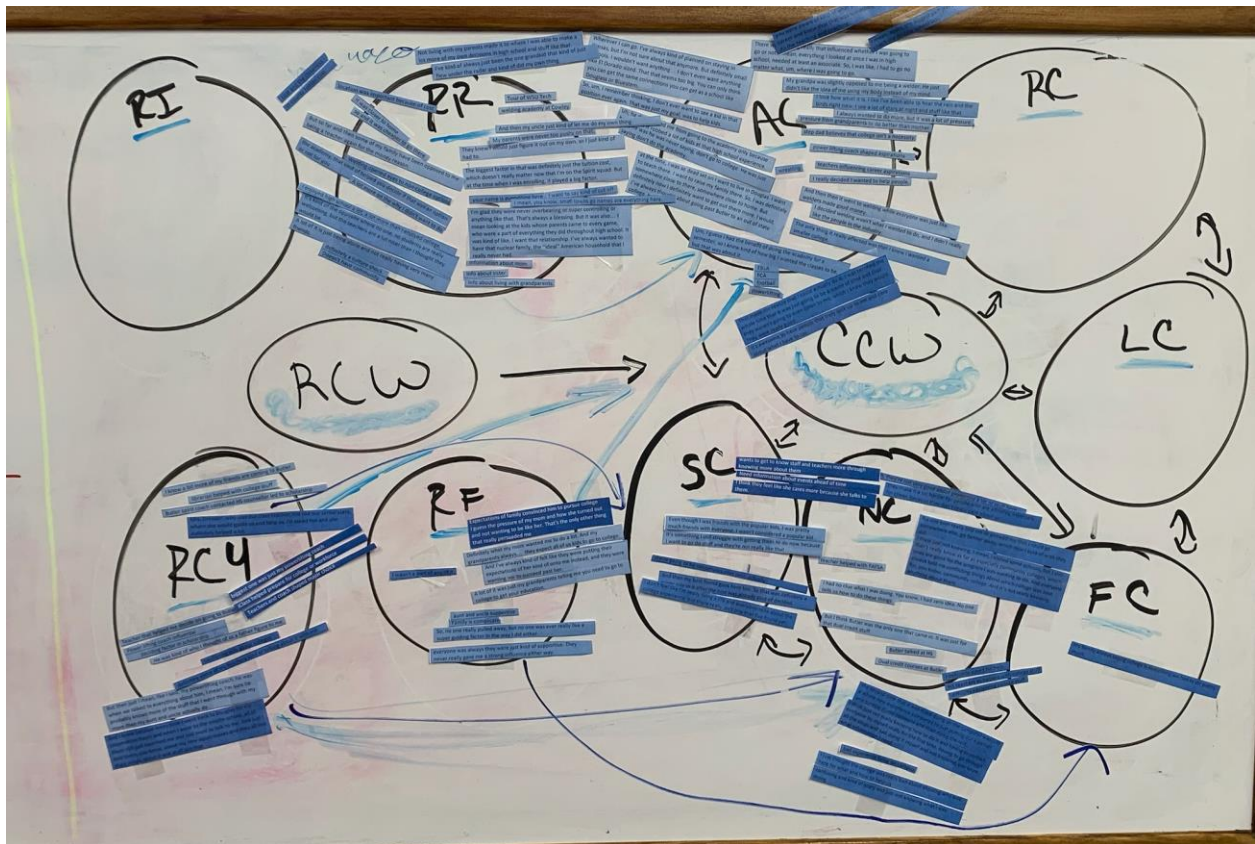


Figure 3.5 *Ella's Code Mapping*

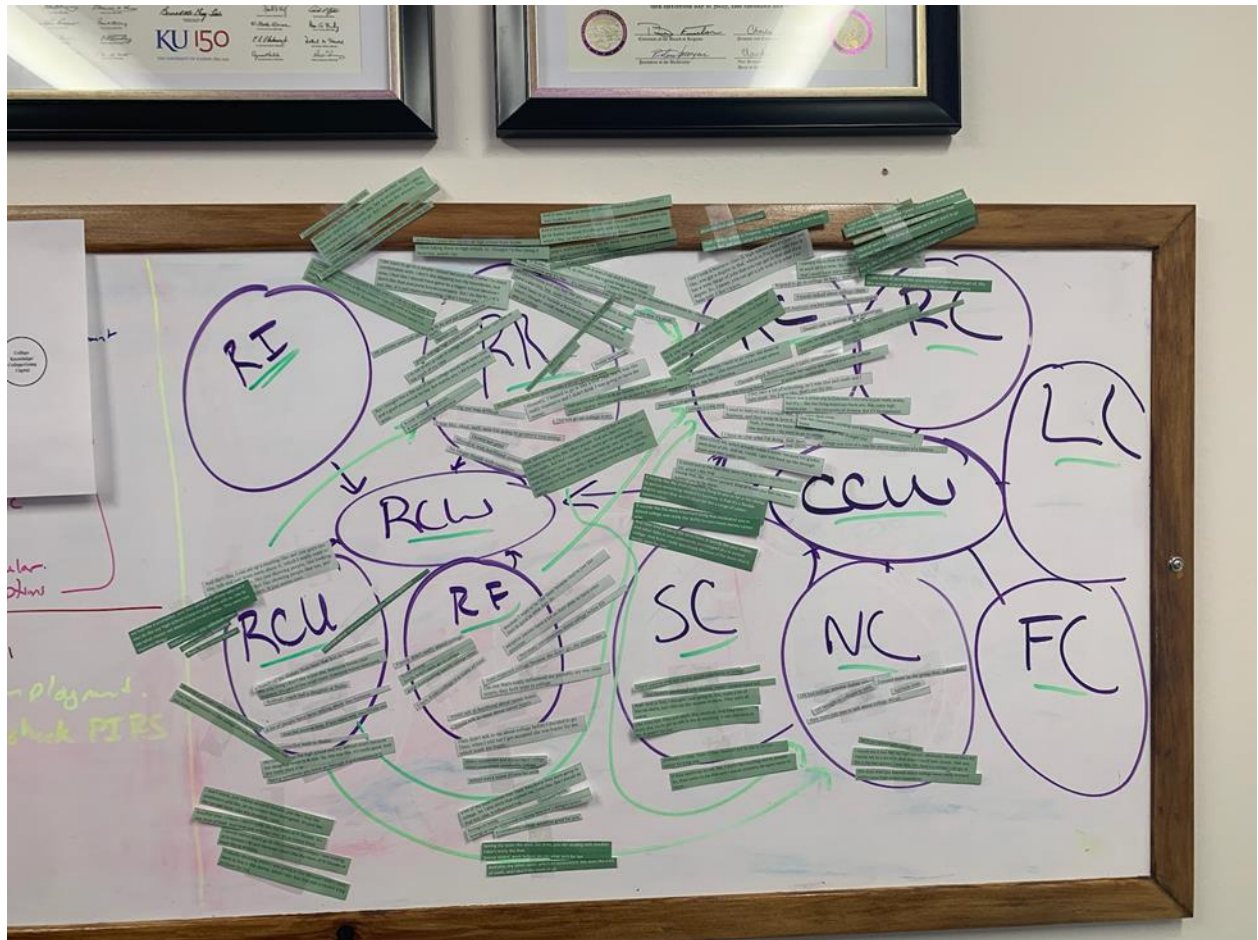
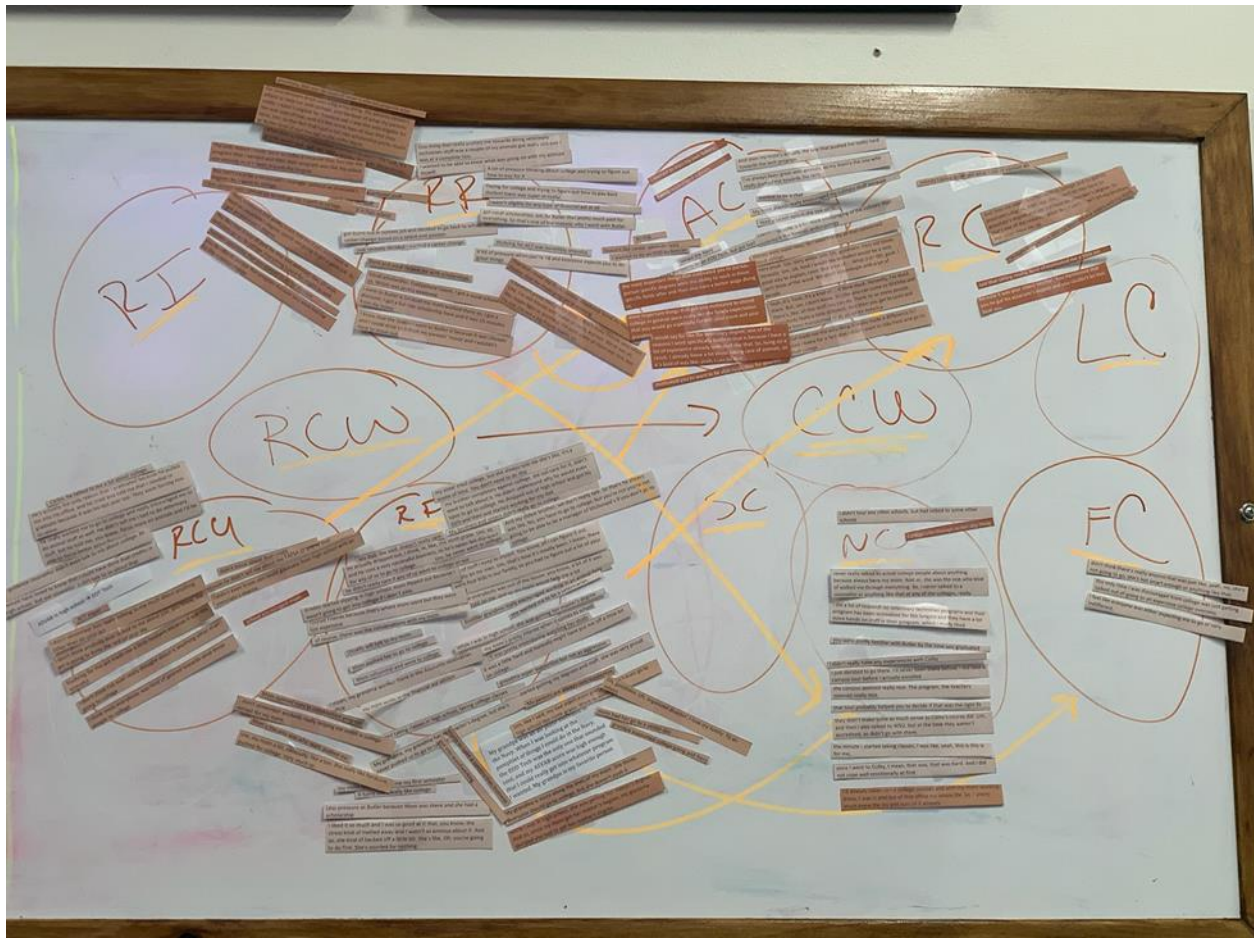


Figure 3.6 *Rebecca's Code Mapping*



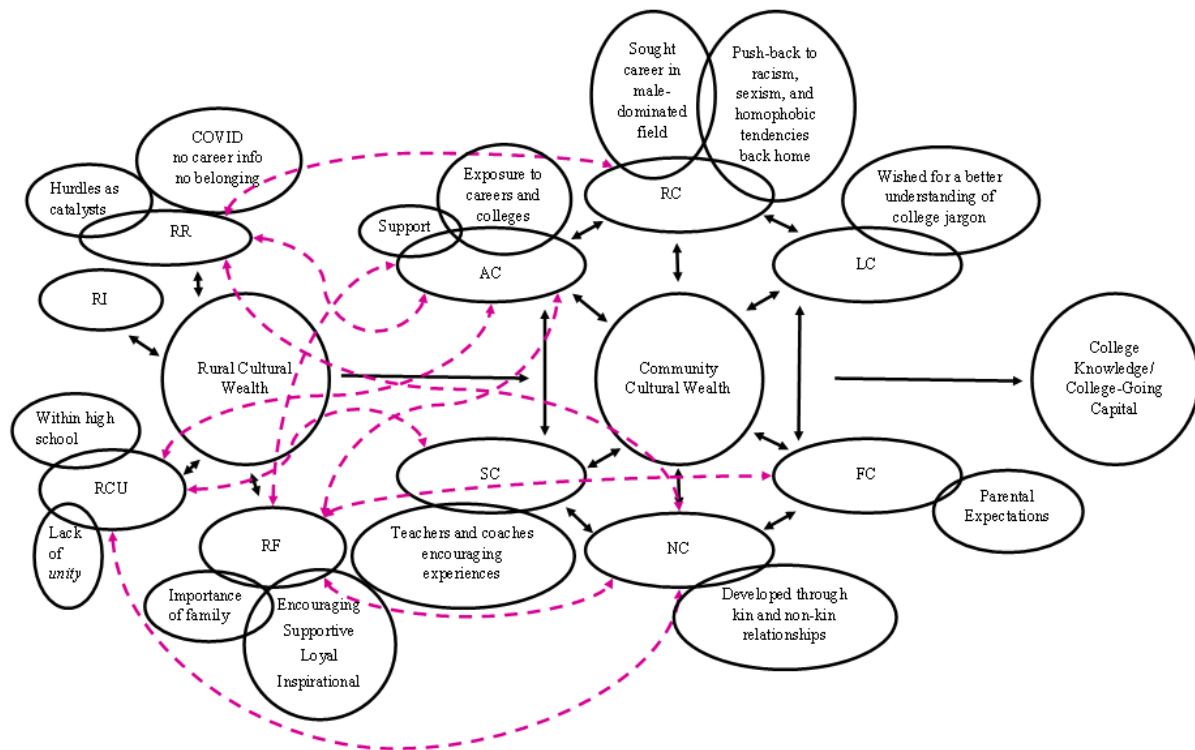
Third Analytic Memo

After code mapping was complete, the researcher wrote reflectively about the code mapping and clustering process consistent with Bhattacharya's (2017) description of inductive analysis. This memo also allowed the researcher to develop follow-up questions for the next round of interviews or adjust pre-planned questions to better fit the participant. The steps were conducted after each interview.

Second Cycle Coding

After all interviews were completed, second cycle coding began. According to Saldaña (2021), “the primary goal during second cycle coding is to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual and/or theoretical organization from your array of first cycle codes” (p. 297). Bhattacharya (2017) described this step as an opportunity to, “look across and within categories to identify patterns” (p. 151). Considering community cultural wealth,

Figure 3.7 *Hannah's Second Cycle Codes and Themes*



, and college knowledge, I utilized pattern coding which allows for the condensing of large amounts of data, searches for explanations in the data, and explores social networks and patterns (Saldaña, 2021). Thus, pattern coding directly related back to the research questions. The following figures provide a visual representation of the interconnected nature of the themes as they directly relate back to the theoretical framework that guided this study.

Figure 3.8 *Joshua's Second Cycle Codes and Themes*

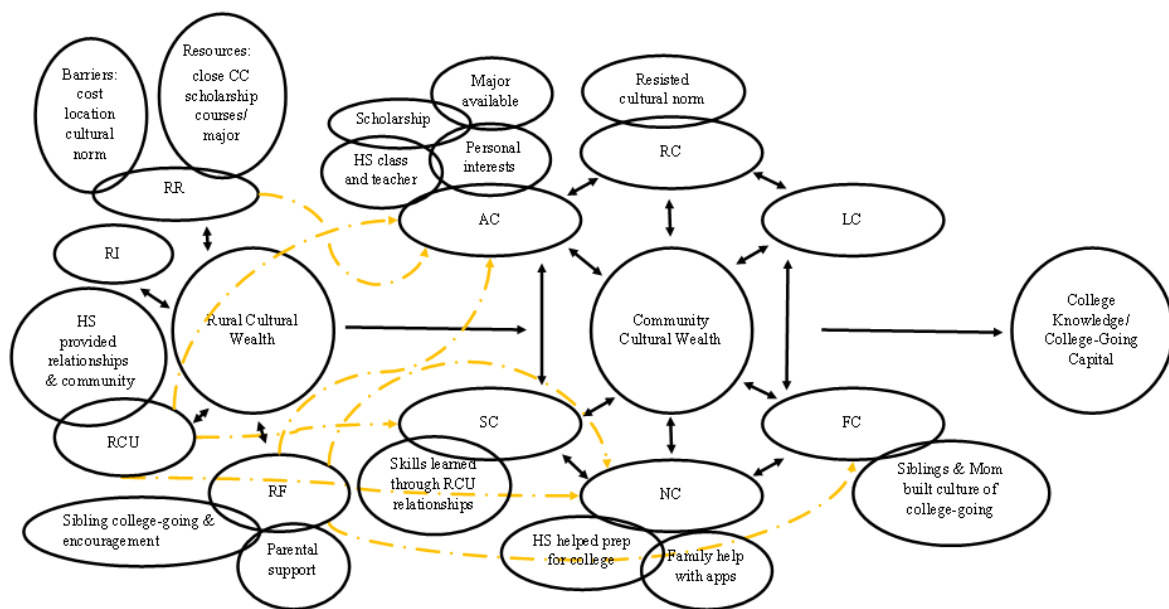


Figure 3.9 *Mason's Second Cycle Codes and Themes*

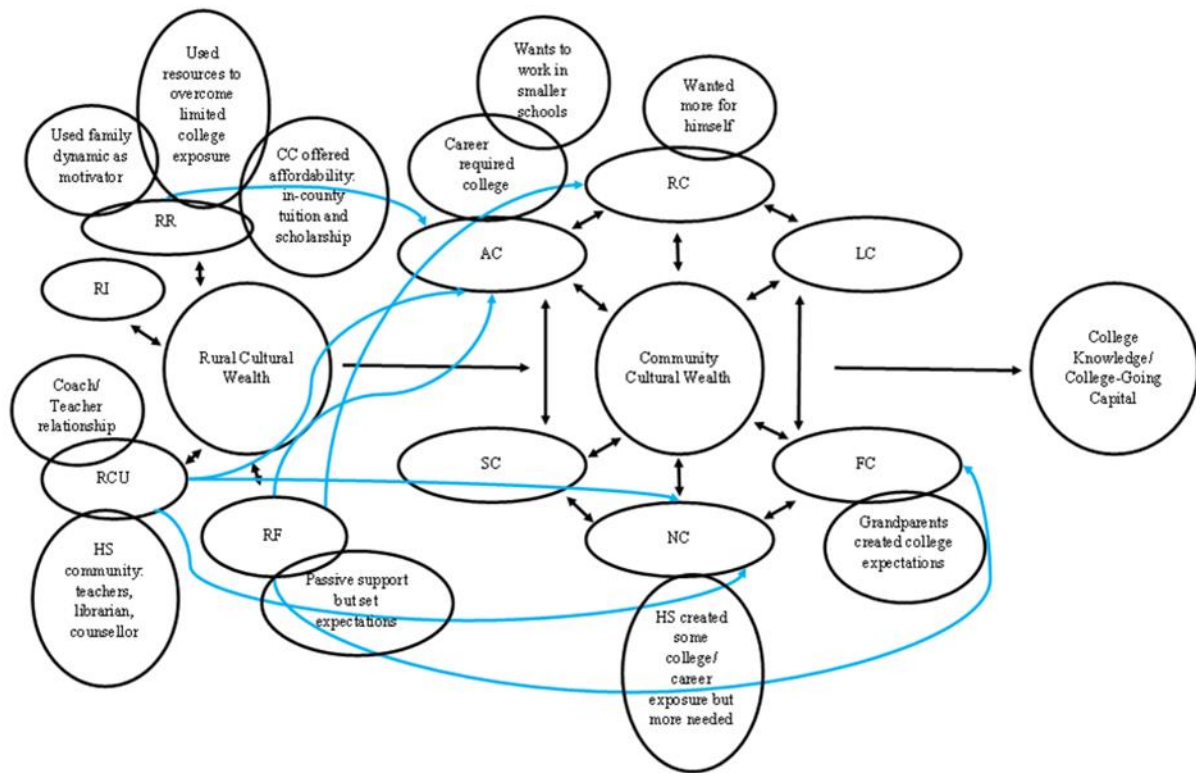


Figure 3.10 *Ella's Second Cycle Codes and Themes*

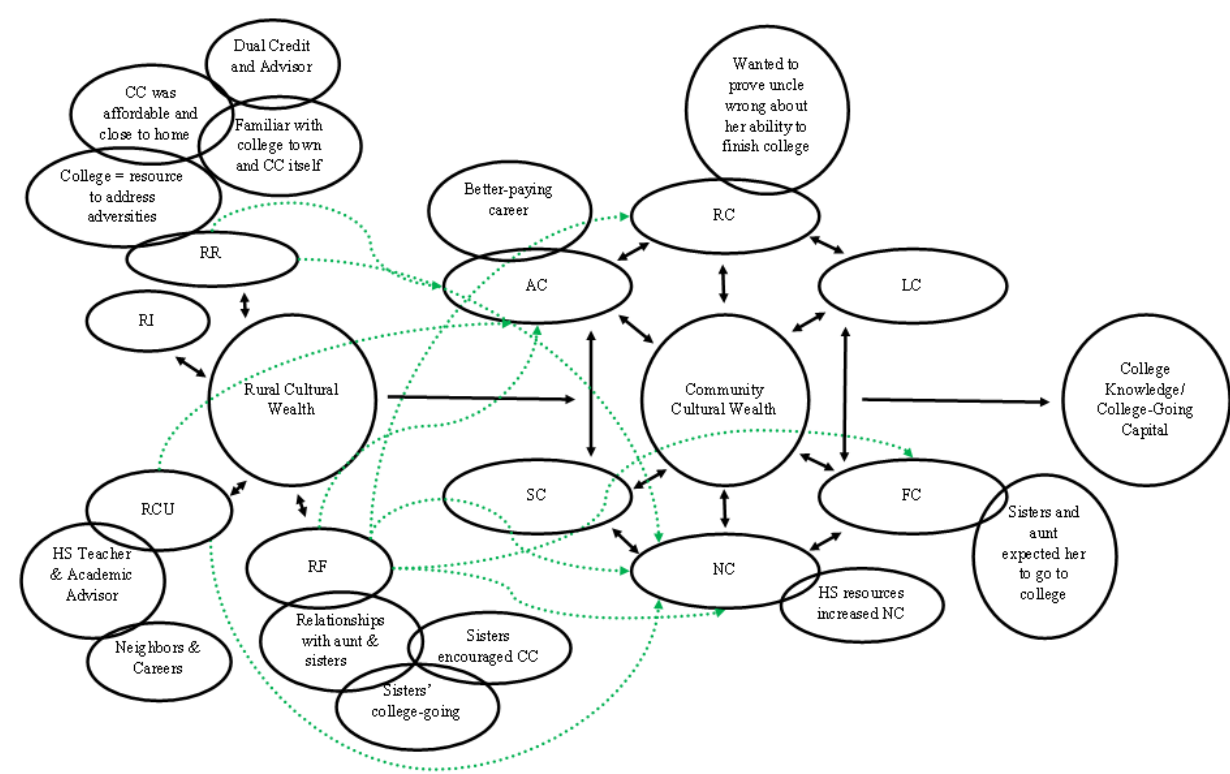
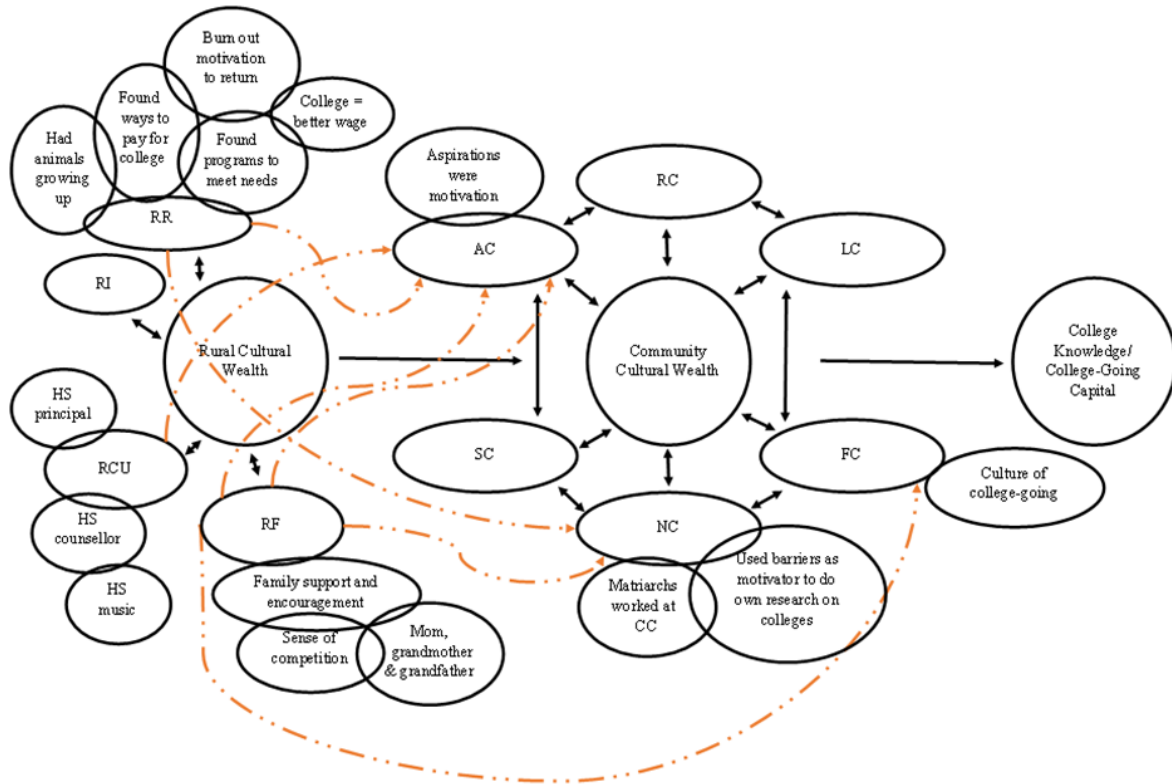


Figure 3.11 *Rebecca's Second Cycle Codes and Themes*



Fourth Analytic Memo

After second-cycle coding was complete it was important to, “write reflexively about pattern identification” and to “look for silences, contradictions, and tensions” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 151). This was the final analytic memo for each round of interviews as described by Bhattacharya (2017) and Saldaña (2021).

Third-Party Review

In her description of inductive analysis, Bhattacharya (2017) stated that it is important to, “discuss your process and findings with a peer” (p. 151). This review was conducted with a peer of the researcher before data representation and member checks took place.

Data Representation and Member Checks

Consistent with Kim's (2016) description of narrative analysis and creative nonfiction, I created stories from the data collected, "to help the reader understand why and how things happened in the way they did, and why and how [our] participants acted in the way they did" (p. 197). I utilized techniques such as narrative smoothing, "to evoke a mood, conversation, or setting derived from fact" (Kim, 2016, p. 142). The narratives created must not only engage the reader, but also challenge preconceived notions and encourage deeper understanding (Kim, 2016). The formation of fictionalized scenes allowed for accurate and factual representation while allowing for another layer of protection for the participants' privacy (Bhattacharya, 2017; Kim, 2016). As appropriate, this study utilized direct quotations as identified through first cycle, In Vivo, coding.

After narratives were written, they were provided to the participants. Participants were asked to read their narrative and provide any feedback related to their stories. Based on feedback from each participant, appropriate edits were made and an updated draft was provided for their review until they are comfortable with the representation of their narrative. If needed, the researcher allowed for follow-up with participants as necessary to address questions or gaps within their narrative.

Trustworthiness

While qualitative research has gained some traction in recent history, some researchers still question the validity and rigor of qualitative research. Some of the pushback comes from qualitative research's flexibility which makes it difficult to establish criterion for quality qualitative research. Tracy (2010) describes eight key tenets to ensure excellence in qualitative

research including worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence.

Worthy Topic

“Worthy topics often emerge from disciplinary priorities and, therefore, are theoretically or conceptually compelling” (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). A worthy topic may also question established assumptions or explore little-known phenomena (Tracy, 2010). This study on rural students meets this criterion because it is timely (with current trends in enrollment drops) and addresses a current gap in the literature which focuses either on urban/suburban populations, populations in culturally different parts of the country, or focus on a conceptual framework based in deficit thinking.

Rich Rigor

Qualitative research should include rich, abundant data focusing on careful data collection. Tracy (2010) states that there are four questions that qualitative researchers must address regarding rigor:

- Are there enough data to support significant claims?
- Did the researcher spend enough time to gather interesting and significant data?
- Is the context or sample appropriate given the goals of the study?
- Did the researcher use appropriate procedures in terms of field note style, interviewing practices, and analysis procedures? (p. 841)

This study meets this criterion by establishing methodology in current literature stressing rich rigor, namely Kim (2016) who states that data in narrative inquiry should be overwhelming; if

one is not overwhelmed during their data collection, they probably have not collected enough information.

Sincerity

Tracy (2010) states that sincerity, “can be achieved through self-reflexivity, vulnerability, honesty, transparency, and data auditing” (p. 841). Furthermore, Tracy (2010) states that sincerity is seeking authenticity, not singular truth. This study established sincerity through the researcher’s subjectivity statement, but also through transparency with the participants including member checks. The researcher also utilized self-reflexive practices during analytic memos to critically examine reflections and subjectivities. Researcher-participant relationships were built through conversation and expression of shared experiences which helped the researcher establish rapport with the participants and ensure sincerity.

Credibility

According to Tracy (2010), “credibility refers to the trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings” (p. 842). Qualitative researchers establish credibility through in-depth description in their findings as well as triangulation and crystallization. In-depth description must be culturally relevant and provide complex detail by showing rather than telling the reader about the findings (Tracy, 2010). Triangulation and crystallization both require the research to include multiple sources and viewpoints to increase validity. Credibility was established by utilizing in-depth interviews to produce engaging narratives and showcase the complexity of participant thoughts and experiences. Emergent themes to be discussed in the findings chapter will focus on concepts that were found across participant experiences.

Resonance

Resonance refers to the research's ability to be meaningful to an audience (Tracy, 2010). This goal can be reached through effective writing and transferability among other tactics, and not all studies will approach it the same way. Narrative inquiry addresses this goal through writing techniques like narrative smoothing, depending on the subgenera utilized (Kim, 2016). This study produced resonance through aesthetic merit by employing an evocative and artistic writing style through creative nonfiction.

Significant Contribution

This tenet calls for research to contribute to theory or practice or by encouraging further research. "At its most basic, research may provide a theoretical contribution by examining how existing theory or concepts make sense in a new or different context" (Tracy, 2010, p. 846). In contrast, "practically significant research asks whether the knowledge is useful" (Tracy, 2010, p. 846). This study addresses theoretical significance by applying well-established conceptual framework to a unique population and representing findings in a unique way through creative nonfiction. Additionally, this study showcases practical significance by discussing how to better understand and cater to underserved, rural students.

Ethics

Tracy (2010) discusses that ethics are paramount to qualitative research and that there are several different subcategories that constitute an ethical study. Procedural, or categorical ethics, include standards dictated by organizations such as Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). This category, "encompasses importance of accuracy and avoiding fabrication, fraud, omission, and contrivance" (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). Procedural ethics should safeguard participants from unnecessary risks and protect their privacy. Procedural ethics were

considered by utilizing a pseudonym for each participant as well as important institutions of education. Additionally, interview recordings were transcribed in a timely manner and destroyed as soon as transcription was complete. Electronic files were stored on a password-protected device and transcripts will be destroyed after three years. Lastly, interviews were conducted via Zoom allowing participants to select a comfortable and secure location.

Tracy (2010) goes on to describe situational ethics to refer to, “ethical practices that emerge from a reasoned consideration of a context’s specific circumstances” (p. 847). Situational ethics go beyond the IRB mandates and assume that different circumstances require different ethical decisions. In narrative inquiry, the researcher must consider each participant’s unique story and what may be appropriate for one participant may not be appropriate for all. This study considered situational ethics by actively reflecting on the interviews and needs of each participant and editing subsequent interviews based on that reflection.

Relational ethics in contrast, “involve an ethical self-consciousness in which researchers are mindful of their character, actions, and consequences on others” (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). A relationally ethical researcher engages with participants for a mutually beneficial study establishing interdependence through relationship building, collaboration, and compassion. This study established relational ethics by engaging in conversational in-depth interviews allowing for relationship building, as well as member checks to ensure that participant stories were accurately and ethically communicated.

Lastly, exiting ethics speaks to how researchers end their studies and share results (Tracy, 2010). Debriefing statements as well as member checks were used in this study to address the last category. Data representation, as discussed below, also falls into exiting ethics for this study because rural stories can be easily identifiable. Creative nonfiction was utilized

as a conscious choice because it allows the researcher to protect the participants at a level that is not possible with other subgenres.

Meaningful Coherence

“Studies that are meaningfully coherent eloquently interconnect their research design, data collection, and analysis with their theoretical framework and situational goals” (Tracy, 2010, p. 848). Simply put, each part of a study should make sense with the other sections. One such way that this study ensured meaningful coherence is through the selection of appropriate methodologies and frameworks to examine the research study. For example, creative nonfiction was an appropriate choice for this study because it encourages truthful and engaging stories from the perspectives of the participants while providing for their confidentiality.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth look at the methodological considerations for this study. Starting with my personal connection to the research, special consideration was given to the tenets of quality qualitative research, specifically the subgenre of creative nonfiction in narrative inquiry. Quality research is paramount to all studies, but especially so in arts-based inquiry as it helps to establish credibility and validity for the study. Tracy’s (2010) work framed the essential tenets that were essential for this work. Then, this chapter introduced the study’s epistemological stance looking at subjectivity and interpretivism as described by Crotty (2015). Through this lens, this chapter applied Yosso’s (2006) concept of community cultural wealth to examine which forms rural students utilize to pursue college, and what facilitators rural students identify.

Narrative inquiry, specifically creative nonfiction, was discussed as the methodological framework used in this study. Creative nonfiction was the best choice as it allowed the

researcher to weave together the personal experiences of the participants by keeping the integrity of the data through In Vivo coding as discussed by Saldaña (2021) and protecting the identities of the participants. Lastly, much attention was paid to research design incorporating participant selection, data collection and management methods, as well as discussion regarding data analysis and representation.

Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter reintroduces the research questions as well as provides context for the population included in the study. Then, consistent with creative nonfiction, this chapter showcases the findings of this study through five individual stories. Though techniques such as fictionalization of data and narrative smoothing have been utilized, each story draws directly from each participant's experiences incorporating direct and indirect quotes. For example, each participant's narrative is reported in first-person. This is important in this context because it focuses on each student's unique perspective. Additionally, these narratives are interconnected, but not interwoven; this technique allows for individual autonomy for each participant, but also showcases how students may become acquaintances once at their community college. This is important for this study because it is likely that they have crossed paths without becoming major factors in each other's rural cultural wealth, community cultural wealth, or college knowledge/college-going capital as it applies to their pursuit of college. The writing style of the narratives will stray from APA 7 guidelines in formatting as well as formality to increase readability and authenticity.

Research Questions

There were three research questions for this study:

1. How do rural students describe how they develop community cultural wealth?
2. How do rural students describe how they apply community cultural wealth to their pursuit of college?
3. How does community cultural wealth contribute to college knowledge for rural students?

The five participants in this study were all from rural areas in Southeastern Kansas and enrolled at one community college as defined in previous sections. The community college was given the pseudonym of Tallgrass Community College to protect the confidentiality of the participants. While the participants did not know each other, the narratives are written in such a way that they do. Three participants (Hannah, Mason, and Jason) were involved in on-campus activities that provided book and tuition scholarships. Rebecca was involved in similar activities during her first two associate degrees, but not during her current one. Furthermore, Ella expressed interest in getting involved on campus with a club or activity. One participant – Ella – was deciding on a major and one participant – Rebecca – was a non-traditional student who also served in the military. Rebecca was also the only student who was not working towards her first associate degree. Four out of the five participants were living off-campus at the time of the study.

Hannah

Hannah was nearing the end of her associate degree and planned to transfer to a four-year college out of state to pursue her bachelor's and possibly a graduate degree. She grew up in a small town not far from Tallgrass Community College and moved into the city where the college was located after her first semester there. She lived off-campus while attending college and rented a house with several friends with similar academic and career interests. Hannah's story included a majority of the concepts of both rural cultural wealth and community cultural wealth. Before beginning Hannah's narrative, it is important to note that after analysis, there was no evidence of rural ingenuity relating to her pursuit of college. This may be because of the close relation between rural ingenuity and rural resourcefulness, but also because rural

ingenuity considers a collective ingenuity, not a personal ingenuity. As I tell her story below, I will discuss each tenet of rural cultural wealth before moving into community cultural wealth.

The Boys of Fall - Finding Her Community in College

“Hey Corrie! I’m out of tape!” Reaching up, I snatch the roll Corrie flings over my head as she half laughs, half hollers for the next football player to get his ankle taped. We’re prepping for our last home game of the season; I can’t believe my time here has gone so fast. *This time last year, I was finally finding my place at Tallgrass Community College.*

Just as my last player slips on his cleats the coaches are starting their pregame speeches. I grab a carrier of water bottles and my trainer’s bag. *I love my job!* Corrie and I load the rest of the water onto the golf cart and head toward the stadium. As we hit the edge of the track, the cart leaps a little sending us into a laughing fit.

As we unload and set up for the game, I can’t help but think about how much I’m going to miss this and how thankful I am that I took a risk and took this job.

“Hannah! Think fast!” I snap back to reality as Corrie pretends to be our quarterback to my wide receiver. *It’s game time!*

We both scream “Let’s go Buffs!” at the top of our lungs as our team takes the field for the last time.

Fast forward to halftime, the whole training staff works frantically to get our boys ready to finish off the game.

“Alright, you’re all set!” Davon puts his gloves back on after getting his wrist taped, “Thanks babe!” he winks as he runs towards the field.

Coach smirks as he yells, “Fraternize with your girlfriend on your own time 33!”

What seems like a few short minutes later the final score sinks in... Buffs win by a field goal, clinching the regular season title! The entire student section rushes the field as the band plays our fight song.

The first scene of Hannah’s narrative introduced her as she works at a football game. This scene is important as it sets up important non-kin relationships that Hannah developed once starting college at Tallgrass. I will expand on rural community unity in a later section, but it is important to note how Hannah built a sense of community once in college. This showed that she had the ability to build non-kin relationships and assets which directly related to her community cultural wealth.

Home Sweet Home - The Push and Pull of Rural Familialism and Rural Community Unity

After the chaos clears and we’ve unpacked all the gear, Davon grabs his bag, and we head back to the house I rent with Corrie and a few of the other trainers. Corrie hugs me tight as the two of us walk in, “Hey Davon! Great game man!” We grab a few slices of pizza and the guys chat with Davon about the game as Corrie and I pack my bag.

“So, are you nervous about having Davon meet your family this weekend?”

With my mouth full, “mmm... my family not so much...” I pause for another bite “I’m more worried about what we’ll get at my sister’s volleyball tournament tomorrow.”

Holding up shoes for me to choose from, Corrie looks confused.

I point to my selection, “It’s just... It’s ridiculous. My sister’s classmates have been picking on her about me dating Davon... because he’s not *from here*” I stare at Corrie until it clicks what I mean.

“Are you freaking serious?! Well, they can go... well, you know what.” We both laugh. *If only it were that simple.*

Early the next morning, Davon and I are on the road to my hometown. It’s really not far, but the tournament starts at 8:00 in the morning and I want to be there for my little sister, she’s finally getting to start a varsity match. We drop off our stuff at the house and head to the high school, getting to the gym as they’re doing the coin toss. I search the crowd for my parents as I feel condescension from all around me. Proudly, I take Davon’s hand as we weave through the bleachers and sit with my parents.

“Hannah, sweetie!” my mom waives with her whole body, “Who is this handsome young man?!”

“Mom, Dad, this is Davon. Davon, these are my parents.” My mom sweeps him up in a hug and dad extends a friendly handshake.

“I hear you played one hell of a game last night, son! I’m sorry we missed it.”

Dad distracts Davon with football talk as mom elbows me and winks.

My little sister – Haley – bounds over after they win their first match! I hug her sweaty little body and squeal as she pushes me playfully. “Dude! You did great, that dig was fire!” I walk with her to go get a drink from concessions. As we pass, I’m met with stares and whispers. Fortunately, she’s so hyped up she doesn’t notice.

As we stand in line, Principal Smith – my old basketball coach - catches my eye. *Finally, a friendly face.* “Hey Coach!” Leaving Haley in line, I shake his hand.

“Hey! It’s good to see you! I hear you’re doing well at Tallgrass! Sounds like you’re making a name for yourself?” he chuckles. “I always knew you were going to end up doing something in athletics. I do miss having you underneath the basket though!”

I smile, *he was always one of my biggest cheerleaders.* “I’ve been meaning to call you...” he looks intrigued. “I’m thinking about applying for a scholarship to be a trainer for the football team at Red Bud State. I wanted to get your thoughts on it.”

Itching his eyebrow, he ponders for a second, “Well, they have a fantastic football team. I imagine they’d have a great training program too.” He waves at one of the parents who eyes me suspiciously, “I think you should apply. What’s the scholarship cover?”

“Uh, I think it’s a full ride. But I’m not sure.” I know I should have come prepared to answer that question... “I will double check when I get back to the house and let you know.” He smiles and grabs my shoulder reassuringly, “Atta girl! I’ll get you a letter of recommendation as soon as you do. You best be asking your boss for one too.”

“Yessir! Thanks for writing that for me. You’ve always known exactly what I need to do.” Haley is waiving me back to the gym, I shake his hand and as I

start to walk away, he adds, “Oh, by the way my old buddy works in sports communications out there at Red Bud. I’ll make sure to give him a call soon.”

I rush back to give him a hug as a thank you. “Keep it up, kiddo and you’re gonna do great things” he winks as I rejoin Haley.

Later that evening, we’re all out to dinner at the local Pizza Hut... along with literally half the town. “Good grief little lady, where are you putting all that pizza?!” My dad laughs as Haley smiles with a full mouth. Mom hits him playfully on the arm, “Leave her be, Haley deserves to celebrate! She did win her team the championship match with her serving!”

We all chat about Dad’s high school football team and if they’re going to make it to regionals this year and Mom’s new job in the office at the city. We’re almost done with dinner and the conversation turns to Davon and my plans for after Tallgrass.

“So, Davon, Hannah tells us you’re hoping to transfer and play somewhere next year?”

“Yessir, I’ve got two schools back east looking at me, but I think it will depend how the post season goes.”

My dad mulls that over, “Hmmm... either of those programs Red Bud?” he asks with a smirk my direction.

My face grows bright red, and Davon tries to hide his laugh, “Uh, yes sir. They have a great team, and their business department is one of the best.” My dad seems pleased that Davon is also thinking about what he wants to do after college, “Well, you let me know if you need me to get you in touch with

anyone. Some of my old teammates from college work in marketing and I'd be happy to get you a meeting." Davon shakes his hand and thanks him for that connection.

"Honey" my mom smiles, "how are your grades this term? You know you're going to have to keep them up for that training scholarship."

I tell her how my schedule this semester is a little lighter because of football and remind her I'll be taking more of my heavy training classes in the spring.

"But so far those grades this term are good?"

I smirk, "Mostly... yeah."

Mom's eyes get big as dad chuckles, "Oh, you know she's pulling your leg!

When she wants to do well at something, she's going to."

"Ok, honey. I know you're more than capable."

She looks at me over her glass as she takes a drink. "I told you, that we'll support you as long as you're in school and pursuing something you're passionate about. No matter if that's an associate degree or a doctorate."

I smile, "I know mom. I know." *I know I've probably got at least a master's degree ahead of me to get where I want. Between my parents and my boss at Tallgrass, I have no excuse not to know what it takes or how to get there.*

Dad orders the most wonderful brownie thing for the five of us to share. As the evening goes on, we chat about Haley's match-winning serve and her plans for fall homecoming. Dad rolls his eyes at every dress she shows me. We'll head back to town tomorrow afternoon because Davon and I both have morning practice at Tallgrass on Monday.

This second scene transitioned from the football game above, continuing to focus on the importance of non-kin relationships in Hannah's pursuit of college especially as she faces an unnerving situation; taking her boyfriend home to meet her parents. Not only is this a big step, but she also faces the certain racism of her hometown as her college boyfriend is black. As she faces this tension, the relationships with her family but also an authority figure from her childhood are incredibly important to Hannah's rural familialism but also rural community unity as they contribute to her development of community cultural wealth and pursuit of college.

Rural familialism includes the kin relationships and assets held by rural communities which may provide rural students with the skills and knowledge they need to pursue and persist in college. Hannah's main theme was the importance of family; they were encouraging, supportive, exposed her to careers, helped her with college navigation, expected college of her, they were loyal and inspirational. This aspect of rural cultural wealth was directly related to the development of community cultural wealth as I will discuss below. Similarly, rural community unity includes the non-kin relationships and assets held by rural students. Hannah's story showcases a struggle with the *unity* piece of rural community unity, in that those relationships were still important, but she did not feel at home in that community. Relationships with authority figures and friends were undeniably important for Hannah as they provided her with the skills or knowledge that contributed to aspects of community cultural wealth.

Rise and Shine – Importance of Community and Introduction of Rural Resourcefulness

It's 5:30 Monday morning and Corrie and I are prepping ice for after weights.

"It is too damn early for this!" she yawns as she places another ice bag in the freezer. "How did this weekend go?"

I'm pumped for the early morning but try not to be **that** girl, "Oh, just about as I suspected. The fam was great."

She suspects I'm not telling her the whole story, "What happened?"

As we work, I tell her about the looks we got as we went through the school.

"Nothing really happened, but I could just feel their stares the entire time... they're so racist. Just because Davon is black, doesn't mean he is any different than I am. He is literally the nicest, most respectful guy I've ever dated. And just because he looks different, they can't get over it. I hate going home" I sigh, "I am so ready to get out of here."

Corrie looks down, "I know it sucks Hannah, but you don't really hate it here at Tallgrass, do you?"

I realize she thought I meant I hated it here too... "Corrie, you have no clue how much I love it here. Working with the team, living with you and the guys. This job, this place, our home here... It saved me. I know I've said how much I was looking forward to going to playing basketball at Prairie Community College and I was so angry when COVID took my senior season away from me and that opportunity went down the drain. My only regret is that I didn't get connected with athletic training earlier. Prairie seemed like such a good fit, and Tallgrass

may have been my safety school, but it is the best thing that could have happened to me. I'm just ready to move up. I'm ready for more."

She seems satisfied that I am going to miss her when we're done here, as our boss hollers at us and snaps us back to reality.

"Ladies!! Are those ice bags ready? Weights are over in five!"

"Yes sir!" We say in unison as we ready ourselves to care for the team.

"Oh, Hannah! Before I forget, stop by my office after class today before drills.

We need to chat."

Corrie and I exchange concerned glances, unsure of why I'm getting called in and she's not.

After returning to college the next Monday after visiting home, this scene again reflected on how important her community in college is for Hannah. She addressed the issue of racism in her hometown and how it affected how she feels about where she grew up. This scene also introduced the concept of rural resourcefulness which refers to the capacity of rural students and residents to overcome socio-contextual adversities that threaten their livelihood and well-being through taking actions to mitigate limitations. Hannah utilized hurdles like COVID and a lack of connection or sense of belonging as catalysts to overcome adversities that threatened her well-being, directly building her community cultural wealth.

Calls, Careers, and Courage – Relationships and Rural Resourcefulness

I peek in the training office a little before afternoon practice as I knock on the doorframe. Charlie – my boss – is finishing up a call as he waives me in to have a seat. A short minute later he apologizes as he takes a swig of his water.

“Hannah, there’s a few things I want to talk to you about before practice, so I’ll try to be brief.”

A lump builds in my throat.

“First, I just want to commend you for a job well done. When you started here, you were the only female on the training team, and you took that in stride. Since then, you’ve helped me build that and bring in several strong young ladies to the program.”

I smile, but do not say a word as he continues, “Second, I know you’re hoping to transfer to Red Bud State next fall, and I’m assuming you’ve been looking at the scholarship opportunities they have. I know that scholarship is competitive as hell, so I want to write you a strong recommendation letter, if you’ll take it.”

“Oh, Charlie, that would be amazing. Thank you so much! I’ve been meaning to ask you, but I wanted to wait until the end of the season since things have been so crazy!”

He laughs at my excitement, “Ok, good! Now, before I can do that, we need to talk about what you want to do long term. Why you got into training. They’re going to ask you those kinds of questions and I want to make sure I back that up in my letter and if they call me as reference. Sound good?”

I nod emphatically.

“Alright. It’s almost time to go prep for practice so we’ll come back to that later. The guys will have the day off on Friday since we have a week before the first postseason game. Let’s say 10:00?”

I agree and we chat about the day’s duties as we walk to the training room.

It’s Friday morning and I meet Charlie in his office. “Hey, kid. Let’s walk over to the coffee shop and grab a drink. My treat.”

After we’ve ordered and gotten our drinks, we find a table outside the cafeteria and watch as a few students find their way to their Friday classes.

Campus is always so dead on Fridays...

“Alright, so I know you started training last fall, but that wasn’t your first semester at Tallgrass, right?”

I nod as I take a sip of my latte, “Right, I graduated high school a semester early, since COVID took my senior basketball season away. I started here in the spring after I decided not to go to Prairie for that scholarship.”

He looks at me, wondering, “Why did you give that up?”

“I was just so afraid that it would get bad again, that I would end up getting sent home and paying for a dorm I couldn’t even live in. It just wasn’t worth it to me... And at that point I realized that I wanted to stay home and just commute to school here at Tallgrass... At least until I moved out with my friends.”

“Mmm... Yeah, we really didn’t know what to expect then did we?” He trails off for a second, “Well, I’m glad it worked out the way it did. You’ve made a great addition to the team.” He takes another sip “So, why athletic training?”

I think about that for a moment, I've never tried to put it into words... "Well, you know I've always been around football... My dad played in college and coaches for the high school back home now. I was a three-sport athlete in school myself. I almost went to Prairie on that basketball scholarship. It's just part of who I am... So, when I saw the flyer for the athletic training scholarship, I just decided to take a risk on something I missed and loved."

"What was it you missed?"

"The community... I've always seen my dad talking about how much he loved playing in college. His old buddies still get together and talk about their time there. I... I just wanted to belong like that, to be loved like that... Honestly, this team gave me a home. More than I could have ever guessed. And I have loved my time here, I am just ready for something bigger. To do more. It's like athletic training lets me still be involved in sports, but it also lets me help the guys and build a community with this super great group of people I wouldn't have otherwise. I feel like I can be successful at it. That I will get to do something different every day, but still have a family outside of work."

Charlie nods as he drinks his coffee, "So obviously, you're wanting to continue on, hopefully at Red Bud with that scholarship..." I nod, "So, what are you thinking for school long term?"

"Well, that's a good question. I want to continue my athletic training major for sure. But I'm also thinking about grad school after that. You'd mentioned before that to work for a D1, a master's degree would just about be required?"

“It will definitely help. So, you’re thinking maybe grad school then managing the athletic trainers at a D1? Kind of like what I’m doing here?” I nod. “Hmm... That’s a great path. I know you’ve got a few years, but you should consider applying for graduate assistantships when you’re ready. It would be great experience, and they should help you pay for that degree.”

We sit for a few moments, letting the fall breeze flow over us. “Has that always been your goal?” he asks.

“No... I wish it had been though. My first semester I was going for education. Mom and Dad are both teachers... so it’s just kind of always what I thought of. I didn’t know I could do athletic training for a living until I started working for you. I just didn’t know what was out there. No one ever explained that there were other options outside of being a teacher, or doctor, or working in an office. Honestly, no one ever really explained college either. Like how the college dynamic worked, or that you had to be accepted. They never explained how you take classes, or why you take that order of classes, or that you don’t have to take that order of classes. It was like they just assumed we knew... So, I just figured a lot of it out on myself. My mom and dad expected me to go to college, so I did. I just never considered not going even if I didn’t understand what college was going to be like.”

Charlie finishes his coffee... “Well, I can see how much you’ve grown as a trainer and as a student over the last year. It takes courage to go for what you want, and I respect that in you Hannah. I will be sad to see you go. You know,

there will always be a spot here for you should you decide not to go the D1 route.”

I thank him and we chat a little more about applying to Red Bud and the scholarship.

“I know the football season is wrapping up here soon, but I’d like you to think about staying on in a leading role for the winter sports season. We really need help with the other sports through the winter and spring. Are you up for staying busy all year?” I accept his offer and we both head off to enjoy the rest of our Friday.

I don’t know what the rest of this semester, or the next will hold. I’m glad I took a risk even if it meant not following what was expected of me back home; it paid off big time.

I call my mom like I do every Friday, she’s so excited to hear that I’ll have two letters of recommendation for my scholarship. I tell her about Charlie’s suggestion to pursue graduate assistantships.

“Honey, I am so proud of you. And I want you to know that we’ll do whatever it takes to get you to your dreams. Even if it means driving you and a U-Haul halfway across the country.

I laugh, “I know Mom. I need to get some homework done. I love you.”

“Love you too, Hannah. See you next weekend!”

As I hang up, I think about how much my parents have encouraged and supported me. *They might not know what all my options are, but they’re always going to be on my side. No matter what I choose.*

The last scene introduced one more non-kin relationship to Hannah's narrative in the form of a current authority figure. While this relationship was built after entering college, Hannah's ability to do so was directly tied to her experiences building those types of relationships with former bosses and coaches. In this scene Hannah reflects on some of the hurdles that could have come between her and her pursuit of college. These potential hurdles ultimately became the things that motivated Hannah to pursue college, to step out of her comfort zone, and to reach for a career and life she would be proud of.

Hannah and Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital is the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real or perceived barriers. Hannah built aspirational capital through rural community unity, rural resourcefulness, and rural familialism. This was exemplified by the fact that her parents supported her goals, but also through her experiences. She gained exposure to career ideas and the idea of work and college by experiences with her family, her boss, her principal, teacher, and a coach. These facilitators helped her to build aspirational capital, which was also connected to social capital, navigational capital, and familial capital. Furthermore, her jobs during college exposed her to what it would be like to work in athletics full-time, building her aspirational capital. Hannah's aspirations of working within athletics encouraged her to take a risk on something she loved, which in-turn continued to build her aspirational capital showcasing a cyclical process for Hannah. She further applied her aspirational capital by considering a college education as a way to get the career and life she wanted. She stated that success meant fulfillment to her, and she believed she would feel successful when she had a career that she enjoyed as well as a family of her own. She also applied her aspirational capital to go after the job in athletics at the college.

Hannah and Resistant Capital

Resistant capital includes the knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenge inequality. While concepts of rural resourcefulness and resistant capital are difficult to separate, it is evident that Hannah built resistant capital through opposition to lack-luster high school experiences, COVID, and in response to racism, sexism, and homophobic tendencies within her community. She applied resistant capital by working towards a career dominated by men directly relating her resistant capital to her aspirational capital.

Hannah and Linguistic Capital

The intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style are called linguistic capital. While there is no evidence of the building or applying of linguistic capital for Hannah, it is worth noting that her mom helped her navigate the FAFSA and applications to college. Since she focused more on the navigation rather than understanding of the words, that piece will remain in navigational capital. It was evident that she wished she had a better understanding of the college jargon that is thrust upon students.

Hannah and Social Capital

Social capital includes the networks of people and community resources. Hannah's sense of rural community unity and the skills she developed there included networks with her Future Farmers of America sponsor, her principal who was also from a small town in Kansas, her coach who encouraged athletics, and her friends through which she saw the opportunity for student life. These resources were applied through the building of aspirational capital and

navigational capital specifically by the navigation of pre-college tasks, the pursuit of her major/career, and college attendance.

Hannah and Navigational Capital

Navigational capital refers to the skills of maneuvering through social institutions, in this case, specifically college. Hannah's navigational capital was developed through involvement and experiences that were facilitated by both kin and non-kin relationships. This makes Hannah's navigational capital a direct development of both rural community unity and rural familialism. Hannah applied her navigational capital as she completed FAFSA requirements as well as college applications. She continued to develop her navigational capital through college staff (advisor and professors) as well as friends. During the time of the study, she applied navigational capital as she prepared to transfer to complete her bachelor's degree.

Hannah and Familial Capital

Lastly, Familial capital are the cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition. While there were no first-cycle codes in familial capital because of its close tie to rural familialism. After exploring all other tenets, it is evident that Hannah's familial capital was built through the expectation from her parents that she was going to go to college. Familial capital was applied to her pursuit of college through direct ties with her aspirational capital and navigational capital. Specifically, Hannah's family expectations and support developed her aspirational capital to pursue the major and career she chose. Additionally, their support helped her develop navigational capital which she applied to navigate college processes.

Hannah's Summary

In summary, Hannah's story showcases that rural students develop community cultural wealth through their rural cultural wealth. She applied aspirational, resistant, navigational, and familial capital in her pursuit of college. These concepts were applied to her pursuit of college through career exploration and the development of beneficial resources and skills. In this way, Hannah armed herself with the knowledge and skills to pursue a major and career she enjoys but also be successful in college and those fields.

Joshua

Joshua was a first-year student at Tallgrass who planned to enter the workforce after earning his associate degree. He lived at home with his parents during the study, outside of a town within Tallgrass Community College's service area. Joshua's activity required him time outside of class much like athletics or an on-campus job. He also worked at a local business in the town over from where he lived as well as doing odd projects for other businesses related to his interests and college major. Joshua was the only participant who identified a specific, tangible artifact that was influential to his pursuit of college. The artifact will not be included because it had information identifiable to Tallgrass as well as the specific activity and major Joshua pursued there. Similarly, to Hannah, Joshua's story included many concepts from rural cultural wealth and community cultural wealth. Again, I chose to focus more on rural resourcefulness over rural ingenuity because it allows for a concentration on the individual where rural ingenuity focuses on collective ingenuity.

Lights, Camera, Action – Introducing Rural Community Unity and Rural Resourcefulness

Nearing the end of my first fall semester at Tallgrass Community College, our football team was going to play in the national title game. As campus buzzed with excitement, I head to our weekly meeting for the journalism department.

“Obviously, with making nationals we’ll be focusing on that this week. I want to cover everything... social media, the newspaper, and the radio show. Can we handle that?”

I look around the room, everyone cheers or nods excitedly.

Dr. Greene goes around the room giving out assignments when he gets to me, “Joshua, I want you on videography for the coach and staff interviews and then writing copy for the radio show. Got it?”

“You’ve got it!” I write down my assignment and head to my station to start working on the interview schedule with my-coeditor, Maritza.

“Hey, how was your weekend?” Maritza asks as she scurries about her station, gathering notes as she listens.

“It was alright, mostly worked. How about you?”

Without missing a beat, she smiles, “Oh about the same. Worked and did some internship applications... Hey, have you applied to any yet?”

She takes my pause as a no, “Ok, well you need to apply for the one at SEK-TV. I think you’d have a good shot at it. Here’s the link.”

My phone buzzes, she’s already sent me the application. We dive in and finalize an interview schedule; all too soon it’s time for my next class.

“See you later, Maritza!” I wave as sling my backpack over my shoulder and trudge to math.

The next morning, we lug our equipment to the football training facility, we’re set to talk with the coaches and staff after morning weights. *Ugh, this is too early!*

Maritza snags the head coach as the players head to the training room. “Coach T, what does it mean to you to be heading to the national title game?”

Centering him in the frame, I capture Coach T as he talks about how important it is for our players to see the outcome of their hard work. Maritza talks to him for another minute or so and asks the rest of the coaching staff similar questions.

As the coaches head out, I recognize one of the student athletic trainers from history. “Hey! It’s Hannah, right? Can we get a couple words from you?”

She strides over with her friend.

“Yep! This is Corrie you should talk to her too.”

Maritza interviews them together, “So, as part of the training staff you’ve put in a lot of hours” they both nod and laugh, “That being said, how does it feel to support the team in their journey to the title game?”

They tell us how proud they are of the team and the hard work they’ve put in.

How excited they are to share the experience with them and with each other.

We thank them and the rest of the staff for their time and head back to the media studio.

I work on editing the pieces together for social media as Maritza gives her feedback. “These are great! I’ll get these scheduled for the socials and hand

over the rest to Jake so he can use those in the newspaper. How are you doing on your copy?”

“Oh, it’s almost there. I just need to confirm which player is coming in to talk with me for the show.” We chat for a few more minutes before heading out.

Over the next few days, the team puts finishing touches on our content.

Friday morning, Dr. Greene supervises as I broadcast player interviews with the help of my team over the live radio show. After we wrap up, it’s time to head home for the weekend.

The first scene of Joshua’s narrative picks up where Hannah’s narrative left off, introducing them to one another as acquaintances with the context of Tallgrass as a larger community. It is important to establish context within Joshua’s life by introducing the importance of his activity — and that community — to his identity at Tallgrass. While this scene introduces the outcomes of his rural community unity and rural resourcefulness, I will discuss both concepts in more detail in the later scenes.

Order Up – Rural Community Unity and Rural Resourcefulness

It’s a short 20-minute drive up the highway from Tallgrass to get back home. I drop my backpack off and change before heading to the diner that my family runs the next town over. As I wander through the back door, Mom is just flipping the sign to open.

“Hey Mom!” She smiles back at me my dad looks up from the grill and nods hello. *Friday night should be decently busy...*

A couple of servers pop in for their shifts just before people start to arrive for supper. As the night passes quickly, I float back and forth from the register to

the kitchen, helping where needed. As the crowd in the dining room starts to thin out, I notice a few familiar faces. My high school journalism teacher and counselor are laughing over a burger and fries.

I stop over to their table, “Miss Aire! Mrs. Shepherd! Is there anything else I can get for you?”

“Joshua! I think we’re OK. How are you?! How is your first semester at Tallgrass?!” Mrs. Shepherd asks excitedly.

“Oh, it’s going good! We just wrapped up some pre-game stuff for the football team’s trip to the championship so that was cool. Classes are OK.”

Miss Aire buzzes, “Oh good! How are you doing with Clint... I mean, Dr. Greene?”

Laughing to myself at her slip, “He’s great! Thank you so much for connecting me with him for the scholarship. I’ve been meaning to thank you.” *Without that, I don’t know if Tallgrass would have been an option.*

“Of course!” she beams, “Cl... Dr. Greene and I go way back. And you deserved that scholarship. Plus, I know how expensive college can get!”

Mrs. Shepherd listens intently as we talk about my projects for Dr. Greene.

Taking a sip of her water she directs the conversation to next semester. “So, do you know what you’re taking next term?”

I hesitate for a second, “Well... Kind of? I know what courses I have to take with Dr. Greene but I’m not real sure other than that.”

Knowingly Mrs. Shepherd adds, “You best be making your appointment to see your advisor. If you still have questions after that, you let me know.”

“Yes ma’am. I’ll make sure to do that.” I smile because I know she really means it.

Miss Aire changes the subject, “So, Joshua you decided not to move to campus? How are you doing with that?”

“Oh, it’s alright. It saved a lot of money, and we’re close enough that it’s really not a bad drive. I’m glad it’s not any farther though! Plus, I still get to work here that way.”

“Good!” Mrs. Shepherd inquires, “So, have you met anyone interesting so far?”

“Mmmm... I guess, my co-editor Maritza is alright. Jake got the same scholarship as me, so we get to work together a lot. And I’ve met some guys through the gaming club.”

They both look pleased with my expanding friend group, and we chat about local events and town happenings for a few minutes while they finish their supper before they settle their bills.

After the last guest is gone, I lock the door and Mom reminds me and the servers that we’re shooting for social media tomorrow morning before lunch rush.

This second scene brought Joshua home and briefly introduced us to his family life as he starts his shift at the family-run diner. Joshua’s rural community unity was closely tied to his high school and high school teachers which provided him with relationships and equipped him with skills and knowledge he needed to pursue college. This is evidenced by the connection that Miss Aire had with the college professor that gave him access to a scholarship.

It was also this high school teacher's class that opened Joshua to the idea that he could pursue that topic as a major and a career out of that interest. Additionally, his high school counselor — Mrs. Shepherd — provided college information and resources helping students walk through the required steps. The location, cost, and cultural norm not to pursue college were all possible barriers for Joshua, but Tallgrass, those connections, and the scholarship all became resources in themselves. Each of these aspects is directly tied to a tenet of community cultural wealth as discussed below.

Leveling Up – Rural Familialism

“Oh, Joshua. Those look great!” My mom exclaims as she looks over my shoulder. “I’m so glad you agreed to take the pictures and put together the new clips for the diner!”

I smile to myself and think back about how this is how I fell in love with videography. “Of course, Mom, I’m happy to help!” *Without her pushing me, I might not have tried this; might not have decided to pursue journalism and videography in college.*

She hugs me as she grabs her keys, “Do you boys need any snacks for tonight? I’m running into town for groceries.”

“Mmm... maybe just some pop to drink and some chips? We’ll just grab a pizza at Casey’s.”

“Check and check! See you when I get back!” she hollers as she closes the door.

Over the hour or so, I work furiously to wrap up edits before the guys get there for video games. *Alright, almost done. Just a few more tweaks here and we should be good to go.* As I finish, I think to myself, *without getting started*

filming stuff for the diner I would have never started doing other projects in the community... Miss Aire may have never approached me about taking her course. She may have never encouraged me to talk to Dr. Greene about the scholarship at Tallgrass. I may never have considered this as a career.

Just then, I hear Mom's car pull into the drive and I meet her there to help with bags. Before she can grab bags from the back, I surprise her with a hug.

"Thanks Mom, seriously." She looks at me curiously, wondering what caused my sudden outburst. Deciding not to question it, she hugs me back.

Getting the groceries put away she asks, "Did you get what you needed this morning?"

"Yeah, I think they're going to look great. I should just about be done if you and Dad want to take a peek before we put them up."

Dad strolls in just in time, kissing mom on the forehead, "What am I peeking at?"

I show them my work and they make one or two small suggestions and wrap up edits just as my sister and her family pop in the front door.

"Hey! Just wanted to say hi on our way to town! What are the plans for Christmas dinner?"

Squeezing her grandkids tight, my mom confirms the plans for the holidays and raves about my work showing her our new content for the diner.

"You know, Josh, you have always been good at this kind of thing, but I think this is some of your best work yet. I'm so glad you listened to me and decided to go to Tallgrass." My sister says with a wink.

We banter back and forth for a few minutes before she packs up her sons and heads out.

Later that evening the guys show up and the four of us pile into my car to go pick up pizza in the town over. Chatting as we head back to my house, we catch up. Mason, from the gaming club, has only met Ben and Jake once before but it's like we're all old friends. We all talk about our plans for the rest of the semester as we pull into my driveway.

The next few weeks will be super busy with finals and my projects focusing on the championship game. The guys will all be busy with their own lives, but we hope to get together again over break.

Playing video games late into the night, we laugh and holler at each other before passing out on the basement floor amidst the remains of our junk food.

This scene showcased the importance of rural familialism to Joshua's pursuit of college. The main takeaway is that relationships with his parents and siblings equipped Joshua with aspects of community cultural wealth helping him pursue college; they made college-going the norm in his family directly connecting back to the concept of rural familialism as stated before the last scene. These paragraphs also introduced us to some of Joshua's childhood friends as well as new friends as he has expanded his community since beginning college. This is important because these non-kin relationships are important to the development of aspects of community cultural wealth.

The Twelve Days of Christmas – Further Explaining Kin and Non-Kin Connections

The next few weeks fly by... We survive finals, the football team narrowly gets beaten in the national championship game, and Maritza and I both hear back about our internships for break at SEK-TV.

“So, Joshua, what did you think of your first day?” Maritza and I leave the studio together talking about all we learned and saw.

“It was kind of... overwhelming...? But awesome.”

She laughs in agreement, “Bet. Did I hear something about early applications for summer internships?”

As we get to our cars, we discuss working on the applications and how great it would be to land those spots next summer. Waving goodbye, we both get in our cars and head home.

A few days later, I’m helping my mom prepare for Christmas dinner; both brothers and my sister will all be over with their families.

“So, Joshua, how did your first semester go? Are you glad you followed after these two?” my oldest brother asks between bites, pointing at my sister and other brother.

“Yeah.” I swallow, “It’s been really good so far. I’m glad I went this route. The stuff like you did was really interesting, but I think this is better for me.

Especially since it’s so hands-on... I get the best of both worlds.”

He jokes with me about being nerds like the other two as my mom hollers at him to leave us alone.

My sister feeds her baby mashed potatoes and adds, “You know getting started was really hard, there were just so many unknowns even with your help” nodding towards Mom and Dad.

“Yeah, I remember you getting started. It seemed so scary... But honestly, watching you two go through it... It just made it more normal because so many people in my class just didn’t go. Watching you two survive made it so much more attainable.” My middle brother puts his hand on my shoulder and smiles as his wife asks if anyone needs anything.

As the evening goes on, we catch up on everything from the last few months.

The kids open presents as we sit around, laughing at their antics.

The next few weeks will fly by and soon I will start my second semester at Tallgrass.

As I sit watching my family laugh together, I think, *I am so thankful for them...*

They encouraged me to shoot for my goals and to do the best I can. Without that support and their example, I wouldn’t be where I am today.

This last piece of Joshua’s narrative focused again on the importance of both rural community unity (non-kin relationships) and rural familialism (kin relationships) to Joshua’s pursuit of college. It is important to note that these relationships all directly tie to his current and further development of community cultural wealth. This scene provides Joshua with the opportunity to reflect on the impact of his family, friends, and teachers on his life.

Joshua and Aspirational Capital

Moving into a discussion of Joshua's community cultural wealth, I will start with aspirational capital. For Joshua, aspirational capital boils down to the fact that his high school course had the largest impact cascading from family experiences and his interests. Those interests gave him the motivation to pursue a class in high school that, in turn, would open up opportunities to explore college majors and possible careers. That class also connected him to scholarship opportunities that made college possible. Joshua utilized his rural resourcefulness to overcome potential barriers and build college aspirations. He also used rural community unity to develop the aspiration of media as a major and career. He utilized rural familialism to develop the aspiration of college-going in general, but also as a deciding factor on what he would like to pursue. His aspirational capital contributed to college knowledge because it inspired him to explore careers and find a college that had the program he wanted. Additionally, he made the effort to understand his learning style as a hands-on learner and find something that fit those needs. Lastly, Joshua utilized his aspirational capital to learn what type of education he wanted, helping him to make the decision to pursue a two-year degree over a university education.

Joshua and Resistant Capital

Ultimately, Joshua's resistant capital was built from his rural resourcefulness where he resisted the cultural norm where most of his peers did not intend to pursue a college education. This resistant capital was built mainly through his rural familialism because his family encouraged college-going, making it the norm within their family unit. Joshua operationalized his resistant capital by pursuing his dream, that being said I found no evidence of a strong connection between Joshua's resistant capital and a contribution to college knowledge.

Joshua and Linguistic Capital

While I had no first cycle codes for Joshua's linguistic capital, it is important to consider the concept in comparison to navigational capital which will be discussed below. It was evident that Joshua still felt like the enrollment and financial aid processes were difficult to navigate, suggesting a lack of linguistic capital. Similarly, to Hannah, because Joshua focused on the navigation rather than understanding of the college jargon, I chose to connect those pieces to navigational capital instead. This suggests that linguistic capital did not have a direct correlation with college knowledge for Joshua.

Joshua and Social Capital

Joshua's rural community unity directly impacted his social capital as his high school ties connected him with college resources such as instructors. This networking opened doors to scholarships, new friends, and ultimately knowledge of internship opportunities. His ability to network – building social capital – was applied to his pursuit of college as he built college knowledge as these connections taught him the importance of scholarships and how those scholarships could open doors, as well as the importance of internships for further networking and experience.

Joshua and Navigational Capital

In an earlier section, I mentioned that Joshua focused on navigating the college atmosphere rather than understanding the jargon utilized in higher education. Thus, navigational capital was more influential on his pursuit of college than linguistic capital. One of the main themes connected to Joshua's navigational capital is that his high school helped him prepare for college. Conversely, college itself has not contributed to his development in that area. Joshua's rural community unity connected to navigational capital specifically

through his high school counsellor. Furthermore, rural familialism developed his navigational capital because his family knew how to navigate the college application process. In this way, college knowledge and navigational capital connected to each other in a cyclical manner as Joshua applied to, enrolled in, and began his college career.

Joshua and Familial Capital

Similar to Hannah's case, there were no first cycle codes for familial capital because of its close tie to rural familialism. After exploring the remaining pieces of rural community wealth and community cultural wealth, it is evident that Joshua's familial capital was built through his family's culture of college-going. His family made college-going the norm which encouraged Joshua to utilize familial capital as a springboard to pursue college in general. Lastly, as mentioned, his familial capital also contributed to college knowledge which helped him understand aspects of the college application and enrollment processes.

Joshua's Summary

In summary, Joshua's story supports the idea that rural cultural wealth helps rural students develop community cultural wealth. Joshua applied specific aspects of community cultural wealth such as aspirational capital, navigational capital, social capital, and familial capital to his pursuit of college as he began his college career. These concepts contributed to college knowledge for Joshua by helping him to gain the information and develop the skills needed to make informed decisions and pursue a college major and career that fit his interests and talents.

Mason

Mason was also a first-year student from a small town within Tallgrass Community College's service area where he grew up with extended family members. He was the only participant living on campus at the time of the study and intended to transfer to a four-year college after earning his associate degree. While he lived on campus, he visited his family and high school friends frequently on the weekends and over school breaks. Mason's activity resulted in a scholarship and kept him very busy as it required him to attend practice as well as weekly competitions. Consistent with other participants, Mason's narrative included many concepts from both rural cultural wealth and community cultural wealth. His story relied heavily on the development of aspirational capital through rural community unity, rural resourcefulness, and rural familialism. In addition to aspirational capital, Mason developed other aspects of community cultural wealth. In contrast, I did not find evidence of rural ingenuity, resistant capital, or linguistic capital thus I will not include discussions of those specific concepts through Mason's narrative.

An Empty Dorm Room – Introducing Mason

I turn up my radio as I pull out of Joshua's drive. Singing and drumming out the rhythm on my steering wheel, I start to think about everything I need to do once I get back to my dorm.

Practice tomorrow morning... then back home to finish up my last few observation hours of the semester. Oh shoot, I've got to start studying for my math final. I guess I can do that while I do laundry today.

The drive to Tallgrass goes by quickly, I nod to the RA as I unlock the door to my empty dorm room. Tossing my bag on the floor, I pull out my phone and vault into my bed. I text Joshua, “Hey thanks man. I had fun.”

Glancing at the abandoned bed across from mine, *I can't wait for Justin to move in next semester.*

My phone buzzes with a text back from Joshua, “You bet!” I smile and lay looking at the ceiling for a few more minutes before grabbing my laundry and algebra stuff and head to the laundry room.

Sun rays peak in the window the next morning as my eyes crack open.

Buzz! Buzz!

Hitting my alarm, *Ugh. It's too early for this.*

Reluctantly, I roll out of bed and get dressed for wrestling practice.

I keep my head down as one of the trainers finishes my ankle. “Alright! You’re all set!”

I tell Hannah thanks as I put my shoes back on and hop down from the table and the next couple hours go by rather quickly.

As we wrap up our weightlifting circuits, I hear a couple of the guys talking about their weekends. Keeping to myself, one of them hollers, “Hey, Mason. How about you? What did you do this weekend?”

“Oh, not too much just hung out with some of the guys from gaming. How about you?” We chat for a few minutes before we head our separate ways. I’ve got just enough time to shower and get to math class.

This first scene connected Mason back to Joshua, positioning them as new friends, having developed a connection over video games since starting college. To protect confidentiality, I did not share names of participants with each other, so I am unable to know if the two knew each other in real life. This writing technique fits into the concept of narrative smoothing to add context to both participants' social lives at Tallgrass. This first scene is important to Mason's experiences in college because it highlights the loneliness he felt while transitioning into college without discounting his ability to build non-kin relationships which will be discussed in following scenes.

Hey Coach! – Introducing Rural Community Unity

After class I head straight to my car so I can get back home and finish up my last teaching observation hours for the semester.

Its only 45 minutes on the highway, but it feels like so much longer.

Pulling into the school parking lot I can feel a smile start to creep across my face.

I get to Mr. Wilson's class just as the bell rings to release the kids for their next class. Slipping in the door I shake his hand. "Mason! Good to see ya!"

"You too! How've you been?"

We catch up for a few minutes before the next bell rings and I find my place towards the back of the classroom, notebook and pen in hand. I spend the rest of the day observing Mr. Wilson as he prepares his classes for their history finals.

He is such a great teacher; I hope I can be half this good when I'm teaching.

The final bell rings and the students scurry to put away their books. “Say, Mason. Do you have time to stick around for practice today? I’ve got several middle schoolers that I’d like you to work with today if you can.”

“Yeah! I can stick around for a few hours!” The kids swarm me as we get to the gym, and I can’t help but laugh at their excitement.

“Alright guys!” Mr. Wilson commands their attention. The middle and high school wrestling teams both use Mr. Wilson as their head coach.

“Y’all remember Mason.” Directing his gaze at the handful of 7th and 8th graders, “He’ll be working with you today. I expect you to listen to him just as you would me.”

I’m not going to have any problem there. These kids are great.

Earlier this fall, I thought they would have just looked at me and ignored my direction. But since then, even though I’ve only been back a couple times, they hang on to every word I say.

Mr. Wilson hands me an extra whistle and after they’re done warming up, I split my guys off from the high schoolers. Leading them through skills, I hit my stride, “Ok, again!”

Making small adjustments as they need, we get through the rest of practice and they all high five me on the way to the locker room.

Mr. Wilson stands beside me, pleased. “You did great Mason. Those kids look up to you.”

I smile, “Yessir. Thank you, sir. I enjoyed getting to work with them today.”

“Well, you’re going to be a great coach, and you know you’re welcome any time.”

I smile and nod as he’s told me those same words a thousand times.

“You’ve probably got finals to study for, but Sharron is making dinner if you have time to join us tonight.” I agree and follow him to his house.

We followed Mason back to his hometown as he observed one of his favorite and most influential high school teachers and coaches who had a large impact on Mason’s sense of rural community unity. Represented here by Mr. Wilson, this teacher and coach provided Mason with the knowledge he needed to pursue college directly tying rural community unity with Mason’s aspirational capital. This sense of rural community unity shaped his major and career aspirations as well as the college that Mason decided to attend. Furthermore, outside of this coach, his high school provided Mason with non-kin relationships with other teachers, the school counselor, and the librarian. These connections were all directly tied to Mason’s rural community unity and aspirational capital because they exposed him to the subjects that he hoped to teach during his career. Additionally, these connections built navigational capital and college knowledge because they helped him gain information about career opportunities as well as establishing a support system as he was weighing his college options. Furthermore, the librarian and teachers helped him navigate enrollment even after high school graduation. Lastly, his counselor helped to build social capital through a connection with his college coach; this network provided him with an application of community cultural wealth to help him pursue college via a college scholarship. I will further discuss the application of community cultural wealth tenets below.

A Homecooked Meal – Exploring Rural Community Unity and Introducing Rural Familialism and Rural Resistance

His wife hugs me as I follow him inside. “Hi Mrs. Wilson. How are you?”

“Mason! You’re not in school anymore! I told you, it’s Sharron! But good! How is Tallgrass treating you?! Is my brother taking it easy on you?”

I laugh, “Ha! Yes ma’am, Coach has been great. Thank you for getting me in touch with him by the way. I don’t think I would have ended up on scholarship without that.”

“Mason, you’re too modest. You earned that spot yourself; it just helps to have a connection to get noticed.” She winks as she hands me a plate.

We laugh and catch up over good food for the next hour or so. “Say, Mason. How’s your mom? Have you talked to her recently?” Mr. Wilson chews his last bite as he listens intently.

“Oh... you know it’s been a minute since we’ve talked, but it seems like she might be doing a little better. Sounds like she’s got a new place and a new job that she likes well enough.”

Nodding, Sharron adds, “How about your little sister? Or your aunt and uncle?”

“Ali is doing OK, she’s with her dad in Colorado now. I don’t see either of them much.” Taking a sip, I add, “And my aunt and uncle are alright. They’re super busy with their kids so I just see them if I come home on the weekend. Or if I need to grab something from my room. Uncle Tom is trying to get me to move home after the spring term. That conversation will be... fun while I’m home for break.” Knowingly, they chuckle.

We talk for a few more minutes about my plans for next semester and how excited I am to have Justin to room with in the spring.

“Mrs. Wi...” She glares at me, “Sharron, when are you due?”

“Oh, just another month or so!” She smiles as she places her hand on her stomach.

Several minutes later, we say our goodbyes and I thank them again for dinner.

On my way back to Tallgrass, I drive past my aunt and uncle’s house. I see them flip off the light in the bedroom next to mine, it must be their son’s bedtime.

I really don’t want to stay at home over break... he’ll pitch such a fit if I don’t though.

My drive back goes quickly as the stars come out and I enjoy the serenity and peacefulness of being outside of the city. *There is just something about living and working in a small town, even if I don’t end up back here, this is the setting I need.*

This scene explored the deep connection Mason has with his former coach as well as the school counselor – introduced here as Mrs. Wilson – and his college coach. In the scene the coach is introduced as Mrs. Wilson’s brother, while the specificity of close connections between these three resources has been fictionalized to protect confidentiality, it is important to note that there were strong connections within Mason’s networks. Here, I also introduced to the complicated nature of Mason’s family dynamic which will be further discussed in the next scene.

Furthermore, this scene introduced the concept of rural resistance as it applies to Mason's story. Mason had limited exposure to college and career information due to isolation (as well as family dynamic). By taking advantage of the resources that were provided through rural community unity, he learned what he did and did not want to pursue for a career. Lastly, the affordability of college affected the likelihood that he would pursue that option after high school. Mason was able to overcome this barrier by leveraging the resources that were available to him. Specifically, he selected a school close to home that offered an in-county tuition discount as well as a scholarship directly tied to his existing networks.

Finals Week – Further Developing Rural Resistance and a Complex Sense of Rural Familialism

A few days later, I drag myself to the front of the room and turn in my math final. Hesitantly, I smile at my professor as I walk out the door.

That didn't feel too great, but I think I could have done worse. I guess I'll just see how it goes.

My first semester at Tallgrass is officially done!

BuzzBuzz! I pull my phone out of my pocket and see a text from Joshua.

“Hey! Are we still on for a movie later?”

I shoot a quick confirmation back before heading to my room to pack what I can before I leave for home tomorrow morning.

After a night out with the guys, I return to my room much of which is packed, ready to leave. Looking around the empty room, I think back over my first semester here. From my first roommate dropping out and going home, to the fire in the laundry room...

Dorm life has been a wild ride, and I am so ready for Justin to move on campus in January. Even though he hasn't met the rest of the guys, I know they'll be fast friends. Plus, it will be nice to have someone around here, especially my best friend.

As I get in my car, I give Justin a quick call just to see what his plans are for the weekend. As I pull in the drive at my aunt and uncle's house it begins to snow, and I see my aunt open the front door to welcome me home. The kids tackle my ankles as I enter the front door and I laugh as they run off to play.

My aunt hugs me, "Lunch will be ready in a few minutes if you want to get unpacked."

The next few days go quickly enough between playing with the kids and hanging out with my old friends.

Flashforward to Christmas dinner; Grandma and Grandpa are up from Arizona and a couple other family members crowd around the table.

Later, as we watch the kids play with their new toys the conversation turns to my mother.

"So, Mason, have you talked with your mom recently?" Grandpa asks as he takes a sip of his coffee.

"No sir." I smile as my little cousins zoom their new cars around the carpet floor, "I thought she might come tonight but I guess not. I do think she has a new job."

My grandparents both ponder that for a moment. Grandma adds, “Well, hun... I’m glad she’s got a good job...” After a moment, she adds, “How did your finals go?”

I share that I passed math with a B, and that I got to do my shadowing with Mr. Wilson this semester. Excitedly, I add that I’ll be taking more teaching courses in the spring and that Justin will be staying on campus too.

“Kiddo... I know you know this, but I’m really glad you decided not to go into fire science.” Taking another sip of his coffee Grandpa adds, “You can’t make a ton off teaching, but I’m proud of you for finding something you’re interested in that won’t take such a toll on your body. You’ve got a great mind; you should put it to work instead of torturing your body like I did.”

Lovingly, Grandma adds, “You’re going to be a great teacher and coach someday. We love your mom, but you know how much more we expect from you.”

They mean the best, but it can be a lot of pressure. I smile, “I know Grandma. I know.”

Just then, my aunt announces that it is time for dessert. As we enjoy an array of pies, the conversation shifts to lighter topics and discussion of the impending snowstorm in the next few days.

As I sit and absorb this time with my family, I think to myself:

I know Mom did her best, but I am going to do everything I can to make sure kids aren’t in the same situations she put me in. Without Mr. Wilson’s support, Mrs. Wilson’s guidance, and connection to Tallgrass... I don’t know where I

would have ended up. Grandma and Grandpa always expected me to do great things, even if they pushed too hard sometimes... They all expected those things and believed in me... I know I can and will do more and be more.

This last scene of Mason's narrative reintroduced Joshua as a developing friendship at college. We are also given the opportunity to learn more about his student life experiences and the idea that another friend will be moving into the residence halls. This is important for Mason as he was looking forward to his future at Tallgrass and building a community on campus.

Then, we were given a picture of his complex family dynamic and how it applied to his rural resistance as well as a sense of rural familialism. Mason utilized his ability to overcome socio-contextual adversities that threatened his ability to pursue a college education and career. His family dynamics were complex and less than ideal but served as a motivator for Mason to build aspirational capital. For example, Mason shared details of his life with his biological mom that put him in grave danger as a small child. From these experiences, he learned that he wanted to help children in any way that he could. I will further discuss this application of his aspirational capital as it relates to rural resistance in the aspirational capital section below.

Although Mason's family dynamic was complicated, there was still evidence of rural familialism that helped him pursue college. While his aunt and uncle were passively supportive, the expectations placed on him by his grandparents created a culture where college-going was expected. This expectation directly contributed to several aspects of community cultural wealth as it pushed him to want to do more than his biological parents.

Mason and Aspirational Capital

Mason's aspirational capital was his most developed tenet of community cultural wealth. As I discussed above, Mason developed aspirational capital through rural community unity, rural

resistance, and rural familialism. His experiences in a rural community contributed to the fact that he wanted to teach and coach in smaller schools, he applied this aspirational capital by pursuing an education that would help him earn the degree he would need to do so. Mason also applied the aspirational capital that was built through rural community unity, as it shaped his specific career aspirations. His high school coach and teachers exposed him to the idea of teaching and coaching as a career. Lastly, Mason learned from his experiences with his mom that he wanted to do more and be more, this aspiration further motivated him to strive for a different life that included a college education and career.

Mason's Other Capitals

It is also important to note – as stated above – that while Mason's family dynamic was complicated there was a culture of college-going developed through rural familialism. This built his familial capital which was applied through the pursuit of college and directly tied back to his aspirational capital as well. This complicated sense of rural familialism also directly tied to Mason's resistant capital; in short, he wanted better for himself and wanted to help kids so that they did not have to go through the same things he did with his mom. Lastly, looking back to Mason's rural community unity, it is evident that his high school provided some college exposure. That being said, Mason still felt as though he was not able to navigate the college atmosphere as well as he would have liked. Ultimately, Mason still utilized navigational and social capitals built within his high school community to help him navigate college. In that way, he applied navigational and social capitals to apply to college, secure a scholarship, and enroll at Tallgrass.

Mason's Summary

In summary, Mason's story showcases how rural community unity, rural resistance, and rural familialism can build community cultural wealth and support college-going through the application of

specific capitals. Mason most commonly operationalized aspirational capital through the pursuit of a specific degree and career. It is also in this way that his community cultural wealth contributed to college knowledge because he learned the information and skills needed to make informed decisions and pursue those dreams.

Ella

Ella was also a first-year student at Tallgrass who began her year there living on campus. After beginning her second semester, she moved out to an apartment not far from campus with her boyfriend. Ella was from a different small town a little further from the college but still within their service area. She grew up living with her aunt and uncle who later adopted her, along with two older cousins who she referred to as sisters and a much younger adopted brother. Ella was not involved in a specific activity and thus did not have a scholarship like the aforementioned participants. Additionally, Ella was the only participant who was unsure about what major and career she wanted to pursue. Ella worked part-time while attending college at Tallgrass, and often found time to go home over the weekend to visit her family. While Ella showed evidence of social, navigational, resistant, and familial capitals, aspirational capital was the biggest contributing factor as she applied community cultural wealth to gain college knowledge and pursue a college education. As I move through her narrative below, I will showcase how each aspect of rural cultural wealth and community cultural wealth as well as how they address the three research questions for Ella.

Girls' Day – Establishing Rural Familialism and Rural Community Unity

I watch my oldest sister – Sarah – chase her little girl around the house as I sit talking with our middle sister, Stephanie.

Well, I guess they're technically my cousins, but I've lived with them all my life... they're more like sisters. I laugh to myself as Sarah finally catches her little one, scooping her up breaking out in a giggle fit.

“So, Ella, how was your first semester at Tallgrass?” Stephanie asks, unable to silence her laughs at her older sister and niece.

“Oh, I guess it was alright. I’m just glad to be done with finals right now.” We chat for a few minutes about finals before Sarah chimes in, “Did things ever get better with... oh what’s her name? Your friend you were living with in the dorms?”

“No, not really. We’re going to see how things go this semester I guess.” *I’m not holding my breath.*

“Well, I hope you two can work things out.” Stephanie adds, “So what are we taking this spring? Still going with something in business?”

“Yeah, maybe... Just kind of the normal stuff I guess, English and math... Something else I can’t remember right now... Oh! And I’m going to take this, like, ‘running a business’ class. That one sounds kind of interesting. And the lady I used to babysit for said I can talk to her about that kind of thing anytime if I’m interested. So that’s kind of cool.”

“Oh yeah!” Stephanie adds, “Who was that again? I can’t remember what she does.”

“Liz Johnson. Her and her husband own the insurance agency the town over. She heard that I might want to do something like that, so she wanted to have coffee sometime and show me more about what it’s like on a normal day.”

Excited that I'm looking into something specific, Stephanie adds "I think that's a great idea! Dental Hygiene just wasn't for you then?"

I cringe, "Yeah, no. Just, no." The three of us laugh, mostly at my reaction.

Sarah, placing her daughter in the highchair for lunch, "Well, you know if you ever want to see more of what I do in the finance side, I'd be more than happy to show you!"

I nod, knowing she would be thrilled if I got into finance. *Too much math for me.*

"Remind me, Ella, what was it that got you thinking of a business degree in the first place?"

Throwing together our sandwiches, I think back... "Well, honestly probably Mrs. Smith in high school... She taught my business class and told me that it might be a good major if I wasn't sure what I wanted. That and Tallgrass had it.

So many people go there and seem to have had a good experience, or their kids were there – like my coaches' daughters and the counselor's son were all there."

Taking a bite, Stephanie adds, "Yeah. I still think Tallgrass was a really good option for you. I remember the three of us talking through it when you decided to take that one college class in high school. It just made sense."

"Mhmm." I swallow, "It's close enough so I can come home when I want, but I'm still 'in college'. It's just weird, you know? Like being in town, it's not like here where everyone knows you and will stop and help you if you need it."

They both nod, having gone to college in other bigger towns.

“Yeah, I remember feeling like that. But does it still feel like a good steppingstone?”

“Yeah, plus I get to show Dad that I can do it... and that it is worth my time.”

They both chuckle a bit at my smirk.

“You both have done so well for yourselves, and you’re so good at what you do.

I want that. I want to show that I can put in the effort too. That I can be good at what I decide to do and that I can do something good for myself. And that it’s not a waste of time!”

They both wrap their arms around me as Sarah says encouragingly, “We know you’re going to do wonderful things Ella.”

Stephanie pulls back to look me square in the eye without letting go, “And we’re going to be there when you walk across that stage. Screaming and embarrassing the heck out of you.”

We all laugh and turn our conversation to lighter things as we finish our lunch.

The first scene introduced us to Ella as well as her sisters over the holiday break, picking up where Mason’s narrative left off. The introduction of her sisters as well as their interactions show the importance of rural familialism in Ella’s case. Ella had relationships with her older sisters and her aunt that provided her with the skills and knowledge she needed to pursue college. Although Ella met mixed messages, the influence of her aunt and sisters directly impacted development of community cultural wealth in aspirational, familial, and navigational capital. By watching her sisters experience college, Ella learned a lot about what she did not want to do for a career, building aspirational capital and college knowledge. They also encouraged her to consider community college as an option. Furthermore, Ella developed

familial capital because the female figures in her life built this expectation of college going. In contrast, Ella's uncle questions her ability to be successful in college, motivating her to prove him wrong and thus building resistant capital. Lastly, Ella built navigational capital through her sisters because they helped her learn how to consider different majors and college options. Ella applied these facets of community cultural wealth by pursuing a major and college that fit those aspirations and utilizing the navigational capital built through her sisters. Specifically, Ella's community cultural wealth contributed to college knowledge because she sought out information regarding specific majors and colleges.

This scene also introduced Ella's concept of rural cultural unity and how it shaped her college aspirations. She was exposed to the idea of business majors as well as her community college through non-kin relationships such as neighbors, teachers, and the academic advisor at her high school. These relationships provided her with information through conversations and seminars as well as encouragement. Ella's relationships exposed her to information about each of their own experiences impacting her aspirations. Furthermore, Ella benefitted from seeing people in her community experience life at her community college. This helped her to feel a connection and familiarity with the college before starting her coursework there. It is evident that Ella built aspects of community cultural wealth through this concept of rural community unity and applied them to her pursuit of college.

Changing Tides – Connecting Community to Rural Resourcefulness

Fast forward and it's just a week before the start of the spring semester. I've moved back into the dorms with my high school friend, at least for the time being. Propped up on my bed, with my laptop I'm looking to see what books I'm going to need when I see an email from my academic advisor:

“Hi Ella – I’m sorry for the late notice but it looks like your English II class was cancelled. Can you stop by today and we’ll get a different section added to your schedule? I’ll be here for drop-ins until 5:00 today. Hope to see you then!”

Well, that sucks. I guess I’ll run over there real quick, it’s not super cold right now.

As I grab my keys my roommate unlocks the door, “Hey” we half grunt at each other as I slide out of the door.

It looks like advising is a little busy, but Ms. Lee gets to me in just a few minutes. “Hi Ella! Thank you for coming, I didn’t expect to see you so quickly! I’m going to pull up your records really fast... How was your break?!”

We chat for just a few minutes; I’ve only met with Ms. Lee once or twice, but she seems nice enough.

At least I know I can come to her when I have questions.

“Ok, so the English II class you were in got cancelled because not enough people were in that one, but we have some other options we can just switch you into depending on what your work schedule is like.”

She already has a list pulled up of the options and spins the monitor around so I can see.

“I was going to say, if those don’t work, we could wait on that one and take Intro to Business or Public Speaking, but you took those in high school.”

I nod, looking at the list of English classes, “Yeah, my high school had a couple classes with Tallgrass. Uh... how about that one?” I ask, pointing at one of the options.

Double checking for conflicts, “That’s awesome! Is that what convinced you to come here after high school?”

“Mhmm. It kind of showed me that Tallgrass was a good option for me, like ‘Oh, here’s a college I can go to.’ Plus, its close enough to home and I already knew a lot of people who went here in the past from back home.”

“Yeah, that looks like it fits well with everything else you’re in this semester! And that’s cool! I wish I would have had the chance to try a class or two while I was in high school. I’m glad you had a good experience with it and you’re here now!”

Hitting print definitively, Ms. Lee adds, “Okie dokie Ella, you’re all set for spring. Let me grab your updated schedule. I did go ahead and print off a book list for you just in case you wanted a hard copy too. Let me know if there’s ever anything you need!”

I thank her as I take my new schedule and head back to my dorm.

In this second scene, Ella returned to campus before the start of the spring semester, currently still living on campus with her friend from high school. Through their interactions we get a glimpse of the strain on their relationship and a possible loss of community for Ella. As Ella interacts with the college advisor, it is evident that she has learned how to forge new connections with non-kin authority figures that she can leverage when needed as she runs into possible roadblocks. Through this conversation, it becomes evident that Ella views the college itself as a resource to be used and that her experiences with high school concurrent courses helped her to understand it in that way.

Ella pursued an education at the community college because it allowed her an affordable option that was close to home. This closeness provided her with the ability to return home when she wanted. It also gave her a sense of peace and community because she was already familiar with the town and had watched several community members complete an education there. Ella utilized her resources in high school such as dual credit and specific teachers to gain experience with the college thus increasing her comfort level with enrolling there after college.

Furthermore, Ella utilized her previous experiences in high school and with her community as she grappled with major and career aspirations. She chose a major that was broad because it would allow her flexibility until she could narrow down her goals. She also learned how to use the resource of her academic advisor in college. While enrollment was scary to begin with, she utilized this resource instead of running from the barrier. Ultimately, Ella expressed that attending college itself was in-fact resourcefulness, stating that a college education shows, “that you’ve put effort in to go further in life, I think is what it means... And you want to do better for yourself.” Ella built aspects of community cultural wealth through rural resourcefulness by taking advantage of the resources she had at hand and using them to reach her goals and provide a future for herself. In this way, community cultural wealth was applied to her pursuit of college and contributed to her knowledge about what a community college could do, as well as major options and careers she could pursue.

Group Projects – Creating a New Sense of Community

Friday afternoon, a few weeks later the spring semester is in full swing. My roommate’s side is already empty as she’s already moved out. As I pack up my dorm room I think about the last few weeks and last semester.

This is for the best; we just weren't good at being roommates.

Knock! Knock! I finish folding the blanket I was working on and open the door.

“Hey babe!” It’s my boyfriend Zach here to help me with the last load of my stuff. “Are you almost ready?” he says with a hug.

“Yeah, this is the last box and then I’m ready to take it to our apartment.” He decided to move out over break, and with everything going on, it just made so much more sense for me to move in too. *This is going to be great!*

The next day, I take a break from math homework to put away some of my clothes. *This already feels more like home than the dorm did.* I make good progress on my boxes as well as my homework before starting dinner.

By the time he gets home from work, dinner is almost ready, and I’ve found a decent movie for us to watch while we eat and finish unpacking my things.

Monday morning, I grab my bag and we hop in the car together to get to our classes; it’s too cold to walk right now anyways!

I make it to English II just a few minutes before the start of class. “Alright everyone! You’ve been making really good progress on your first essay this semester. Now it’s time to do our peer review.”

As our professor moves through one half of the class, she explains, “Those of you with a piece of paper are picking your partner for this review.”

I reach into the cup and a few pieces stick together, separating one I pull out my partner’s name. *Alright, who is Mason?* Scanning the room, I find my partner and find a neighboring chair.

“Hey, I’m Ella. Mason?”

“Yeah! Hey Ella. You ready for this?”

Our professor quiets the class and explains what we’re to work on. Mason and I get started and the class flies by; the professor interrupting at the end of the period, “Okay. That’s great progress for today. Don’t forget this step is due by next Monday! You’ll have some time to work together in class on Wednesday, but we’ll spend most of our time on the next reading so plan accordingly!”

Mason and I walk out together. “So, I’m going to be gone to a wrestling meet on Wednesday. Can we meet sometime before Monday to finish? If you’re busy that’s OK.”

I think about my schedule for a moment, “Yeah that sounds like a good idea.

What’s your number? I don’t remember my work schedule right now, but I can text you later and we can figure it out.”

“Sweet. Thanks for understanding. Here’s my number, just let me know.”

Mason waves as we head in opposite directions.

I have just a couple minutes to grab coffee and look at my work schedule before my next class.

Hmm... I don’t work Saturday morning. I wonder if 10:00 would work. I shoot

Mason a quick text before grabbing my cup and heading to my business class.

Grabbing a seat near the back, I smile at the woman next to me and I wonder what she’s like. She seems like she might be in her late 20s or early 30s and has a few really cool tattoos.

Mr. Tate – the professor – strolls in, “Hey everyone! So, we’ve been talking about different types of businesses. Can anyone remind the class what an LLC is?”

The woman next to me raises her, as Mr. Tate calls on her, she answers confidently. He goes on lecturing for a few minutes before leading us into our next project. “So, I know you’re all going to hate me for this but you’re going to write a business plan with a partner.” The class groans annoyed. “I know, I know. But! You get to pick your own partners! Pairs and one group of three... Ready! Go!”

Panicking, I look up as the woman next to me does the same. “Partners?” we say in unison, making us both grin.

“I’m Rebecca.”

“Hey, I’m Ella”

We chat for a few minutes before Mr. Tate hands out the instructions for the project. “So, this is what I’m expecting, this will be your final project for the semester, so you’ll have the rest of the term to work on it. Most of it is going to be outside of class so make sure to exchange contact info before you leave today... Actually, now this is the one time I’ll say this so don’t miss it! Get your phones out right now and make sure you save your partner’s info.”

A minute or two goes by and he resumes his lecture moving on to other types of businesses. As we gather our things to leave, Rebecca and I say goodbye and she promises to text me after work to figure out when we can get started.

I don't work on Monday's, so I head to the library to finish up homework for tomorrow's classes while I wait for Zach to get done.

The next couple of hours fly by.

Two group projects in one day... I guess I really am going to have to meet new people this semester, I laugh to myself. Maybe I'll decide to join a club or something... Or maybe in the fall.

Just then, Zach walks through the door, a huge smile on his face.

Right now, this is what I need.

I give him a hug before he takes my backpack, and we head home for the evening.

In this last scene Ella's roommate has moved out of their dorm and she prepares to move to an apartment with her boyfriend, who she also knew from high school. This scene is important to Ella's story because it showcases how she is losing touch with some of her rural community while holding on to other pieces and building new networks within college. First, we find that Ella is partnered with Mason from the previous narrative. Secondly, Ella is paired with another woman – Rebecca – in another course. While they may not have ever met in actuality, it is quite likely that they would cross paths in this way. These interactions showcase Ella's ability and desire to create new relationships and networks within her college atmosphere. I will further discuss this in the social capital section below.

Ella and Aspirational Capital

So far, I have mentioned how Ella's rural community unity, rural familialism, and rural resourcefulness have developed her community cultural wealth, especially in the case of aspirational capital. Thus, I will now focus on how she applied aspirational capital to her

pursuit of college. There were originally close to 40 individual codes for aspirational capital, most of which were direct quotes. The main theme was that Ella applied her aspirational capital – her dreams of a better-paying career – to pursue an education at the local community college. Thus, her aspirational capital motivated her to learn more about her college options, increasing her college knowledge.

Ella and Social Capital

It was evident that Ella had the ability to build social capital as showcased by her strong sense of rural community unity. That being said, there was no evidence that she had already built a network of people or resources in college yet. I found that she had the desire to do so during her second year of college as she increased her involvement and connections with resources on campus. This can be evidenced through a burgeoning relationship with her academic advisor as well as new relationships with classmates as well as her intention to become more involved with activities.

Ella and Navigational Capital

In the previous sections, I briefly discussed how Ella developed navigational capital through rural community unity, rural familialism, and rural resourcefulness. It is then important to understand the application of navigational capital to her pursuit of college. She stated, “[my high school] exposed me to a lot of [college] information. And since I could take classes, that was a big eye opener. I was like, ‘Oh, here’s a college I can go to.’” Namely, Ella utilized the skills she learned through her high school resources and teachers to successfully apply to and enroll in college. This shows a direct link from Ella’s rural cultural wealth to navigational capital, to her development of college-knowledge and pursuit of a college education.

Ella, Resistant Capital, and Familial Capital

While there were no codes mapped to resistant capital and familial capital during first-cycle coding, it later became evident that Ella built both capitals as she navigated her complicated family dynamic. Specifically, she developed resistant capital by wanting to show her uncle that she could, in fact, be successful in college. On the flip side, she built familial capital through her sisters and aunt as they expected her to go to college and be successful. Both resistant capital and familial capital were applied to her pursuit of college because they directly impacted her aspirations. Furthermore, these two aspects of community cultural wealth contributed to her college knowledge, again because she sought out information that fit her aspirations.

Ella's Summary

In summary, Ella developed community cultural wealth through rural cultural wealth much like the aforementioned participants. Similarly, Ella's aspirational capital was her most developed aspect of community cultural wealth. Aspirational capital was widely applied to her pursuit of college as she sought a major that would secure a sustainable career. In this way, aspirational capital also contributed to college knowledge for Ella giving her the motivation to learn specific information to go after what she wanted.

Rebecca

Rebecca is the last of five participants and was the only non-traditional student in this study. Rebecca was nearing the end of her third associate degree – second at Tallgrass specifically. Looking for a career change, Tallgrass and its programs fit her needs as she balanced work and a family. Rebecca did not currently participate in an on-campus activity, nor did she have a scholarship like many of the other participants. That being said, during her

first stint at Tallgrass she was involved in an activity that secured a tuition and book scholarship. Rebecca also spent a short time in the military before having to leave for personal reasons. Lastly, Rebecca as well as her family members worked for Tallgrass, and the nature of their employment has been changed as to protect confidentiality. Similarly, to other participants, Rebecca did not showcase strong attributes in rural ingenuity, linguistic capital, or social capital. Through the narrative and summary below, I will explain the applicable aspects of rural cultural wealth and community cultural wealth and how they address each research question for Rebecca.

The Matriarchs – A Strong Sense of Rural Familialism

“OK, thanks. I will text you after work tonight and we can figure out when to get started on our business plan.” I say my goodbye to my new partner, Ella.

I check my phone as I walk toward the library, *just enough time to stop by Mom’s office and grab lunch before heading to work.*

I wave to the receptionist and sneak into my mom’s office as she hangs up her phone. “Hey Rebecca! Eating lunch with me today?”

Somewhat hurriedly, I respond, “Yep, just really quick though. Then back to the ranch to finish up for the day.”

We walk to the breakroom and pop our lunches in the microwave as she asks, “How many lessons do you have this afternoon?”

I think for a moment, “Just a few kids after school. I should finish up with that by about 5:00 or so and then everything else by 6:30. You’ve got Sophie after school, right? Caleb doesn’t get off work until late tonight.”

“Yep! I’m going to have her help me bake cookies tonight!” Mom adds excitedly.

Finishing up my lunch, “I don’t have any riding lessons on Friday, but I have a group project to get started on, so I might not be able to work my full shift here.”

“OK, I’ll just see you when you can. If you can’t get to everything this week, it will still be here!” she smiles as she puts away her Tupperware.

“Cool. I’ll see you tonight when I pick up Sophie. Thanks again!” I say goodbye as I head off to the horse ranch.

That evening, I stop at my mom’s to pick up my stepdaughter. I pull into my parents’ driveway, parking behind my grandma’s car.

She must be staying for dinner.

Walking through the front door, Sophie hugs my leg, “Mom! I helped grandma make cookies!” Excited, she pulls me into the kitchen where I find my mom stirring a pot on the stove and my grandmother at the kitchen table.

“You’re just in time for dinner. How was your day sweetie?” Grandma asks as I lean down for a hug, she bristles lovingly because I’ve come directly from the ranch.

I regale them with the events of the day, my mom getting a plate for Sophie.

“Thanks again Mom for watching her today.”

She grins tousling Sophie’s hair, “Of course! I needed my big helper!” Sophie beams with her mouth full of food.

Oh shoot, I need to text Ella. After sending her a quick rundown of my schedule I shove my phone back into my pocket and begin to enjoy dinner.

Dad and Grandpa are working late tonight preparing for the upcoming rodeo.

Sitting here together it hits me that there are four generations of women in this room. I smile to myself, understanding how much their example has taught me, how much they've pushed me.

So many years of hard work, I couldn't ask for better examples for Sophie.

The night flies by as we laugh over the little things that Sophie says. In her five years she's obviously soaked up the tenacity and spirit radiated out from my mom and grandmother.

After dinner, I pack her up in the car and head just down the road to the house we rent from my parents. As I tuck her in, Caleb comes in and kisses us both on the forehead.

"Hey babe, did you eat?" He shakes his head no, "I brought home leftovers from Mom's. Do you want me to heat it up?"

"Yeah, that'd be great. I'll be in after a short bedtime story." He sits at the edge of the bed reading our little girl one of her favorite books.

After she's fallen asleep, he meets me at the kitchen table, and we catch up after a long day.

The first scene of Rebecca's narrative introduces her as a character as she connects with Ella from the previous narrative. Here, we begin to understand how busy Rebecca is, as well as the strong connection she feels to the matriarchs in her family. Rural familialism was the most defined aspect of rural cultural wealth for Rebecca, overwhelmingly showing that while

Rebecca's family had varying viewpoints on the value of a college education, she always felt supported and encouraged. Much of this encouragement came through her mom and grandmother, but also from her grandfather. She also felt a strong tie with her grandfather who served in the military. Lastly, she felt a sense of competition with her oldest brother which also motivated her to pursue a degree and led to her enrollment, and eventually multiple degree completions. This sense of competition was fostered by the college-going expectation within her family.

A New Friend – Introducing Rural Community Unity and Rural Resourcefulness

The next morning, I wake up to a text from Ella, "I have to work on another project Saturday morning at 10:00, but I'm free before or after if that still works!"

"How about the café just across from campus at noon?" *That will give me time to go feed horses beforehand.*

"Sounds good! See ya then!"

The rest of the week flies by between both jobs, chasing after Sophie, and school. Friday, I get to the library after feeding horses and surprise my mom with the fact that I will be there until I have to pick up Sophie from school.

"Yeah, today didn't work for my partner so we're meeting tomorrow for lunch after I feed." I start on the odd projects they have stacked up for me. The next thing I know it's time to get Sophie.

I watch her play as I work on homework from the back porch. "Mommy! Come push me!" *This can wait.* Sophie swings her feet wildly on the swing as I cross the yard. "Higher! Higher!" she squeals.

She flies out of the swing as Caleb's pickup pulls up the drive. Wrapping herself around his leg, he tries to walk with a pizza box in one hand and his lunchbox in the other.

Sophie barely makes it through dinner and bath time before falling asleep. As we get ready for bed we catch up and talk about the weekend ahead.

"Yeah, I don't have to finish anything up tomorrow so I can come into town with you. Sophie and me will get lunch and run to the grocery store while you're working on your project."

"Awesome. Then we can go check to see the progress on the house and get the yard mowed tomorrow afternoon?"

"I'll mow, you do homework." He says as he kisses me goodnight and switches off the lamp.

The next morning, I get up early to feed horses then back home to change and load into my car to head to town. Caleb drops me off at the curb of the café before taking Sophie for a burger at her favorite spot.

Ella is already at a table near the back, and I weave my way through the crowd waving when she looks up. "Hey Rebecca!"

"Hey! Thanks for doing this today."

The server strides over to our table, "Have you two been helped yet?!" I give the menu a quick once over while Ella orders.

A few short minutes later, he brings over our sandwiches and drinks. "So, is this your first year at Tallgrass?" I ask between bites.

Nodding, “Yeah, I graduated last year from Dogwood-Reed. Tallgrass was close enough to home, but not too far.”

I chuckle, “Oh! Ok, yeah, I went to Oakville. I think we played y’all some.” I recall back to high school.

“Mhmm! So how about you? Is this your first year at Tallgrass?”

“No,” I smile, “I’ll be done with this degree after this semester.”

“This degree?” Ella raises her eyebrow.

Nodding, “Yeah, I went to Tallgrass for a bit right out of high school before I joined the Navy. Then to a JuCo out west for Ranch Management. And now I’m back...”

“Wow! But, why?” Ella ponders.

I can’t help but laugh at her surprise, “Well, I got a degree in music right after high school because I liked it and got a scholarship. Then decided to go to the Navy, but after I got hurt, I needed something else. I went out there for Ranch Management because they had an Equine department and that’s what I wanted. So, I did that for... um about seven or eight years, I think. I teach riding lessons between here and Oakville. It’s great but I’m ready for something else.”

“That’s crazy. But so cool! What are you going to do after this semester?”

Chewing my food, I answer, “So, my husband and I are going to start our own home design business. He works in construction now, and I’m finishing up Architecture Assistant so I can help with that part. Plus, the business course we’re in is going to help with the business end.”

“That sounds so cool!” eager to get started Ella asks, “Actually, I know we’re supposed to come up with a business plan for class, and I didn’t have any specific ideas. Do you want to do that for our project?”

Surprised she doesn’t have anything in mind, “Yeah... You don’t have anything specific you’d want to do it over?”

“Mmm, not really. I thought about a tattoo shop. I noticed you had a few cool ones, and my biological dad does that for a living. But I really like the home design business idea!”

We agree that it makes for a good project and chat for a few minutes about tattoos and our families before lining out what we need to do for the project over the next few weeks. As we leave, I introduce her to Caleb and Sophie who raves about her burger before heading home.

The next scene focused on Rebecca’s busy schedule as she fits her meeting with Ella in around multiple jobs, school, and her young family. It is important to note the supportive nature of Rebecca’s husband, who also represents rural familialism in her case. Through her interactions with Ella, we are introduced to Rebecca’s multiple degrees and connection to the military. As they chat, they find out that they went to similar high schools not far away establishing a connection and budding sense of community between them. This scene also introduces us to the idea that Rebecca had a strong connection with music and other resources encouraged by her high school. These concepts all link back to Rebecca’s rural community unity and rural resourcefulness.

And an Old Friend – Expanding on Community Unity, Resourcefulness, and Familialism

The next Monday, I get through my classes and chat with Ella for a few moments before stopping in to see my mom again for lunch. She's busy so I eat real quick and check my email before heading to the ranch for work.

Weird... an email from Carol Lee?

Escaping for a moment, Mom pops into the breakroom, "Hey, Mom any idea what this is about?" I ask, turning my laptop towards her.

"Oh! Yes, she talked to me this morning! They're looking to talk to some non-traditional students who are graduating this spring. Something about the advisors are wanting to be able to share success stories. I thought you'd be a good one for them to talk with."

"Hmm, alright. I'll see what she needs, if I can fit it in."

"Yeah, I kind of told her you could do it on the clock here if you wanted to."

She adds, popping one of my grapes into her mouth before going back to work.

I smile and roll my eyes at her as I respond to Carol's email.

Jump forward to Friday and I feed horses before meeting Carol for coffee on campus.

"Rebecca! Thank you so much for meeting with me!" she motions to a booth in the corner, already with a drink for both of us. "So, I won't take up too much of your time. We're hoping to talk with some of our non-traditional students graduating this semester and just share their success. I know you and I were both here on a music scholarship right after high school. Can you tell me more about what you've been up to since then and why you're back at Tallgrass?"

We sip our coffee and I tell her about my time in the Navy. “Yeah, my grandpa was in the Navy and always encouraged me to follow my dreams. With that in the back of my mind, and Oakville pushing the military so hard it just seemed like a good option.”

She listened intently as I continued, “After getting hurt, I was looking for something to do with my life when I learned about the equine concentration out west. My family was always into riding and my principal at Oakville... I can still hear him telling me how well he thought I would do working with animals. So, I gave it a shot and fell in love. And I’ve been doing that for the last few years.”

“So, you’re giving riding lessons and helping manage the horse ranch here outside of town?”

“Yeah, and honestly, I love it, but I’m just burnt out. I’m ready for a change of pace. Sophie is getting bigger and will start having her own things soon. Plus, a bump in pay would be really nice.”

Nodding, Carol adds, “Yeah, I get that! So, you came back for **another** degree! That is quite the feat with everything you’re balancing.”

“Yeah, I guess. My mom and my grandma have always made school a priority. For both themselves and me.”

“I can see that with your mom. She finished her master’s in library science when we were singing together, right?”

“Yeah, right after my grandmother did her MBA. It’s like it’s a competition between all of us. Like, in the best way.”

We both laugh for a few minutes; Carol knows my mom from working at Tallgrass.

“So, why come back to Tallgrass for Architecture Assistant?”

“I feel like my mom is all over this story.” We both laugh again, “But really, she told me about the program after I mentioned wanting to start a business with Caleb. I mean, I work here some too, but her being on campus she knew about it and just said ‘Hey, this might interest you.’ So, I looked at it and talked with Caleb and it just fit.”

“That is so cool. I’m so glad to hear that you’re in this together and he’s so supportive. So, you’re going into business together when you’re done?”

“Yeah, he already works in the industry and my family has connections there too, so it’s more like branching out on our own than something brand new.”

In awe, Carol adds, “I know it’s been a really long time since we’ve seen each other, I’m just glad you had the time to chat. Your story is just so inspiring, other people need to hear it.”

We reminisce for a while and catch up on life since college before both returning to work.

Chatting with Carol really made me think about how influential my mom and grandma have been. Between them and Caleb, and my principal I just always felt like I could do whatever I set my mind to.

In this last scene Rebecca is asked to sit down with an old friend – Ms. Carol Lee, as introduced in Ella’s story - that works for Tallgrass to discuss her life as a non-traditional student. Through this conversation the influences of rural community unity, rural

resourcefulness, and rural familialism become more evident as she reflects on her many college choices over the years. Much like the specifics of her family members, Rebecca's relationship with Carol has been changed to further protect confidentiality.

Rebecca's rural community unity was strongly connected to her high school experiences namely through her principal, counselor, and music education. These non-kin relationships also connected Rebecca with resources, building her sense of rural resourcefulness. Specifically, music was a resource developed through rural community unity that led to a scholarship for Rebecca. This was one way that rural resourcefulness helped to develop her community cultural wealth. Similarly, she used other resources that reduced her cost of attendance to make college a reality. Furthermore, her experience with animals growing up – and her desire to know how to care for them in the face of obstacles – shows how she utilized her socio-contextual adversities to build community cultural wealth. Rebecca also faced burn out from a job, which in turn she utilized as a catalyst to go back to school and change careers. In this way, Rebecca worked against those barriers to find colleges that met her program, cost, and location needs. Like other participants, Rebecca utilized college as a resource to reach specific goals. When asked what a college education meant to her, she indicated that college was a practical resource she used to meet career and salary needs.

As mentioned above, Rebecca had a strong sense of rural familialism. This connection was also evident in the relationship she had with her grandfather who also encouraged her aspirations to join the military. This along with the information and resources provided by her counselor in connection with the ASVAB influenced community cultural wealth as well.

Rebecca and Aspirational Capital

Rural community unity, rural resourcefulness, and rural familialism all contributed to Rebecca's sense of aspirational capital. Highlighting the importance of a high school community, her principal increased her aspirational capital through encouragement and support even through difficult academic periods. In contrast, her counselor did not provide college guidance, but instead provided information about military options which also led to increased aspirational capital. Rebecca's aspirational capital motivated her to gain more information about desired career fields and how she could reach those goals, directly relating aspirational capital to the development of college knowledge.

Rebecca and Navigational Capital

Navigational capital was mainly developed through Rebecca's mother and grandmother as they both worked for one of the colleges she attended. Furthermore, she developed navigational capital through rural resourcefulness as she used barriers or socio-contextual adversities as motivators to learn more about college programs. Second cycle coding showed that she used her navigational capital to effectively research college programs thus contributing to college knowledge. She also utilized navigational capital to navigate applications to multiple colleges and enroll in courses required to help her reach her goals.

Rebecca and Familial Capital

As noted earlier, rural familialism contributed to familial capital for Rebecca. Consistent with other participants, Rebecca's family established a culture of college-going where Rebecca was expected to attend college even if her family didn't always see eye to eye on the concept. This was mainly facilitated through the matriarchs of her family, as she applied this capital indirectly through aspirational and navigational capitals.

Rebecca's Summary

Developed through aspects of rural cultural wealth, Rebecca applied community cultural wealth to her pursuit of college including aspirational capital, navigational capital and familial capital. Overall, she utilized community cultural wealth – namely aspirational capital – as motivation to gain college knowledge. This was evidenced by the fact that she sought out majors and careers that fit specific goals while building college knowledge and utilizing those resources to those reach goals.

Cross-Case Summary of Research Questions

Considering the five narratives above, there were clear themes that emerged, addressing each of the research questions.

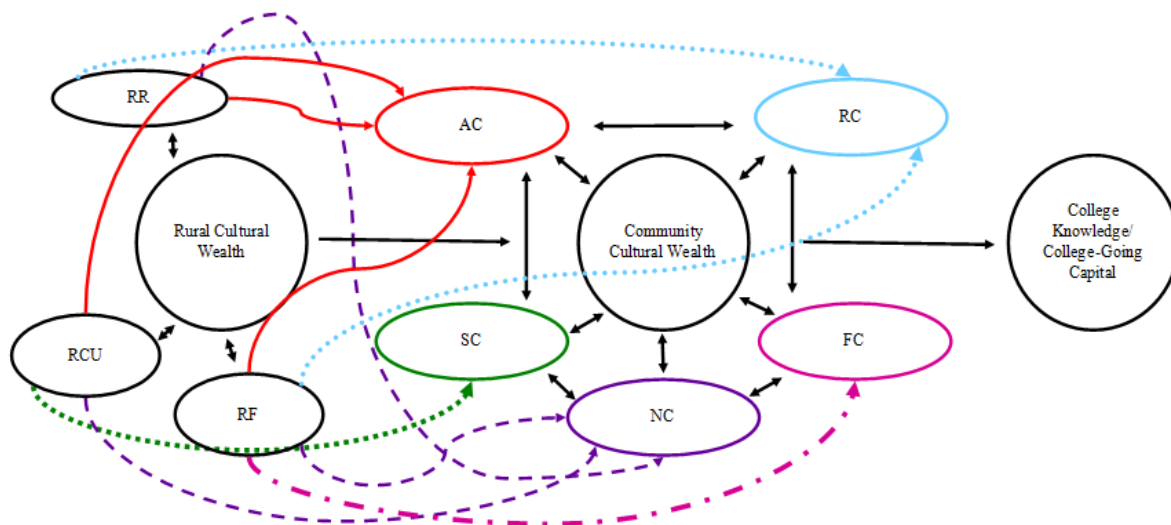
Research Question 1: How do rural students describe how they develop community cultural wealth?

As discussed in each participant's summary, rural cultural wealth led to the development of community cultural wealth for the participants in this study. It is important to note that not every participant exhibited each form of capital within community cultural wealth, nor was there a strong connection to linguistic capital for the five participants of this study. While each participant may have operationalized their respective capitals differently, it was evident that there was a strong connection between the rural cultural wealth and community cultural wealth for these participants.

Chapter Three included summaries of second-cycle codes and themes showing connections between the tenets of rural cultural wealth and community cultural wealth. Figure 4.1 below, is a summary of those connections across all five participants showcasing the interconnection of the two frameworks. The black circles and lines are an adaptation from

Figure 2.1 that showcases the interconnected nature of rural cultural wealth, community cultural wealth, and college knowledge/college-going capital. Each form of capital within community cultural wealth is showcased as a specific color along with the arrows leading from tenets of rural cultural wealth. These arrows identify which tenet related to each form of capital. For example, the five narratives showcased how aspirational capital – shown below as AC in orange - was developed through rural resistance (RR), rural community unity (RCU), and rural familialism (RF).

Figure 4.1 *Summary of Connections between RCW and CCW*



As each participant told their story, they described how important rural cultural wealth facilitators were to their development of community cultural wealth. These facilitators became champions for each participant, helping them to develop unique capitals as they pursued college. These facilitators included people, educational institutions, and programming that was available to the five participants. These facilitators can be categorized into three of the four concepts of rural cultural wealth: rural familialism, rural community unity, and rural

resourcefulness (Crumb et al., 2022). It is important to note that connections with rural ingenuity nor rural ingenuity facilitators were identified in this study.

Rural Familialism and Facilitators

Rural familialism refers to the kin relationships held by rural communities that may provide their students with skills and knowledge to pursue college (Crumb et al., 2022). This study found that all five participants in this study showcased some evidence of rural familialism that created a culture of college-going. Immediate family members such as biological parents, siblings, and grandparents created college-going expectations and exposed Hannah, Joshua, and Rebecca to career and major opportunities. These rural familialism facilitators are directly tied to their development of aspirational, familial, and navigational capital or a combination of those concepts. Conversely, Mason and Ella faced mixed messages within their family units.

Ella's immediate family consisted of her aunt, uncle, and cousins which later became her adoptive family who she often referred to as her mom, dad, sisters, and little brother. Different family members provided her with different levels of support. For example, her dad often questioned her ability to do well in college, and ultimately discouraged her from attending in the first place, stating that it would not be worth her time. Fortunately, her sisters were actively supportive of her college pursuits, often discussing college, major, and career options with her. As she reflected, she mentioned how influential it was to watch her sisters as they experienced college, stating that she learned a lot about what she did not want to pursue as a major and a career. Furthermore, those sisters specifically encouraged her to consider community college as an option as she was considering life after high school. Ella's adoptive mom was less active in encouraging her college-going. Ella reflected on the idea that she could

not really talk to her adoptive mom about college while she was growing up, but once she was accepted to Tallgrass, her mom was supportive and excited for her next step.

When he was a small child, Mason lived with his mother before being raised by a combination of his grandparents and later, his aunt and uncle, unlike Ella, he was not adopted by his extended family members. As Mason discussed his family, he shared the complicated dynamic pointing out that his experiences with his mom growing up had an impact on his career aspirations. Specifically, he discussed that while he was in his mother's care, she struggled with substance abuse and addiction in addition to a rotating stream of boyfriends that would often spend time around young Mason. Exposure to these situations motivated Mason to pursue a career in which he could help children. First, he considered a career in community policing then turned his aspirations towards education when he felt the direct impact it had on his life. Mason's aspirations to become a cop were unsupported by his grandparents as they encouraged him to focus on a career that would be safer and utilize his mind instead of putting himself in harm's way on a daily basis. While his grandparents were actively supportive of college, his aunt and uncle were more passive in their supports, neither directly discouraging nor encouraging him.

Rural Community Unity and Facilitators

This study also found that rural community unity facilitators aided in the development of community cultural wealth. Participants identified that their high schools as well as Tallgrass Community College became instrumental in the development of their community cultural wealth including aspirational capital, social capital, and navigational capital.

Connections to their rural high school in the form of a specific teacher, counselor, coach, or principal created informal mentoring opportunities for the participants. Mason

benefitted from these informal mentoring relationships with facilitators such as his teacher/coach, high school librarian, and high school counselor which provided him with the skills and knowledge needed to pursue college. While no students cited specific programs like GEAR UP, Mason and Ella benefitted from dual credit or concurrent education, college visits, and exposure to other college resources like scholarships. Like Mason, Ella also leveraged her sense of rural community unity and its facilitators in place of a strong *familial* college-going expectation. Ella's rural community unity facilitator also came through her high school including teachers and her high school academic advisor as well as neighbor from whom she babysat when she was younger. It is interesting to note that while Mason and Ella had the least developed sense of rural familialism, they leaned more heavily on rural community unity which provided them with a similar culture of college-going. In this way, they leveraged a strong sense of rural community unity rather than letting a lack of rural familialism stand in their way.

While the other participants may not have relied on their rural community unity as much as Mason or Ella, rural community unity facilitators were still important to Hannah's, Joshua's, and Rebecca's pursuit of college. For example, Hannah dealt with a lack of connection to her hometown, but still benefited from a sense of rural community unity and a strong facilitator in the form of her former coach and a principal as represented by Principal Smith. Joshua mentioned a teacher in high school that encouraged him to pursue his major and utilized her connections to guide him to a scholarship opportunity. Lastly, while Rebecca had a very strong sense of rural familialism, the importance of rural community unity and those facilitators came out in her narrative such as her principal. Thus, non-kin relationships resulting

in informal mentoring opportunities strengthened the aspirational and navigational capitals of the participants.

Hannah, Joshua, Mason, and Rebecca all utilized extracurricular activities to open doors to scholarships. Hannah was intending to play a sport at the collegiate level on a scholarship until she decided not to move that far from home. Instead, she ended up getting a job related to athletics that also provided an activity scholarship while at Tallgrass. Joshua also benefited from a scholarship connected to his extracurricular activities in high school. While this activity was also directly tied to a high school teacher's class it was a club which allowed him to connect with and obtain a related scholarship in college, also covering tuition and books. Furthermore, Mason's involvement in an athletic activity during high school led to his connection with and obtainment of an activity scholarship at Tallgrass. Lastly, Rebecca discussed the importance of her involvement in music during high school. That involvement resulted in another activity scholarship covering tuition and books, not only during her first stint at Tallgrass but also at a subsequent college before she returned to Tallgrass. These scholarships became resources through which participants could pursue their college education. Ella is the only participant who was not on a tuition and book scholarship while attending Tallgrass but mentioned that her high school coaches' children had attended and was able to connect those experiences with her own.

Often, there was a link between their high school resources and the resources available at Tallgrass Community College. Exposure to college campus through tours or dual and concurrent courses were also important resources for the participants. These tours represented exposure to college knowledge and college information for many rural students that they may not get otherwise. Hannah and Mason both discussed how touring campuses helped them

decide what college, but also which major was right for them. Hannah reflected on her choice to attend Tallgrass stating, “most colleges just didn’t feel like the right fit” especially as she navigated the uncertainty of COVID-19. Tallgrass opened its door to three of the five participants of this study by giving them the opportunity to “try out” college before committing to enrolling there full-time. Hannah identified that she took college classes with Tallgrass before enrolling there as a full-time student. While she did not identify these experiences as a big factor in choosing Tallgrass, she discussed how having a class on campus before she graduated high school helped her feel more comfortable with the college once she was there as a college freshman. Furthermore, Mason discussed his dual credit experiences both with Tallgrass and another community college within the area. While taking a block of technical courses at the other community college, Mason was able to explore a possible career path and make the decision that it was not the right fit. During his dual credit courses at Tallgrass, he gained valuable exposure to the college itself, as it was his only experience with Tallgrass’s campuses before enrolling there as a college freshman. Lastly, Ella identified her dual credit experiences with Tallgrass as a large motivator to attend after high school. During her interviews she stated that taking dual credit, “was a big eye opener. I was like, ‘Oh, here’s a college I can go to.’” In short, dual credit courses made Tallgrass attainable for Ella.

Not only did Tallgrass offer resources to these participants, but it also became a resource itself through its proximity, becoming a steppingstone through which, they could accomplish their goals. Joshua mentioned that it was important that Tallgrass was close enough to home that he could commute, “It allowed me to stay home, but it also allowed me to stay within an area that I was comfortable with. I’ve already driven a lot in [the city where Tallgrass is located] and everything, so it was a very familiar area.” Tallgrass represented the best option

to Joshua because he got to complete hands-on coursework without having to sit through four years of courses before starting his career. Like Joshua, Ella appreciated the closeness of Tallgrass to her hometown discussing how she had a lot of friends and community members who had good experiences with the college. During her interviews, she reflected on the fact that Tallgrass was a lot closer to home than other colleges she considered, and that it gave her the flexibility to move to town but also visit home on the weekends and holidays. Ella also shared that she was encouraged to pursue her major because she could get a good job with it without having to spend as much money and attend a four-year college. Mason and Rebecca appreciated the closeness of Tallgrass for slightly different reasons. Location became important to Mason because of in-county tuition rates; before he secured his scholarship, Mason selected Tallgrass because it was cheaper, showing that location can be interconnected to other student needs. Lastly, while Rebecca ultimately did move further away from home for a short time, she appreciated the convenience of Tallgrass both times she attended the college. For her it was a practical solution that fit within her busy work and family life. While this idea of utilizing Tallgrass as a steppingstone did not seem to be at the forefront of Hannah's mind it was evident that is how she viewed it by the time she graduated. She had exposure to four-year colleges but those nor the other two years did not feel like the right place for her.

Rural Resourcefulness

Participants also identified their sense of rural resourcefulness as contributing to their development of community cultural wealth. As noted above, rural familialism and rural community unity featured external facilitators that helped in the development of community cultural wealth; rural resourcefulness was different in this respect as each participants' sense of resourcefulness or resilience became the facilitator in this area contributing to their

development of aspirational and resistant capitals. Each of the participants identified at least one obstacle that could have derailed their college-going, but it was this sense of rural resourcefulness that helped them to overcome these adversities.

For Hannah, this obstacle was COVID-19 and the idea that it could take away her chance to have the college experience and scholarship opportunities. During her interviews, Hannah talked about how Tallgrass ended up being her fallback school after COVID-19 affected her plans of attending another community college to participate in athletics. Her involvement at Tallgrass led to a career and major choice ultimately making the college a steppingstone to those opportunities at a four-year institution. While COVID-19 affected Hannah's choice in colleges, she made the decision that she would not let it take college-going away from her. Thus, her determination to overcome this hurdle is directly connected to her development of community cultural wealth.

Joshua also identified that there was an expectation that much of his graduating high school class would not pursue college. As discussed in rural familialism above, he developed a personal expectation that he would pursue training beyond secondary education. He considered industry credentials over a college education until he was exposed to the opportunities at Tallgrass. When discussing his future hopes and plans he aspired to earn his associate degree and secure a job that paid well in a field he loved. In this way, Joshua's resisted the stereotype that he would not pursue college and enrolled at Tallgrass as a steppingstone into the workforce directly relating his sense of rural resourcefulness to his aspirational capital.

Ella viewed her time at Tallgrass in a similar way, watching her classmates going straight into the workforce made her realize that she wanted to go to college first, but a four-year school was too expensive, at least for now. This norm of entering the workforce directly

after college was also perpetuated by her father as he actively discouraged her from pursuing college, stating that she would not make it and that it would be a waste of her time. She recognized that she wanted more and pushed against this norm and to develop her own college-going aspirations. When asked what a college education meant to her, Ella said, “That you’ve put effort in to go further in life... And that you want to do better for yourself.” Tallgrass thus became the vehicle through which she could take action against socio-economic barriers that could have limited her, directly relating her sense of rural resourcefulness to her development of aspirational and resistant capitals.

Mason identified several hurdles that could have derailed his pursuit of college including limited college-information from being from a small town, as well as his family dynamic. As discussed in the rural familial section above, Mason utilized his experiences with his mom as the motivator to pursue a career in which he could help children avoid similar situations, a career in education. Mason knew that Tallgrass had an academic program that would help him transfer into a teacher education program at a four-year college and thus he sought out those resources accordingly. Mason’s ability to overcome this adversity was also connected to his development of aspirational and resistant capitals.

Lastly, Rebecca identified several barriers that could have threatened her well-being including the cost of college as well as burn-out in her current career. During her first stint at Tallgrass as well as her second degree at another community college, Rebecca sought out scholarships that would help her pay for college. Rebecca’s ability to recognize that the cost of college would be a barrier, and then to take action to mitigate that risk evidences her strength and sense of rural resourcefulness. Later on, Rebecca faced burn out in her career and decided that she was going to do something about it. Returning for a third associate degree, Rebecca’s

resourcefulness helped her to mitigate the limitations that her old career had placed on her life which included psychological barriers like burn out and anxiety, financial constraints, as well as work-life balance constraints that prevented her from spending the time with her young family that she hoped to. In this most recent degree, Rebecca believed that returning to school so that she could open her own business with her husband would help her to overcome these adversities.

In summary, rural students described many ideas and stories that align with the rural cultural wealth constructs. Rural cultural wealth and those facilitators that become their champions. Most participants in the study could be considered at-risk for one reason or another. It was evident that their strengths and resilience were facilitated and encouraged by their champions, and that is what set them apart.

Research Question 2: How do rural students describe how they apply community cultural wealth to their pursuit of college?

The participants applied several tenets of community cultural wealth to their pursuit of college. While several forms of capital helped to develop these goals, aspirational capital was at the forefront of all five narratives, often building from the other tenets of community cultural wealth. The sections below detail the application of each tenet as it applies to the participants' pursuit of community college.

Application of Resistant Capital

Resistant capital was applied in opposition to real or perceived barriers including family or community perceptions of higher education, socioeconomic status, personal attributes, or major life events. These barriers motivated the participants to prove these perceptions wrong and pursue college anyway. For example, Joshua discussed the fact that it

was not the norm for people from his community to pursue college. Ella also experienced negative perceptions of higher education from her adoptive father who thought college would be a waste of time because he did not need it for his profession.

Joshua, Mason, and Ella also discussed the importance of the cost of college as it could have been a deterrent for them to pursue a post-secondary education all together. Each of these three participants discussed how they fought against the idea that they could not afford to attend college by choosing Tallgrass either because it was cheaper than a four-year, because it offered in-county tuition rates, or because it provided them with a scholarship to help cover their costs.

Participants also felt as though someone important in their lives – such as a family member or school official – told them that they could not be successful in college because of their circumstances or personal attributes. For instance, Rebecca discussed how her high school counselor pushed military involvement over a college education making her feel as if she was not “good enough” to pursue college. Additionally, Ella felt that her father discouraged her from going to college because he believed that she would not be successful.

Lastly, Hannah and Rebecca applied their resistant capital to their pursuit of college in opposition to major life events. For Hannah, COVID-19 threatened a college scholarship as well as her college career. Instead of letting the virus take away her college experience all together, she elected to attend Tallgrass as her “backup” just in case COVID-19 got worse again forcing her to return home. In contrast, Rebecca’s most recent degree at Tallgrass was chosen so she could overcome the barrier of burnout and reskill for a change of careers.

Application of Social Capital

Social capital includes networks of people and community resources and was evident in several of the participants' narratives stemming mainly from a sense of rural community unity. As discussed above, non-kin relationships throughout their high school career helped these rural students build social networks which were in turn applied as they pursued college. Specifically, networks with school officials such as coaches, teachers, counselors, and principals connected the participants of this study with resources and skills they needed to make new connections in college.

Joshua's high school networks directly connected his major and future career as well as a scholarship opportunity. This connection put him in direct contact with a key faculty member at Tallgrass with whom he had to interview for his scholarship; without the connection he did not believe he would have known about the major let alone the career or the scholarship. Another example is Mason's application of social capital with his coach and counselor to a major/career and scholarship opportunity at the community college, respectively. His experiences with his coach exposed him to the idea of coaching and teaching as a profession. Furthermore, his high school counselor had a direct connection to the person who would be his coach at Tallgrass; without the contact from his coach at Tallgrass to his counselor Mason did not believe he would have considered trying out for his activity or even known about the scholarship. Each of these examples illustrates how the participants utilized their existing social networks to both develop new ones and connect with resources at Tallgrass, most notably scholarship opportunities.

In contrast, Ella's social networks with a previous boss, teachers, coaches, and counselors helped her to understand the major and career opportunities available to her by attending Tallgrass. She utilized her social networks – or capital – to explore college majors

and her options of where she could attend after high school. I will discuss this concept more as it relates to the acquisition of college knowledge.

Application of Navigational Capital

Navigational capital refers to the ability to traverse social institutions like higher education including college applications, scholarship applications, enrollment procedures, and the FAFSA. Navigational capital for the participants often developed similarly to social capital but was applied to the pursuit of college namely through applications and enrollment. Joshua and Mason discussed how their connections (social capital from their rural cultural wealth facilitators) helped them learn when to apply to Tallgrass, but also how to navigate the enrollment and financial aid processes. Similarly, Ella utilized her high school resources to develop and apply navigational capital. For example, Ella was able to take dual credit coursework through a partnership between her high school and Tallgrass; she reflected on the fact that it was this exposure that helped her learn how to navigate college classes and feel like she could be successful taking more coursework at Tallgrass after graduating from high school. In addition, Hannah applied navigational capital as she sought to transfer to a four-year college. She was aware that she would need to secure letters of recommendation, send transcripts, and apply to her new college as she prepared to complete her time at Tallgrass. Lastly, Rebecca learned how to navigate the college atmosphere during her first two degrees but also at the hand of her matriarchs. These skills were used when she decided to return to Tallgrass for a third degree, which she successfully completed.

Application of Familial Capital

Familial capital includes knowledges and skills that are promoted among family members. For the purpose of this study, familial capital was most commonly the belief that a

college education was important and worthwhile, often creating a culture of college-going within the participants' families. Familial capital was complicated for Mason, Ella, and Rebecca as they received mixed messages from family members regarding the importance of college, but also their ability to do well in post-secondary education. Portions of Mason's family encouraged him to attend college while others did not actively encourage or discourage. Ella and Rebecca on the other hand experienced both active encouragement and discouraging words about college. Ella's sisters were very supportive while her father discouraged her from going, saying that college was not worthwhile but that she also would not do well. Rebecca's mother and grandmother strongly supported her college attendance while several of her siblings also echoed the idea that college was not worthwhile.

While some faced mixed-messages, participants applied familial capital to their pursuit of college namely through its contribution to aspirational capital. All five participants had at least one family member that expected them to attend college, several of which felt that it was not an option for them not to go. Their familial capital thus came most strongly through a culture of college-going spurred on by one or more of their facilitators and champions within their homes.

Application of Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital is "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). This form of capital was evidenced across all five narratives in this study and was one of the most consistently applied tenets of community cultural wealth. Furthermore, aspirational capital was directly tied with the other forms of capital as evidenced by Yosso's (2005) representation of her work. This

study found that aspirational capital was often the motivation behind rural students' pursuit of a college education.

For example, Hannah aspired to pursue a career in division one athletics even though she faced hurdles such as sexism and COVID-19. She was motivated to overcome these barriers and utilized that as a catalyst to pursue her dreams. Similarly, Joshua pushed back against the barriers of location, finances, and cultural norms as he took steps to enroll in a major that he was interested in. Mason also faced hurdles like his family dynamic and finances but knew that he wanted more for himself. Instead of letting these things impede his dreams, he still hoped for a career in education and took the steps he knew he needed to, to get there. Both Ella and Rebecca had similar applications of aspirational capital, facing their own potential deterrents but deciding to hold on to their hopes for better careers. In summary, the participants of this study sought enjoyable careers which would give them access to a living wage and it was these dreams that helped them stand up to adversity.

Research Question 3: How does community cultural wealth contribute to college knowledge for rural students?

While community cultural wealth encouraged the cultivation of college knowledge in several ways, this study found that aspirational capital was among the most important contributor. For example, Hannah's aspired to a career in athletics, motivating her to seek out more information about what it would take to reach that goal. Understanding that she may have to eventually pursue a graduate degree, she considered the long-term ramifications of her decisions making sure to leverage her strengths along the way. Similarly, Joshua's career aspirations pushed him to consider colleges that offered relevant majors utilizing his facilitators to better understand application and enrollment processes as well as secure a

scholarship to help him afford college. Mason was also motivated to obtain college knowledge as he decided to pursue a career in education. Like Joshua, he researched colleges to the best of his ability to find one that offered an associate degree that would be a steppingstone into his chosen career. Mason was the only participant who discussed a reduced tuition rate for in-county students, indicating that he specifically sought out information about the cost of college. Furthermore, Mason discussed being uncomfortable with the enrollment and financial aid process stating, “I had no clue what I was doing. You know, I had zero idea. No one tells us how to do these things.” Even though he was not comfortable with the processes, he leaned his aspirations as well as social and navigational capital to help him maneuver them.

The participants of this study relied heavily on their community cultural wealth, developed through rural cultural wealth and those facilitators, as motivating factors to pursue college knowledge and eventually college enrollment. While several specific resources like family members, high school authority figures, and programming were referenced it was the participants’ application of their capitals – namely aspirational capital - that built up their college knowledge.

Chapter Summary

In summary, the narratives presented above showcase five current, rural students’ stories and their pursuit of a community college education. Each individual story above considers each participant as the main character of their own story while connecting them with common themes, people, and places. These accounts utilize both direct and indirect quotes to add to the authenticity of each narrative while preserving confidentiality of the participants. The discussion above addresses each of the three research questions regarding each participant, but the study population as a whole. The next chapter will include a summary of the study,

interpretation of the findings, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion of the study.

Chapter 5 - Summary and Conclusions

The preceding chapter presented the data in the form of five unique narratives. This chapter consists of a summary of the study, interpretation of the findings, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and conclusion of the study. Later in the chapter, I will expand the understanding of the data, relating it back to previous research on rural cultural wealth, community cultural wealth and college knowledge. Furthermore, the recommendations stated below are to expand on the previous research as it applies to rural students' pursuit of college as it applies to community colleges. Finally, the summary will provide a synthesis of this research.

Summary of the Study

College attendance rates of rural students continue to lag behind their urban and suburban peers (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2015; Byun et al., 2017; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Hlinka et al., 2018; Longhurst, 2014; McDonough et al., 2010; Morton et al., 2018; Tieken, 2016). Rural students are an underserved population that continues to be ignored in a lot of previous research as well as community colleges. Even recent studies that focus on rural students often ignore their strengths, and take place in Appalachia, the rural South, or the rural Northeast (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Harris, 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015; Howley et al., 2013; Morton et al., 2018; Sharp et al., 2020; Theodori & Theodori, 2015; Tieken, 2016; Wright, 2012). This study sought to address the gap in literature by investigating rural student college access, utilizing a strengths-based approach, to explore how rural students build and apply community cultural wealth to pursue college.

This study utilized a three-tiered theoretical framework to address this research purpose including interpretivism (macro-level), narrative inquiry (meso-level), and the combination of community cultural wealth and rural cultural wealth (micro-level). The sections above detailed each of these levels within the study's theoretical perspective. Furthermore, narrative inquiry – specifically creative nonfiction – served as the methodology for this study. In this way, this study sought to answer three research questions:

1. How do rural students describe how they develop community cultural wealth?
2. How do rural students describe how they apply community cultural wealth to their pursuit of college?
3. How does community cultural wealth contribute to college knowledge for rural students?

The study found that rural students develop community cultural wealth through facilitators of rural community wealth, depending on the resources with which they are armed. Secondly, this study found that rural students apply different aspects of community cultural wealth as they build college knowledge and operationalize it to take steps to reach their college-going goals. The sections below further synthesize the findings of this study.

This study addressed all eight of Tracy's (2010) key tenets for excellence in qualitative research: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. Due to current declining enrollment trends as well as a gap in the previous research, this study addressed a worthy topic. To meet the criterion of rich rigor, this study established methodology consistent with Kim (2016). Furthermore, sincerity was addressed through the researcher's subjectivity statement as well as transparency with participants including member checks and self-reflective analytic memos. Credibility was

addressed in this study by utilizing in-depth interviews to produce accurate and engaging narratives to showcase the complexity of participant experiences. Furthermore, this study addressed the tenet of resonance through aesthetic merit capitalizing on evocative and artistic writing styles used in creative nonfiction. To address significant contribution this study by applying well-established conceptual framework to a unique population. Additionally, this study showcased a practical application for this unique population which will be further discussed below.

Great care was taken in this study to address the tenet of ethics which Tracy (2010) argues are paramount to qualitative research. Procedural ethics were addressed by utilizing pseudonyms for each participant as well as hometowns and the institution where the participants were enrolled. Additionally, interview recordings were handled with great care and stored appropriately until they could be transcribed and deleted. Situational ethics were addressed through active reflection on interviews as the researcher considered each participant's needs making sure to be flexible and responsive to those requirements. Furthermore, this study addressed relational ethics by engaging in conversational, in-depth interviews. These interviews along with member checks helped to build rapport with participants and ensure that their stories were accurately and ethically represented. Lastly, this study utilized creative nonfiction to address exiting ethics. This methodology allowed the research to protect the participants through narrative smoothing and the fictionalization of data that would not be possible with other subgenres of narrative inquiry. Creative nonfiction not only addressed exiting ethics but also served as an appropriate choice for this study connecting research design, data collection, and analysis with the theoretical framework thus addressing meaningful coherence.

Interpretation of the Findings

Previous research regarding rural students' pursuit of college often utilizes a deficit model to examine why rural students' college attendance rates are lower than their non-rural counterparts. O'Shea (2015) argues colleges and universities should focus on students' culturally relevant strengths instead of what the students are lacking and how to better prepare them for and help them adjust to the college atmosphere. Authors such as Yosso (2005) and Crumb et al., (2022) used strengths-based perspectives and it was through these frameworks that the research questions for this study were developed. Ultimately, this study found that rural cultural wealth facilitators are essential to the development of community cultural wealth, that aspirational capital is paramount for rural students, and that the development of college knowledge should be a priority for supporting rural students. The following sections discuss each of these themes as connected with previous research.

Rural Cultural Wealth Facilitators are Essential in the Development of Community Cultural Wealth

Recent studies state that parental perception of higher education has an effect on college aspirations and enrollment for rural students and that these students are often met with mixed-messages concerning the importance of college (Ardoin, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2017; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Hlinka et al., 2015; Tieken, 2016). Ardoin (2018) specifically stated that familial facilitators (namely parents/guardians) are especially important for rural students as they are among their key sources of college knowledge. While prior research focused on the importance of parents or legal guardians, Yosso (2005) urged that an extended concept of *familia* is important when considering the impact of college perceptions for under-served students. She stated that

extended family including siblings, grandparents, godparents, aunts/uncles, and cousins can be just as important for building familial capital (Yosso, 2005). It is important to note that rural students' concept of close family did not just include their biological parents but also included adopted parents, other guardians such as aunts, uncles, and grandparents as well as siblings, cousins, or spouses. This concept aligns more closely with Yosso's (2005) concept of *kin* rather than what colleges often expect as the typical family dynamic. This study showed that rural familialism is important to rural students' pursuit of college consistent with these studies.

Previous research also states that community perception of higher education also affects rural students' pursuit of college, but rural students often face mixed messages from their schools and communities (Ardoin, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2017; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Hlinka et al., 2015; Tieken, 2016). Ardoin (2018) specifically mentioned the importance of teachers and counselors stating that public high schools must take steps to address the gaps in college knowledge for rural students. Consistent with recent findings (Ardoin, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2017; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016), this study found that these facilitators also became important in rural student's pursuit of college. These connections represent informal mentoring opportunities as discussed by Sims and Ferrare (2021). Furthermore, Ardoin (2018) stated that rural students receive less information from four-year colleges who rarely recruit from smaller, rural schools. The participants in this study described how important these rural community unity facilitators were to their development of community cultural wealth and pursuit of college.

Participants of this study were also exposed to scholarships through these rural community unity facilitators, consistent with previous research (Ardoin, 2018; Johson & Brophy, 2006; Morton et al., 2018). As described above, high school faculty and staff were

identified as rural community wealth facilitators, in this way the high school itself becomes a resource for students that they can leverage. Thus, it is evident that the participants of this study had strong, non-kin relationships resulting in informal mentoring opportunities strengthening their aspirational and navigational capitals, consistent with previous research (Byun et al., 2012; Sims & Ferrare, 2022).

Ardoin (2018) and Barr (2018) specifically mentioned extracurricular activities, dual credit courses, and college visits as resources that would increase rural students' college aspirations. Ardoin (2018) discussed how certain extracurricular activities such as athletics or leadership are valued by institutions of higher education, while other hobbies such as fishing, or hunting are not. She found that the “valuable” activities often opened avenues for rural students that would look good on college applications or even just expose them to college campuses. Barr (2018) supported this, discussing that trips for extracurricular activities exposed students to the college campus but were often missed opportunities as high schools and colleges did not take advantage of these opportunities to connect students with resources. Neither Ardoin (2018) nor Barr (2018) discussed how these extracurricular activities could become financial resources for students.

Some authors discuss the importance of extracurricular activities as they relate to exposure to college campuses and open opportunities for campus tours (Ardoin, 2018). Howley et al. (2013) also discussed dual or concurrent credit as a resource for rural high school students. Johnson and Brophy (2006) stated that these programs are not only beneficial for post-secondary institutions, but also students, their parents, and high schools. Research suggests that high schools benefit from expanded offerings while parents (and students) benefit from cost savings (Johnson & Brophy, 2006). In addition to dual or concurrent credit

coursework, previous research suggested that proximity is a deciding factor in rural students' pursuit of college (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Harris, 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015). This is consistent with the findings of this study especially in Joshua's, Mason's, Ella's, and Rebecca's accounts.

Community colleges are also seen as facilitators to move rural students from high school to the point of transfer as discussed by Hlinka et al., (2015). Consistent with Hlinka et al. (2015), participants in this study identified Tallgrass Community College as a steppingstone into a four-year college that addressed their needs for proximity, support, and decreased costs. Hannah and Mason both intended to pursue a four-year degree after finishing at Tallgrass. Furthermore, consistent Tieken (2016) and Wright (2012) discussed the idea that a community college education represented an opportunity to secure a better wage while staying connected to their home community, or a similar one. This was consistent with Joshua's, Ella's, and Rebecca's narratives.

Summary of Facilitators

Mitchell's (2007) work examined cultural capital facilitators among first-generation community college students, finding that facilitators were essential to the development of capital. While approached through a different lens, this study found that such facilitators were essential to the development of community cultural wealth for rural students. These facilitators become champions for their students and often include close and distant family members, secondary school officials or community members, and the community college and its resources. Ultimately, it is important that community colleges take the time to see themselves as a facilitator and build connections at rural high schools and recruit in those schools so that they may become a resource for rural students (Ardoin, 2018). While not every rural student

develops community cultural wealth in the same way, it is evident that rural community wealth and those champions are affiliated with the development of community cultural wealth.

Aspirational Capital is Paramount for Rural Students

While each participant had their own unique combination of facilitators who helped them to develop their community cultural wealth, aspirational capital was the most-widely utilized tenet in this study. Previous research points to college aspirations as among the most important factors that contribute to college-going (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Harris 2013, Morton et al., 2018). This is important for rural students because they face the added barrier of lower educational aspirations in comparison to their suburban peers (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2015; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Garcia, 2020; Jaeger et al., 2015; McDonough et al., 2010; Morton et al., 2018; Sharp et al., 2020; Tieken, 2016).

As discussed in Chapter Two, earlier research points towards a connection between college-going resources or experiences and increased college aspirations for rural students often in the form of support and connections through schools and/or families (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Harris, 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015; Morton et al., 2018; Tieken, 2016). For example, Ardoin (2013) discussed the concept of relational capital, stating that, “cultural interactions between children and parents give some children an advantage and create barriers for others as they possess through their educational processes” (p. 36). It is through these experiences, guided by their facilitators, that the participants developed their aspirational capital and decided to pursue college.

Development of College Knowledge Should be Priority for Rural Students

Lastly, these different aspects of community cultural wealth contributed to college knowledge for these rural students through motivation. College knowledge and college-going

capital are related terms that refer to information and concepts about college and financial aid (Ardoin, 2018) as well as the “aspects of social capital and community cultural wealth as they relate to the college-going process” and “the activation of those resources” respectively (Leibbrandt, 2016, p. 14). As discussed earlier, it was their aspirations that motivated the participants of this study to seek out information regarding colleges including majors, financial aid, careers, and the colleges themselves. While the participants showed great strength and determination, they also discussed how difficult it was to gain information about colleges and careers. This is consistent with Ardoin’s (2018) research where she discussed how elusive college jargon is for rural, first-generation students from working-class backgrounds. Thus, it is important for community college to acknowledge the convoluted nature of their institutions and work towards further developing those strengths in their rural students as they prepare for and begin college which I will further discuss below.

Implications for Practice in Community Colleges

Instead of viewing rural students through negative stereotypes, community colleges must see their forms of knowledge and capital as useful (Ardoin, 2018; Tieken, 2014). Furthermore, it is increasingly important – especially in a world of declining enrollment – that community colleges value every student, including rural students within their service areas, rather than focusing all their efforts on students from larger high schools. This is currently not the norm as recent research confirms the idea that colleges often focus their recruitment efforts on larger communities where they get more “bang for their buck” (Ardoin, 2018; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2014; Ganss, 2016).

The main implication for community colleges is a renewed effort to consider and build on strengths of underserved populations like rural students is essential. Community colleges

must consider utilizing non-deficit models such as rural cultural wealth (Crumb et al., 2022) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to inform practice and policy. As mentioned in Chapter Two, recent research suggests that rural students have a more difficult time gaining college knowledge because their exposure to such concepts is limited (Ardoin, 2018; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Ganss, 2016). From this study, it is evident that college knowledge can be increased through further development and application of aspirational capital. I suggest that this be accomplished by partnering with local high schools and communities to further develop a sense of rural community unity.

First, it is important for rural students to see connections between their existing community members and the community college. As evidenced in several of the narratives, this can simply be a personal connection between their high school teacher and a professor or coach at the college. Community colleges can impact this network between rural high schools and the college by becoming more visible within their service areas. For example, science and math faculty at the community college may come together to host events at their local high schools with the intention of both networking with and exposing their high school counterparts to the opportunities that the college offers. Another example would be providing an opportunity for high school coaches to connect with community college coaches. Not only would this provide a professional network for the coaching staff, but students would benefit from the resulting connections and may be exposed to more resources such as the idea that they can get a scholarship to play their sport at the local community college.

Second, it is important for students to experience college information within the comfort of their communities. Ardoin (2018) and Gannon (2022) both indicated that rural students often feel undervalued by local colleges due to the size of their high school even when

located within their service areas. Furthermore, research indicates that college-going resources and experiences increase college aspirations for rural students (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Harris 2013, Morton et al., 2018). Community colleges can address this issue by renewing their focus on local students, especially those from smaller schools. I suggest that this includes strengthening already existing dual and concurrent credit opportunities for students – especially those located within their communities.

Proximity to the community college is a large factor for rural students, both for concurrent options but as well as options after high school (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Byun et al., 2015; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Harris, 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015). Thus, it is incredibly important for rural students to have access to community colleges close to home where they are not required to drive an hour one way to experience what the community college has to offer or connect with those resources. Proximity became a deciding factor for all five participants in the study either due to cost-savings or familiarity, or a combination of the two. Furthermore, Tallgrass provided students with college knowledge exposure and resources including information about college majors, admissions, financial aid, and enrollment that they would not have had access to without a local community college. Thus, it is essential that rural students are within a reasonable driving distance to community colleges to increase college knowledge as well as college access and ultimately enrollment, even if they choose to attend a different school. (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Harris, 2013; Hlinka et al., 2015; Wright, 2012).

Third, like Rebecca, rural students may return to community colleges later in life to reskill for a career change or for professional advancement. Thus, it is important for colleges to make connections within the community and develop coursework that fits the needs of the

local industry. One such way that community colleges can do this is to connect with employers such as the county departments within their service areas to conduct market research and gain information about their unmet workforce needs and then implement both credit and non-credit credentials that fit those needs. This is well within the purview of community colleges as Boggs and McPhail (2016) discussed, as it addresses community needs of both access and success. Another way for community colleges to connect with their community is to be present at local events such as county fairs, homecoming parades, harvest festivals, and athletic events. These events provide the college with direct access to their constituents as well as expose possible students to the programs and resources the college offers.

Lastly, students like Hannah and Joshua were able to connect with instructors and activity sponsors at Tallgrass who facilitated the continuing development of their capitals and college knowledge. Thus, once rural students are in college, they must be encouraged to pursue informal mentoring opportunities with their professors as well as staff members such as academic advisors, financial aid specialists, and student life professionals to build new social and navigational capital (Sims & Ferrare, 2021). Other students in this study evidenced that they had this skill before getting to college, but most had not learned to transfer that to their new college community. Providing students with access to faculty and staff with similar backgrounds and interests not only allows for students to connect with these professionals, but also allows them to envision themselves within those roles.

Recommendations for Further Research

While this study adds to the previous research base surrounding rural students' pursuit of college, there is still work to be done to address current gaps in college enrollment. This study utilized a methodology that focused on unique, individualized narratives limiting the number of participants in the study and decreasing the generalizability of the data. Therefore, further research should include larger scale studies within the same geographic region as well as other understudied geographic regions to broaden the scope of research. I propose that a statewide survey specifically targeting new, in-state, students from rural areas, at Kansas community colleges be considered. This could also be expanded to the other states within the Great Plains region of the United States as much research focuses on other regions.

Additionally, due to the individualized focus, rural ingenuity was not observed because it focuses on a collective ingenuity across rural populations. Furthermore, participants in this study focused on navigational capital rather than linguistic capital, thus further exploration is needed to see if either of these concepts are applicable in rural students' pursuit of college.

Furthermore, this is one of few studies that applies community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to specifically study rural students. As encouraged by previous research (Adsitt, 2017; Ardoin, 2018; Button, 2017; Leibrandt, 2016; Morton et al., 2018; O'Shea, 2015; Sims & Ferrare, 2021; Vasil & McCall, 2017) more research needs to be done to further expand the use of community cultural wealth to more underrepresented populations including, first-generation, low socioeconomic status, and rural students.

Lastly, participants in this study were all from hometowns within the service area of the college. More work should be done to see if these same strengths and applications are apparent

for rural students who attend colleges further from home, or even four-year institutions instead of a community college.

Formal programs and experiences – including dual credit, formal mentorships, extracurricular activities, and college visits - have been shown to increase students' college aspirations (Ardoin, 2018; Barr, 2018; Harris 2013, Morton et al., 2018). No participants in this study identified formal programs like GEAR UP or Upward Bound as influential to their pursuit of college. I suggest that it is essential that further research include quantitative studies to examine how these programs affect rural students' college aspirations on a larger scale. Furthermore, it is imperative that future studies within the same geographic region examine the correlation between dual or concurrent credit, college visits, as well as extracurricular activities and rural students' college aspirations.

Conclusions

This research utilized creative non-fiction to examine the strengths that rural students use to pursue college. This study examined this research purpose through a conceptual framework that included rural cultural wealth, community cultural wealth and college knowledge/college-going capital. Through inductive analysis and narrative analysis, four themes emerged: that rural cultural wealth facilitators are essential, that rural cultural wealth builds community cultural wealth, that aspirational capital is paramount for rural students, and that the development of college knowledge should be a priority for supporting rural students.

Rural cultural wealth facilitators – especially family, community, and community colleges – help rural students to build community cultural wealth through rural cultural wealth. This is important because these facilitators can have a drastic impact on rural students' college aspirations which were found to be among rural students' greatest strengths. This was

evidenced by the fact that the participants utilized their college aspirations as motivating factors to seek information about careers, colleges, majors, coursework, and the steps needed to pursue their dreams including applying, enrollment, and financial aid processes otherwise known as college knowledge or college-going capital. Thus, it is essential that facilitators - especially community colleges - make the development of college knowledge or college-going capital for rural students among their highest priorities.

These findings show that rural cultural wealth and community cultural wealth are applicable and useful while studying rural student's pursuit of college. This suggests that further research should consider utilizing strengths-based perspectives to better support underserved populations in higher education. Furthermore, creative non-fiction served as a valuable way to protect the confidentiality of easily identifiable participants while allowing for their individual voices to be valued. This knowledge contributes to the current base of literature because it showcases the validity of this methodology without jeopardizing rigor or confidentiality.

Lastly, while there were limitations to the study based on population, location, and methodology the findings of this research contribute to the knowledge base as it expands the current use of strengths-based frameworks an underserved population as suggested by previous research (Ardoin, 2018; Crumb et al., 2022; Leibrandt, 2016; McDonough et al., 2010; Morton et al., 2018; O'Shea, 2015; Schwalbe et al., 2000; Sims & Ferrare, 2021; Yosso, 2005). By incorporating rural cultural wealth, community cultural wealth, and college knowledge/college-going capital through creative non-fiction this research has begun to fill a gap in the literature surrounding rural students' pursuit of college.

Not that long ago, I was a student from a small town in this region of Kansas starting my post-secondary education at a community college. Those connections made it easy for me to identify with my participants and quickly develop a strong relationship with them, allowing for honest and open communication about their experiences. As I interviewed the participants in this study, I began to see myself, my family, my friends, and my classmates. These participants told their stories, eventually identifying their personal champions, those who became rural cultural wealth facilitators in their lives, and it reminded me of those who championed my journey. Their tales also reminded me of the people who discouraged me, who made me question if I could make my dreams a reality. I am happy to say, much like the participants in this study, those discouragements only spurred on the pursuit of higher education. I do know that is not the case for many like me – or the participants – and as I reflect over this research and my own experiences, I hope that somehow this work will empower more rural cultural wealth facilitators to support and champion their own students.

I am still a rural student who was the first in their family to complete their associate degree. I am still a woman who wondered why her goals looked different than many of her peers growing up. I am still a community college staff-member and instructor who believes that rural students are strong, and that their unique sense of endurance should be celebrated and built upon. I had a very strong sense of aspirational capital, which I fully know was nurtured at the hands of my rural cultural wealth facilitators, my champions. These champions, just like the champions of the participants, came along side me to help me pave my very own yellow brick road.

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Appendix A - Interview Questions Aligned with Research Questions

Research Question	Conceptual Framework	Interview Questions	Possible Follow Up Questions
RQ1: How do rural students describe how they develop community cultural wealth?	Familial capital, linguistic capital, navigational capital, social capital, aspirational capital, rural familism, rural community unity.	Can you tell me about anyone influential in your life that went to college before you?	
	Navigational capital, college knowledge, college-going capital, rural resourcefulness.	Did you have any experiences with this college before you decided to enroll here?	How about other colleges?
	Aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, navigational capital, social capital, college knowledge, college-going capital.	Can you tell me more about the conversations about college you experienced growing up?	Can you tell me more about what that was like from your perspective? Who was involved with those conversations?

Aspirational capital, resistant capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, navigational capital, social capital, college knowledge, college-going capital, rural resourcefulness.	How was college talked about during your previous school experiences?	Who was involved with those conversations? Was there anyone that discouraged those conversations?
Aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, navigational capital, social capital, college knowledge, college-going capital.	Describe your high school experience.	How did those experiences affect how you thought about college? Or your other options after high school? Are there any memories or stories that you'd like to share?
Aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, navigational capital, social	Think about the experiences or resources you had that exposed you to the idea of	Looking at those artifacts, what do you remember about those experiences? How did

capital, college knowledge, college-going capital.	college or college information. Are there any pictures, emails, brochures that show what those experiences were that you'd like to share?	they impact your thoughts about college?
Aspirational capital, resistant capital, familial capital, navigational capital, social capital, rural familism, rural resourcefulness.	Who expected you to go to college? Or expected you not to pursue college?	What was that like? Do you have any specific memories related to those expectations?
Rural resourcefulness, rural ingenuity, navigational capital, linguistic capital, social capital, college	What types of activities were you involved in growing up especially in high school?	Did that get you interested in college? If so, how?

knowledge, college-going

capital

Aspirational capital, resistant

capital, linguistic capital,

familial capital, navigational

capital, social capital, rural

resourcefulness, rural

ingenuity, rural familism,

rural community unity,

college knowledge, college-

going, capital.

Aspirational capital, college

knowledge, college-going

capital.

Where did you go if you

wanted to talk about your

future or career? Who did

you go to?

Was there anything or anyone

that influenced your college

choices?

What was your dream job

growing up? Was there

anyone who discouraged you

or encouraged you from

pursuing those dreams?

Rural community unity, social capital, aspirational capital, linguistic capital.	Describe your hometown. How did where you grew up affect your perception of college?	Were there any colleges close to your hometown? Or was this one the closest? Did that affect your perception of college in general or this college?
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Familial capital, rural familism, rural community unity, aspirational capital, linguistic capital, navigational capital, social capital, college knowledge, college-going capital.	Describe your family. How did they contribute to you going to college?
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RQ2: How do rural students describe how they apply	Aspirational capital, college knowledge, college-going capital.	Tell me about why you decided to pursue college.
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community cultural wealth to their pursuit of college?	Aspirational capital, college knowledge, college-going capital.	How did you decide to enroll here?	What were the things that made this college the best fit for you at that time?
	Aspirational capital, college-going capital.	Other than the college itself, can you tell me more about what you believe had the biggest influence on your choice to attend college in general?	What about your decision to enroll here?
	Rural resourcefulness, rural ingenuity, navigational capital, resistant capital, linguistic capital, college knowledge.	What was the most difficult part in choosing to attend college?	Did you have any doubts about enrolling in college?

	Aspirational capital, navigational capital, college knowledge.	What was the easiest part in choosing to attend college?	What made those things easy? ?
	Aspirational capital.	What does a college education represent to you?	
RQ3: How does community cultural wealth contribute to college knowledge for rural students?	College knowledge, navigational capital, social capital, rural resourcefulness, familial capital, college-going capital.	How did you learn about college?	
	Aspirational capital, resistant capital, familial capital, social capital, college-going capital, college knowledge, rural community unity.	What made you choose the major you are pursuing?	Can you tell me more about those experiences?

Linguistic capital,	Think back to the first time	Where there things that didn't
navigational capital, social	you were looking at enrolling	make sense?
capital, rural resourcefulness,	in college. What was that like	How did you navigate that?
rural ingenuity, college	for you?	When something was
knowledge.		confusing, what did you do?

Appendix B - Informed Consent

Project Title: Analysis of rural students' pursuit of community college using community cultural wealth: Not Everyone Has a Yellow Brick Road

Project Approval Date:

Project Expiration Date:

Length of Study:

Principal Investigator: Dr. Royce Ann Collins, Associate Professor, Kansas State University

Co-Investigator: Jenna Gannon, Doctoral Candidate, Kansas State University

Contact Details for Problems/Questions:

Dr. Royce Ann Collins, racollin@k-state.edu, 913-307-7353

IRB Chair Contact Information:

Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

Project Sponsors: NA

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this research is to investigate rural student college access utilizing a strengths-based approach to explore how rural students build and apply community cultural wealth to pursue college.

Procedures: If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in three to four interviews approximately one hour long. Most will happen via Zoom with at least one interview conducted in person. We will schedule the interview remotely using a password-protected Zoom link. The video file will be deleted, and the audio file retained for transcription purposes. You will be assigned a pseudonym, and all identifying information will be removed. You will be provided the opportunity to review all interview transcripts for accuracy. Follow-up interviews may be completed to clarify information and allow you to give feedback. We will complete the interviews in a location convenient to you and to recording, for instance your school or your home.

Biological Samples Collected:

Whole genome sequencing will not be included as part of the research.

Not applicable.

Anticipated Risks or Discomforts: There are no expected discomforts or risks related to this study. You may voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher will delete any previously collected information at that time.

Anticipated Benefits: Through involvement in this study, you will have the opportunity to learn yourself and discuss potential strengths and connections you have developed.

Confidentiality: Video recordings will be deleted, and audio files will be transcribed in a timely manner. Audio recordings and transcripts will be retained until the research is complete.

Electronic files will be stored on a password-protected computer and backed up on an external hard drive. If participants contribute artifacts, all identifying data will be removed.

Transcriptions will be destroyed after three years. Some interviews will be conducted via Zoom,

which will require a personal, password-protected video session for each interview. Since it will be via Zoom, participants will also get to select a location they feel is the most secure.

The information or biospecimens that will be collected as part of this research will not be shared with any other investigators.

Terms of participation:

I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

PARTICIPANT NAME:

PARTICIPANT

SIGNATURE:

WITNESS TO

SIGNATURE:

(PROJECT STAFF)

DATE:

DATE:

Appendix C - Debriefing Statement

Thank you for participating in this research. If you would like to obtain a copy of the dissertation once it is finalized, please contact Jenna Gannon at jlannon@ksu.edu.