Appropriating Community Cultural Wealth through Study Abroad in Cuba

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Abstract

In a qualitative case study, we explore how US American graduate students conceptualize, develop and wield various forms of capital while participating in an international research course in Havana, Cuba. The authors were embedded in an academic course offered through graduate programs at two mid-atlantic universities. We conducted our research before, during and after travel with a group of eleven study participants, all graduate students in this course. Our research initially set out to explore how graduate students perceived the benefits of international coursework in a unique and rare destination. Research questions quickly pivoted once in-country, as we observed how students viewed Cuba as an opportunity to further develop their cosmopolitan capital.

Cosmopolitan capital refers to those skills and competencies required to navigate in international contexts (Weenink, 2007). It is traditionally associated with travel to elite nations, and with individuals who embody various forms of privilege. Our study participants all boast high levels of cosmopolitan capital, and aim to further develop themselves by seeking out and even creating situations in which they can build additional capital. Our findings suggest that the capital that students were seeking through this specific experience in Cuba closely resemble the capitals typically associated with marginalized communities through Yosso's model of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005). Participants demonstrated a desire not for an elite form of cosmopolitan capital, but rather forms of cultural capital that afford them access to and approximation of traditionally marginalized communities.

This apparent appropriation of forms of capital traditionally attributed to Communities of Color demonstrates both the value of this capital, and the association of traditional forms of capital with whiteness and privilege. We consider our findings in relation to each of Yosso's six forms of capital and discuss the implications of privileged students seeking to embody these forms of capital.

Keywords: study abroad; cosmopolitan capital; Latin America; community cultural wealth; graduate students; educational exchange; Cuba

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Introduction

The increase in international student mobility (ISM) since the 1970s has drawn the curiosity of scholars seeking to understand motivations and outcomes of international experiences in higher education (OECD, 2022; Shields, 2013; Tokas et al., 2023). International student mobility is often described in terms of economic rationalism in that students seek opportunities to develop skills (e.g. English language, academic qualifications, and multicultural dispositions) that "are rewarded in labour markets" (Bamberger, 2020, p. 1367). Considering the flow of students across national borders, those going from less affluent countries to more affluent host countries, is most commonly associated with cosmopolitan capital, having garnered much attention in the literature (Bühlmann, David, and Mach, 2013; Carroll, 2010; Igarashi and Saito 2014; Kim 2011; Wagner 2007; Weenink 2007).Traditionally, cosmopolitan capital has been associated with "elite" nations and cultures. This is to say that cosmopolitan capital typically references attributes of capital pertinent to individuals from elite nations, as well as to the capital gained from visiting elite nations. As access to international education has increased, and as globalization and internationalization have necessitated the development of international networks, we consider whether or not traditional pathways to cosmopolitan capital still yield the same advantages.

In this study, participants belong to social and professional networks in which international travel is commonplace. Having international experiences alone does not make them special, nor does it afford them additional capital. Prior to the international experience, we observed how participants sought out Cuba as a "rare" destination to further distinguish their cosmopolitan capital from that of their peers. During our time in Havana, we also observed participants seeking to expand upon their already impressive levels of cosmopolitan capital. We query how Cuba, with its restricted access, anti-American sentiment, and even navigational difficulties, thus provided an opportunity to enhance participants' cosmopolitan capital beyond what traditional study abroad can provide. Until recently, less attention has focused on the flow of students from more affluent countries to less affluent destinations as they seek international educational experiences and enhance their cosmopolitan capital (Bamberger, 2020). This study centers graduate students seeking educational opportunities in a less-affluent host country, by delving into the participants' experiences of conducting international research in Cuba, aiming to answer the following research questions:

What are graduate students' perceptions of international immersion experiences

How do graduate students' experiences and forms of capital influence their engagement within an international program?

Initial phases of data collection guided us toward conceptualizing the pursuit of cosmopolitan capital in the traditional Bourdieusian sense (Bourdieu, 1986; 1991). However, once we were in Cuba, we began to notice how students' attempts to build their cosmopolitan capital demonstrated an attempt to replicate forms of capital traditionally associated with communities of color. To further explore and conceptualize cosmopolitan capital, we view our findings through the lens of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), and observe that our participants did, in fact, demonstrate a desire to accumulate each of the six aspects of Community Cultural Wealth.

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Conceptual Framework

In designing our study, we were interested in how graduate students' identities and forms of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu,1986) influence their engagement within an international program. We were informed by Cosmopolitan Capital, Linguistic Capital, and encounters with American Identity as participants sought to complete a research project situated in the Cuban context (Dolby 2004, 2007; Lindell & Danielsson, 2017; Yosso, 2005).

Cosmopolitan Capital

In the Bourdieusian sense, we are drawn to Lindell and Danielsson's (2017) description of cosmopolitan capital as "legitimate" ways of navigating society in various places around the world, outside of one's place of origin, with tastes and mannerisms that have been "cultivated to suit the place one happens to be, live, or work" (p. 52). Cosmopolitan capital refers specifically to the forms of cultural capital that come with "internationality" (Buhlmann, David & Mach, 2013). Cosmopolitan capital refers to the set of skills and competencies that allow one to navigate within a variety of different social and cultural spheres (Lindell & Danielsson, 2017; Weenink, 2007). One's language skills, cultural understanding, adaptability, and even ability to travel all contribute to cosmopolitan capital (Calhoun, 2002; Igarashi & Saito, 2014; Lindell & Danielsson, 2017; Macready & Tucker, 2011; Rizvi, 2005; Weenink, 2007). Cosmopolitan capital also lends itself to greater levels of social capital, as cosmopolitanism allows for both access and acceptance in a wider global social network. Cosmopolitan individuals have the competencies, experiences and inroads which allow them to maneuver as comfortably in global settings as they would at home (Weenink, 2007). Furthermore, the specific skills, attitudes and competencies include "communication skills, persuasiveness, drive, resilience, adaptability, self-confidence, and problem-solving" (Brown et al., 2016, p.193; Friedman, 2018). Leveraging these skills garnered through studying abroad, in tandem with graduate credentials can facilitate attainment of elite status. While scholars debate whether cosmopolitan capital is cultural or social capital, we understand cosmopolitan capital to encompass both cultural and social capital (Bamberger, 2020; Buhlmann, David & Mach, 2013; Weenink, 2008).

Typically, cosmopolitan capital has meant proximity to western European and North American cultures affords the greatest levels of capital, especially in an increasingly global workforce. Study abroad statistics have reflected this preference (Institute of International Education, 2023), as the vast majority of students studying internationally do so in these regions, and credentials from "elite" nations are often considered more valuable (Gilbertson, Parris-Piper and Robertson, 2021). Our study participants largely demonstrated high levels of cosmopolitan capital and spoke about living abroad for extended amounts of time, visiting and hosting friends from different nationalities, and maintaining a globally dispersed and diverse circle of friends. Participants also demonstrated that they stay informed about various places in the world by consuming news and other types of cultural and informational media that reaches global audiences (Weenink, 2007). In these ways, we explore how our study participants perhaps believe that they have achieved satisfactory levels of cosmopolitan capital, and are now seeking new ways to differentiate themselves from similarly situated peers.

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Given the measures institutions of higher education have taken over recent decades, previous barriers to study abroad opportunities, while still present, are not as prevalent for some as they once were (Raby, Rose, & Ward, 2021; Simon, & Ainsworth, 2012). The reduction of barriers to study abroad opens pathways of access to cosmopolitan capital, thereby potentially, diffusing its relative value. To build upon the already existing cosmopolitan capital, we observed, and participants discussed, attempted proximity to "Other," language as capital, and leveraging capital in pursuit of gaining access to authentic and insider's knowledge.

Community Cultural Wealth

Yosso (2005) challenges this traditional understanding of cultural and cosmopolitan capital by asking the question "whose culture has capital?" Yosso critiques Bourdieu's original conceptualization of cultural capital by pointing out the various ways in which it assumes the culture of white upper- and middle-class individuals to be the norm on which all other cultures are evaluated. This consequently leads to the perception of non-white individuals as lacking these valued characteristics, or at best, needing to learn or acquire them through intentional socialization or schooling.

Informed by Critical Race Theory, Yosso counters this argument by presenting a model of Community Cultural Wealth, which details the various forms of capital that are inherent to communities of color. Aspirational Capital refers to the tendency within communities to continue to hope and dream, despite systemic obstacles to success; Linguistic Capital recognizes the ability to communicate in more than one language or style, highlighting not only language skills, but also storytelling and oral tradition; Familial Capital points to the extended relations of kinship, and how this leads to greater feelings of community responsibility and support; Social Capital refers to the robust social networks within communities of color, including mutual aid groups and informal social supports; Navigational Capital honors the ability to exist and move through spaces and institutions that were not built to consider the needs of you or your culture; and Resistant Capital refers to the skills that are developed through facing, and indeed resisting, inequality.

Our study suggests that the cosmopolitan capital that students were seeking through this specific experience in Cuba closely resemble the capitals typically associated with marginalized communities through Yosso's model of Community Cultural Wealth. In selecting to travel specifically to Cuba, students demonstrated a desire not for an elite form of cosmopolitan capital, but rather forms of cultural capital that afford them access to and approximation of traditionally marginalized communities.

Methods

To explore graduate students' perceptions of their experiences and forms of capital in a course with an international exchange component in Havana, Cuba, we take up a single, qualitative case study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). We used convenience sampling, inviting all 33 students enrolled in the course to participate, and the study includes 11 classmates who participated in this project. We consented participants electronically and administered the pre-travel survey via email.

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During our time in Cuba, we recorded our observations daily, often splitting up to visit separate sites, when multiple site visits were available. At the midpoint of the program, we conducted a focus group during a scheduled lunch break at a roadside cafe. We started the focus group with a few questions and allowed the participants to flow into conversation and reflect upon their experiences to that point. We also observed both large and small group reflection sessions built into the program's schedule as well as small group discussions occurring between Cuban education professionals and participants, grouped according to research interest.

Post-travel surveys with follow-up individual interviews probed for themes that emerged from observations and reflections in Cuba. All interviews and focus groups used a semi-structured format with open-ended questions to further explore survey responses, our observations, and anything participants wanted to share regarding their experiences in Cuba (Andrade, 2021). As researchers as well as students enrolled in the course, we wrote reflexive memos of our impressions and any questions that arose for us at various points of data collection from immediately following interviews to daily reflections in Cuba (Seidman, 2006, p.113). Not only did memo-ing enhance our communication and organization, but it also helped us to triangulate our data (Lee et al., 2019).

Collected data consists of (1) surveys from both pre- and post- travel; (2) individual interviews from both pre- and post-travel; (3) public reflections posted to the course learning management system (LMS); and (4) researchers' observations from both the international exchange and a post-program reflection meeting. Analysis began almost immediately through our memo-writing and our repeated discussions throughout the data collection process. We employed a combination of In vivo and descriptive coding methods to capture participants' thoughts, feelings, and perceptions evidenced in survey responses, interviews, observations, and written reflections submitted as a course requirement (Saldaña, 2016). We then triangulated our data by comparing codebooks for interrater reliability.

Program Context

Graduate students, in a course entitled International Investigations in Cuban Education Embargoed Dialogues: Critical Studies in US & Cuban Education, learn about Cuban education and how US students might approach and conduct international research in Cuba. Four class meetings occurred prior to the 10-day exchange in Havana, Cuba. In preparation for the exchange, students completed reading assignments, public and private reflection posts, and developed research questions specific to Cuba. In Cuba, graduate students gathered for lectures at the Association of Professional Cuban Educators, the host organization, visited multiple education sites, and engaged in small group discussion with Cuban education professionals across a variety of disciplines. Upon return to the US, graduate students worked to complete the final course requirement, a research product on Cuban education and participated in group reflections.

Limitations

The sample size is small and limited to students who volunteered to participate in our study. With this convenience sample, "key informant bias" (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 99) is a possible limitation of the study, as our sample represents those students who self-selected to participate in a study about professional academic goals. Therefore, we do not seek to generalize our findings to a larger population of graduate students who participate in study abroad or international educational exchanges. We also note the highly specific nature of Cuba as a research and program site. Because of the complex US-Cuban relationship, findings are not necessarily generalizable to other international exchange experiences.

Positionality

The first two authors were enrolled as students in the course, and the third author served as a teaching assistant in 2023. While visiting Cuba was a first-time experience for the first two authors, the third author previously traveled to Cuba in 2015, leading a group of graduate students in international educational exchange similar to the program in this study. All three authors identify as white, females, typical of the majority study abroad population. We also all have extensive international travel experience for both professional and personal reasons, affording us extensive cosmopolitan capital. We want to highlight that we cannot fully remove ourselves from these identities and how they impact our research and relationships to our participants (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, our experiences as students often mirrored our participants' in terms of processing our perceptions and engaging in thought-provoking discussions meant to challenge our ideologies and present alternative views on education and society. As researchers and as students, we can not shed our White, American identities and sentimentalities. While we strive to be self-reflective and self-critical, we are aware that our findings will necessarily reflect our privileged perceptions.

Findings

Our findings show that participants view Cuba as a unique and distinct study abroad location that both requires and affords additional forms of cosmopolitan capital. Through our data collection and observations of the group, we noticed several ties to aspects of Community Cultural Wealth. Participants referenced previous international travel experiences, social circles, and language proficiency, which served to demonstrate their embodied capital. They also demonstrated a strong desire to discover the true Cuban "reality," which we view as an attempt to expand upon all aspects of their various forms of capital, and approximate [appropriate?] the community cultural wealth of their peers from Communities of Color. We discuss our findings through the lens of Yosso's (2005) framework of Community Cultural Wealth, demonstrating the various ways in which student participants sought to achieve these six forms of cultural capital.

Aspirational capital

It was clear that our participants viewed this educational travel opportunity as a means to increase their academic and professional skills. Graduate students expressed their hope to gain and/or expand upon 21st century work skills accessible through SA experiences (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017; Loveland

& Morris, 2018). Being graduate students, it is not surprising that each of our participants had specific professional goals, and articulated the ways in which they hoped this experience would better position them to advance within their careers. One participant's stated perceived take-aways included, "global competency and to build those skills that you get from going abroad, there's just certain skills and experiences that you don't get by staying in your home country" (Pre-Travel Interview, 2023). Another participant stated, "I do think that it's a rare and unique opportunity, not many people get to experience that. So [studying abroad in Cuba] would set me apart from other candidates in a job interview or a lineup of applicants" (Pre-Travel Interview, 2023).

Supporting our assertion that this represents new ways in which participants aim to appropriate Community Cultural Wealth, we found that even students with advanced capital sought to expand upon the capital they already have to better achieve their personal and professional aspirations. All participants had previous international experience, and discussed the ways in which these experiences benefitted them to this point in their lives.

One participant, who already boasts impressive international and professional experience, discussed how they hoped this experience would elevate their career from the national level to their ultimate goal of working for a supranational organization. "I'm currently working in the government, I hope to continue to do so. And I'm also really interested in work with the UN. So I'm in the pipeline for a few different things" (Post-Travel Interview, 2023). We contrast this with a student entering the program with no academic travel experience, but who does have personal experience with international travel. "I was never able to do a study abroad program during undergrad…with my current schedule of me being full time and like very invested in my work, and then also just things in my personal life wouldn't allow me to, like, get up and leave the country." (Pre-Travel Interview, 2023) While we do not suggest that these two participants are representative of larger trends, it is interesting to note how students themselves view the difference between personal travel (which in this case is associated with traditional familial capital within Yosso's framework) and travel sanctioned and promoted by academic institutions.

Yosso (2005) defines aspirational capital as "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). We see both a traditional manifestation of aspirational capital in the above participant looking to overcome personal barriers to accessing study abroad, and examples of the appropriation of aspirational capital from participants who perhaps perceive very different obstacles to their aspirations having to do with logistics or even specific skills they perceive themselves as lacking currently. Participants mentioned logistics such as obtaining security clearances and desired skills such as research publication and experience with specific populations. This experience in Cuba provided them a quick solution to these perceived obstacles.

Linguistic capital

The ability to speak foreign languages while navigating a foreign culture is a component of cosmopolitan capital (Bamberger, 2020; Buhlmann, David & Mach, 2013; Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012;

Tarchi & Surian, 2021). Additionally, Rossier and Bulhmann (2018) call for consideration of how people, like our participants, will reconvert these resources to maintain their positioning among the socially elite in their home country. Highlighting the overall demand for linguistic capital, the participants in our study discussed their linguistic capital.

Four participants spoke of relying on classmates for understanding, while another two discussed feeling fortunate that their language skills afforded them the ability to "get more" out of their interactions. This led to a dynamic in which those who were able to communicate in both languages became de facto interpreters and leaders amongst their peers. "I just had to make sure that I was close to someone who felt comfortable in communicating in Spanish" (Post-Travel Interview, 2023). This also extended to the academic portion of the trip, and how students approached research projects. "[Language] was a huge barrier to getting quality, qualitative data. I've literally had to change my research" (Post-Travel Interview, 2023).

Having a thorough understanding of what was being said, and how it related to what participants wanted to learn while in Cuba remained an almost constant topic of conversation. In addition to linguistic challenges, participants questioned the veracity of what they were being told from official sources. They therefore came to understand that access (through language) to other sources of information would enhance their ability to understand the Cuban context. "I feel like I got just as much out of conversations with taxi drivers, and some of the student interpreters and workers at the hotel and waiters…that was only possible because we spoke enough Spanish to do that" (Post-Travel Interview, 2023).

Yosso refers to not only the ability to speak a language (which could be learned in a classroom), but also the various social and communication skills that are associated with Communities of Color. We observed this difference in our participants who did boast stronger language skills, but may have missed some of the nuance or cultural references when interpreting for their peers. One point of observation we found particularly interesting was students who had an inflated sense of their linguistic competence in this capacity, and erroneously depicted what they had learned in conversations with Cubans (Field Observation, 2023).

One student without strong language skills noted "I could tell there was a difference between what people were saying and what we heard and understood" (Post-Travel Interview, 2023). This was a common source of frustration for participants without linguistic capital, as well as a perceived barrier to accessing reliable information. Participants perceived language to be a determining factor in their ability to gain full, or more complete access to the target community, with the intent of capitalizing on the knowledge of this community. Participants seemed to understand that more insider information would aid them in approximating forms of familial capital that would allow them to see the "reality" of the Cuban context.

Familial capital

Participants are acutely aware of the ways in which they are not insiders to the Cuban community, and speak about their positionality when entering an outside culture. They discuss the need to enter with respect and deference, and with an acknowledgement of privilege and power. In reflections upon their positionality as outsiders, participants made statements like, "I know that in Cuba, I will be seen with skepticism and may be held at an arm's length until I am able to develop trust," and "I think that you have to lean into being a newbie and unknowing about the cultural customs and let the international counterpart lead the way" (positionality statements). Several participants discussed the steps they would take to build relationships to foster reliable research data. We note that despite acknowledgement of their lack of familial capital, students seemed to believe they could approximate it enough to gain access, if only the right steps were taken. Participants further acknowledged the privilege and power they have. "I am aware I need to continue to check my privilege in international and/or Cuban contexts" (Positionality statement - written reflection).

However, in their actions we observed that participants still desired the benefits of insider or familial status. Students discussed their difficulty in obtaining reliable data for their research projects. This was often attributed to language barriers, lack of time in the community, and even poor program planning. From the American lens, it was assumed that steps could be taken to earn enough trust for honest evaluations of the Cuban education system to be shared. In this way, we see that although participants acknowledge they do not have familial capital in this setting, they seem to want to be treated as if they do. Nearly every single participant of our study discussed wanting to see or hear the "reality" of the Cuban experience. They wanted access to the "sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" that Yosso (2005, p. 79) attributes to familial capital, despite not belonging to familial in-groups. Authors noted on multiple separate occasions that participants pushed for certain questions to be answered, while Cuban counterparts resisted answering these questions. "Our group insisted on asking specific questions about their research topics" (Observation, Small-group Discussion). This occurred throughout the trip, and became a theme that participants eventually began to discuss amongst themselves. It was ultimately brought up in a large-group discussion, wherein an analogy was made regarding what one allows guests to see when they enter their homes. Paraphrasing slightly, one participant self-reflected "it's like we're coming to their homes for a visit, and they are showing us their living room, their kitchen, and we're like 'but we really want to see under the bed or inside the medicine cabinet'" (Observation, March 23, 2023).

Participants initially expressed that not having access to the medicine cabinet felt like lack of mutuality. Another participant reflected upon being "as honest as possible [in response to Cuban inquiries]" but felt that "what I get [back] isn't what I wanted to receive," leading other participants to "wonder about genuineness" (Observation, March 23, 2023). Upon further reflection, and with the aid of the medicine cabinet as a metaphor, students came to see that they had not earned the requisite trust to get direct, honest, or even critical responses from their Cuban counterparts (Observation, Post-Trip Retreat). Ultimately, familial capital proved complex for participants, but also inspired reflexivity for emerging international researchers and early career international education professionals.

Social capital

Participants viewed their international exchange as a way to fulfill their desire to expand their social capital with international community members and professional peers. Engaging in the international exchange in Cuba, participants sought social capital through interactions with Cuban education professionals. To this end, one participant stated, "I think they did an excellent job too. During site visits to students' research interests and trying as best as they could, given the large size of the group, connecting professionals that we could connect with on either, you know, informal or more formal interview basis. So that was excellent" (Post Trip Interview, 2023).

Networking among classmates to enhance participants' social capital was also evident. Participants talked about learning from one another, leaning on one another for linguistic and academic support, and their gratitude for meeting one another on the trip. They also tied this to their professional pursuits. Upon returning from the international exchange, one participant reflected that "this group was especially unique given the fact that all of us study or are highly involved in the work of international and/or higher education. Throughout the trip I found myself constantly engaging in intellectually stimulating conversations with my peers…I don't think I would have had such an enriching intellectual experience had I traveled to Cuba on my own. Above all, I am incredibly grateful to have been in the company of so many brilliant individuals on this trip (Post trip reflection).

Data collected from participants as well as our own observations provide evidence that all participants desired to interact and connect with Cubans who have not left the island nation. To this end, one participant said, "I don't have a lot of knowledge about Cuba. And even the information I've learned recently, it's usually from a Cuban American perspective. So I'm looking forward to…I'm not saying that Cuban Americans aren't Cuban, but seeing a Cuban Cubans perspective, and seeing how they live, public culture, like observing that" (Pre-trip interview 2023). Furthermore, participants discussed how connecting with any Cuban people during the international exchange enhances their social capital. As evidence of seeking to expand already robust social connections, another participant said, "I am around people who travel a lot. And this is the coolest one [destination] of that…international traveler street cred is a real thing--and this is that, in a lot of ways" (Pre-travel interview, 2023). Participants clearly value social capital to be gained or enhanced through an international exchange in Cuba as an individual benefit, but what remains unclear is participants' gained or enhanced social capital as a benefit or asset to their communities.

Navigational capital

Living with relative privilege in the United States, most of our participants have not had the opportunity nor necessity to develop navigational capital. Navigational Capital is defined as the ability to "maneuver" through social institutions that were not designed with your social groups in mind (Yosso, 2005). Coming primarily from dominant social classes, our participants have always navigated through institutions designed specifically to accommodate them and their needs. We therefore consider the ways in which students seek out foreign settings as a way of situating themselves as outsiders in order to flex their navigational skills.

The various restrictions associated with Cuba in particular made this experience even more attractive for students who have already learned to navigate other international settings. All of our participants have past experience traveling abroad, as well as experience navigating multicultural settings within the US. However, they note the novelty of how much more difficult this travel experience was than others they've had in the past. "This feels like we've never traveled before in our entire lives. Like as if this were the first time that I've ever gotten on a plane and gotten a visa and like, done all these things. I've had to move mountains to even get euros because normally I would just pull out my ATM card in the country" (Pre-Travel Interview, 2023). This relative inaccessibility also helped separate them from peers who only have more traditional international experience. One participant shared a story of two colleagues discussing our participant's upcoming trip to Cuba. She paraphrased how her American colleague explained to an international coworker "You don't understand, like, this is a normal trip for you. But for me, it's like [Participant] is traveling to North Korea." Our study participant continued in her own words "This feels like, unlike anything that, you know, we as Americans are typically doing" (Pre-Travel Interview, 2023). This echoes the sentiments of many participants, who repeatedly referred to this experience as a "once in a lifetime experience." They noted that were it not for this class, there would be too many obstacles to navigate in traveling to Cuba.

While initially excited by the allure of the challenge, participants also lamentented just how difficult they found Cuba to navigate. Every participant we interviewed discussed how difficult they found the experience to be, citing everything from mental exhaustion and cognitive dissonance ("I found the frequency with which I was engaging in these conversations to be overwhelming, often leaving my mind in a pretzel of Cuban politics and pedagogy"), to physical hunger and confusion over how to ethically and legally access safe meals ("It was a little bit, not hard, but stressful, finding food, sometimes finding places to buy water when the hotel was out of water. Obviously, we were fine, but it was something I never had to think about before"). Despite seeking out this more-challenging environment, it was clear that participants felt frustrated by their lack of ability to easily navigate Cuba. This bled into critique of the program, and the assumption that greater institutional organization or support would have ameliorated many of these pains.

Resistant capital

"Resistant capital refers to those knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). In a myopic reading of this definition, we can posit that individuals from a variety of backgrounds may possess resistant capital insomuch as they fight to overturn unjust systems. This is evidenced within our study sample, as many students discussed enrolling in the course and/or pursuing their degrees as a way to gain more understanding of how to address pressing social issues impacting domestic and global communities (Positionality Statements). Students spoke about their desire to promote positive change from various positions of privilege. One student noted that they "hope to leverage the strengths associated with my identity as a graduate student in international education as a reminder of my commitment and value for cross-cultural

connection and understanding." (Pre-trip positionality statement, 2023). Another referenced their less-privileged identity as a disruption to systems of oppression in higher education in the US, and reflected on their potential impact in Cuba, noting "my hope is that by being authentic but sensitive to the experiences of Cubans, my presence in this exchange will be a good disruption." It was evident through their words and their actions that our participants felt a strong desire to resist systems of inequality, and were well versed in language, values, and ideologies that they believed to support this resistance in the US context.

Their time in Cuba complicated this for some study participants, however. Confronting the complexities of Cuban reality provoked questions about human rights, government structures, and ultimately blurred the lines between what are often positioned as binary political ideologies. Specifically, students who strongly aligned with leftist values now struggled with the ways in which the realities of a socialist system brushed against their American values. "I'm not patriotic, I've always been like, I want to get out of here. I want to live in a different country. I don't like it here. And I still feel that way, but I wasn't prepared for that feeling of like, Wow, thank God, we have freedom of speech. It just made me very grateful to live in a democracy, no matter how flawed it is" (Post-Travel Interview, 2023). Another participant put it much more succinctly: "Yeah, I'm not a communist anymore" (Post-Travel Interview, 2023).

One student described this dissonance as a sort of identity crisis. Students' sense of their own resistant capital was in this way intertwined with their own identity. However, so too were their American values (Dolby, 2004). In encountering their American identity, they struggled to reconcile their alignment with American values with their commitment to resistance, especially in the current, highly-polarized political landscape. "Screw this country. It's horrible, politically speaking. I hate it here, it sucks. But, I've never really taken time to appreciate a lot of those, like, basic freedoms that we have [in the US]. But I feel like people who talk about freedoms like that are on the other end of the political spectrum for me, so it's like, I hesitate to say it, but it's true" (Post-Travel Interview, 2023).

Discussion

We now turn our consideration to the possible implications of this appropriation of Community Cultural Wealth. In this discussion, we parse out the important differences between how various forms of capital manifest in communities of color and privileged communities, consider how our findings represent the conceptualization of Cultural Capital as Whiteness (Wallace, 2017; 2018), and note how privileged individuals seek to appropriate the benefits of Community Cultural Wealth while eschewing cultural factors that lead to the development of this capital. We end by recommending further research into how study abroad in particular may facilitate the appropriation of CCW, and what this means for the implications of study abroad participation demographics.

There is considerable overlap between the frameworks of cosmopolitan capital and community cultural wealth. This is not surprising, given that both emerged as considerations of Bourdieusian

capital, and that both consider the advantages of access to different cultures and ways of being. The primary difference, as we see it, is that the former considers access to different cultures from within dominant culture, while CCW considers the wealth of capital that emerges from within non-dominant cultures. That being said, both frameworks consider the ways in which individuals can leverage language skills, adaptability and problem-solving skills, as well as their social networks, to their advantage (Brown et al, 2016; Weenink, 2007). In considering the two frameworks and how they intersect, we developed the following Venn diagram which demonstrates competencies that are attributed to each framework individually, as well as those which are firmly situated within both.

Figure 1: Venn diagram of Cosmopolitan Capital and Community Cultural Wealth

Another important difference, not represented in this diagram, is to whom these forms of capital are accessible and typically attributed. We posit that anyone can technically have access to cosmopolitan capital, and in fact this has often been referenced in considering possibilities for upward mobility. However, systems of inequality have made it disproportionately difficult for members of Communities of Color to partake in experiences that would build their cosmopolitan capital (Engel & Gibson, 2020). Even in cases when they do have access, scholars note that they are still not perceived to possess the same levels of capital as their white peers (Reay et al., 2007; Wallace, 2017; 2018). For these reasons, we consider how our findings illustrate Wallace's assertion that Cultural Capital is itself conceptualized as whiteness.

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With her Community Cultural Wealth framework, Yosso (2005) pushes back on the association of cultural capital with whiteness by illuminating the capital of communities of color that so often go ignored. She explores the specific competencies that emerge from the specific cultural traits of communities of color, as well as from the positionality of existing within a systemically oppressed group. In this way, Community Cultural Wealth is accessible only to insiders from these communities, as it is the particular crucible of circumstances and culture that develop aspirational, familial and resistant capital. Our findings suggest that our student participants from privileged backgrounds acknowledge this capital, and see its value. They seem to see it as so valuable that they seek to obtain it for themselves. We suggest that our participants have come as far as they can with their own cosmopolitan capital, and now seek to reach across the Venn diagram to access Community Cultural Wealth. This suggests that they too have internalized cultural capital as whiteness, and understand that as members of dominant cultures, they should have access to all of it.

We consider the attempt to build these capitals through this study abroad experience in Cuba to be an attempt to appropriate Community Cultural Wealth. Our participants eloquently articulated their positions of privilege in written reflections, interviews, and group processing sessions. They also acknowledged the various ways they were outsiders to the host community. Yet they still (perhaps subconsciously) sought to extract capital from the experience as if they were insiders. Furthermore, we note that they seek to obtain Community Cultural Wealth without having to assume any of the cultural characteristics, nor face any of the challenges encountered by communities of color. This therefore creates important differences in how the aspects of CCW can be embodied when approximated from positions of privilege. Most commonly in our findings, we observed that this took the form of creating or seeking out challenges to overcome in order to build capital.

Aspirational capital, therefore looks like aspiring to the highest levels of achievement, even when one has numerous past achievements both in their own lives and within their familial networks to build from. Consider in this case the student participant seeking to “grow” to a position with the UN. Social capital, for this student, means expanding networks, looking for that individual who might help them with a scholarship or other advantage, without the added pressure of feeling the need to represent a community, or raise others up through their accomplishments. Our study participants often referenced the connections they were able to make, and what they would be able to learn from their peers, professors and Cuban counterparts. Only one discussed coming back and sharing what they learned with their social network so that they too could learn and grow. Our participants knowingly put themselves into a situation in which they would have to navigate outside of their normal context, and yet struggled with how uncomfortable they were existing in such a vastly different culture. Faced with their discomfort, rather than confront their lack of navigational capital, they instead asked why aspects of the program weren’t designed with their needs in mind. One participant expressed their belief that visa stipulations required a certain number of hours in academic sessions each day, yet even holding this belief, lamented that it was unrealistic to expect graduate students to stay attentive for that many hours a day.

Insider access, or what we consider an attempt at familial capital, was perhaps the most discussed topic in interviews, reflections and casual conversations. We observed that our participants struggled to unpack their expectations, and how it related to their privilege and positions of power. Yet, we note that our participants still seemed to think there could (should?) have been a way to approximate this insider status. Participants mentioned more time in-country, more access to Cuban individuals who do not hold positions of power, more extensive orientation and expectation-setting and better translation as possible "solutions" to not being granted insider information. We point out that assumption in this quote: "I know that in Cuba, I will be seen with skepticism and may be held at an arm's length until I am able to develop trust" (Positionality Statement, emphasis added). Even in acknowledging the justifiable skepticism and distance, there remains the assumption of temporality. Linguistic capital did afford some students greater access to insider information, and we observed differences in how this advantage was wielded (or not) in Cuba. Specifically, some students who have obtained Spanish as a second language seemed eager to demonstrate this knowledge, thus flaunting their capital. Other students with acquired language skills chose to remain quiet, allowing interpreters and their native-speaking classmates to take leads in the discussion. Although this was unfortunately not discussed with our participants, we wonder if this represents one area in which students were aware of the potential for cultural appropriation. We observed (and in fact ourselves participated in) some debate about what was more respectful, to "interpret" with uncertainty, or to allow those better equipped to interpret for us.

Conclusion

Within each aspect of Community Cultural Wealth, we have articulated the difference between the original manifestations of these forms of capital within communities of color, and the ways we have seen the capitals approximated by predominantly privileged students studying abroad in Cuba. This is especially important in the case of Resistant Capital. Because students lack a genuine connection to this community (and the aspirational, linguistic, familial, navigational and social capital it affords), they could not fully understand the nuanced complexities of the social justice issues they faced. Further, some struggled with their resistant capital in terms of not being able to reconcile challenges that the Cuban experience created in confronting their American identities and political ideologies. Perhaps the struggle that students faced in figuring out how to resist systems of oppression on behalf of Cubans stems from the very fact that they are fighting on someone else's behalf. While allyship is important, it cannot be equated with a fight for one's own liberation.

Our findings show that participants in this academic experience in Cuba viewed their experience as an opportunity to build various forms of capital, thus better positioning themselves academically and professionally. We observe that they sought not only to expand upon the cosmopolitan capital they all already possess, but also to approximate forms of capital commonly associated with communities of color. In this way, we begin to consider how study abroad may provide opportunities for the appropriation of Community Cultural Wealth.

This study is not representative, however, and we therefore cannot portend that the findings from this study extend to other groups of students studying abroad. The specific parameters of this program (its destination in Cuba, its host universities being located in cosmopolitan areas, and it being conducted at the graduate level) all impact our findings, and may even make our findings unique to this experience. For this reason, we implore other educational researchers and international education practitioners to pick up this conversation and consider the ways in which study abroad facilitates appropriation.

We also recommend further exploration of how study abroad supports the conceptualization of cultural capital as whiteness. Current study abroad demographics show white females as disproportionately represented (Institute of International Education, 2023), meaning that white women reap the benefits of study abroad at greater rates than do their peers from Communities of Color. Further, conversations around study abroad typically boast outcomes that ignore Community Cultural Wealth. Study abroad is sold as an opportunity to master a new language, learn to navigate a new culture, encounter your own identity from an outside perspective, etc. (Adam et al., 2018; Clarke et al, 2009; Dolby, 2004, 2007). By discussing study abroad in this way, we are leaving students out of the conversation who have been mastering these skills throughout their entire lives (Brown et al., 2016). We suggest instead prioritizing consideration of how students with high levels of Community Cultural Wealth continue to build and develop their cosmopolitan and other capitals through study abroad. In other words, what's the benefit for members of communities of color that they can't get through existing in White America? Perhaps more attention to these specific outcomes could begin to better diversify study abroad.

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