Chapter 6

Working-Class Academic Cultural Wealth

Keywords: Cultural wealth; aspirational capital; navigational capital; social capital; familial capital; linguistic capital; resistant capital; perspective capital

Overview

Previous chapters have highlighted numerous instances of classism faced by working class academics (WCAs). Additionally, my respondents shared insights into their contributions to academia, emphasising how their unique perspectives, shaped by lived experiences, enrich the scholarly landscape. Chapter Six develops Yosso's (2005) conceptual model of 'community cultural wealth' to highlight the cultural assets and strengths – or cultural wealth – of WCAs. This contribution was not readily identified by respondents, as WCAs tend to underestimate their value. Soria et al. (2023), for instance, highlighted the resilience of WCAs and their profound insights into matters of equity and justice, likely stemming from their experiences of managing limited economic resources. Chapter Six also refers to 'funds of knowledge', i.e. culturally developed knowledge, skills, and practices present within households and communities (Moll et al., 1992).

Community Cultural Wealth

Critical race theory (CRT) provides a framework for identifying, analysing, and challenging the ways that race and racism interconnect with other axes of oppression and how these dynamics collectively shape the everyday experiences of individuals of colour (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Yosso's influential 2005 article, 'Whose culture has capital?' developed 'CCW', a conceptual model that

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identified the diverse forms of capital which people of colour use to resist and successfully navigate the education field. Her framework acknowledges obstacles but emphasises the wide spectrum of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks held by socially marginalised groups, which are often overlooked and uncredited. CCW is a flexible framework and can be used to provide an important counterbalance to the misrecognition of WCAs and their skills. While Bourdieusian theory allows for various interpretations, it is frequently perceived from the perspective of the white middle class, often portraying those outside this demographic as having deficits. By utilising Yosso's framework we can observe the cultural resources that WCAs leverage for empowerment, to persevere through challenges and to succeed academically despite systemic barriers. Forms of CCW include: aspirational capital (resilience and hope), navigational capital (manoeuvring institutions), social capital (community resources and peers), familial capital (cultural heritage),[1] linguistic capital (communication), and resistant capital (skills fostered through opposition) (Yosso, 2005, pp. 77–80). Alongside the six forms of cultural weath first discussed by Yosso (2005) – and developed by Crew (2020) to discuss WCA cultural wealth – Cole (2019) referred to perspective capital i.e perceiving situations through diverse worldviews. These examples of cultural wealth are summarised in the following figure and expanded in the next section.

Fig. 3. Working-Class Academic Cultural Wealth.

[1]Social and familial capital are often analysed together.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital refers to the resilience and capacity to sustain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the presence of real and perceived obstacles (Yosso, 2005). Disadvantaged communities may harness this capital to help envision possibilities beyond their current circumstances. Łuczaj (2023) found that her respondents 'home-grown resilience…[could] also positively impact teaching or research duties' (p. 203). In the face of potential barriers, aspirational capital also serves as a form of resistance. A systematic review by Denton et al. (2020) evaluated the presence of CCW in STEM education. With 28 studies identifying at least one example of aspirational capital, this was the most cited form of CCW. In Dika et al. (2017), ethnic minority students discussed pursing their objective of attaining an engineering degree. Descriptive quantitative data highlighted the prevalence of various types of cultural wealth, with aspirational capital being particularly prominent. Many studies described this persistence as contingent upon an ability to remain focused on goals despite barriers to students' aspirations (cited in Denton et al., 2020). Research by Brooms and Davis (2017) discussed how Black males derive meaning from their educational experiences, argued that aspirational capital can help marginalised students to cope with common academic challenges like classism and imposter syndrome. Similarly, Morrison (2010) found that working-class female students' aspirational capital was something encouraged by their mothers. Academic staff and family members also played a significant role in nurturing aspirational capital among marginalised students (Denton et al., 2020).

As preceding chapters have outlined, my respondents faced numerous obstacles navigating academia's elite/middle-class culture. But Lucas, a Senior Lecturer in Health at a traditional institution, observed that the mere presence of '*people like us'* demonstrates resilience (and a form of aspirational capital) as WCAs often persevere in their careers despite facing pressures to conform to elite or middle-class norms. Bev, a PhD Student in Sociology at a post-1992 institution expands on this:

> *I've had setbacks in my life, because of my background, but I can see that there's a way through them, whereas I think if I had not had those challenges, and I came up against a wall, something that was really difficult, like doing a PhD. I've seen it in other people, they just fall apart. When really the situation they're facing i.e., just doing a PhD with enough money and no kids to look after, is not actually that difficult. Obviously, everyone's experience is different, but I think when you've had setbacks and you've had to fight that bit harder for your education, you fight that bit harder to get a foot in the door, and that's helped me, I think if I didn't have that as part of my character, because of my upbringing I would have quit by now.*

Bev acknowledged the setbacks she had experienced due to her background but suggested that these challenges provided a unique advantage when encountering difficult situations, such as pursuing a PhD. Despite setbacks, Bev contrasted her

own experience with that of others who may not have faced similar challenges. The notion is that the extra effort invested in fighting for education and opportunities had instilled a tenacity that helped her overcome obstacles. Overall, Bev demonstrated the transformative power of facing and overcoming challenges. A significant minority of respondents (13%, n. 32) reported that despite feelings of exclusion, isolation, and the acknowledgement of the inherent challenges, they persevered in their aspirations of securing an academic position throughout their doctoral studies. These respondents showed admirable determination and resilience, pursuing academic goals despite adversity from working-class backgrounds.

My respondents expressed a further example of aspirational capital by their desire to support others from their working-class communities. Bryan, Research Fellow in History from an Oxbridge institution articulated this sentiment, stating, '*My academic journey has always been anchored in a desire to bring about positive change in the community I come from'*. Another respondent, Becky, a PhD student in English from an Oxbridge institution echoed this commitment, affirming,

> *Being a working class academic is not just about personal achievement; it's about leveraging my position to uplift the community that shaped me. I want to bridge the gap between academia and the everyday lives of people in my neighbourhood.*

Becky described organising various community-based art projects to preserve the cultural heritage of her community. Whereas, Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an elite institution, was actively engaging in a collaborative project with a local business to facilitate connections between academia and industry. Alan, Bryan, and Becky exemplified how being a WCA extends beyond personal accomplishment; it's a tangible expression of a desire to make a positive impact beyond the walls of academia.

While aspirational capital can be a positive response to negative experiences, respondents acknowledged that it was hard to keep going at times, leading some to contemplate pursuing alternative career paths beyond academia. Approximately 5% (n. 12) of respondents expressed being so profoundly demoralised by the precarious nature of academia, that they had seriously contemplated leaving the field, particularly because they struggled to demonstrate the tangible benefits to their families. Lucy, a Teaching Associate in Law at a Russell Group institution articulated this sentiment, stating, '*What do I have to show? We are short of money, I'm tired and don't have time for my partner'* (Crew, 2020, p. 59). Both Jack and Robert emphasised that it was to sustain themselves in the long term due to the limited hours allocated for undergraduate teaching. Robert, a Teaching Associate in Business Studies at a post-1992 institution, talked of his financial hardships during our interview, disclosing that he had relied on his friends for meals due to his dire financial situation. Similarly, Jack, a Teaching Associate in Mathematics at an Oxbridge institution, rescheduled our online interview due to financial constraints regarding his internet access. The economic precarity of some respondents led them to contemplate leaving academia at the end of the semester. Robert explained his predicament, stating:

> *If I don't manage to secure some additional work, such as being a research assistant for a few months, I'm going to have give up my PhD, and academia, for the foreseeable future.*

This sobering reality shows the immense financial challenges faced by PhD students from working-class backgrounds. Despite their determination, a lack of financial stability during the critical PhD training period can derail careers before they start. Without addressing these barriers, academia risks losing a range of talent and diversity.

The presence of successful role models and mentors emerged as another facet of aspirational capital identified by my respondents. These accomplished academics served as tangible examples, demonstrating to my WCA respondents that their aspirations were indeed achievable. Yvonne's sentiment, a Lecturer in Health and Social Care at a Russell Group institution, resonated with this notion. She observed, '*Seeing professors from backgrounds like mine showed me I could do it too. They paved the way'*. Yvonne's statement demonstrated that role models personified the future selves that my WCA respondents could envision. For instance, Amelia, now a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at a Russell Group institution noted: '*My PhD advisor pushed me. I wouldn't have made it through without him*'. Role models not only made desired identities seem attainable but also actively contributed to the resilience of some WCAs.

Respondents expressed concerns that, given the underrepresentation of WCAs in academia, the mentors they were matched with were often from middle-class backgrounds. While respondents acknowledged the positive qualities of their mentors from different class backgrounds, they referred to there being a lack of shared experiences and perspectives. As Petra, a Lecturer in Human Geography at a post-1992 institution, remarked, '*She was helpful and kind, but I didn't have anything in common with her'*. Respondents, particularly those at elite institutions, lamented the dearth of mentors who shared their working-class heritage, echoing a broader lack of research on academic mentoring tailored specifically for WCAs. The importance of ethnicity and gender 'matching' when allocating mentors has been established by both Blake Beard et al. (2011) and Nickerson (2020), but the significance of considering social class background in mentor/mentee relationships remains overlooked. Considering that WCA aspirations endure despite well-documented exclusions, there is a compelling case for further research into effective mentoring practices that consider the specific challenges and aspirations associated with their class heritage.

WCAs who enjoyed the privilege of successful mentorships displayed a profound commitment to paying it forward by providing support to students and aspiring academics throughout their academic journeys. While this behaviour could be seen as an example of navigational capital, showcasing effective navigation of academic systems, it is fundamentally rooted in aspirational capital. The core motivation driving these respondents is twofold: first, to challenge the deficit discourse surrounding working-class individuals, and second, to serve as inspirations for others from similar backgrounds. Respondents such Yvonne, a Lecturer in Health and Social Care at a Russell Group institution, discussed the

prevalent negative portrayal of working-class students and academics and passionately highlighted that: '*we are not fucking useless you know, we can do so much despite everything there has been in our way'*. Yvonne's words reflected a perspective of empowerment and a commitment to challenge negative stereotypes. Ellie, a Lecturer in Health Sciences at a Russell Group institution, speaking from her experience as a student, mentioned: '*I know how important it is to have a visible presence of BME staff members, so I will always be that presence at open days, at school events'*. She also expressed her aspiration to establish an organisation aimed at assisting working-class people in HE, having witnessed the struggles faced by her friends and family when they embarked on their own academic journeys. Ellie's quote served as a powerful reminder of the importance of representation, mentorship, and support networks in fostering an inclusive and equitable academic environment.

Research conducted by Manstead (2018) indicated that working-class people often demonstrate higher levels of empathy and a greater willingness to offer support to others facing challenges. This emphasised the potential for working-class people to be strong advocates for positive change within academia. Darren, a PhD Student in Gaming from a post-1992 institution talked of wanting to inspire others: '*I was once asked as part of the interview for the PhD what my teaching style was, I don't know the pedagogical language, but in essence, I want to inspire people*'. In Crew (2020), two of my respondents with a disability reported that role models with disabilities were vital to create a sense of belonging in HE, for students and academics. Although both acknowledged that some people with disabilities may not want to emphasise their disability or to be 'shoehorned into the disability champion role' (Martin, 2017, p. 26).

Navigational Capital

Navigational capital refers to students' skills and abilities to navigate institutions such as universities. It's similar to the resourcefulness that Hurst (2010) suggested that her participants associated with their working-class perspective. Yosso (2005) explains that this form of capital empowers people to manoeuvre within hostile environments. As an example, Wright et al.'s (2016) research involving young black males discussed how they would use black community organisations to navigate educational challenges. These organisations provided them with valuable advice, mentoring, and information on education and training opportunities. In turn, this support then allowed them to effectively convert their social capital into navigational capital (p. 28). While not specifically related to WCAs, Nikolaraizi and Hadjikakou (2006) outlined how role models from within the Deaf community provided strategies on how to cope with distressing situations when navigating the 'hearing world'. Łuczaj (2023) found that one of her respondents referred to a type of entrepreneurship, a form of navigational capital, which enabled her to navigate academia (p. 199).

One manifestation of navigational capital among my respondents, was the academic advising they performed for students from disadvantaged backgrounds as part of their faculty responsibilities. While most academics are expected to provide

support in this manner, my respondents wanted to help students manoeuvre through the often opaque and unwritten rules of academia. Respondents in Hurst and Nenga (2016) study discussed mentoring working-class students where possible. Several of my respondents had a similar approach. Craig, a Lecturer in Mental Health,[2] remarked:

> *There is a hidden curriculum. So, I'll often read through essays before submission, and provide in depth feedback…I care about the students and have this constructive approach to feedback, to help them make progress*.

Craig suggested that this may be something other WCAs might discuss, and he was correct. Nearly two-thirds (65%, n. 165) of my respondents expressed their commitment to providing this level of support for their students:

> *If you're a working class person whose been successful academically, you also know how painful it can be for someone to get poor grades…. It can be really hard…I guess what makes you more caring, is having this experience that was bumpy, and you know very well, that others don't have such a bumpy trajectory*.

The academic advising role undertaken by these academics was often a means of 'paying it forward', i.e. passing on their own hard-earned knowledge and experience. Craig's approach to mentoring epitomised this as he actively guided his students through the fundamentals of essay writing and offered comprehensive feedback. His caring and constructive style demonstrated that WCAs often possess a high degree of empathy and a genuine understanding of the challenges students might encounter.

Similar to the findings of Listman's (2013) study on support for deaf mentees through exposure to a broader scholarly community, my respondents expressed a desire to empower both students and early career researchers (ECRs) by integrating them into research-related activities. Respondents shared numerous examples[3] of innovative practices that they had included into their modules. Some of these initiatives included:

- *Conference Engagement:* students actively participated in conferences, providing experience of real-world academic discourse and networking.
- *Writing Retreats:* online and in-person writing retreats, dedicated spaces for collaborative writing efforts and a sense of community.
- *Research Task Hub:* a centralised hub or a 'one stop research shop' where students engaged in various research tasks beneficial for the school.

[2]The respondent preferred not to give details of his institution.

[3]I don't identify respondents here because some approaches are unusual, and as such might identify them outside of this study.

- *Writing Kickstart Exercises:* Activities crafted to assist students overcome procrastination and boosting productivity.
- *Peer Teaching:* Encouraged 'peer-to-peer teaching', allowing students to share their expertise and fostering a collaborative learning environment.
- *Cross-Year Mentorship:* First-year students are paired with more experienced students who provide guidance and support.
- *'Genius Hours'*[4]*:* Dedicated time where students work on projects of personal interest, encouraging creativity and self-directed learning.
- *Academic Paper Writing:* Integrated academic paper writing into postgraduate courses.
- *Staff/Student Working-Class Network:* Established a network that connects staff and students from working-class backgrounds, promoting mentorship, shared experiences, and a supportive community within the academic setting.

These examples encapsulated the diverse strategies employed by WCAs to enrich the academic experience, empowered students, and cultivated a culture of active and meaningful engagement with the academic community.

Despite the various innovative initiatives, my respondents often faced resistance from their Heads of Department. Instead of receiving recognition or promotions, they encountered criticism, particularly in elite and Russell Group universities. Notably, a small but significant percentage (4%, n. 11) of respondents reported being labelled as 'handholders' by their colleagues.

> *I've worked hard on providing these resources for my students, all students, although the aim is to primarily help working class students, and all my institution can do is to call it handholding*. [Eddie, Senior Lecturer in Criminology at a traditional institution]

> *Colleagues at my university have been 'concerned' that I'm lowering standards with my handholding*. [emphasis added by author following the emphasis in the interview]. [Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an Elite institution]

The use of the term '*hand holding*' refers to the prevailing perception that supporting working-class students academically is overly nurturing. My co-writers in an article I wrote with Flynn et al. (2023), agreed with this perspective, noting that: 'if it's with, you know, working class students…students of colour it becomes spoon feeding and you're lowering standards. Whereas if it's with other students, it's called scaffolding knowledge and it's ok. It's really loaded' (p. 173). The distinction made between '*hand holding*' and '*scaffolding knowledge*' suggested a discrepancy in how these supportive practices are perceived based on the demographic characteristics of the students receiving support. These reflections reveal potential biases in creating equitable educational environments.

[4]https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/genius-hour-questions/

My respondents reported that supporting disadvantaged students was an inextricable aspect of their professional responsibilities, as aptly expressed by Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an Elite institution, who referred to it as a '*moral obligation*'. Undeterred by institutional pressures that marginalised student advocacy, my respondents remained steadfast in their dedication to providing support tailored to their students' needs. These criticisms not only uncovered the deeply ingrained biases surrounding the definition of valid academic work but also illuminated the unrecognised time and emotional labour invested in student mentorship. Echoing the broader undervaluation of student support, 9% (n. 22) of respondents reported that their student support initiatives were not acknowledged in their annual performance reviews, despite being an integral component of their workload.

An analysis of the data revealed an uneven distribution of navigational capital among respondents, with WCAs on precarious contracts having limited access to this essential resource. This disparity seemed to arise from the need for strong professional networks, which WCAs in precarious academic positions struggled to establish and maintain due to the insecure nature of their roles within academia. As mentioned in Chapter One, WCAs like Flynn, a Lecturer in Health at a traditional university, faced significantly reduced access to professional networks. In some instances, these challenges were exacerbated by their limited familiarity with colleagues on permanent contracts. Casualised staff often lack autonomy as universities typically prioritise resource allocation and support for academics holding permanent positions, for instance, Talia, a Research Assistant in Nursing at a traditional institution perceived that she did not have the same level of academic support, including mentorship and professional development opportunities. This disparity in access to navigational capital compounds the existing challenges faced by WCAs on precarious contracts, hindering opportunities for career advancement.

Linguistic Capital

Yosso (2005) cited linguistic capital as being the knowledge, skills, and resources related to language and communication. It encompassed the ability to effectively use language in various contexts and the advantages that this language proficiency offers. Something as simple as a shared sense of humour can represent linguistic capital bonding. Bourdieu (1986) conceptualised linguistic capital as being a form of social capital. According to Bourdieu (2000), language is a kind of wealth (p. 467). Linguistic capital operates at both individual and systemic levels, conferring privilege or disadvantage. Individually, it influences how marginalised people navigate social worlds through available linguistic resources. Bourdieu's conception of linguistic capital differs from Yosso's quite significantly. Bourdieu primarily emphasises the linguistic superiority of the middle classes, often without acknowledging that this perspective is rooted in the supposed linguistic inferiority attributed to the working classes (Leeb, 2004, p. 94). Whereas Yosso's concept of linguistic capital emphasises the skills of marginalised groups and the social biases that promote certain voices over others, i.e. those from advantaged social backgrounds being privileged over WCAs.

One embodiment of WCAs linguistic and navigational capital was evident in their discussions with disadvantaged students about the lived experiences of adapting communication to different environments. For instance, Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an Elite institution openly shared his lived experiences of adapting communication to different environments with his students.

> *I tell students to use the language that fits where you are…I explain how I shift between home dialect with family and academic speak at university. Both have value. It helps students know that academics code switch too.*

Alan believed that '*exposing the hidden rules of universities liberates knowledge*', Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution, echoed this sentiment, stating, '*I let students know that the game is tough, but it can be done – with luck and hard work*'. These perspectives demonstrated the crucial role WCAs play in bridging the gap between their students' backgrounds and the academic world. For WCAs like Alan and Dominic, proficiency in academic language served as a valuable tool to empower their students. By sharing their own experiences of navigating the academic landscape, WCAs such as Alan and Dominic, helped students gain the confidence to help them thrive in HE.

Linguistic capital encompasses the prestige attributed to specific speech patterns within a society's power dynamics. This facet of cultural wealth involves the biases ingrained in societal structures that elevate particular voices. In academia, an individual's accent, such as 'received pronunciation', can serve as an illustration of embodied cultural capital, whereas a regional accent may label them as an outsider. As discussed throughout this book, many of my respondents reported being stigmatised due to their regional accents, however, a shared or similar accent can also foster community, with students responding well to scholars who 'sound like them'. Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution, who said he had a strong Newcastle accent, remarked: '*Students often express appreciation for my Geordie accent, as it helps them feel more relaxed and comfortable'*. While fluency in privileged linguistic styles is typically desired, linguistic diversity, such as a 'Geordie' accent, has its own unique value. Yvonne, a Lecturer in Health and Social Care at a Russell Group institution summarised, '*My local, regional accent is a reminder to students that academics are not just posh people'*. This statement highlighted the importance of authenticity and relatability in academic settings. By using their local, regional accent, Yvonne and others demonstrated that they were not only an expert in their field but also someone who is approachable and relatable to students from diverse backgrounds. This accessibility is particularly valuable for students who may feel intimidated by the academic environment, as it humanises academics and makes them seem more approachable. Moreover, the use of a local accent can be seen as a subtle form of resistance against the stereotypical perception of academics as elitist and detached from the realities of their students.

Familiall Social Capital

Familial/social capital refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among kin (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016, p. 2). It encompasses the social, cultural, and economic benefits that come from one's family background. The strength of family capital is typically determined by the family culture that can be transferred to the next generation. This is crucial as the wealth and quality of family resources play a decisive role in shaping employment opportunities. Family networks can serve as a gateway to job prospects, mentorships, and valuable connections within professional and social circles, aiding in identifying scholarships, assisting with application preparation, providing guidance, and facilitating the acquisition of education and employment. This form of capital has been widely theorised by many such as Coleman (1998), Putnam (2000), and Bourdieu (various). Like Bourdieu, Coleman perceived social capital to reside in the social structure of relationships among people, whereas Putnam defined social capital as being those connections among individuals and the trustworthiness that emerge from these connections. Yosso's conceptualisation of social capital expands upon Bourdieu's as it additionally recognises the cultural wealth generated through community spirit and mutual support. It is not just who you know, but the knowledge, care, and cohesion nurtured through communal ties.

Research on familial capital often utilises the narratives from students of colour at universities within the United States, so direct comparisons with WCAs in the UK are not possible. However, it can help us understand how familial capital manifests. For instance, research by Matos (2015) found that family encouragement is a form of familial capital, as is support from academic advisers (Carter Francique et al., 2015). Students of colour in US universities tended to look for support from ethnic-focused student organisations, as these were spaces where they felt a sense of belonging (Fernández et al., 2023). O'Shea (2016) interviews were primarily characterised by the voices of 'others', with several parents specifically reflecting on the substantial impact their children had on their educational pursuits. Respondents with disabilities relied on familial/social capital for practical assistance. For example, Tina, a Lecturer in Secondary and Post-Compulsory Education at a post-1992 institution, stated, '*My parents happily read my work aloud when my vision worsens. They're my rock*'. This emphasised the importance of family support as a source of strength and encouragement in the face of personal difficulties.

Beyond family, my respondents demonstrated familial capital through university networks and associations such as Afro-Caribbean societies and women's networks. Despite challenges, communal ties, whether with university administrators or campus groups, provided advice, validation, and solidarity. Online disability communities also played a significant role in providing moral support. Brandon, a Teaching Assistant in Health Studies at a post-1992 institution, and a wheelchair user, emphasised, '*I couldn't navigate ableist campuses without my community. We cope together*'. Tina and Brandon underscore the crucial role of support networks for WCAs, especially those dealing with disabilities or encountering

ableism in academia. Brandon's mention of online disability communities aligns with Bricout's (2004) research, highlighting the value of virtual networks in offering moral support and addressing ableism.

Resistance Capital

Resistance capital refers to the resources, skills, and strategies that individuals or communities possess to resist, challenge, and navigate oppressive systems or structures. Resistance capital stresses the desire to challenge power dynamics, advocate for social justice, and challenge inequity (Yosso, 2005). Samuelson and Litzler (2016) observed students exhibiting resistant capital, with the aim to change stereotypes and succeed despite racial discrimination. Some addressed microaggressions, while others expressed the desire for increased diversity within existing systems. One of the respondents' fathers in Tolbert Smith (2022) research provided him with a navigational and resistant strategy by teaching him oppositional behaviour that would challenge the negative perceptions others had of Black men. Whereas Kornbluh et al. (2022), who conducted 145 surveys with minority and first-generation students, found that they expressed awareness of systemic inequities which facilitated a desire for social action. Most participants in Strangfeld (2022) provided an example of resistance capital as a desire to improve upon the economic conditions of their parents and other family members. Finally, Revelo and Baber (2018) qualitative study with Latino/a STEM students saw resistant capital in the form of role modelling and participating in community outreach. These respondents were committed to giving back to their communities not only as a way to challenge the gap between the Latino/a community and college, but to also promote STEM programs and careers which do not have many Latino/a students.

Das (2023) highlighted that the academic classroom is a crucial battleground for ideological class struggle, especially within the Social Sciences and Humanities. He asserted that professors often espouse ideologies that align with the interests of the ruling class, inadvertently perpetuating capitalist structures and reinforcing class divisions. An instance of resistance capital manifested through the introduction of WCA pedagogy, a teaching approach I presented in Crew (2020) where respondents would refer to having pedagogical assets that emphasised social change. What emerged as an intriguing finding was that as the study progressed, through all three phases, a sizable proportion (68%, n. 167) of respondents, particularly in the fields of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, continued to provide examples of how their classed experiences influenced their pedagogical approaches. The first aspect involved adopting a 'strengths-based approach' to teaching (Crew, 2020, p. 116), emphasising the inherent strengths of students (and WCAs) within the university environment, rather than focusing on their perceived shortcomings or limitations. This corresponds with the concept of 'funds of knowledge' (FoK), which was initially introduced by Wolf (1966) and then elaborated upon by Moll et al. (1992), wherein households are repositories of knowledge. This perspective refers to practical skills (home maintenance), social competencies (community organising), personal/local knowledge (understanding

of local geography, landmarks, and historical events), and life experience (conflict resolution skills). This manifested among my own respondents and their students, with reference being made to '*coping mechanisms for dealing with adversity*' [Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution]; '*class based discrimination*' [Jeremy, a Postdoctoral Researcher in Geography at a traditional institution] and '*political perspectives shaped by personal experiences*' [Sophie, a Teaching Assistant in Biological Sciences at a Red Brick institution]. These examples emphasised the importance of understanding and incorporating the rich knowledge that WCAs and their disadvantaged students bring to the academic environment. However, academia often overlooks WCA cultural wealth. Lived expertise can not only enhance teaching, research, policymaking but it strengthens institutions who value people from all backgrounds.

A second strand of WCA pedagogy is whereby respondents 'co-created knowledge' with their students (Crew, 2020). Traditional pedagogy revolves around rote memorisation, a practice criticised by Freire (1970) for treating students as passive recipients. Instead, a Freirian approach shifts the teacher's role from the sole instructor to being a collaborator where both teachers and students engage as learners, fostering a sense of equality and shared knowledge (Freire, 1993). Respondents in this study had a variety of examples such as '*projects that allowed us to apply theoretical knowledge to real world scenarios*' [Alan, a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at an Elite institution], or 'contributing to ongoing research' [Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution] and as outlined in Crew (2020) '*students as consultants to help embedding employability skills into a programme*' [Amy, a Teaching Fellow in English at a Russell Group institution].

A further dimension of this pedagogy involved the 'inclusion of lived experience'. Amelia, a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at a Russell Group institution described designing assignments whereby students could apply their lived experiences to propose solutions to social issues. Margaret, a Lecturer in Education at a Russell Group institution incorporated diversity in her reading list whereby she selected material that represent a wide range of lived experiences. In an assessment set by Jeremy, a Postdoctoral Researcher in Geography at a traditional institution, students wrote a diary of a fictional character travelling to England on the Empire Windrush. Brandon, a teaching assistant in Health Studies at a post-1992 institution, wanted to make what was '*historically invisible, visible*'. He utilised his personal experiences with a physical disability to help students conceptualise the evolving nature of our understanding of disability throughout specific historical periods (Crew, 2020). The 'incorporation of lived experience' within this pedagogical framework not only acknowledged the richness of students' backgrounds but actively leveraged these experiences to enhance learning, transforming their education into a more participatory and inclusive process. This culturally responsive teaching enables students to engage with course content in personally meaningful ways.

'Incorporating social justice' was the final component of a WCA pedagogy. LeCourt (2006) emphasised that the pursuit of social justice in education involves fostering student consciousness and addressing inequalities in their lives. My

respondents gave examples of applying social justice principles across their curriculum. This included diversifying reading lists, to more extensive actions such as partnering with national social justice organisations and using activist strategies to effect positive change in their local community. Other respondents described engaging in grassroots community organising as part of their teaching, leveraging their resistance capital to push for social change. Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution, co-founded a research group on employment disadvantage, noting '*I draw from my family's union history to stand up to exploitation*'. Whereas Sal, a Lecturer in Social Studies at a traditional institution, who volunteered with housing justice advocates, explained that she '*had first hand insights of homelessness which I include in my teaching*'. Respondents emphasised mutual learning was embedded in their teaching through what Delgado Bernal (1998) calls 'pedagogies of the home', similar to FoK. This refers to the informal learning experiences that individuals encounter in their homes. This concept recognises the importance of familial and cultural influences on an individual's educational development, acknowledging that the 'home' plays a crucial role in shaping one's knowledge, values, and skills. Rather than the typical top-down teaching methods Sal reflected that she facilitated students to organise local community fundraising events. Overall, these educators grounded their teaching philosophies in social justice by including students in their teaching practice.

Another example of resistance capital is related to my data on imposter syndrome. Just under 20% (n. 44) of respondents explicitly challenged the narrative of imposterism. Instead, they emphasised their competence and significant contributions within the academic sphere. For instance, Flynn, a Lecturer in Health at a traditional institution, asserted that '*I refuse to buy into the idea of imposter syndrome; I am here because I deserve to be. My capabilities speak for themselves*', as did Danielle, a Graduate Teaching Assistant at a Redbrick institution, who was clear that: '*we are just as capable, if not more capable, than other academics as we are here, as academics, despite overcoming barriers*'. Both responses demonstrated a resistance to the imposter narrative but also a sense of self-worth, emphasising the competence and resilience of WCAs in academia. This perspective provided a counter-narrative to the notion that WCAs lacked competence, and, as such, experienced imposterism. These respondents had a resilience, that surpassed mere defiance. Mark, a Lecturer in Engineering,[5] encapsulated this by stating:

> *My background is a strength, not a limitation. It enriches academic landscapes as I have diverse insights that tend to be overlooked. I've earned my place here, unlike some privileged academics.*

This perspective not only countered the imposterism narrative but also framed the WCA experience as an asset rather than a deficit, showcasing their agency in reshaping the discourse within academic environments. The emphasis on the enrichment of the academic landscape through the '*diverse insights*' that respondents like Mark offer the academy was a powerful assertion of the unique value of WCAs in this intellectual environment. Mark also boldly asserted the legitimacy

[5]Mark preferred not to give details of his institution.

of WCAs like himself in academia. Mark boldly affirmed the legitimacy of WCAs like himself in academia, asserting that they have earned their position, distinguishing them from the typical academic who may benefit from unearned advantages.

My data uncovered a provocative example of resistance capital, one which related to the current[6] Universities and College Union (UCU) strikes. As working-class people have a history of support for strike action, their comments on the strike were to be expected. From 2018, the UCU, a trade union representing around 110,000 staff at UK universities, has organised a series of industrial actions. Referred to as the 'three fights', there were three core campaigns:

1. Pay – fair compensation with a pay increase that meets or exceeds inflation (RPI) plus 2%, or 12%, based on whichever figure is higher.
2. Pensions – advocating for the reversal of reductions in pension benefits and ensuring a secure retirement for academic staff.
3. Equality – gender, ethnic, and disability pay equality, and addressing the use of precarious contracts and excessive workloads (Lewis, 2023; Universities & Colleges Union Left, 2023).

The elected representatives on UCU's higher education committee (HEC) voted to begin a marking and assessment boycott (MAB) from 20th April 2023. This meant that all UCU members in HEIs who took part in the strike were asked to cease all summative marking and associated assessment activities/duties (Universities & Colleges Union, 2023). In reaction to the MAB, some universities have perceived this boycott to represent a 'partial performance' of contractual duties – and have exercised their legal right to reduce/or to not to pay salaries in full (WONKE, 2023). As of August 2023, more than 60 employers said they would deduct between 50% and 100% of wages from those taking part in the MAB (Lewis, 2023, p. 23). The UCU informed their members that if their employer made these deductions from their daily pay for partial performance, they could claim from the fighting fund (UCU, 2023).

In all, 6% (n. 15) of respondents mentioned the UCU strikes either during their interview or in the survey data.[7] Among those, nine expressed their support for the strike. One respondent stated: '*I participated in the UCU strike to voice my concerns about fair pay and working conditions within academia*'. Another respondent echoed this sentiment, noting, '*The UCU strikes have been an essential way to collectively address pay inequalities and insecure contracts*'. Others defended the boycott, arguing that the need for systemic change necessitated strike action: '*powerful institutions only respond to disruptive actions*', said one respondent, while another said: '*a strongly unified strike sends an unavoidable message that exploiting*

[6]At the time of writing, September 2023.

[7]In light of the UCU strike being the subject of discussion, I present this data in a collective manner, departing from the individual approach adopted throughout this book. This divergence is to provide an additional layer of protection for respondents' anonymity while discussing resistance capital.

academic labour is unacceptable'. Their participation in the strikes was portrayed as a proactive stance to address systemic issues, particularly in terms of precarious contracts. The choice of phrases such as '*essential way*' and '*meaningful change*' suggested a belief in the effectiveness of collective action to bring about transformative shifts in the academic landscape. Moreover, the respondents justified the strikes as being a necessary measure, viewing them as a potent tool to challenge and disrupt established power dynamics. The idea, as expressed by one respondent, that '*powerful institutions only respond to power*', reflected a strategic perspective, indicating a belief that unified, impactful actions are essential to compel institutional change. This perspective aligned with a broader narrative that sees the UCU strikes not only as a protest against immediate issues but as a means to convey an unmistakable message against the exploitation of academic labour. In essence, these responses highlighted the UCU strikes as being a pivotal moment for those participants who supported the movement, showcasing a belief in the potential of collective action to address systemic challenges within academia.

Nevertheless, a small minority (2%, n. 6) of respondents expressed reservations about the UCU strikes. As mentioned earlier, these respondents held a distinct perspective on their academic roles, differing from the prevailing views among their colleagues. Despite reporting that their academic peers viewed academia as being demanding, my WCA respondents, with backgrounds in manual labour and challenging jobs, generally considered their academic workloads to be less strenuous compared with their previous manual jobs. This standpoint shaped how they conceptualised the nature of academic labour and their class identity as academics. Respondents recognised the mental strain of academia and the detrimental impact of casualisation. However, their prior physically demanding jobs, which had adverse effects on their physical health, framed their academic work as comparatively comfortable and privileged by comparison. This standpoint also shaped how they perceived the UCU strikes. While recognising the need for change, as many of my respondents were/had been on precarious contracts, all had some reservations about the strike. For instance, one respondent said: '*supporting the cause is important, but there are more effective ways to bring about lasting change in academia*'.

Discussions over the recent marking boycott revealed divisions among my WCAs on how best to leverage their resistance capital. Their perspective was interesting considering many respondents had grown up in families who were either involved with or supported the miners' strikes in the 1980s, the action that was symbiotic with the working-class struggle. This again highlighted the complexities within academia, where individuals' classed experiences could lead to varying interpretations of collective actions such as strikes. Although my respondents wanted to address inequities, they felt that at times, ways of referring to the MAB on social media were often excessive displays of privilege. This is encapsulated in the following comment:

> *I've lost count of how many wage slips were flashed on social media. They could have conveyed the salary reductions without the vulgar performative displays. Many working class people would be grateful to earn half of what those people have left following deductions.*

These perspectives reflected the complex navigation of resistance capital. While participants desired reform, some questioned whether the aggressive approach of the MAB was the most strategic path forward compared to other forms of collective actions that they felt '*would cripple the university system*'.

When questioned about how they would pursue systemic reforms instead of resorting to strike action, my WCA respondents proposed leveraging their collective power over knowledge production. Research by Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) observes that working-class people are also often 'sensitive to questions of power distribution in society" (p. 98) and may want a counter system of social order that opposes excessive hierarchy and exclusivity' (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988, p. 136). In all, 2% (n. 5) of my respondents claimed that ceasing all academic research was the way forward, remarking that such a radical strategy could exert far greater pressure on universities than walkouts or marking boycotts ever possibly could. As one respondent stated, '*It's simple – we down "tools" and halt our research output*'. This sentiment was echoed by another respondent:

> *strikes will only briefly disrupt routines, but if you want change, real change, if you want the universities to come to the table, stop giving them [the universities] our intellectual capital.*

Instead of engaging in what one of my respondents described as '*posing with wage slips*',[8] they argued that collective research abstention was a more strategic resistance tactic. This approach would have the bold aim of '*transformational change rather than mere temporary disruptions'*. By weaponising their knowledge production, the university's core money-making mission, one respondent suggested that they '*could expose the business model that depends on exploiting scholarship for profit*'. These WCAs advocated for a form of activism within academia that exposed and challenged the underlying systems and structures they perceived to be problematic.

Perspective Capital

Jackson-Cole (2019) presented this as a resource that enabled ethnic minority students of colour to contribute to academia. Hurst (2010) was an early proponent of perspective capital as she referred to the ability of working-class students to recognise multiple perspectives and ways of thinking about research relating to minoritised groups. This view was influenced by their own experiences of being 'left out of academic conversations'. Jackson-Cole utilised this perspective to explain how one respondent had a profound understanding of the

[8]The respondent in question was discussing HE staff facing salary deductions in marking boycott: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jul/30/university-bosses-attack-staff-pay-protest-wages-queen-mary-university-london. 'Posing with wage slips referred to some academic staff protesting about these salary deductions by posting a picture of their wage slip that showed how much of their salary had been deducted due to the marking boycott'.

complexities surrounding the reluctance of some Gypsy Traveller communities towards child vaccinations. The respondent in question connected the historical persecution endured by Roma communities over centuries to their inherent fear of the authority of government agencies. She was also able to propose strategies to address the issue. Her contribution encapsulated the power of perspective capital, as she was able to draw upon her nuanced awareness of how some ethnic minorities have endured a history of harassment, surveillance, and abuse. This form of perspective capital emerged as a vital tool in enhancing academia's understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding marginalised communities. Hurst's (2010) respondents actively sought out courses that challenged their perspectives, such as international studies, African Diaspora literature, and transgender identity courses. They were unafraid to share their diverse viewpoints (p. 124).

The lived experiences of my respondents provided an example of perspective capital. As Dominic, a Senior Lecturer in Education at a post-1992 institution attested, '*My main accomplishment is that I can help someone understand more about the difficulties that poverty stricken families experience. It's a systematic issue, it doesn't represent a moral frailty*'. Amy, a Teaching Fellow in English at a Russell Group institution, explained that having come from a disadvantaged background, '*I see injustices and inequities that others dont*'. My respondent Mila, a Lecturer in the School of Education and Communities at a traditional institution, echoed this:

> *We bring understanding, we bring humour, we bring authentic news, we bring sadness sometimes…I believe, and I've done trauma informed training…that my past trauma means I can relate to lots of different things…So, I notice little changes, whereas the other people don't care.*

These excerpts demonstrated that WCAs enrich the academic environment by providing a deeper understanding of societal issues, greater sensitivity to injustices, and a unique capacity for empathy. Similar to the findings of Hurst (2010), my respondents discussed their advocacy for other academics facing inequalities, sharing instances where they offered pastoral support to female academics experiencing sexism, to ethnic minority colleagues who had encountered racism, as well as academics confronting issues of ableism, heterosexism, transgenderism and other forms of discrimination. As already highlighted, these perspectives can contribute to more inclusive and effective forms of teaching and support for students.

Sal, a Lecturer in Social Studies at a traditional institution felt that her working-class heritage also gave her '*insights into the reforms needed in higher education*'. Jamie, a Lecturer in History at a traditional institution, agreed: '*our ability to understand varied perspectives, built from navigating different worlds, can solve problems and reduce conflicts when applied collectively*'. These examples highlighted how WCAs exhibit multifaceted worldviews which empower them to see their background as an asset. My data also revealed that WCAs applied

perspective capital as a resource for broader societal improvement. Theo, a Politics Research Fellow[9] expanded on this:

> *Because our journeys have often been a lot less traditional we see institutions that are rooted in tradition…where everything is old fashioned. We can come in with our different perspectives and we can…change, modernise, awaken these institutions and be a force for good.*

These respondents felt that their different perspectives could serve as a catalyst for driving positive change, to challenge the status quo and contribute to societal improvement. My data revealed that some WCAs see themselves as agents of change, bringing in fresh perspectives and actively participating in the transformation of these institutions.

[9]This respondent did not wish to give details of their institution.