

Contradictions of Belonging: The Educational Aspirations and Agency of Youth in the
Somali Diaspora

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Joanna A. Tzenis

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Joan DeJaeghere, Advisor

June 2018

Acknowledgements

I have so many people to thank. First and foremost, I must acknowledge the nine youth participants: Marwa, Layla, Khalid, Hamdi, Faiza, Hodan, Ahmed, Abdi, and Roodoo (and their siblings). You are each intelligent, bold, totally goofy, and entirely inspiring. Thank you for trusting me with your experiences, your values, and hopes. Thanks for making me laugh and for challenging me to do good things in this world.

To Zakariya, Kowsar, Ibrahim, Fatima, and Mahamud: I am so grateful for your partnership. Working with each of you has shaped me for the better. Thank you for welcoming me (and at times, my daughter) into your programs. Thank you for the rich conversations, the laughter, your friendship, and the Somali tea.

To my adviser, Dr. Joan DeJaeghere, I am so grateful to you. You have been and are exactly what I need in a mentor. You set the bar high and never let me doubt myself. I would always leave our advising meetings with more confidence, new ideas, and an eagerness to get to work. At the risk of sounding dramatic, I would not have come to this program if it were not for you. I had a *fairly* clear idea of the topics I wanted to pursue in my graduate studies, but was not sure where I would be able to find a “fit.” Finding your bio/description of your work on the CIDE webpage gave me a sense of belonging in academia and my application followed suit. Thank you for your mentorship for these past five years.

Dr. Peter Demerath, Dr. Jarrett Gupton, and Dr. Karen Miksch: Thank you for serving on my committee and elevating my scholarship with your feedback and support.

Dr. Jennifer Skuza: I have learned many things from you, but the biggest lesson you have given me is how to work toward a goal with determination and straight up hard work. I am grateful for your mentorship and of course for the opportunity you granted to me to work in partnership with Somali Youth Strength.

Dr. Fran Vavrus and Dr. Chris Johnstone: Thank you for being such wonderful educators who worked tirelessly to prepare me and all your students to be superb and compassionate scholars.

Dr. Anna Kaiper, your brilliance and your compassion have been such a source of support for me. Thank you for your friendship and for continually lifting me up. You were “my person” during this endeavor; I am forever grateful to you and for you.

Dr. Amina Jaafar, Emily Morris, and Elisheva Cohen: You are fiercely intelligent women and supportive friends and colleagues. I am so glad to have accomplished this alongside each of you.

I want to acknowledge UDSDA/NIFA and the Children, Youth, and Families at Risk program for investing in young people and their potential to thrive. The youth programs in which the young people in this study participated, came to be because of the support of these programs.

To my Urban 4-H Team past and present, thank for you for the sunshine.

Dr. Kate Walker, thank you for giving me my first opportunity to do research with youth and for supporting me in my career.

Hey, hey, hey Dr. Kim Cummings! You showed me through your mentorship, and by example, that scholarship should be an enactment of citizenship. You set me on the path to becoming a community-engaged scholarship working towards justice. You also once told encouraged me to “be bold” in my writing; I listened to this advice as I wrote this dissertation. Thank you.

Dr. Gary Gregg, my freshmen year writing seminar professor: You were the first person to tell me that I was an excellent academic writer. Those words of encouragement not only set me on my current academic path, but I relied on them while writing this dissertation.

Dr. Anna Farrell, you are brilliant. Thanking for your extraordinary editing.

Dr. Nimo Abdi: Thank you for your early guidance on this dissertation. I appreciate you taking the time to discuss the study with me.

Now, my family:

To my husband, Dean-Paul Natto—patient, kind, handsome, wonderful, and quietly supportive, Dean. Thank you for always being in my corner. Thank you for vacuuming. You are my biggest source of strength (and serenity).

To my children, Maria and Michael-Paul. Being your mother is my greatest joy. During my five years in this Ph.D. program (during which you were both born), I was frequently asked how I was able to pursue my doctorate while raising two children. The honest answer is that I don’t know how I could have done it without you. I mean, let’s be real, sometimes I was so tired I would show up to work with mismatched shoes or I would lose my car keys in the refrigerator. But sleep deprivation aside, you two cuties make everything better.

I am grateful to my parents, Mixalis and Connie Tzenis. In the years since I’ve left the nest, being your daughter had remained core to my identity. Your love and unrelenting support has given me the courage to pursue my best life. I love you both.

My big sister, Jennie--to me, you will forever be the coolest, smartest, most breathtaking human being on this planet. I admire you as much as I did when I was in diapers and will always strive to be like you.

Gus, Kaylin, and Luke, you are my favorite people. Thanks for being so smart and loving.

To the Durners, Maslowskis, Nattos, και η Οικογένεια Τζενη, I am grateful for your love and support and am honored to have you as my family.

To my friends who have become my family—thank you for the support.

This dissertation was a team effort. I am grateful for my team.

Dedication

Αυτή η διατριβή είναι αφιερωμένη στον παππού μου, Ιωάννη Τζένης

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandfather, Ioannis Tzenis

Abstract

Many young people turn to education as a way to achieve what they hope their lives will be like in the future. This qualitative longitudinal study drew on the capabilities approach and the concept of habitus to understand the ways in which American youth in the Somali diaspora described their educational aspirations and how they exercised their abilities to achieve them. My findings show that youth in the Somali diaspora had aspirations that were influenced by their parents' pasts as Somali refugees. Many aspired to be doctors so that they might one day be of service to people living in Somalia and so that they would earn enough to care for family members. Aspirations changed (and became more open-ended) through time among the high school youth as they began to more deeply engage in new social fields, like school. My findings also show that youth enacted agency by navigating contradictions they encountered in different social fields. Being Somali (and Muslim) made them targets for discrimination, but also offered them security and strategies to do well in school. Youth navigated a concomitant sense of belonging and isolation in the diaspora—where their biggest social supports, their parents and other diasporic resources, also prompted them to self-exclude from activities outside of the diaspora.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Dedication.....	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	ix
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
SITUATING THIS STUDY	1
PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	4
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	5
SUMMARY OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS	6
DEFINING TERMS	7
<i>Youth.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>The Somali Diaspora</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Aspirations</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Agency</i>	<i>11</i>
OVERVIEW OF REMAINING CHAPTERS	14
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	16
EDUCATION IN THE SOMALI DIASPORA	16
<i>The Dispersion</i>	<i>16</i>
ISLAM: “THE ULTIMATE GUIDING PRINCIPLE”	19
KEEPING SOMALI CULTURE THROUGH EDUCATION	22
DIASPORIC IDENTITIES	24
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS	26
<i>A Functionalist Conceptualization of Social Capital.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>A Critical View of Youth Agency.....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>The Capabilities Approach.....</i>	<i>49</i>
CONCLUSION.....	60
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	63

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	63
PARADIGM	64
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: GUIDING THE RESEARCH DESIGN.....	64
RESEARCH SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS	66
<i>The Partnering Somali Youth Organization</i>	68
<i>Research Sites</i>	69
<i>The Young People</i>	71
POSITIONALITY STATEMENT	76
<i>Professional Positionality</i>	77
<i>Personal Positionality</i>	78
RESEARCH DESIGN.....	82
DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND PROCEDURES.....	89
<i>Interviews</i>	90
<i>Focus Group and Conversations with the Mothers</i>	92
<i>Field-based Observations</i>	93
<i>Nonformal Educational Activities</i>	95
ANALYSIS.....	98
<i>Memoing</i>	98
<i>Member Checks</i>	98
<i>Coding</i>	99
LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS	101
CONCLUSION	102
CHAPTER FOUR: THE SHAPING OF ASPIRATIONS IN THE SOMALI DIASPORA.....	104
IMAGINING FUTURES TIED TO THEIR PARENTS' REFUGEE PAST	105
<i>Aspirations to Help People in Somalia: "When I become a doctor."</i>	106
<i>Criticism of Parents' Influences on Aspirations: "Do you actually want to be a doctor?"</i>	112
<i>Aspirations to Help Parents: "They were there for me, so I'll be there for them."</i>	117
CHANGING ASPIRATIONS THROUGH TIME AMONG THE HIGH SCHOOL-AGED YOUTH.....	126
<i>New Influences, New Possibilities: "I've been exposed to so many environments."</i>	126
<i>Challenging Family Expectations: "I get to do whatever I want."</i>	132
CHAPTER FIVE: AGENCY AS NAVIGATING CONTRADICTIONS.....	139
CONFRONTING DISCRIMINATION AND CORRECTING STEREOTYPES.....	140
<i>Facing the Trump Factor: "He thinks that we can't have the same opportunities."</i>	141
<i>Keeping Faith amidst Adversity: "I can't let go."</i>	144
<i>Insisting on Abilities: "I'm motivated to prove them wrong."</i>	155

APPLYING THE MUSLIM WORK ETHIC IN THE UNITED STATES.....	165
<i>Following the Teachings of the Quran in Education: “You got to step up.”</i>	166
<i>Focus over Friends: “I’m just here to learn”</i>	173
<i>Connecting Children to American Opportunities: “Don’t miss what I missed.”</i>	178
PURSUING ASPIRATIONS AMIDST BELONGING AND ISOLATION.....	184
<i>Taking Lonely Pathways: “On an island by myself.”</i>	186
<i>Noting an Absence of Mentors: “There’s no one to help me.”</i>	189
<i>Keeping and Resisting Family Values: “It’s not like I don’t like it, but I want to try new things.”</i>	193
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	199
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	200
ASPIRATIONS IN THE SOMALI DIASPORA.....	201
AGENCY IN THE SOMALI DIASPORA	204
TRANSITIONING FROM THIS MOMENT IN TIME IN YOUTHS’ LIVES.....	213
References	215
Appendices	233
APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM	233
APPENDIX B: YOUTH ASSENT FORM.....	236
APPENDIX C: BASELINE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (WAVE 1)	238
APPENDIX D: SECOND WAVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	240
APPENDIX E: FINAL (WAVE 3) INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	243
APPENDIX F: PARENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL	245
APPENDIX G: IDENTITY WHEEL ACTIVITY.....	247
APPENDIX H: VISION BOARD ACTIVITY	250
APPENDIX I: PRIVILEGE WALK ACTIVITY	251
APPENDIX J: MOCK COLLEGE ESSAY	254

List of Tables

Table 1. Savanna Hills youth participants	74
Table 2. Cedar Riverside youth participants	76
Table 3. Waves of data collection	91

List of Figures

Figure 1. Theoretical framework: The capabilities approach and habitus	66
Figure 2. Hodan's perfect future.	111
Figure 3. Roodoo's perfect future.	136
Figure 4. How Roodoo feels in school.....	188

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Education can be transformative. On a societal level, investing in education is often a strategy for alleviating social and economic inequalities. On an individual level, education is deeply tied to people's imaginations for a better future—whether it is for themselves, their families, or communities (Apple, 2012).

The potential for education to create a better future is particularly significant for youth living in the American Somali diaspora. Most young people who belong to the Somali diaspora have parents or other family members who escaped war and violence in Somalia and were denied an opportunity to receive an education themselves. Many Somali refugees who settled in the United States, like the parents in this study, are now raising first generation American children with the hope and expectation that this next generation will receive an education so that they may improve their own lives and the lives of others (Bigelow, 2010). Youth in the Somali diaspora tend to embrace this value instilled by their parents—education matters and can make a difference in their lives. (Willhide, 2018). This abiding faith in education as a pathway to a better future for youth in the Somali diaspora lies at the heart of this dissertation.

Situating this Study

This study is situated in the Somali diaspora within the state of Minnesota in the United States of America. Minnesota is home to the largest Somali population in United States, with the majority of the population living in the Twin Cities metro area (TAYO Consulting Group, 2016). Data suggest that youth living in the Minnesota Somali diaspora embrace the idea that they can benefit from receiving an education. A recent student report showed that eighth graders in Minnesota who identify as Somali self-report

the highest commitment to education than any other social group in the state. They also self-reported high levels of family support (Minnesota Student Report, 2016; TAYO Consulting Group, 2016). Other research found that Somali parents have a positive attitude toward education and view it as a major strategy to escape poverty (Kaptein & Arman, 2008).

Despite these findings, educational attainment in the Somali diaspora is alarmingly low. Among Somali adults between the ages 25 and 64 living in Minnesota, 34% do not have a high school diploma or GED. Only 11% of adult Minnesotans who identify as Somali have earned at least an associate's degree (Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2016). Among Minnesota high school students, dropout, truancy, and suspension rates remain high in the Somali diaspora (Adan & Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights, 2007; TAYO Consulting Group, 2016). Low educational attainment is a significant issue because the number of years of education a person has is a key factor determining whether or not a person will be able to improve the quality of her or his life (UNESCO, 2010). Further, this disparity between youths' *commitment* to educational attainment and their *actual achievement* (e.g. graduating high school) begs the question: How are youth *acting* on this commitment to education? There is a need to better understand how Somali diasporic youth in their middle years (grades 6-9 and ages 11-15) interact with their social world as they try to achieve their aspirations for a better future in and through education. This dissertation will address that question.

Biased misconceptions and social attitudes tend to attribute disengagement from education to a false characterization of Somali youth as being perpetually at-risk, having special needs, or difficult to educate—as well as to a false characterization of Somali

parents as being detached from their children's education (Abdi, 2015; Bigelow, 2008; 2010). However, research suggests Somalis and other Muslims living in Western societies, face a gamut of social obstacles in their educational experiences that contribute to youths' disengagement from education. For instance, inaccurate depictions of Somali people perpetuated by the media is one of violence and extremism, and this shapes how many view and interact with Somali people (Abdi, 2015).

Such false depictions have major consequences for youth in their schools as they are frequently viewed and treated as threats or as having inferior intelligence (Abdi, 2015; Bigelow, 2008; 2010; TAYO Consulting Company, 2016). Facing these negative stereotypes can affect youths' sense of belonging and safety in their school environment (TAYO Consulting Group, 2016). Sirin and Fine (2007) more deeply explained the burden young people might carry on account of such discrimination:

When one's social identity is fiercely contested by the dominant discourse either through formal institutions, social relationships, and/or the media, one of the first places we can witness psychological, social and political fallout is in the lives of young people. (p. 151)

Bigelow (2010) further suggested that experiences with "xenophobia, racism, and Islamophobia" in school takes its toll on young people and they "justifiably disengage" from their education (p. 148). What is less understood from this important research about Somali diasporic youth and Muslim youth are the *processes* that "justify" and lead to this "fallout" or disengagement. There is a need to understand the ways in which youth interact with their social environments in order to understand and ultimately support their pursuit of educational aspirations. Empirical studies about Somali and Muslim youth (e.g.

Abdi, 2015; Bigelow, 2010; Siri & Fine, 2007) have illustrated the process of youth identity development across multiple spaces--schools, families, religious schools—emphasizing the social barriers that influence their identity development. However, these studies only minimally address the ways in which youths’ various social spaces influence their actions, decisions, behaviors, and dispositions in their educational endeavors. To this end, this dissertation acknowledges and situates youth in these social contexts of discrimination, anti-Muslim racism, and school drop-outs, but does so by lifting up the ways in which youth employ agentic strategies (within and across these contexts) as a future-oriented process toward aspiration achievement.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to understand the ways in which young people who belong to the Somali diaspora are acting upon their social worlds while striving to achieve their aspirations for a valued future through educational attainment. This study focuses on Somali diasporic youth in their middle years specifically because research suggests that it is at this age in their development and schooling experience when young people’s optimism for a better future through education has not yet been thwarted in the face of structural barriers—young people at this stage are more likely to have faith in the transformative power of education (Kao & Tienda, 1998). It is also an age of transition into high school. If youth in the Somali diaspora are disengaging from their education in high school, but their commitment to their education is high in middle school (Minnesota Student Report, 2016), then it is timely and critical to deeply understand their educational strategies at this junction of their educational pathways.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How do youth (in grades 6-9) in the American Somali diaspora describe their educational aspirations for the future?
 - a. In what ways do social conditions influence their educational aspirations?
2. In what ways do youth (in grades 6-9) in the American Somali diaspora exercise their abilities to achieve their educational aspirations amidst obstacles and opportunities?

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it provides insight into the ways in which American youth in the Somali diaspora draw on social supports and navigate challenges to achieve their desired futures through education. It attempts to understand factors that facilitate and impede young people's abilities to work toward their goals in education. More importantly, this study offers insights into the educational values and strategies young people in the Somali diaspora enact in school, at home, and in the community as they interact with these factors. It is my hope that by revealing the common patterns, or multiple pathways youth undergo for aspiration achievement, policymakers, educators, youth workers, and community leaders might find more effective ways to support young people in their educational pursuits. For instance, policymakers could create and implement initiatives that consider how educational attainment might affect the broader well-being of young people – including the betterment of their lives intrinsically and support their abilities (and opportunities) to act on what they value from education. (DeJaeghere & Lee, 2011; Saito, 2003; Sen, 1999). Youth workers, educators, and community leaders might design programs, carry out learning activities, and facilitate

dialogues that support youths' abilities to act toward achieving valued lives by influencing youths' capacities to overcome adversity and rely on social supports.

Summary of Theoretical Frameworks

This dissertation examines strategies and abilities exercised by young people living in the Somali diaspora to achieve their educational aspirations in and across social contexts. I emphasize ways in which young people act on their environments to navigate barriers and seek new opportunities, rather than focus on the ways in which social constraints prevent successful educational outcomes. To this end, a capabilities approach, which evaluates whether an individual has the ability to act and choose among a range of options in deciding what kind of life to lead, will be employed as my primary conceptual lens (Dreze & Sen, 1995). This approach provides a framework for understanding whether and how individuals can take calculated action to pursue a valued life. For this study in particular, the capabilities approach provides a framework in which to assess the ways youth belonging to the Somali diaspora act, in both big and small ways, in the face of barriers and opportunities related to their educational aspirations.

Additionally, like other scholars using the capabilities approach (e.g. Bowman, 2010; DeJaeghere, 2016; Hart, 2012) I chose to ground this approach sociologically to understand the role of power in influencing youths' agency and aspirations—illuminating how social structures influence youths' educational strategies and habits as well as the barriers and social supports young people must navigate (Robeyns, 2005). I specifically draw upon Pierre Bourdieu's (1986, 1990b), concept, *habitus*—or a person's socialized disposition that guides action—because it is helpful in understanding how youth choices, outlooks, and educational strategies are mediated by social location (i.e. one's position in

society on account of his or her social class, race or ethnicity). According to Bourdieu (1990b), choice is influenced by a person's sense of who they are based on their membership to a group. To this end, situating Bourdieu's concept of habitus within the capabilities approach offers a more nuanced framework for understanding how various social contexts—like school and family/home—influence the ways in which youth in the Somali diaspora exercise their abilities to achieve their future aspirations (Bowman, 2010). A more comprehensive discussion of the conceptualizations of the capabilities approach, habitus and ideas of youth agency as it is related to educational aspirations is presented in Chapter Two.

Defining Terms

This dissertation aims to provide insight into the aspirations and agency of youth in the Somali diaspora. As such, understanding the terms, *youth*, the *Somali diaspora*, *aspirations*, and *agency*, is important. In the following sections I define what I mean when I use each term in this study.

Youth

When I speak about youth or young people, I am referring to a social construct that includes a person's age and stage of development (DeJaeghere, McCleary, & Josić, 2016). Social discourse often positions youth as assets that need to be mobilized for prosperity or risks that need to be managed (DeJaeghere, McCleary, & Josić, 2016; Sukarieh & Tannock 2014). Youthhood is different than adolescence, which more explicitly refers to a stage in development, but the two concepts are related. The young people in this study are youth in their “middle years” (ages 11-15 and grades 6-9)—a time that aligns with early adolescence. At this developmental phase, a young person

begins to depart from the protection of her family context and works toward interdependence with peers and other adults in new social contexts (Hirsch, 2005; Konopka, 1973). It is also a developmental stage when a young person begins to apply personal meaning to her social experiences and to form her identity in relation to others (Konopka, 1973). While this is not a study of adolescent development, it is helpful to have a foundational understanding of the social experiences and arrangements young people at this stage and age are inclined to pursue.

The Somali Diaspora

Diaspora refers to a community of people who stay connected to an ancestral homeland. The word diaspora, deriving from the Greek word meaning to “disperse” refers to the involuntary dispersion of people from their homeland to a new land (Brubaker, 2005; English Oxford Living Dictionary, 2018). Bigelow (2010) deepens our understanding of the Somali diaspora by explaining its meaning using Anderson’s (2006) concept, *imagined community*:

It includes the tangible feeling of connectedness to the nation of Somalia and the imagined community. It is imagined in the sense that it is not concrete, actual community in everyday terms but rather a sense of belonging, an abstract affinity, or even a sense of loyalty associated with the community or, in this case, nation.

(p. 3)

This “connectedness” and “abstract affinity” to the country of Somalia likely explains why many young people often feel a sense of pride in being Somali, even if they were not born in Somalia or had never been there (Bigelow, 2010; Spaaij & Broerse, 2018). It is in this diasporic belonging and connectedness that this research study is situated.

Aspirations

When I speak of aspirations, I am referring to what young people hope and imagine their lives will be like in the future (Appadurai, 2004; DeJaeghere, 2016). Aspirations fit well with the theoretical framework of this study—the capabilities approach—which is an evaluative framework for understanding the range of opportunities a person has to one day be able to do and be things they consider valuable (Sen, 1999). Understanding Somali diasporic youths’ aspirations will indicate how they understand their hopes and dreams in relation to education, as well as the larger social structures and constraints they encounter in trying to achieve these aspirations (Conradie & Robeyns, 2013).

In the United States there tends to be a focus on “raising” the aspirations of young people who have lower educational outcomes—conflating aspirations with ambition and assuming the possession of an aspiration serves as impetus for youth to make choices and exhibit behaviors that will set them on a path to achieve high educational attainment (Archer, Hollingworth & Mendick, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 1995). This conceptualization views aspirations as an individually possessed state of mind that motivates young people to succeed. This also implies that a lack of future aspirations, or the possession of “low” aspirations would doom young people to put little effort into their education. This binary account of aspirations is limited because it leaves power—as exercised by institutions such as schools—unexamined (Bok, 2010; DeJaeghere, 2016; Gale & Parker, 2015.)

Research in the fields of sociology and anthropology suggests that aspirations are a more complex social-cultural phenomena. One conceptualization of aspirations is that they are limited or made unachievable by the past. Bourdieu argued that often aspirations

are habituated—meaning young people aspire for what they believe is within their reach based on their family’s history—essentially succumbing to the idea that what has been, will be again (Bourdieu, 1990b; Gale & Parker 2015). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) made a similar argument, asserting that minority youths whose families have a long history in the United States are keenly aware of their social obstacles and as such do not believe education can lead to an improved life. In the same vein, Fordham and Ogbu also argued that immigrants and refugees place hope in the transformative power of education to bring about upward mobility and occupational success because they do not have a long history of oppression or blocked opportunities in the United States (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Omar, 2011). From this view, having aspirations for an improved life is problematic because it might lead young people to aspire for what is actually out of reach and then blame themselves when aspirations are left unachieved (Zipin, Sellar, Brennan, & Gale, 2015). Nussbaum (2000) introduced the concept of adapted preferences, meaning that people adjust their aspirations so they can be satisfied with what is possible for them on account of their limited opportunities.

Another body of literature positions aspirations as more future-oriented and transformative—critiquing the notion young that people temper or adapt their aspirations in the face of constraining social structures. It is in within this body of literature that I situate youth aspirations for this study. Appadurai (2004) argued that youth can have aspirations that are different from families’ pasts and considered aspirations to be a navigational capacity that young people with limited social, cultural, and financial resources have fewer opportunities to activate (Gale & Parker, 2015). Other scholars conceptualize aspiration as socially situated and theorize its relationship to agency.

Conradie and Robeyns (2013) see aspirations as having an “agency-unlocking” role (p. 565). Different than aspirations being conflated with ambition, aspirations might encourage young people to try to address obstacles or organize social support that will help them have more opportunities. DeJaeghere (2016) conceptualized aspirations as socially embedded and dialectically related to agency, in which support from others and “action to use and apply knowledge and skills fosters reconsideration of aspirations within horizons of agentic action” (p. 15). Gale and Parker (2015) argued that in order for marginalized communities to “imagine futures different than their pasts” other “cultural groups” must also believe that it is possible to achieve alternative futures and support young people’s abilities to achieve these alternative futures. This dissertation contributes to this growing body of literature by examining the ways in which the children of Somali refugees imagine futures that are an alternative to their families’ refugee pasts. It offers insight into the ways in which young people enact agency with others in order to achieve their hopes for their futures.

Agency

In this study, I situate agency as related to aspirations. I draw on and McLeod’s (2012) and Walker’s (2009) conceptualizations and define youth agency as a young person’s ability to take action toward a desired future. Agency is a key element of the theoretical framework of this study, Amartya Sen’s (1999) capabilities approach. The capabilities approach is a framework for evaluating the real sets of opportunities or freedoms an individual has to be and do what they value in the future (Sen, 1999; 2009). Agency is integral to this approach because as Sen (2009) explained, “The freedom to choose gives us the opportunity to decide what we should do, but with that opportunity

comes responsibility for what we do” (p.19). This means that within the capabilities approach, agency refers to the idea that individuals are responsible human beings who take action and make choices according to what they aspire to achieve in life (Sen, 1985, 1999).

It is common for researchers in the field of education, sociology, psychology, and anthropology to offer myriad explanations as to why young people are *unable* to act toward aspiration achievement in education. Such research argues that school structures and curriculum are failing their students, stymying action that might lead to positive educational outcomes and reproducing social inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Others, like Jean Anyon (2014), have argued that the poverty surrounding schools (e.g. the lack of jobs) matters more than individual or school efforts. These arguments are significant in that they showcase the social and cultural constraints on youth agency and counter more mainstream explanations of low educational attainment among marginalized young people, which tend to blame the children and their families (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Zipin et al., 2015). However, these accounts barely consider how young people perceive and navigate their educational pathways from the perspectives of the young people.

There are exceptions to these accounts; a modest number of studies consider the role youth agency from the youth perspective. This research is characterized in several ways. The fields of youth development and developmental psychology place great emphasis on youth as “producers of their own development” (Larson, 2006; Sadlowski, 2011). These studies focus greatly on how youth develop agency as a cognitive skill, such as high order reasoning, that can help young people succeed in multiple social contexts

(Larson & Tran, 2011). Critical race theorists include the voices of youths' experiences of oppression in education in order to counter mainstream narratives of racial privilege (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 2005; Yosso, Parker, Solorzano, & Lynn, 2004). Youth voice is intended to heal and empower students of color, but there is little research that explains what empowerment looks like and whether it can advance youths' pursuit towards desired futures. Sociopolitical studies positions agency as means for social change. Bajaj (2009) conceptualized agency as transformative, meaning that agency "involves a larger critique of one's social realities and a willingness to act upon them" (p. 552). Here agency is positioned as a way individuals remove barriers so that they and others may have more educational or other social opportunities. Finally, sociological studies often present agency of marginalized young people in educational contexts as an either/or situation—claiming they can either adapt to constraining norms or resist them in order to stay on the path toward aspirational achievement (e.g Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; MacLeod, 1995).

While there are studies that show youth are able to respond to their social arrangements in more varied and complex ways (e.g. Barajas & Pierce, 2001; DeJaeghere & Baxter, 2014; DeJaeghere, 2016), more research is needed in this area. Insufficient attention has been paid to the ways in which young people might act or interact (alone or with others) within and on constraining and enabling social structures in a pointed effort to achieve their desired futures. This suggests a theoretical need to understand processes through which young people may be able to act effectively, negotiate their futures, and to achieve their aspirations within specific social contexts (White & Wyn, 1998). This study about youth living in the Somali diaspora also has the empirical aim of showing how

young people who belong to a little studied social group exercise their abilities to take action toward desired futures.

Overview of Remaining Chapters

The disparities between youths' desire for high educational attainment and their actual attainment beg for a better understanding of youth agency and aspirations in the Somali diaspora. The narratives I put forth in this dissertation depict a deep exploration of the roles of faith and family in shaping aspirations, guiding agency, and concomitantly providing young people with their biggest supports and biggest obstacles in their educational pursuits in a society that systemically favors Western values. The young people in this study were entangled in and compelled to navigate challenging social and cultural contradictions as they acted on their values in order to achieve a future they considered valuable.

The following chapters outline a review of the literature about young people's educational experiences as members of the Somali diaspora, the theories that contribute to the study, the methodology used to carry out the study, the results from 10-months of field research, and concluding remarks about the implications this study has for future work. Specifically, in Chapter Two, I describe educational contexts of Somali youth and their families. I then explore theories that investigate the ways in which youth agency is enacted related to desired futures through education. In Chapter Three, I describe and rationalize the set of methods I used to investigate my research questions using a qualitative longitudinal design. My findings are divided into two chapters. Chapter Four focuses on the first research question and sub-question and investigates the shaping of youths' aspirations in relation to their various social contexts. Chapter Five focuses on

the study's second research question and explores the ways in which the young people in this study enacted agency in order to achieve their aspirations. In Chapter Six, I summarize and describe the significance of my findings with the hope of being able to provide new and insightful ways to think about agency and aspirations in and through education among American youth in the Somali diaspora.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins by reviewing the existing literature around the educational experiences of youth in the Somali diaspora and Muslim youth in order to demonstrate and justify my plan to investigate aspirations and agency among young people in the Somali diaspora. I then explore three bodies of literature that investigate the role of youth agency as it is related to aspirations for educational attainment. These three bodies of literature are a functional conceptualization of social capital, a critical theory of social reproduction, and the capabilities approach. The remainder of this dissertation extends this third body of literature by integrating the concept, *habitus*, into the framework and situating it within the context of the American Somali diaspora.

Education in the Somali Diaspora

The following review of the literature about youths' educational experiences in the Somali diaspora is a critical foundation to understanding their agency and aspirations in education, because it draws attention to the socio-cultural influences that guide agency and shape aspirations. Before I address the literature, however, it is important to outline the circumstances by which Somali immigrants came to Minnesota.

The Dispersion

Somali people have a distinct presence in Minnesota. Considered somewhat of a “cultural hub” for the Somali community, Minnesota is home to the largest population in the United States—with a segment of Minneapolis being coined “Little Somalia” or “Little Mogadishu” because of its vibrant Somali community (Almond, 2012; Yusuf, 2012). Somalis began seeking refuge in Minnesota (as well as in other places around the globe) beginning in 1991 at the onset of the country's civil war.

The war began after the overthrow of Somali's dictator, Siad Barre, by clan militias; Somalia has a long history of being a clan-based society (Marchal, 2013). Following this ouster, clan groups and war lords competed to run the country. In southern Somalia in particular, multiple autonomously run factions were organized and led by rebel leaders (Marchal, 2013). The Somali government effectively collapsed, and citizens of the country found themselves engulfed in clan-based violence, famine, and drought (Wildhide, 2018). Public schools were destroyed along with many public institutions. Millions of Somali citizens were displaced by war and violence and fled to nearby African countries, including Ethiopia and Kenya. The war endured in the country for decades; it was not until 2012 when Somalia's first formal parliament was sworn in (Wildhide, 2018). Presently, the Somali government is working to establish a safe and secure state amidst social, political, and economic turbulence, making it difficult for those who fled to return, although many Somalis retain the hope of living in their homeland again one day in the future (Wildhide, 2018).

Since being displaced by war, many Somali people have lived in refugee camps for decades; others have found new homes. As of 2015, the number of Somali people living abroad reached approximately 2 million; an estimated 150 thousand Somali people live in the United States. Census data reports there are approximately 57,000 members of the Somali community living in Minnesota, although determining the precise number is seemingly difficult to determine. Some suggest the number to more accurately be around 80,000 to 100,000 people (Wildhide, 2018; TAYO Consulting Group, 2016).

Minnesota was a key place for resettlement based primarily on word of mouth that described Minnesota as a place of good employment, good schools, and excellent

refugee services. (Minnesota Historical Society, n.d.; Omar, 2011). Somali refugees ultimately settled (and continue to settle) in Minnesota after spending years in refugee camps, having to abandon educational pursuits, careers, and perhaps most importantly, having to separate from their family members (Minnesota Historical Society, n.d.). Many Somalis also arrived in the US with little to no English language proficiency, few material resources, and with high levels of refugee related trauma exposure (TAYO Consulting Group, 2016).

Currently, approximately 57% of Somali people living in Minnesota live below the poverty line, and they have the lowest median income of any cultural group in Minnesota at \$18,000 (Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2016). As noted in Chapter One, they are also one of the lowest performing group in education with 34% of adults being without a high school diploma or GED and only 11% of adults attaining at least an associate's degree (Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2016; TAYO Consulting Group, 2016). It is worth noting, that these data are not disaggregated by immigrant or refugee status. Given the age range of the data set, it is likely that many of the people included in this data set had their educational pathways disrupted by the war before settling in the Minnesota.

These social hardships unsurprisingly bring about challenges for Somali individuals and families living in Minnesota; yet in many ways, Somali people have found ways to thrive in Minnesota because they also arrived with many assets. Cited as having a strong “entrepreneurial spirit” (TAYO Consulting Group, 2016, p. 11), there are many successful Somali-run businesses in Minnesota. Somali people also have a strong oral history; the Somali language was not written down until the early 1970s (TPT Twin

Cities PBS, 2017). Somalia is considered “the Nation of Poets,” with poetry being a primary vehicle through which to preserve their history and culture. This has been particularly important as Somali people resettle in new societies as poetry and oral storytelling have helped nurture people’s connectedness to the Somali diaspora in Minnesota and around the world (TPT Twin Cities PBS, 2017).

Although histories and cultures have been passed down and preserved within the Somali diaspora, little is known about Somali people, culture, and history in the United States among non-Somali people. This is particularly important in this political moment in time when anti-Muslim sentiment is shaping misconceptions and prejudices about Somali and Muslim people (Abdi, 2015). Bigelow (2010) succinctly explained that outside of the diaspora, “Where there was once no knowledge, there now exists biases” (p. 153). Somali young people in particular are often not included as participants in studies (Abdi, 2015; Bigelow, 2010).

Islam: “The ultimate guiding principle”

The majority of Somali people are Muslim (Yusuf, 2012). Being Muslim and being Somali tend to be equally central to youths’ identities, as young people tend not to distinguish between being Muslim and being Somali (Bigelow, 2010). Yusuf (2012) described Islam as the “ultimate guiding principle” in Somalis’ lives, and Collette (2007) reinforced this notion, describing that Islam provides “behavioral guidelines” for Somali people. Muslims’ daily routines and interactions revolve around Islam’s core teachings (Yusuf, 2012). Many Somali youth attend *Dugsi* on the weekends—an informal religious school at which young people memorize and become well-versed in the teachings of the Quran. Parents raise their children emphasizing Islam as important to their children’s

development—helping them to become “moral, successful, and Somali human beings” (Kapteijns & Arman, 2008, p. 32).

For Somali Muslims, living in the United States has posed specific obstacles for practicing their faith—particularly for young people in schools. For instance, Muslims are expected to pray five times a day, but finding a space to do so at school can be difficult (Wilhide, 2018). Muslim women are expected to dress modestly and to wear the hijab, or head covering (Wilhide, 2018). Bigelow (2010) and Wilhide (2018) found that while many Somali women and girls chose to wear the hijab as a way to assert their identity, wearing the hijab also invited religious discrimination at school. Because of this Somali girls sometimes decide not to wear the hijab as a way to conceal their identities and stay safe from discrimination (Basford, 2008). Further, in school, young teens are often faced with social pressures that contradict their faith, like alcohol consumption or dating (Kruizenga, 2010).

One of the most blatant forms of discrimination Somalis and more broadly, Muslims, face in school on account of their religion is when others unfairly associate them with extremist groups. Sirin and Fine (2007) pointed to an increase in discrimination toward Muslim people since September 11, 2001, when the series of coordinated terrorist attacks on the United States was carried out by a radical Islamic extremist group, al-Qaeda. Notably, all of the young people in this study were born after September 11, 2001; discrimination on account of their religion is all that they know. The TAYO Consulting Report (a needs assessment report of the Twin Cities Somali community) described the impact this has on Somali young people in Minnesota:

Somali youth. . .feel they are unfairly stereotyped as potential terrorists—or respected at most as informational tool in the war on terror. . .They argue that sensational media coverage of conflicts in Somalia, North Africa and the Middle East fuels religious misunderstanding and Islamophobia in the U.S. Policy positions and attitudes toward Muslim refugees by presidential candidates and congressional leaders and their followers alienate immigrants who feel as though they do not belong or share in American identity. (2016, p. 5)

Most research on Somali and Muslim youth make it evident that Somali and Muslim young people living in the United States and other Western societies experience discrimination and discord on account of their religious identity. Abdi (2015, 2016) and Bigelow (2008, 2010), in particular, demonstrated how Somali youth experience an intersection of discrimination aimed at both their religion and race. These experiences set off a process of “othering,” which Schwalbe (2000) described as “the defining into existences of a group of people who are identifiable, from the standpoint of a group with the capacity to dominate, as inferior” in school (p. 777). This occurs when youths’ peers, teachers, and/or administrators devalue youths’ culture and faith, by overt religious discrimination, or by implicitly believing that they do not have the right culture to be successful in school. Abdi (2016) gave the example of teachers discounting the classroom participation of young girls who wore headscarves—keeping them from a quality education on account of their religion. Bigelow (2008) gave an example (from a youth narrative) of a teacher pitting a group of Somali youth and African American youth against each other, implying the group of African American young people are better behaved. The examples of discrimination are plentiful.

The literature on the educational experiences of Somali and Muslim youth I have reviewed up until now has identified instances of discrimination and cultural discordances in ways that suggest that these experiences are constraints on youths' abilities to act toward valued educational futures, but it does not fully explore how young people acted upon these constraints or what other kind of strategies (with perhaps specific cultural underpinnings) youth might employ as they work to achieve their educational aspirations.

Further, while most studies rightly note the discordance and rebuffing of youths' Muslim faith by dominant society, al Huraibi (2017) offered empirical data that suggest some Somali families who were resettling in a new country relied on Islam for a harmonious settlement to a Western society because Islam encouraged transnational integration and allowed for "hybrid identities" to exist (p. 56). al Huraibi's study is unique in that it demonstrates how Islam, although its practices might not always align with cultural norms in Western countries, can guide behavior in a way that helps Somali people to feel safe and carve out a sense of belonging into Western societies. My study extends this research and demonstrates the ways in which Somali youth rely on their religion to negotiate dissonant value systems and try to feel a sense of security in their educational spaces.

Keeping Somali Culture through Education

While many Somali youth struggle to find a sense of belonging at school, there also can exist a discord of values within their families (Hussein, 2012). It is a priority to most Somali parents to keep young people connected to their Somali culture. Studies have shown that Somali parents have concerns about their children becoming too

“Americanized” by embracing the American individualism and consumerism pervasive in American schools (e.g. Bigelow, 2010; Hussein, 2012; Kapteijns & Arman, 2008; TAYO Consulting Group, 2016). The TAYO Consulting Group (2016) report referred to this as a “crisis of values” (p. 18) noting a generation gap that occurs when young people in the Somali diaspora embrace values unfamiliar to and disliked by parents.

One reaction to this “crisis of values,” and a signal that young people are feeling unsafe in schools, is the mass enrollment of Somali youth in culturally specific charter schools (Basford, 2008; Hussein, 2012; Kapteijns & Arman, 2008). Hussein (2012) found that at charter schools, parents felt they could have effective communication with teachers and administrators. Parents also felt the smaller classroom and low teacher to student ratio was more fitting with Somali parenting values around education—parents do not need to be directly involved in their children’s education and instead bestow teachers that authority, trusting and respecting their expertise. When Somali diasporic youth attend more mainstream schools, this culturally-based parenting strategy is still employed, but can be rebuffed and interpreted by others as Somali parents not caring about their children’s education (Abdi, 2015). This dissonance of values can be compounded by the fact that parents are sometimes either not literate enough, or not well versed in the American school system and this makes it difficult for them to help their children be successful in their educational endeavors (Kapteijns & Arman, 2008). While studies like Kapteijns and Arman (2008) and the TAYO Consulting Group (2016) note discordant value systems that young people in the Somali diaspora must navigate, there is little understanding on the processes youth undertake to act on or negotiate these varied

value sets in a strategic effort to do well in education and achieve their aspirations in education.

Diasporic Identities

Developing a coherent identity (and resultantly, avoiding identity confusion) during adolescence, is considered paramount to the future thriving of a young person and has therefore been the focus of much research in the fields of education, psychology, and youth development (e.g. Erickson, 1994; Konopka, 1973). Yet, studies on Somali and Muslim youth living in the United States have noted the ways in which young people are prompted to negotiate multiples identities as they live and interact in multiple social and cultural contexts (with multiple sets of values, norms, and expectations). For instance, while many Somali parents may feel their children are losing their culture—particularly in schools—Sirin and Fine (2007) pointed out that culture is not static or bounded, but rather “flowing” as it interacts with “other complex dimensions of self-hood” (p. 152). They further emphasized that when a part of a person’s identity is “under siege” (p. 152) it becomes particularly difficult for young people to navigate that flow as they strive to develop a cohesive sense of self.

Many scholars have investigated identity development among adolescents whose religious or cultural identities are “under siege.” For instance, Bigelow investigated how Somali youth were “hybridizing” their identities” (p.10); Sirin and Fine (2007) explored the concept of “hyphenated selves” (p.151) among Muslim Americans; Khalifa and Gooden (2010) investigated “fragmented” (p. 308) identities of African American Muslims; and Abdi (2015) investigated the interplay of race and religion in the formation of Somali youths’ identities in education. The grouping of all this research should not be

viewed as essentializing their findings or the experiences of Muslim youth. Rather I refer to these diverse studies in order to lift up one core theme in the literature: developing an identity that suits their values and wellbeing is challenging for young people who have identities that are important to themselves and their families, but that also invite discrimination.

Research on identity formation of Somali youth clearly illustrates that young people live and interact in multiple social worlds. Each social world comes with its own arrangement of cultural and social norms and guidelines that may impact not only identity development, but what young people believe is in their reach and the ways in which they rely on (or resist) the norms, values, and expectations in each context in order to exercise their abilities to achieve aspirations. I situate my dissertation in this literature and share narratives of youth in the Somali diaspora who negotiate ways of being Muslim, Somali, and American in their educational settings as well as in other parts of their everyday lives, and I extend this work by emphasizing agency and aspirations. Furthermore, I assert that understanding the disparities in educational attainment among Somali diasporic youth requires more than an understanding of challenges they face as they live and interact in various contexts. It requires an understanding of why and how youth in the diaspora can successfully act toward their aspirations of higher educational attainment; it requires an understanding of youth agency and aspirations.

In the next section, I explore three theoretical explanations of why and how young people can exercise their abilities/enact agency to achieve their educational goals and aspirations. The purpose of reviewing these theories is to position my research within

existing bodies of knowledge around this topic and to explain how I arrived upon my research questions and theoretical framework in relation to this literature.

Theoretical Frameworks

The above review of literature illustrated that within the Somali diaspora, youth have access to many cultural assets and also face many challenges in their educational endeavors on account of being Somali, Muslim, or both. The literature also made evident that Somali youth live and interact in multiple social and cultural contexts that shape how they see themselves. In this next section, I review theoretical frameworks for understanding whether and how young people living in the Somali diaspora enact agency in various social contexts in order to achieve their educational aspirations.

I begin by outlining a body of literature that positions young people as goal-oriented rational agents, who with the proper resources will consistently choose the best course of action in order to derive individual benefits. I review this body of literature, which springs from Coleman's (1988) functional conceptualization of social capital that argues that social networks can provide young people with beneficial resources, in order to bring to light the shortcomings of the resource-based initiatives and ideologies dominating the present-day US educational landscape. In the next section, I examine youths' educational pathways from a more critical perspective. Specifically, I review Bourdieu's (1986, 1990a, 1990b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) social theory to bring attention to the social and cultural influences on youth agency. This body of literature is particularly useful in understanding how young people's social and cultural capital can influence youth outlooks and ways of acting that might limit their ability to acquire resources that would support educational attainment in certain settings. Bourdieu's

concept, *habitus*, which refers to people's socialized dispositions that guide action (Bourdieu, 1990b; Demerath, Lynch, Milner, Peters, & Davidson, 2010) is a useful concept for understanding how a young person's location in certain social arrangements and can generate educational strategies that she employs in order to achieve desired educational outcomes. The third body of literature explored in this chapter is the capabilities approach (Sen, 1999, 2009). This approach prompts a reexamination of critical social theory. Although it does not deny the significance of the role of resources in educational disparities, it redirects the analytic focus to what people can actually do and be. This approach emphasizes the expansion of social supports that allow people to reach a valued future outcome for themselves and for others and offers a clear framework for studying what young people can actually do (Deneulin & McGregor, 2009; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). It is in this third body that I ultimately situate this study. I conclude this chapter by proposing a theoretical framework for looking at youth agency that situates elements of Bourdieu's social theory—namely the concept of *habitus*—within Sen's capabilities approach (DeJaeghere, Pellowski Wiger, & Willemsen, 2016; Hart, 2012). This theoretical framework will guide my analysis of how youth in the Somali diaspora perceive and navigate their social arrangements during their pursuit to achieve their aspirations.

A Functionalist Conceptualization of Social Capital

The idea that social resources, such as families or neighborhoods, can be of value to young people in their educational pursuits has a long history in the field of education (Mikiewicz, Jonasson, Budmundsson, Blondal, & Korczewska, 2011). Social capital is an especially popular concept for scholars, although there have been varied meanings and

applications of the concept. American sociologist James Coleman's conceptualization of social capital has dominated the literature since the 1980s (Portes, 1998). Coleman studied factors influencing educational disparities and argued that weakened social networks, particularly family networks, are a main contributor to disparities. Coleman argued that a young person's social capital—the networks that youth have with family and community members—is the biggest factor in determining educational outcomes, after controlling for class and ethnicity (Coleman 1982; Field, 2003). This implies that social networks are important because they can connect marginalized youth to various resources embedded within those networks, such as knowledge or pro-academic habits, which will encourage action that benefits their educational performance (Field, 2003; Lin, 2001). From this perspective, social capital is defined by its function, both as aspects of the social structure and as facilitating actions of people within that structure.

This view of social capital utilizes the notion of rational action, which refers to the idea that each individual has control over certain resources, interests and events (Coleman, 1988; Field, 2003). It suggests that a person's actions are influenced by the structures within her environment:

[S]ocial capital constitutes a particular kind of resource available to an actor.

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors—whether persons or corporate actors—within the structure. (p. S98)

Coleman (1988) thus anchored his argument in rational action theory which insists individuals will act in their best interests, but he rejected “the extreme individualistic

premises that often accompany it” (p. S95). The argument in this view is that social capital facilitates action within a structure, “making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (p. S98). Social capital can take three different forms: *obligations and expectations*—the degree to which someone can trust another person; *information flow*—the ways in which social networks can function as information conduits; and finally, *social norms* that promote the common good (Coleman, 1988). Social capital in any form is a resource within a structure of relationships that allows individuals to act in ways that help them achieve their own interests, such as improve their educational outcomes and ultimately be qualified and credentialed to participate in the workforce (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001). Notably, the occurrence of agency is an assumed teleological result of social capital, and aspirations are assumed to be individually held and economically motivated.

Evidence for this argument about the beneficial role of social capital comes from Coleman’s study of Catholic schools. This study showed that students tended to have lower absenteeism and drop-out rates on account of close bonds among students, their families and the community and that these networks offset the disadvantaging role of social class (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). Coleman’s frequently cited publication, “Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital,” focuses on the relation between family-mediated social capital and a young person’s ability to do well in school (Coleman, 1988; Morrow, 1999). This publication suggested that close bonds between parents and children facilitate the transmission of human capital and positive attitudes toward school—resources which are claimed to bolster students’ ability to achieve positive outcomes. Coleman (1988) explained: “If the human capital possessed by parents is not

complemented by social capital embodied in family relations, it is irrelevant to the child's educational growth that the parent has a great deal, or a small amount of human capital" (p. S110). The argument is that parents must communicate with their child "properly" by engaging in goal-oriented interactions of enough frequency and depth (Bankston & Zhou, 2002; Coleman, 1988, p. S110). Notably, Coleman emphasizes the *quantity* of interactions, rather than the quality. For instance, examples of parents engaging with their children "properly" include quantifiable indicators such as frequency of parent-child communication about progress and expectations or time spent assisting children with homework or other educational tasks (Bankston & Zhou, 2002).

Israel, Beaulieu, and Hartless' (2001) study of social capital and educational outcomes— measured by test scores, grades, and staying in school—affirmed Coleman's claim about the important role of parents, finding that frequent parent interactions were associated with better educational outcomes. They also found that frequent moves, which are common among low-income families, severed youth's social networks which in turn had disadvantaging effects on youth's educational outcomes. The authors concluded by imploring that resources be invested in "enhancing families' capacity" (p. 62) to provide an environment that promotes their children's education. In their view, this investment will increase youth's social capital—a resource that should help youth from lower social classes do better in school and alleviate educational and social disparities.

The differential effects of social capital. The literature I have reviewed up until this point, suggests that a lack of networks that serve as resources may contribute to disparities and that their presence supports youth agency. Israel, Beaulieu, and Hartless (2001) argued that the solution to educational disparities is to quantitatively increase

social capital among youth who are marginalized. In this view, social capital is treated as a fundamentally good resource that indiscriminately bolsters educational performance and attainment. However, various scholars have challenged this conceptualization of social capital by demonstrating how certain social networks might facilitate positive educational outcomes for some groups, but not facilitate the same outcomes for a different group or in a different social or cultural context. For example, Ho and Willms (1996) found that children of Mexican immigrants consistently scored lower on educational achievement measurements as measured by grade point average and reading and math testing than their white, US born peers—even though their families had higher levels of at-home supervision. Similarly, Bankston and Zhou (2002) learned that black families in their study had high levels of family-neighbor interaction, but this particular social network is negatively associated with academic performance. These studies, as well as others (e.g. Fernandez-Kelly, 1995; Portes & Landolt, 1996) are similar to the findings that emerged from the 2016 Minnesota Student Survey—high levels of family support do not necessarily bring about high educational outcomes.

The above findings suggest that immigrant youth and racial and ethnic minority youth often belong to social networks that might not support their ability to do well in school or that these social networks are constrained in turning their social assets into cultural (academic) or economic capital—despite the frequency or depth of interactions. Specifically, these studies show that social capital is not a fundamentally positive resource, but in fact, has a differential effect on youth of different racial or ethnic identities. This suggests that a functional view of social capital obscures underlying social and cultural issues associated with inequality. Moreover, the quantitative

measurement of social capital does not allow for these underlying conditions to be considered in empirical research and thereby prevents these differential effects of social capital from being measured and understood (Dika & Singh, 2002).

Scrutinizing the role of agency. Another particularly interesting finding from Bankston and Zhou's (2002) study is that the black youth in their study articulated aspirations of higher education, which the researchers consider a "productive normative orientation" toward education (p. 304). However, this orientation was not paired with the belief that they could act toward achieving this aspiration. There was a difference in what they desired and what they believed was within their reach. This lack of belief in their ability to act toward reaching their goals indicates a constraint on agency. This is a curious finding considering that Coleman (1988) argued that social capital (which includes productive norms) should facilitate positive action, not constrain it. In later work, Coleman (1994) suggested that social networks determine whether positive action is actually possible. Coleman (1994) explained that social capital is not something that an individual chooses to have, but rather is a "by-product" (p. 313) made available to them simply by being part of a particular social network (Field, 2003). In other words, whether or not an individual is part of a network that offers her that very resource she needs to act is determined by structure, not choice.

In this view, marginalized young people are excluded from networks which hold the prerequisite to action. Social capital, as Morrow (1999) explained, "has the potential to become part of a 'deficit theory syndrome,' yet another 'thing' or 'resource' that unsuccessful individuals, families, communities and neighbourhoods lack" (p. 760). Portes (1998) identified another limitation of Coleman's view: While Coleman claimed

that social capital is a tool that could help youth improve their educational performance he did not offer a process that demonstrates how youth might be able to access social capital if it is not available to them. Instead, in Coleman's view, the existence of social capital is contingent on factors that are outside of the control of marginalized youth (Lin, 2001; Portes, 1998).

Leonard (2005) also criticized Coleman on this failure to acknowledge youth's ability to access and mobilize social capital from which they could benefit. Leonard conducted a study that found that youth are indeed agentic in the sense that they are capable of mobilizing social capital and are not wholly reliant on parents and other adults to transmit knowledge or skills to them. However, Leonard found that most of the jobs secured by youth were exploitative. This study showed that youth are agentic, but also suggested that the existing social structures in which they are located severely limit young people's abilities to achieve their goals.

So while Coleman's functional conceptualization of social capital advanced the field of education by prompting scholars to explore the role of young people's social networks on educational outcomes, this uncritical conceptualization is limited because its reliance on quantity of interactions neglects underlying social and cultural conditions that influence youth in their education (Sadovnik, 2007). Additionally, the reliance on family mediation of social capital is problematic in a couple of ways. First, it is hierarchical and neglects the possibility of youth agency in accessing different kinds of social capital (e.g. social networks outside of the family) (Dika & Singh, 2002). Secondly, it categorizes only some parenting interactions as "proper" while dismissing the value that other types of strategies, information flow, or norms that might be mediated from parents to their

children. Social capital is not indiscriminately a resource that is positively converted to improving the lives of marginalized young people as Coleman (1988) suggested.

A Critical View of Youth Agency.

Like Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu was a sociologist who believed that social capital is a means to favorable ends. However, Bourdieu (1986, 1990b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) identified myriad ways in which underlying social and cultural conditions influence, shape and often times, constrain youth agency and aspirations by placing structural limits on what young people believe is possible in their lives and thereby affecting their actions toward their imagined futures. One interpretation of this work emphasizes a critical view of social capital, which maintains that social capital is a tool used by the dominant social class to maintain and reproduce their social privilege (Lin, 1999) and is decidedly not a tool to improve educational outcomes for all young people regardless of background.

According to this theory of social reproduction, those who belong to the dominant social class more readily possess the habits, skills, and dispositions that allow them to access resources and successfully navigate their social environment to achieve these favorable ends (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 1999). Bourdieu emphasized structural constraints and unequal access to capital, paying particular attention to the differing social and cultural resources that belong to specific groups (Dika & Singh, 2002). In this view, disparities occur because schools, while they appear neutral, legitimize the resources and behaviors of the dominant class and dismiss the differing resources and behaviors of other groups (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In other words, educational inequalities occur because schools are designed and structured to reward the actions and resources of

middle class youth (Harker, 1984). Therefore, young people who do not belong to this social class are less apt to act in ways that will allow them to reap educational rewards.

In the publication, “The Forms of Capital,” Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 248). In other words, social capital represents the entirety of all resources available to a member of a network or group (Jarrett, Robin, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005). Bourdieu (1986) described social capital as having a “multiplier effect” (p. 89) because it can connect individuals to resources and other forms of capital, such as economic or cultural capital, which may grant youth an institutional advantage in school. Understanding Bourdieusian concepts: *cultural capital*, *habitus*, and *field*, is fundamental to making sense of this theory of reproduction. Further, as I will explain in a following section, they also help draw attention to how young people might enact agency and navigate disadvantages.

Cultural capital, habitus, and field. To begin with, social capital is only one element of Bourdieu’s explanation of educational inequalities among youth of differing social identities as social capital. Cultural capital, habitus, and field are concepts that are equally important to his work. For Bourdieu, cultural capital referred to values and resources connected to a person’s social class (Reed-Danahay, 2005). It can exist in three states: The *embodied state*—dispositions of mind and body, the *objectified state*—cultural goods such as books and artefacts and in the *institutionalized state*—such as an educational qualification (Bourdieu, 1986; Dika & Singh, 2002; Reay, 2004). Bourdieu and colleague Jean Passeron brought forth this concept to counter the perspective which

explains educational success or failure as a result of natural academic aptitude or intelligence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1986; Reay, 2004). Whereas Coleman claimed that family networks *should* be a form of social capital that facilitates positive educational outcomes, Bourdieu and Passeron posited that culturally engrained habits can create disadvantages because school structures reflect and legitimize the norms, values, preferences, attitudes, and behaviors of the dominant class (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Lamont, Lareau, Theory, & Autumn, 1988; Reay, 2004). School is structured in ways that reinforce and reproduce social class by granting a cohort of youth from the dominant class the academic credentials they can eventually convert into economic capital (Reed-Danahay, 2005).

The research of Demerath, Lynch, and Davidson (2008) demonstrated transactional processes through which youth from the dominant social class begin to reproduce their social standing through education. Their findings showed that middle-class high school students (who lived and went to school in a middle- to upper-middle-class suburb) embodied a psychological capital—such as strong agentic beliefs, and a commitment to achieving “individual success”—fostered by a “community with pronounced expectations for personal advancement, and a school oriented toward competitive academic success” (p 286). The authors found that these high-achieving youth developed identity characteristics from their social environments that guided their employment of advantageous educational strategies and practice. This study demonstrated how middle-class families can cultivate strategies and ways of being that are advantageous in youths’ educational settings because they reflect the institutionalized values and culture of their schools. This further means young people can become

marginalized because their social and cultural resources, such as the involvement of their family, their linguistic capacities, and attitudes toward school are not sanctioned by the school structure. Youth are consequently excluded from receiving the academic credentials that can be ultimately converted into economic capital, hindering the ability of lower class youth to perform well in school and achieve social mobility (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). What deserves emphasis is that there is an exchange value occurring within the school structure. In this view, while all individuals possess social and cultural resources, not all these resources have exchange value in particular social fields (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). The remaining key Bourdieusian concepts, *habitus* and *field*, illuminate how youth from a lower social class are constrained in their agentic abilities to do well in their educational pursuits because their cultural resources have minimal exchange value in school.

Bourdieu (1986) described the *habitus* as a “system of lasting, transposable dispositions” (p. 84) belonging to an individual that is inculcated by family members—a primary social network for youth. The *habitus* is embodied and occurs, as Bourdieu (1990a) explained, “below the level of calculation and consciousness” (p.76). Bourdieu (1990b) described the concept of *habitus* as “a feel for the game” (p. 66). Related to *habitus*, is Bourdieu’s concept of *field*. It refers to the rules and relations that comprise of daily life depending on one’s social status. *Habitus* is what enables an individual to bring resources—cultural, social or material—across fields with ease (Apple, 2001). Academic success therefore depends on the ease with which students can follow rules of the dominant social group, which is the middle class according to Bourdieu. Middle class youth are advantaged because they enter with the particular linguistic structures, authority

patterns, dress codes, and knowledge of types of curricula used in school (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Lareau, 2003; Levinson, 2011). On the other hand, youth from working class families or minority backgrounds are disadvantaged because they exhibit behaviors and dispositions discordant with institutional expectations, such as distrust, social distance, or core value systems that guide their behavior (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Lareau, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Therefore, habitus (i.e. dispositions that guide actions) is viewed as a major contributor to inequalities in school settings because a lack of ease in a social field (e.g. school) impedes youth's ability to be successful in their educational pursuits. However, the tricky thing about the habitus, as Bourdieu (1986) often noted, is that because it happens deep enough below the consciousness, people believe that one's "feel for the game" is naturally achieved, rather than culturally engrained. The danger of discounting the underlying reasons guiding one's behavior in a certain field is that it justifies educational inequalities, giving the impression that certain people are simply more naturally gifted or intelligent than others.

Bourdieu's social theory is therefore helpful in showing how one's (family mediated) dispositions can create disadvantages in social fields—particularly in school fields. The habitus provides a sociological explanation for individuals' actions. However, some criticize Bourdieu's for describing the habitus as excessively deterministic—suggesting that educational failure is unavoidable for those who lack the habitus (as well as the network to acquire it) that would allow them to successfully play by the rules and achieve educational success (Dika & Singh, 2002). Giroux (1982) was among Bourdieu's harshest critics in the 1980s, before the publication of "The Forms of Capital," referring to the habitus as a "conceptual straight jacket" that "smothers the possibility of social

change” (p. 7). Considering these critiques, it is helpful to consider more agentic interpretations of Bourdieu’s social theory.

Rethinking habitus. Giroux’s criticism of Bourdieu’s early work prompts an important discussion about agency and whether action can be taken on and within disadvantaging structures to improve educational outcomes. In order to further consider the possibility of agency within this critical view of educational inequalities, it is useful to further explore the concept habitus because it is what orients and guides an agent’s behavior, decisions, and actions.

In later work, Bourdieu (1990b) elaborated on how the habitus influences the ways in which people think and how they engage with their social environment. Individuals embody socialized dispositions that, on although a subconscious level, direct their behavior and actions (Laughland-Booÿ, Mayall, & Skrbis, 2014). For instance, young people’s dispositions may restrain people’s freedoms and affect their choices and aspirations—including choices and aspirations surrounding education and careers (Bourdieu, 1990b; Reed-Danahay, 2005). According to Bourdieu (1990b), youth are not fully conscious of their agency. Therefore, while agency is not a wholly calculated decision, individuals learn only to aspire to what they view is within their reach (Bourdieu, 1990b). This suggests that dispositions *mediate* action, which is different than determining it. Bourdieu stated that individuals could escape their marginalizing habitus by seeing and taking chances (Reed-Danahay, 2005). Therefore, while one interpretation of Bourdieu’s work frames the concept as a deterministic one, other scholars, (e.g. McNay, 1999, McLeod, 2005, Stanton-Salazar, 2011) have reexamined the role of the habitus. McLeod (2005) reminded us that Bourdieu situated the habitus as a “strategy-

generating” principle rather than a theory (as cited in McLeod, 2005, p.13). In fact, Bourdieu (1990c) responded to critics and explicitly rejected the deterministic interpretations of habitus stating, “It is necessary to abandon all theories which explicitly or implicitly treat practice as mechanical reaction directly determined by the antecedent conditions and entirely reducible to the mechanical functionings” (p. 73).

Specifically, Bourdieu (1990b) believed that individuals have the capacity to negotiate the socialized norms and expectations that normally guide their behavior when confronted with adversity. Bourdieu referred to this capacity as *reflexivity*—an adaptive ability that emerges in response to adversity and engages with alternative experiences (Bourdieu, 1990b; Laughland-Booÿ, Mayall, & Skrbiš, 2014). The complication, however, is that Bourdieu insists that the cultural capital and resources of the socially privileged facilitate reflexivity, making it yet another “thing” that reproduces the successful outcomes of non-marginalized youth. However, Laughland-Booÿ, Mayall, and Skrbiš (2014) conducted a qualitative study in which they analyzed data from 50 semi-structured interviews with youth in Australia to understand how a reflexive disposition might manifest in two different groups of young people as they think about future education and career possibilities. They interviewed youth of both working class and socioeconomically privileged backgrounds to understand how they described their future prospects. The youth in the study voiced what they believed they needed to do to accomplish their goals based on their lived experience with educational, social, and financial resources. Laughland-Booÿ, Mayall, and Skrbiš (2014) found that the socioeconomically privileged youth did not have reflexive dispositions; they voiced aspirations of higher education which were commensurate with the social norms of their

social class rather than a choice based on ability. They embraced the attitude that attending university is a given and that “things will work out” (p. 10). Conversely, working class youth expressed that they were exposed to a higher array of opportunities and articulated varying types of jobs. Different than the socioeconomically privileged youth, they voiced specific ways in which they would navigate obstacles, rather than just assuming that “it [attending university] would work out” (p. 596). Case in point: “James. . .had very specific ideas about wanting to do a double degree in programming and creative writing. When asked how these plans were going to be financed he spoke of first joining the Australian Defence Force Gap Year” [a military training that paid enough finance his education (p. 9). Laughland-Booÿ, Mayall, and Skrbiš (2014) argued that reflexive decision-making is not a disposition that belongs exclusively to the socioeconomically privileged as Bourdieu originally suggested. However, the researchers also admitted that “time will tell if they actually achieve their goals” (p. 14).

DeJaeghere (2016) addressed this temporal nature of agency related to youth aspirations and suggested exercising agency in the hopes of achieving aspirations is not linear process meant to be measured by the ultimate achievement of an aspiration. Rather it is a dialectical process reflected in how the individual situates herself in relation to social norms and achievements occur in smaller ways. Findings from DeJaeghere’s (2016) study on girls who had been out of school and returned, and their agency in a low-resourced Tanzanian community suggest that reflexive thoughts and strategic planning might further youth agency to achieve educational aspirations. However, more research is needed to understand this process.

Lareau's (1989, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999) research further developed Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field by conceptualizing reproduction as a *process* of interactions between agents and social structure and showing what it looks like when agents do not know the "rules of the game." This work also illustrated that youth and parent agency are deeply entangled. In a 1999 study, Lareau and Horvat showed how parents of youth who are marginalized and discriminated against on account of their social class and race employed strategies to take action and advocate for their children's education. They also extended Bourdieu's work, which focused on social class, by showing how race influences dispositions and school outcomes—making the theory relevant for understanding educational experiences of people from varied backgrounds (i.e. not just relevant to social class). Their findings showed that in schools, many black parents did not trust that their children would be treated fairly, but educators considered "desirable" (p. 42) parent-school relationships as marked by trust, cooperation, and deference. As a result, when parents tried to intervene and advocate for their children, the school rebuffed their efforts. Similarly, Lareau's (2003) study demonstrated that lower class parents did not feel comfortable questioning the authority of school officials and struggled getting the school to respond to their concerns. These sets of findings are important for two reasons. To begin with, they show how Coleman's functional conceptualization of social capital, which relies on family mediation of positive educational outcomes, ignores the matter of how race and social class affect parental involvement (Lareau, 1989). Further, by noting parents' specific interactions with the school, Lareau and Horvat (1999) demonstrated that social reproduction is not completely determined by one's dispositions, but rather is a result of the interplay of structure and

agency. To refer back to Bourdieu's (1990b) metaphor, as these parents interacted in this formalized education field, they did not know the rules of the game, rendering the actions they did take ineffectual. These findings suggest that by locating the instances of interaction in which reproduction occurs, it might be possible to identify "moments of exclusion" which might ultimately contribute to disengagement or it might pinpoint moments when individuals have the option to alter these interactions in order to navigate or transform disadvantaging structures and change their outcomes (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 44).

A limit of Lareau's work is that it strictly examines *parents'* abilities to act on structures to improve their children's outcomes and does not consider the interplay of youth and parents taking action on structures together for educational gains. Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011) extended Bourdieu's work in a different way, showing how youth can negotiate their dispositions by developing relationships with other resource-bearing adults. Like Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Lareau and Horvat (1999), Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011), emphasized that in school, there is unequal access to beneficial resources for certain groups of young people on account of their class, ethnicity, or race. Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011) argued that it would benefit marginalized youth if their social networks included "institutional agents" who, according to Stanton-Salazar (2011), are "high-status, non-kin, agents who occupy relatively high positions in the multiple dimensional stratification system, and who are well positioned to provide key forms of social and institutional support" (p. 1066). This is a form of social capital available to the youth; the agent can transmit or negotiate school-sanctioned resources and opportunities, such as academic tutoring or mentoring, assistance in college admission procedures, or

career decision-making (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Stanton-Salazar analyzed network construction for marginalized youth in order to highlight the opportunities for them to connect with an institutional agent who can encourage dispositions that match institutional standards. Therefore, unlike Bourdieu, who viewed social networks as a means for social class reproduction, Stanton-Salazar (1997) argued that networks have the potential to function as “lifelines” (p. 5) to marginalized youth, helping them overcome structural barriers to improve academic performance and social mobility, which is different than Coleman’s (1986) theory which emphasized networks functioning as a transmission of human capital.

In an earlier empirical study, Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) examined various ways in which they predicted social capital would be positively related to educational success for working-class Mexican origin students who attended predominately white, middle class high schools. Interestingly, they found that English proficient students were statistically associated with a high likelihood of having non-Mexican friends, which then placed them in a network of these friends’ parents who had white-collar professions. In addition, these students were more likely to have institutional support from agents like teachers and counselors. Another important finding was that students with higher status expectations for themselves generally had greater ties with institutional agents who had the ability to transmit resources and opportunities (e.g. information about college admission or assistance about career decision making). This study showed how marginalized youths’ social capital outside of the home can influence aspirations and encourage pro-academic behaviors. Stanton-Salazar (2011) claimed that institutional agents promote youth agency because they provide young people with the

resources they need to act in their own best interest. However, what is not addressed in this study is how youth make use of these new resources to act. There is also a need to better understand how young people reflect on their dispositions and thoughts (including decisions and actions), transfer these resources across social differing social fields (e.g. home and school), and navigate the different value systems in these social fields.

In later work, Stanton-Salazar (2011) gave further attention to youth agency within social fields by refining the definition of an institutional agent—institutional agents refer to adults who wish to distribute resources to marginalized youth in order to “dismantl[e] the structures of class, racial, and gender oppression” (p. 1098). In other words, the role of the institutional agent is to empower youth to gain “resources, competencies, and key forms of power necessary for gaining control over one’s life and accomplishing important life goals” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1090). In this later work, Stanton-Salazar (2011) showed that by connecting to non-family, resource-bearing adults, marginalized young people have the potential to act and behave in ways that allow them to escape their family-mediated disadvantaging habitus and improve their educational attainment.

The important role of non-family adults [in supporting youth agency] that Stanton-Salazar is advocating is consistent with literature in youth development and psychology which says that caring, non-family adults play in important role in supporting youths’ ability to be “producers of their own growth” (Larson, 2006, p. 677). The ways in which adults can support youth agency deserves more exploration because at the core of Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory is that one’s social networks transmit attitudes, preferences, knowledge, etc. that orient a behavior that regulates one’s ability to achieve

educational success. Larson (2006) pointed out that while it is natural for adults to want to help youth by controlling their choices in order to prevent bad ones, the field of psychology offers evidence that people are intrinsically motivated to take on challenges when they feel a sense of ownership of their lives. Adults are therefore most effective when they support youths' experience of ownership and agency, while at the same time offering them continued guidance to sustain their motivation (Larson, 2006). The role adults play in sustaining youth motivation is especially critical for young people because as Larson (2006) explained, "Daily life presents an obstacle course of situations and conditions that can keep that [motivational] system turned off" (p. #) and limit youth agency. He identified elements of youth social environments—"poverty, disrupted parenting, low-quality schools, dangerous neighborhoods" (p. #)—that impede youths' intrinsic motivation to improve their lives. Notably, these elements are consistent with the aforementioned and well-documented barriers accounting for educational disparities. However, different than previous studies on educational disparities, Larson offered insight into the psychological effects these constraints have on youth agency and what support they need to overcome them.

Borrowing from the fields of youth development and psychology therefore brings a deeper understanding of the word "empowerment" as used by Stanton-Salazar (2011) and sheds light on the way in which non-family, resource-bearing adults might effectively help youth stay steady on a positive educational path. Stanton-Salazar's vague conceptualization of empowerment is limited because it gives the impression that the transmission of resources and values is sufficient fuel to propel youth to act on their own. Stanton-Salazar's (2011) research focused on how the provision of resources and support

from adults are important in enabling youth from “historically oppressed communities” (p. 1092) to become empowered to change their destiny. Stanton-Salazar noted how empowerment agents influence youth aspirations and motivate youth to act in ways to accomplish their goals. However, as Larson (2006) pointed out, even the most motivated youth may often “be waylaid in the obstacle course”(p. 682). Equipping marginalized youth with the right resources does not tell a complete story; it should not be presumed that newly gained access to beneficial resources guarantees agency toward a future goal or aspiration.

Focusing on the resources adults can offer youth precludes Stanton-Salazar (2011) from offering insight into what the agency process might look like for a young person. There is a need to understand how a youth might employ strategies to bring about successful educational outcomes using these resources. There is also a need to understand how newly imparted knowledge, resources, or ways of thinking might fit with the other social and cultural resources young people possess (e.g. their families). Stanton-Salazar (2011) suggested that empowerment will have enduring benefits for young people, but there is little understanding of how that empowerment is carried out by the young people. Stanton-Salazar (2011) claimed that:

To alter the destinies of low-status students and youth, is not only to empower them with institutional support, but also to enable their lasting empowerment via a critical consciousness and the means by which they can transform themselves, their communities, and society as a whole. (pp. 1098)

And yet, how youth actually “transform themselves” (p.1098) in order to “navigate potentially oppressive ecological” (p. 1078) elements remains unclear in Stanton-Salazar’s work.

DeJaeghere, Pellowski Wiger, and Willemsen, (2016), took a different approach and offer examples of teachers’ pedagogical practices in sub-Saharan Africa that support youth agency. They found that adults valuing youth as equals shifted the views youth (who were perceived to be at risk) had of themselves and prompted them to start reimagining their futures. This suggests a process through which social affiliation with institutional agents can affect youths’ habitus and begin to take small steps in “transforming themselves” so that they may reach valued future outcomes.

In summary, the essence of Bourdieu’s view of educational disparities is that school success or failure can be explained by the social and cultural resources and embodied dispositions (i.e. habitus) that are transferred to the individual from the family (Reay, 2004). Those who lack a certain disposition that will benefit them and also lack the social capital to acquire it are more apt to experience educational failure. Bourdieu problematized the work of Coleman (1988) by bringing attention to the quality of social relations and how one’s social identity influences youth agency as it is related to educational disparities (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Lareau’s work particularly demonstrated the ways in which this process happens and extended its relevance to those of different racial backgrounds in addition to differing social class backgrounds. Furthermore, while Bourdieu’s concept habitus has been criticized for being overly deterministic, research has demonstrated that marginalized young people are capable of changing their dispositions when faced with challenges or new environments (e.g.

Laughland-Booÿ, Mayall, & Skrbiš, 2014; McLeod, 2005). Stanton-Salazar's work suggests that young people from marginalized backgrounds can escape their disadvantaging habitus by forming new relationships with institutional agents. While this advances Bourdieu's work because it suggests that the habitus is not irreversible and that adults play a critical role transferring resources to youth that support youth agency, little attention is paid to how youth who are marginalized might use these resources to act to achieve their aspiration or improve their educational outcome amidst both barriers and social supports within their social environment. The final body of literature I will review, the capabilities approach, addresses the role of agency more explicitly by examining the process through which young people can convert resources into actual aspiration achievements amidst varying distributions of social opportunities.

The Capabilities Approach.

Originally an approach to development grounded in philosophy and economics formulated by Nobel-prize winning economist Amartya Sen in the 1980s, the capabilities approach is only recently finding a home in the field of education. At the time of its inception, Sen brought forth this new framework for thinking about human development and inequalities wherein human beings, and the betterment of their lives, become the end goal of development, not economic growth (Saito, 2003; Sen, 1999). The capabilities approach is an evaluative approach that helps policymakers and practitioners make decisions about policies and practices that expand the freedoms of what people can do or be so that they have the ability to act, or enact agency, in order to achieve their desired goals or aspirations (Alkire, 2005a). Like Coleman and Bourdieu, Sen has argued that social and cultural conditions influence an actor's ability to pursue and achieve individual

benefits. However, the aforementioned bodies of literature evaluate inequalities in terms of social and cultural resources that could connect an individual to economic rewards. Coleman (1988) contended that social capital benefits young people because it gives them access to human capital which leads to positive educational outcomes, enabling them to enter the workforce and contribute to the nation's economic well-being. Similarly, Bourdieu posited that “economic capital is at the root of all other types of capital,” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 252).

Different from the two previous bodies of literature, possession and acquisition of capital are not central to the capabilities approach. While Sen does not exclude the role of capital, in this framework, it is considered one of many resources. The capabilities approach examines whether or not a person has the freedom and the ability “to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of doing” (Sen, 1993, p. 30). This approach evaluates inequalities by asking, “Who can do what?” rather than asking, “Who has what?” (Otto & Ziegler, 2006, para. 8) and offers an alternative lens through which to understand educational disparities (Grundmann & Dravenau, 2010).

This approach is therefore distinct because it measures inequalities by assessing opportunities to act rather than outcomes (Sen, 1980). It requires a shift from the traditional ways of looking at educational disparities—often measured by grades, test scores, and graduation rates. Instead, educational disparities are examined by evaluating *freedoms*—which Dreze and Sen (1995) described as the range of real options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead. It emphasizes the importance of examining whether or not an individual has the freedom to choose among alternatives within her ability and social context (Sen, 2009; DeJaeghere & Lee, 2011). Alkire (2005b) offered a

helpful example that distinguishes freedoms from outcomes: “A person who is fasting . . . may seem very similar to a person who is starving. But in the one case, the fasting person could eat and chooses not to; whereas the starving person would eat if she could” (para. 14). Through a capabilities lens, educational disparities are evaluated by looking at freedoms to choose to pursue valued outcomes and not the outcomes themselves.

Walker and Unterhalter (2007) argued that by examining freedoms instead of outcomes, effective intervention for lessening disparities becomes possible. They explained, “We must evaluate freedoms for people to be able to make decisions they value and work to remove obstacles to those freedoms, that is, expand people’s capabilities” (p. 3). This approach promotes expanding freedoms so that individuals can enact agency to pursue a valued life. This is best understood in the context of Sen’s key terms: *functionings* and *capabilities*.

Defining Sen’s terms: functionings and capabilities. Sen’s core argument is that it is useful to identify factors that limit a person's freedom to act in ways that would allow her to achieve her aspirations rather than measuring resources. Sen’s (1993) used an example of a bicycle to demonstrate why focusing on capabilities is a more effective measure of inequality than focusing on resources: While a bicycle is indeed a resource that can be used a means of transportation, whether an individual can use this bicycle for transportation depends on various categories of social and personal conditions. These are: environmental aspects (e.g. the condition of the road), personal (e.g. the abilities of the rider), and social aspects (e.g. the social acceptance of the rider using the bicycle publicly). This is a helpful metaphor that demonstrates why initiatives geared toward alleviating educational disparities should not solely focus on expanding and bolstering

the resources of young people because such efforts do not consider the social aspects that might preclude an agent from turning resources into actual achievement (DeJaeghere & Lee, 2011; López-Fogués, 2012).

Understanding the distinction Sen makes between a *capability* and a *functioning* further illuminates the framing of the capabilities approach. A functioning refers to the various things people value doing or being that they actually achieve (Sen, 1999). Examples of functionings might include securing employment, being healthy, being respected, and being safe. A functioning, or actual achievement, might also include graduating from high school, getting into college, doing well in a course, or even achieving a certain level of mastery of a subject (Alkire, 2005a). Capabilities, on the other hand, refer to the freedom, or options, that allow people to achieve their goals and what they deem valuable (Sen, 1999). The distinction between capabilities and functionings is the difference between the potential to achieve and actual achievement (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007).

The capabilities approach therefore offers a framework for looking at the diverse set of factors that might limit or improve a person's opportunities to act toward achieving their aspirations. As Tikly and Barrett (2011) explained, an individual's set of options differs depending on individuals' social identity such as, "gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation and the wider social relations of power and inequality that create disadvantage" (p. 8). The capabilities approach, as an analytical approach to understanding inequalities, is useful because it draws attention to the underlying social, cultural or economic constraints on youth's opportunities to achieve their aspirations related to education and can be sensitive to aspects of discrimination that are particular to

a youth's social identity (DeJaeghere & Baxter, 2014; DeJaeghere & Lee, 2011; Fukuda-Parr, 2003). For example, DeJaeghere and Lee's (2011) use of the capabilities approach to study marginalized youth in Bangladesh found that despite Bangladesh achieving gender parity in secondary schooling, about a third of the youth in the study (most of whom were girls) did not feel safe in school, at home, or in their community.

Additionally, about a third of the youth did not feel that their parents supported their education. For instance, many girls felt constrained by social attitudes regarding girls' education that was at odds with social values of girls ultimately being good wives.

This dissertation uses the capabilities approach to illustrate that an individual's social identities influence their opportunities to achieve aspirations. In this case, marginalized young girls dealt with gendered constraints that kept them from transforming their education into achievements. While I do not equate the Bangladeshi context with the contextual conditions of the US and the Minnesota Somali diaspora, parallels can be drawn. For instance, a young person in the diaspora might be highly proficient in subject matter, but if she does not feel safe in school, or if her efforts are rebuffed by teachers, she might not be able to transform her proficiency into positive educational outcomes. From a capabilities perspective, understanding the real options an individual person has to act is a prerequisite to supporting agency.

A place for youth agency. Because the capabilities approach argues that individuals ought to have the freedom to *act* toward achieving a life they value, agency plays a larger, or at least more overt, role in this body of literature than the two previous ones. Within the capabilities approach, agency refers to the idea that individuals are responsible human beings who, with access to informational bases to make choices,

shape their life path according to what they aspire to achieve in life (Sen, 1985, 1999). In other words, agency is the ability of an individual to pursue goals that are important for the life she wishes to lead in the future (DeJaeghere, 2016; Walker, 2006). Conversely, someone who is not agentic is considered oppressed or passive (Alkire, 2005b)--a lack of agency is disadvantageous (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). In this approach, people, including young people, are viewed as the drivers of their educational trajectories, capable of acting on behalf of their aspirations as long as they have the social opportunities to do so (Alkire, 2005b). This means that agentic behavior depends on the amount of freedom one has to pursue the educational goals and aspirations she views as important (Sen, 1985). In a sense, capabilities operate as a precondition to agency. When an individual effectively has freedoms, it is up to her to act (Carpenter, 2009).

Another important point of distinction for the capabilities approach is that it does not assume individuals are economically motivated to act. So while it is like Coleman's functional approach to social capital in that it emphasizes individual action, Coleman's infusion of rational action theory relies on the economist tenets that an actor will pursue an economic reward (Coleman, 1988). In contrast, the capabilities approach recognizes that individuals have varied goals for themselves (Alkire, 2005a; Hart, 2012).

Recognizing that youth might have varied goals for their education prompts a new understanding of education's purpose. The capabilities approach allows for education to be evaluated in broader social, cultural, economic, and policy contexts, while taking individual aspirations into account (Otto & Ziegler, 2006). As a result, it is less concerned with human capital production and student credentialing than the previous bodies of literature. Instead, scholars who have applied the capabilities approach to the

field of education (e.g. DeJaeghere, 2016; DeJaeghere & Baxter, 2014; Walker, 2012; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007) have built on Sen's (1999) normative perspective of education as an unqualified good that *ought* to (but may not) lead to the extension of more opportunities for people to choose to pursue a life they value (Otto & Ziegler, 2006). Specifically, Walker (2012) advocated that education's central role should be to support the development of decision-making abilities and enable agentic behavior. I find it curious, however, that the agentic process is seldom discussed in this body of literature.

Sen is, in fact, widely criticized for being too individualistic and for only partially acknowledging the role of social structures on agency and vice versa (Carpenter, 2009). Sen has responded to this criticism by insisting that in seeking to only evaluate the greater social structures (e.g. the family, school), analyses might overlook potential inequalities (and diversity) within these units. For example, Bigelow found that Somali girls faced more overt discrimination in schools than Somali boys on account of their hijabs. Sen supports "ethical individualism" (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p. #), meaning that what ultimately matters is what happens to each individual within a society.

Nonetheless, while Sen (1999; 2009) acknowledged that there is a "deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements" (Sen, 1999, p. xii), he arguably places an excessive amount of faith in individuals' ability to navigate social barriers without taking the time to theorize how a person might actually go about exhibiting agentic behavior within the constraints of his or her social arrangements and how they transform capabilities into actual achievements (DeJaeghere, Pellowski Wiger, & Willemsen, 2014). The following section explores this limit in Sen's work and

explores the ways in the roles of agency with the capabilities approach framework—particularly by looking at agency as socially situated.

Agency as socially situated. DeJaeghere and Baxter (2014) began to extend research in this way by demonstrating how entrepreneurship programs—as a form of education and training—in Sub-Saharan Africa can function to expand freedoms and support youth agency, particularly among youth who had been pushed out of the education system and were unable to be employed. To begin with, they found that simply endowing marginalized youth with entrepreneurial skills is not enough to help them use what they learned in their program to improve their livelihoods. For instance, adults’ immediate financial needs and “widespread distrust” (p. 72) of youth are examples of constraints to youth’s freedoms of pursuing earning opportunities. However, adult mentoring and efforts to link participants to financial products are ways in which the program addresses these freedom constraints. Additionally, and more relevant to this current discussion of agency, the authors noted a second point of transformation, whereby capabilities—or freedoms to make a valued choice—are beginning to be transformed into actual achievements. They found that the program’s focus on life skills, which includes reflecting on motivations for and consequences of decisions and planning for their future, helped youth exercise agency in a way that is likely to enhance their livelihood. They explained:

The allure for youth to spend extra income on leisure activities, luxury items and relationships was expressed by both male and female youth. After participating in a programme in which they were encouraged to plan for their futures and to reflect on the consequences of the choices they make regarding relationships,

many youth explained that they have begun to change their spending habits.

These changes were often accompanied by a decision to associate with new peer groups and to avoid certain environments and kinds of relationships. (DeJaeghere & Baxter, 2014, p. 73)

This study shows how education—in this case, life skills training—can foster agency, enabling youth to take calculated action in order to achieve valued goals. Another important finding is that the youth acted on their social environment by adjusting their social networks in order to improve their well-being. This resonates with Stanton-Salazar's (1997, 2011) extension of Bourdieu's work, arguing that social networks help young people escape disadvantage. However, by examining this process through a capabilities framework, the authors were able to demonstrate how the program and particular components of it operate as a form of social support—a freedom—that promotes and supports youth agency, whereas Stanton-Salazar assumes youth agency will occur as a direct result of a new social network. As DeJaeghere and Baxter (2014) explained, “It is not only the valued options or capabilities available to youth that matter for youth livelihoods, but the *actual choice* [emphasis added] to pursue a particular option for the sake of livelihood improvement” (p. 71).

Finally, a social network change suggests agency enactment is a socially situated process—and provides a bit of affirmation to Sen's (1999) claim that social arrangements influence agency and vice versa. Grundmann and Dravenau (2010) also conceptualized the relationship between agency and structure explaining that “supportive environments and relationships constitute important factors for enacting agency and making valuable choice” (p. 97). Yet there is a little theorization within the capabilities approach about the

relationships between social factors and agency. DeJaeghere (2016) extended the work in this way and suggests that agency and aspirations are dialectically related and socially situated. One finding from this study in a Tanzanian community is that imagining alternative futures in a nonformal educational program, which includes “concrete steps for mapping actions” (p. 28), is a way in which education can foster agency related to future aspirations. Findings show that mapping one’s future bolstered family support of future plans, which in turn, further supported youth actions (e.g. seeking financial support or further education). More research is needed using the capabilities approach in order to understand the ways in which education can be transformative (rather than reproductive) and support individuals’ abilities to pursue valued outcomes within socially situated norms and expectations (DeJaeghere, 2016). This dissertation will extend the research using the capabilities approach in this way by exploring ways in which young teens in the Somali diaspora might go about assessing options, making choices and acting in ways that might lead to aspiration achievement within their social arrangements.

However, because the capabilities approach is an evaluative tool rather than a social theory, it is not equipped to account for or analyze this social process in empirical research (Robeyns, 2005). Robeyns (2005) therefore argued that the capabilities approach would benefit by crossing disciplinary boundaries. Many scholars of the capabilities approach (e.g. Bowman, 2010; DeJaeghere, 2015; Hart, 2012; Nussbaum, 2000; Robeyns, 2005) have extended Sen’s view of agency, by grounding it sociologically. Hart (2012) employed the capabilities approach together with Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction to study aspirations of higher education among working class students in the United Kingdom. Hart justified using a capabilities approach to study the nature of

aspirations by saying, “Understanding the nature of aspiring tells us . . . about the freedom an individual has to develop capabilities and choose to pursue a future they have reason to value” (Chapter 5, para. 1). Hart made use of Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) social reproduction theory in order to illuminate how the social structures in which the transformation from capabilities to functionings might occur constrain youth agency. Hart’s (2012) findings suggest that many working class youth did not pursue their stated aspirations of higher education because of the agency constraints associated with their social class. For example, lower income youth predicted others would not like them in higher education, they were intimidated by a stressful application and admissions process and they predicted that in higher education, they would have to change their class identity and habitus; they worried about being exposed as frauds. Hart also found that family and parents lacked the knowledge of how to support their children’s aspirations. By blending these two theoretical frameworks, Hart (2012) demonstrated how youths’ lack of ease (i.e. habitus) in entering the new social context of higher education (i.e. field) and their parents (i.e. social capital) constrain their agency, or ability to pursue their aspirations of higher education enrollment (i.e. functioning). This study is valuable in that Hart is able to discuss agency as process and experience of marginalized young people. Through this more sociologically grounded framework, Hart (2012) showed how one’s deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions (habitus) can prevent marginalized young people from achieving their stated aspirations. However, this study is limited in that it only reveals social *constraints* on agency and says little about how marginalized youth might rely on social supports and/or exercise agency to navigate and overcome disadvantaging social structures they face on their path toward aspiration achievement. Hart situated

agency in reproductive language and does not explore ways in which it can be transformative (DeJaeghere, 2016). So while the capabilities approach is useful in making the case for youth agency, it is curious that an approach with the goal of expanding freedoms so that individuals might pursue a life of value dedicates little research to understanding how a successful pursuit of a valued life might actually occur within the constraints (and opportunities) of youths' social arrangements. This is a gap in the literature I will begin to address in my dissertation.

Conclusion

Educational attainment is an important predictor of future thriving. Young people and adults in the Minnesota Somali diaspora have low levels of educational attainment—with only a small percentage (11%) going on to attain at least an associate's degree. Because the purpose of this dissertation is to understand the ways in which young people exercise abilities to achieve higher levels of educational attainment, it is important to have a conceptual basis for understanding and designing new ways to address educational disparities in the Somali diaspora. The bodies of literature I have explored have each, in different ways, explained disparities in educational attainment by identifying various agency constraints (and some supports) young people encounter on account of their class, race or ethnic identity. Disparities were explained by: weakened social ties (Coleman, 1988), unequal access to resources and a lack of ease in school (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1986) and unequal freedoms (to utilize one's agency for future achievements or well-being) (Sen, 1999). Further, many of the studies included in this chapter (e.g. Bankston & Zhou, 2002; Hart, 2012) suggest that youth who are marginalized often have educational aspirations that they are not realizing. By examining

three distinct bodies of literature, this review of theories demonstrated that little attention has been paid to how youth who are marginalized might enact agency to navigate and transform barriers and draw on support in order to achieve their educational aspirations. Empirical studies that examine the processes young people undergo as they achieve educational aspirations from the perspectives of young people themselves is especially rare. The aforementioned empirical studies by DeJaeghere and Baxter (2014) and DeJaeghere (2016), using the capabilities approach, provided evidence of youth exhibiting effective agentic behavior related to their educational aspirations. Further, they reveal that thinking about one's future is associated with enhanced youth agency. This is a promising finding that deserves further examination. Walker and Mkwanaenzi (2015) used the capabilities approach to understand the complex agency constraints youth in South African orphanages faced in achieving aspirations of higher education. Wilson-Strydom (2015) used the capabilities approach to understand access to and retention in higher education among poorer students in South Africa, demonstrating that access is not sufficient if youth agency is not supported. Studies such as these, that use the capabilities approach to understand youth agency toward educational aspirations from the youth perspective, are limited yet emerging in the field of education.

Therefore, this dissertation seeks to contribute to a growing body of knowledge within human development and education by understanding how youth in their middle years living in the Somali diaspora enact agency in order to achieve their aspirations in and through education. Because the functional conceptualization of social capital does not attend to underlying social and cultural conditions that affect youth agency, this body of literature will not inform my theoretical framework. Nonetheless, its inclusion in this

review is important because it exposes the imperativeness of considering the social and cultural resources young people bring with them in their educational endeavors.

I will primarily draw on the capabilities approach because it offers a practical framework for studying agency and because I agree with Hart (2012) that aspirations stand for a future life a young person values (i.e. functionings). My research will not seek to analyze individuals' capability sets; rather I use the capabilities approach to examine the process of how young people can enact agency to transform their capabilities into actual achievements. I will also draw from Bourdieu's concept of habitus because it is useful in understanding the way young people think, feel and act and the ease with which young people can transform resources in actual achievements within specific social contexts (Hart, 2012; Wacquant, 2011). By situating the concept of habitus within the capabilities approach's evaluative framework, I aim to understand an agency process and experience young people in the Somali diaspora undergo to navigate and transform barriers in order to lead a life they have "reason to value" (Sen, 1999, p.87). This dissertation adds to the literature by uplifting youth agency in the Somali diaspora as a future-oriented process.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research design of this dissertation which seeks to understand how young people who belong to the Somali diaspora perceive and navigate their educational pathways over time. I discuss my use of qualitative longitudinal research methodology, data collection methods, and analysis strategies.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide my methodological design:

1. How do youth (in grades 6-9) in the American Somali diaspora describe their educational aspirations for the future?
 - a. In what ways do social conditions influence their educational aspirations?
2. In what ways do youth (in grades 6-9) in the American Somali diaspora exercise their abilities to achieve their educational aspirations amidst obstacles and opportunities?

The first question is foundational. Understanding young people's descriptions of their aspirations can offer insight into their valued future lives—the achievements for which they are striving through education. Further, because aspirations are formed “in the thick of life” (Appadurai, 2004, p. 67), understanding the conditions that shaped youth aspirations helped me understand the multiple contexts in which young people enacted agency. It established context and allowed for the young people in the study to “identify the world as they see it” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 7). This research question enabled me to take an interpretivist approach to research, which I will describe in the next section. The second research question operationalizes the capabilities approach's use of the word agency (i.e. exercising abilities to pursue goals; Walker, 2009) and enabled me

to study what young people are actually doing in this moment in time in their lives to achieve their educational aspirations. It specifically allowed me to gain an understanding of youth agency as guided by a *reflexive habitus*, which occurs when young people are faced with new opportunities and challenges. The question helped me to understand how young people negotiated the norms and expectations that guided their behavior through a period of time and in specific contexts (Bourdieu, 1990b).

Paradigm

The purpose of this study is to understand how young people living in the Somali diaspora perceived and navigated their educational pathways over time. I adopted an interpretivist approach in order to understand this process from the perspectives of the young people themselves (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Consistent with elements of interpretivism, which is rooted in the belief that what people believe to be true about the world is constructed or created through interactions with others, over time and in specific social settings, I employed methods—to be described in the sections that follow— which allowed me to rely on the participants’ views of their own aspirations and agency within various social, historical and temporal contexts (Alvermann, O’Brien, & Dillon, 1996; Creswell, 2007). My role as the researcher was to establish shared understandings with the research participants about how they perceived their own agency within these contexts (LeCompte & Shensul, 2010).

Theoretical Framework: Guiding the Research Design

A capabilities approach (Dreze & Sen, 1995; Sen, 1999) is the conceptual basis for this study. It guided the development of my research questions and thus drove the research design. The capabilities approach offers a framework for looking at the real

opportunities someone has to actually act in order to lead a life of value. The individual—and the betterment of her life—is of primary concern; agency is central because it is what an individual draws upon to pursue goals that one values and that are important for the life an individual wishes to lead (Walker, 2006).

I also infused Bourdieu's concept of habitus into my theoretical framework because it grounded this study sociologically. It allowed me to study not just what social conditions were present that could either support or impede agency, but nuances the capabilities framework, allowing me to study the interplay of the young people as social agents and their dynamic social conditions as they worked toward goals they considered to be important—like pursuing higher education. Habitus illustrates how social arrangements, and the power differentials within might foster the development of a certain way of looking at the world, which tends to influence what young people believe is achievable or possible in their lives. This view of the self and world (i.e. the habitus) is what guides action (Bourdieu, 1990b). The fusion of these two frameworks therefore offered a robust framework for understanding how young people acted to convert their capabilities into actual achievement (i.e. functionings) in a way that is socially, and temporally situated. Figure 1 illustrates the study's framework and captures some of the key themes of agency and aspirations.

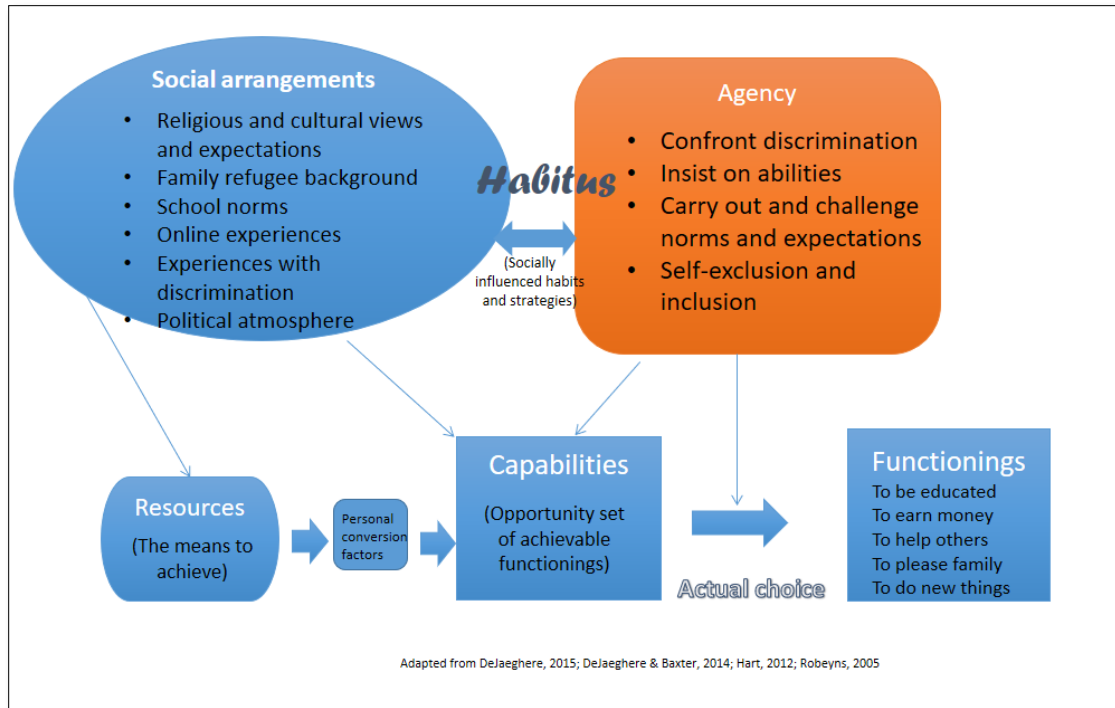


Figure 1. Theoretical framework: The capabilities approach and habitus

Research Setting and Participants¹

The research setting of this study—in the broadest sense—is the Minnesota Somali diaspora. The youth participants are young people in their middle years (ages 11-15) who identify as belonging to the Somali diaspora. The life stage of the youth participants was selected based on two separate, but interrelated bodies of literature. As stated in Chapter One, Somali youth in Minnesota reported the highest commitment to learning than any other social group surveyed (Minnesota Student Survey, 2016). Yet, among Somali American high school students, dropout, truancy, and suspension rates are high; and data trends suggest they have a low likelihood of attaining education past high school if they graduate (Abdi, 2015; Minnesota Demographic Center, 2016; TAYO

¹ Youth programs, staff, youth, and families were provided pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

Consulting Group, 2016). This disparity between youth's' desire for high educational attainment and their actual achievement begs for a better understanding how Somali American youth in their middle years interact with their social worlds—such as school and family—as they try to achieve positive educational outcomes. Such findings might help practitioners and policy-makers identify early moments of disengagement or opportunities to bolster youth support prior to the age many American youth in the Somali diaspora tend to disengage from their education. Additionally, broader literature on educational attainment among marginalized youth suggests it is in the middle years when youth, particularly those who experience varying degrees of marginalization, truly make the decision to pursue higher education and when they start taking action to achieve this goal (Balfanz, 2009; Kao & Tienda, 1998).

This study was also situated in the participants' organized youth programs. While this dissertation does not study elements of the program specifically, organized youth programs are a promising research setting to study youth agency because of their emphasis on the youth development principles of young people being “producers” of their own development (Larson, 2006, p. 277). The youth program sites in this study were particularly poised to help explore the phenomenon at hand because of their explicit mission to encourage Somali youth to pursue a higher education. I came to know the youth participants in this research study through my employment at the University of Minnesota. In my position at the university, I worked in partnership with staff from the Somali youth-serving organization, Somali Youth Strength (pseudonym) to collaboratively build and implement multiple afterschool youth programs for Somali youth. It was through these interactions that I came to know the youth, their families, and

program leaders affiliated with this organization (henceforth known as SYS), and I began to consider who I might invite to participate in this study. I will first offer a description of the organization and then move on to describe the two SYS youth programs that participated in the study. Finally, I will introduce and describe the youth participants.

The Partnering Somali Youth Organization

Somali Youth Strength is a nonprofit organization started in 2007 by a small group of Somali young adults (who at the time were in their early twenties) as a response to issues they identified in their community such as: high school dropouts, gang violence, a growing rift between youth and elders, and a small group Somali youth in the Twin Cities community being recruited by terrorist groups (Zakariya, personal communications, July 10, 2015). The mission of the organization is to support Somali youth in pursuing higher education. Zakariya, the executive director, explained to me in a 2015 partnership meeting that their youth organization was founded on the idea that if they could help youth graduate from high school and go on to college, then all of the aforementioned issues within the community might be resolved. (Zakariya, personal communication, July 10, 2015)

Youth programs is just one service SYS offers to the Somali community in Minnesota. The organization has also, in partnership with others, produced educational documentaries, offered employment services, hosted Somali Independence Day celebrations, and has lobbied at the state and federal level for funds and policies that support Somali youth. They also partner with schools and human services to support youth who have a record of truancy to reengage in their school environment. SYS's afterschool programs, which were the sites for this research, began in 2013 as part of a

five-year, federal grant from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) through the Children, Youth, and Families at Risk Program (CYFAR). This grant was awarded to the University of Minnesota Extension to carry out youth programs for middle school aged youth, in partnership with SYS. The program model aims to stimulate youth interest in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), support youth aspirations for higher education and careers, and encourage youth to set goals for themselves as well as an action plan to achieve their goals. Youth meet twice a week in an afterschool setting and participate in field experiences such as spending a week on a college campus and meeting with STEM industry professionals. Youth and families learned about these afterschool programs from networking within the Somali community in Minnesota. Program staff are well connected with local mosques, residential units, and schools and let families and youth know about the program when interacting with them in those settings. Many young people and their families learned about the program through family members or close friends and requested or were invited to participate.

Research Sites

One participating Somali Youth Strength program takes place in a suburb of the Twin Cities in a predominately white, middle class area. In this study, I will refer to this as the Savanna Hills club (pseudonym). Zakariya explained to me that for a time, this city had a housing voucher program, which attracted many Somali families to the area in the first decade of the 2000s. This youth program was the first one SYS implemented in 2014. For the first two years of programming, the youth met at a space SYS rented at a strip mall in the area. Programming activities primarily focused on homework help

instead of STEM learning and future planning because, as the program leader, Ibrahim, relayed to me, parents would not be happy if they dropped their children off at program and their homework was not completed. He went on to explain that parents did not think the nonformal learning activities were as valuable to their children as homework completion (Ibrahim, personal communication, 2015). As the program matured over the years, however, youth (when they finished their homework) would participate in nonformal engineering leadership activities. Rent in the original location soon became unaffordable for the organization, so with my help, the club found a new home at a local county office, meeting in the conference room twice a week.

The other participating SYS club takes place in a Minneapolis neighborhood, Cedar Riverside, which is nicknamed “Little Mogadishu” because it is home to the largest Somali population in North America. I chose not to give the neighborhood a pseudonym. Because this neighborhood is largely populated with many youth programs, the information I provide is not specific enough to identify the youth participants. All other identifying information, such as participant names and schools will not be disclosed. Further, Cedar Riverside is so well-known for its vibrant and highly populated Somali community that concealing its identity would require that I leave out contextual descriptors that were important to my findings. The neighborhood is brimming with Somali owned businesses and Somali-based community organizations and services. Somali refugees first began to make Cedar Riverside their home in the early 2000s, coming from refugee camps in places like Kenya and Ethiopia. The neighborhood was cited as a welcoming new home for refugees because of the availability of social services and opportunities to secure employment with limited language proficiency (TAYO

Consulting Group, 2016). Presently, it seems that word of mouth is now the main attraction to the neighborhood. For example, the parents of the youth in my study said they came because they already had family members living here. I often walked to the neighborhood from University of Minnesota west bank campus; the visual change in surroundings was always astonishing to me as I left campus to quickly enter a community where I was usually the only non-Somali person walking along the street. As one youth participant described to me, if you are in the Cedar neighborhood, you will be “surrounded by Somali people.”

The youth program in Cedar Riverside was in its first months of implementation when I began this study. In the beginning of the year, it took place in a small room connected to the “Somali mall” which hosts shops (e.g. clothing, coffee, barber, grocery) akin to those in Somalia. Midyear, the organization negotiated permission to use a larger community room in the “C building” one of three skyscraper apartment buildings in the neighborhood that is home to many Somali families and has come to symbolize the Somali community in the Minneapolis skyline.

The Young People

The participants in this study are kind, inquisitive, and bold young people whose introspection and thoughtful worldview made our time together enjoyable and illuminating. The focal participants for this study were nine youth who were members of Somali Youth Strength. There were six girls and three boys ranging in age from 11 to 15 years old (grades 6-9). Five youth (four girls, one boy) were members of the Savanna Hills club, and four youth (two girls, two boys) were members of the Cedar Riverside club. Purposive selection was used to invite youth to become a part of this study

(Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark, & Smith, 2011). Selection was largely based on youths' availability and willingness to participate in the study. I selected youth who, based on my experience with the program and based on insight from program leaders, attended program frequently. I also selected youth who I thought would be able to speak to the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark, & Smith, 2011). I invited youth who I felt could communicate and demonstrate their knowledge, opinions, and experiences around the topic of their educational pathways toward a desired future in a thoughtful and reflective manner.

Savanna Hills youth. Because the Savanna Hills program was beginning its third year, I had known one of the study participants, Marwa (and her siblings and mother) for two years. I had known the other four participants, Faiza, Hamdi, Layla, Khalid for one year prior to the study. In the spring of 2016, while conducting an evaluation focus group in Savanna Hills, I mentioned to the youth that I would be doing my own research project and would like to learn about their future aspirations and how they are working to achieve these aspirations. I then asked them if, in the next year, they would be interested in talking to me more frequently and having me visit more in the future; they all agreed. In fact, all nine youth in the youth program eagerly wanted to be interviewed by me when I started showing up to program weekly for the study. I would often be asked, "When are you going to interview me?" Each of the participating five participants assented to the study. (See Appendix B for the youth assent form.) Each of the youth participants attended public schools that were part of the city's independent school district. Marwa and Khalid were in high school, and Faiza, Hamdi, and Layla were in middle school.

I also talked to and received consent (see Appendix A for study consent form) from each of the parents of the Savanna Hills youth. The parents knew me—or at a minimum recognized me—as a University of Minnesota employee who had a role in supporting their children’s youth programs. Because their youth program was funded by a federal grant, the parents had to previously consent (and the youth had to assent) to participate in the programming and the evaluation procedures that accompanied the programming when they joined the youth program. They also fill out an enrollment form each program year. All this is explained in order to demonstrate that signing documents per my request was a familiar process for the families. When I came to program to request this additional consent, I explained to the families that I would like to spend some more time with their children during program to talk about their educational experiences and aspirations, they consented. Many were particularly happy I would spend dedicated time with their children discussing education. I also had an established relationship with the youth program leader, Ibrahim, who frequently told me I could visit program “any time” and would sometimes call families on my behalf to encourage attendance when I requested to interview someone. He often asked what I was learning and would offer further insight into my findings or help steer my curiosities to a topic I had not considered exploring. Table 1 displays information on the focal participants’ grades and families.

Table 1

Savanna Hills youth participants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Siblings in program</i>	<i>Parent/family member participating in study</i>
<i>Marwa</i>	9	sister (grade 6), brothers (grade 5 and 3)	Fatima
<i>Layla</i>	8	Khalid brother, (grade 6)	Nimo
<i>Khalid</i>	9	Layla, brother, (grade 6)	Nimo
<i>Faiza</i>	8	Hamdi, brother (grade 6)	Hibaaq
<i>Hamdi</i>	7	Faiza	Hibaaq

Cedar Riverside youth. The Cedar Riverside youth program began in late spring of 2016, just a few months before I began this study. Because it was such a new youth group, I did not have a prior relationship with the youth and families from this site. However, I had been working with Zakariya and the site program leaders, Kowsar and Mahamud, on developing educational content for the program in the winter and spring of 2016. In this time, I spoke to the program leaders about inviting youth and families to participate in this study. They agreed to help and appeared excited to have youth participate. My first major interaction with the youth and their families was in early August 2016 when I accompanied the youth program participants to a presentation of their engineering projects to the Minneapolis City Council. I rode the bus with the youth and families to City Hall, and it was at this time when Kowsar and Mahamud introduced

me to parents and youth, while also enthusiastically telling the parents about this study (without my prompting) and encouraging them to participate. It was also when I first met Roodoo and her sister and brothers, Abdi and Ahmed. I received consent for this study from their parents, Sahra and Fartun while waiting to enter Minneapolis City Hall. My view at the time was that they considered it as a valuable opportunity for their children to talk about their educational futures. Both Sahra and Fartun would occasionally ask me about their children throughout the year wondering, “What do they want to be in the future?” I met Hodan a few weeks later at the program site since she had not participated in the City Hall presentation and received both consent and assent for her participation. I selected these four youths to participate primarily because Kowsar had a good relationship with their mothers and the youth, and she assured me these young people would be available to participate in the study—and that she would help assure their continued participation. She later told me that many of these mothers chose to involve their children in this particular program because of their trust in her. Hodan is Kowsar’s niece—her sister’s daughter, who she ensured would be available for the study. Hodan is also the only immigrant youth in this study—having just moved here with her mother from Kenya in April to join her father, who had been living here for over a decade.

In the summer months, the Cedar Riverside youth spent a lot of time doing engineering projects, but as school began, parents expressed that they primarily wanted their children to receive homework help, so time spent at program was dedicated to homework. In the early months, all four focal participants attended regularly—as did Roodoo’s and Abdi and Ahmed’s mothers who would sit near the door and drink tea, socialize, and occasionally remind their children to focus on their studies. During the

winter months, attendance waned and become more sporadic. For instance, Ahmed did not attend for four months, and his mother, who would come with her younger children, told me he no longer wanted to be in the program (or to be in the study) because he wanted to be by himself. But then, he returned in the spring, and I was able to have informal conversation with him, learning about his life. He agreed, and his mom consented, to be interviewed by me one final time. Roodoo, her sister, and Abdi attended charter schools that primarily serve students of East African descent. Hodan, attended the middle school that belonged to the city's independent school district. Ahmed started the school year at the same school as Hodan, but as I will explicate in the findings chapter, later transferred to the same K-12 charter school as his siblings.

Table 2

Cedar Riverside youth participants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Siblings at program</i>	<i>Parent/family member participating in study</i>
<i>Roodoo</i>	9	Sister (grade 8)	Sahra
<i>Hodan</i>	7	Cousin, Kowsar's daughter	Kowsar (aunt and program leader)
<i>Abdi</i>	6	Ahmed, sister (grade 5)	Fartun
<i>Ahmed</i>	8	Abdi, sister (grade 5)	Fartun

Positionality Statement

As an interpretivist researcher, I know that my understanding of the findings in this study is influenced by personal experience and interactions with the research participants (LeCompte & Shensul, 2010). It is not possible for me to separate myself

from the social processes and contexts I study. To this end, it is important to that I reflect on my own background, value systems, and my relationship to the research participants in order to take into account the positionalities in my relationship with the young people.

Professional Positionality

I began working with some of the study participants in 2013. In my role at the University of Minnesota, I supported the design and implementation of programs intended for youth who experience educational barriers, which included the two research sites. My professional role had been to develop and sustain community partnerships with the site hosts and support the program staff and volunteers in building their capacity to run high-quality youth programs through trainings, site visits, and program planning meetings. I administered evaluative pre- and post-surveys and mid-year focus groups for each club. Finally, I designed and coordinated the program's summer campus immersion program. While I was never program staff and was not charged with leading programs, I was occasionally present at program activities, particularly field experiences—such as when the young people visited campus. I first came to know many of the youth participants and their parents in this role. Because of my professional role, spending more immersive time with the youth at programs for this research project seemed a natural transition (from my standpoint and I believe from that of the families as well). For instance, during the study, youth never questioned, why I was at their program. Instead they would often ask questions like, “When is the next field trip?”

This brings up the point that at times, I would happily answer questions like when the next field trip was and even help collect permission slips for it. While I did not lead programs, it was often helpful for me to discuss the program development with the

program leaders while I was there. I would often collect forms, troubleshoot questions about how to deliver an activity, or just have broader discussion about the benefit the program leaders and I hoped the program would have on the young people and community. Additionally, the Cedar Riverside site had many drop-ins looking for homework help, and many times I would sit with younger youth and help with their homework.

Personal Positionality

Throughout the study, I found myself continually reflecting on the ways in which my position, as a white, Christian, middle-class, adult woman associated with the University of Minnesota and working with Somali and Muslim youth, influenced the study—both in my interactions with participants and in my analysis. Early in the study, I confided in Zakariya that I was worried young people might not feel comfortable opening up to me about some of their experiences, and he warned me that could very well be the case telling me: “They don’t want to come off—who knows if Joanna feels that way...If a white kid did something, they can’t tell another white person” (Personal communication, September, 21, 2016). Zakariya highlighted bluntly that I was a person who belonged to a social group which has marginalized youth on account of their belonging to a different, less privileged social group. Another interaction that prompted me to confront my power and privilege is when Sahra (Roodoo’s mother) gifted me two books on Islam telling me, “You work with us now, you must learn.” She went on to tell me that she did not want me to think bad things about them and she wanted me to be able to tell others good things about her community. These interactions heightened my commitment to frequently attend programs to build mutual trust. I tried to listen as much

as I could and I worked to employ methods that would privilege the young people's voices and quiet my own.

There were smaller moments when I felt an affinity with the young people. I am a daughter of Greek immigrant who grew up with little money and tried to give my sister and me every educational opportunity he felt he was denied. Much like the mothers I met, he did not understand the ins and outs of the American school system, but was luckily able to rely on my middle-class, American-born mother who could navigate it on our behalves. I also sometimes spoke empathically with some of the youth who were not completely fluent in Somali about how frustrating it could be to not fully be able to speak your parents' native language. These small shared experiences brought us closer together, but I was very much a member of the outside group who had a place of power and privilege.

The methods I employed were developed with my positionality in mind and helped me to capture youths' experiences well. The young people trusted me with their narratives in many ways—telling me about their faith and their experiences with anti-Muslim racism. But they still kept secrets from me, and I learned to be okay with that. I had two young people tell quietly that they did not want to answer a question about (for example, why peers were “bullying” Ahmed). Fatima told me she did “not have a very good childhood,” but made it clear to me that she did not want to share details of what I imagine was great trauma as a young person living in a war-stricken country. I was trusted in many ways and definitely liked and greeted often with hugs from the young people and their mothers, but I was still on the outside.

I also developed a firm moral stance in the midst of biting sociopolitical climate in the US. I felt angry about the pervasive rhetoric, policies, and actions that falsely affiliated Muslim people with violence and extremism. I clung to that very issue as one of many aspects of the current administration's viewpoints and policies I disdained. Early in the study (and during the presidential campaigns), I realized I was partially motivated by my own political dissatisfaction to learn how the young people felt about the political climate. I thought for certain they would be outright angry, sad, or scared. For the most part, they were not. In fact, when I returned to the Savanna Hills group in February 2018 to do a check-in and member check, I reviewed some of the topics we discussed. When I mentioned the campaign and election, a few youth said, "Oh yeah," as if they had forgotten about the election. Layla told me, "I'm over it." At the time of the study youth had opinions about what was happening. The president's name came up fairly frequently (as someone they disliked), and the Savanna Hills club leader, Ibrahim, led group discussions after debates, the election, and women's march that followed the inauguration. The young people were decidedly opposed the president and what he stood for, but I learned my own fresh outrage came from my place of privilege.

Shortly after the election, Saturday Night Live did a skit in which Dave Chapelle and Chris Rock followed the election results with white friends who (comedically) were aghast with shock each time a state turned red in favor of the current president. Chapelle and Rock sat amongst them calmly and mocked their surprise and naiveté, because the election of someone who was so blatantly racist fit with their worldview. The white people in this skit humorously and accurately represented my positionality (at least the one I had early in the study) so well. I was so freshly outraged, whereas the young

people, in many ways, were accustomed to experiencing anti-Muslim racism, which made the current president's election disappointing, but not surprising to them.

Participants were also young adolescents, so it was fitting with their stage of development that they possessed a more abstract social sentiment and were engaged with friends, school, and funny YouTube videos more than politics (Caskey & Anfara, 2007; Halpern, Heckman, & Larson, 2013). My moral stance against the political anti-Muslim rhetoric and actions persisted in many ways, but through this study, I attempted to act on this stance by lifting up authentic stories of youth—highlighting stories of faith and family.

I am also a mother. This mattered to the youth participants and perhaps more importantly, granted me social entry with their mothers. The first time I brought my daughter to a program site (Cedar Riverside) was in September, and it was because I was without childcare. It is hard to imagine this perspective now, but at that stage in my study, I worried I would seem unprofessional. Yet, it was on that first day that my daughter came that I noticed mothers feel more at ease with me. It was a subtle and perhaps indescribable shift in dynamics, but from that moment forward I felt new trust for me was formed among the Cedar Riverside mothers. Additionally, at the time of the Savanna Hills parent focus group in December 2016, I had just become visibly pregnant with my son, who was born in June 2017. Prior to the focus group, the mothers congratulated me on my pregnancy and showered me with well wishes and advice. I was pregnant for the majority of the data collection period, which was a frequent icebreaker for the participants. Mothers at both sites almost always asked how my baby and I were doing when they saw me. The young people often asked if I was going to bring my

daughter (because they found her entertaining) or would ask if I were pregnant with a boy or girl. Both mothers and youth had an interest in my role as a mother.

My weekly presence at the sites was enjoyable and enriching, and I became sad when I was wrapping up data collection and would no longer be visiting as frequently. My exit from both sites was natural and did not seem sudden from my view or the participants because of its concurrence with the end of the program year, Ramadan, and the birth of my son. My last day at the Savanna Hills site was April 18, 2017. My last day visiting Cedar Riverside was May 17, 2017. Ramadan began and the programs stopped meeting on May 27, 2017, then my son was born June 15, 2017. I paid a brief visit to the youth at their summer campus program in July while I was on parental leave, and then visited both clubs right when they started up again October 2017. I returned to Savanna Hills in February 2018 to share my findings with the youth. I still visit both sites throughout the program year, albeit not as frequently as when I was conducting the study.

Research Design

This study uses qualitative longitudinal research (QLR hereafter) methodology to investigate youth agency as a socially-situated and temporal process young people in their “middle years” undergo as they try to achieve their educational aspirations in the Somali diaspora. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for understanding agency as a process because qualitative inquiry is aimed at understanding in-depth, individualized, and contextually sensitive processes (Patton, 2015). Qualitative methods help get “the inner experience of participants” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 5).

The decision to use a qualitative *longitudinal* design was driven by the research questions and theoretical framework. The purpose of QLR, according to Saldaña (2003)

is: “(1) To capture, through long-term immersion the depth and breadth of participants’ life experiences and (2) to capture participant change (if any) through long-term comparative observations of perceptions and actions” (p.17). Longitudinal methods are particularly helpful in understanding the temporal rhythm of young adolescents. This is not an adolescent development study. Yet, using a methodology that allowed me to capture and account for the changes youth go through as they develop a deeper understanding of themselves within varied social and cultural contexts helped put a spotlight on these contexts. This methodology supported my ability as a researcher to best answer the research questions which aimed to understand the social arrangements under which youth came to aspire for a particular future and the ways in which they enacted agency within these arrangements over time.

Studies that investigate the lived and temporal experiences of young people—with multiple data collection points over time—are rare (McLeod & Thomson, 2009; Morrow & Crivello, 2015). Many qualitative studies ask participants to offer insights into a phenomenon retrospectively, which requires participants to recall experiences at a time when they are removed from the social conditions that shaped their experiences. For example, in Abdi’s (2015) research on the Somali youth identity construction, her high school aged study participants frequently recalled experiences of racialization and discrimination from middle school. This research in particular prompted me to enquire about how young people would describe their experiences while they were currently having them. QLR is useful in its ability to capture what young people are feeling “in the moment” which helps researchers “avoid the trap of interpreting the past through the present” (Morrow & Crivello, 2015, p. 277). For example, I was able to talk to Roodoo

at a time when she was in the peak of disappointment and crushed self-esteem about poor grades she was earning and could explore the processes she went through to cope with this experience, which ranged from asking for help, to cheating, to avoiding her homework all together. I could also see this in context in her earlier aspirations of getting straight As to please her parents. Had I only met with her during one of these moments, I could tell two different narratives—one of a young person motivated by her parents and another of a young person feeling hopeless and ashamed of disappointing her parents. As Morrow and Crivello (2015) emphasize, QLR allows for “flexibility, multiplicity and even contradiction” (p. 275). Using this methodology allowed me to stick with this young person—and all of the young people in my study—for a duration of time which helped me understand their agency as dynamic and non-linear processes. A longitudinal design allows for flexible understanding of youth, acknowledging that the ways in which young people see themselves and what they believe is possible in their life might change through time and in different contexts. This then might change the way in which they exercise their abilities to act on their social worlds.

In addition to being well-suited to understanding the temporality of young people, QLR is a fitting methodology for understanding processes, which is particularly relevant for my capabilities approach framework that examines youth agency as a process related to aspirations that are perceived and enacted over time. As McLeod and Thomson (2009) explain, QLR is used to understand processes rather than outcomes and “provide insights into social and psychological processes that underpin behaviours that western governments are increasingly interested in influencing” (p. 7). The capabilities approach is a framework that helps in understanding the underlying social and personal factors

such as family, school, and abilities that influence people's decisions and actions that lead to a particular outcome/functioning. Therefore, QLR is an appropriate methodology for using this framework to understand youth agency in the Somali diaspora because community leaders, family members, educators, and social and government organizations are interested in influencing youths' decisions and actions in order to ensure that they are able to thrive and live a life they consider valuable.

Other QLR studies with young people help demonstrate the usefulness of the methodology for answering my research questions. McLeod and Yates' (2006) intensive QLR research design to research youth identities and aspirations in Australia included a relatively small number of cases and many waves of data collection. This helped them understand how educational discourse and policy were internalized subjectively by young people and how process impacted identity formation. By asking interviewees to describe themselves now and project themselves into the future, they could compare these responses over time, noting how descriptions of self, which included values, beliefs, and orientations differed across "time, ages and moods" (McLeod & Yates, 2006, p. 43). This is similar to my study which also aimed to investigate how institutions, social norms, and other elements of a young person's social life influenced how young people viewed themselves and how they imagined their futures, how they enacted agency, and how any of these things might have changed over time. McLeod (2003) referred to this as the "habitus-in-process" (as cited in McLeod & Thomson, 2009, p. 6).

Similarly, DeJaeghere (2016) studied youth agency and aspirations over time in rural Tanzania. Her study used qualitative longitudinal data (over four years of secondary school) to problematize common assumptions that aspirations spur action and more

broadly, that high aspirations are a way of addressing issues related to poverty. DeJaeghere's work conceptualized agency and aspirations as dialectically and socially situated, as well as fluid and changing over time. By employing QLR design, DeJaeghere was able to make assertions about how young people's aspirations were dialectically linked to what they could do and how they were supported as agents. The study's findings suggest that a change in support often prompts a change in one's agentic abilities in working toward aspirations. At the same time, a change in one's abilities also shifts aspirations. If this study had only collected data at a single moment in time, this fluid nature of aspirations and agency would not have surfaced in the data. The McLeod and Yates (2006) and DeJaeghere (2016) studies, which examined youth agency and aspirations in a way similar to my study, demonstrate the usefulness of a longitudinal design. By employing QLR, I went beyond "one-off" accounts that an individual might produce retrospectively and instead I was able to "walk alongside" the youth over time as they as they regularly interacted with social arrangements that both constrained and supported their abilities to achieve their educational aspirations (McLeod & Thomson, 2009, p. 27).

QLR is not only useful in capturing the temporality of youths' life stages, but it is also effective in capturing the temporality of political and historical moments in time (McLeod & Thomson, 2009; Morrow & Crivello, 2015). This study occurred during the tail end of a presidential campaign, election, and then inauguration of the 45th president of the United States. The campaign trail was blazed by platforms that frequently referenced a Muslim registry, fabricated statistics presenting an inflated number of Muslims carrying out violence, and suggestions of closing down Mosques. Early in the

presidency (and midway through the study) a travel ban was placed on majority Muslim countries, and one club leader was temporarily kept at the airport in Mogadishu in transit to the United States with his pregnant wife. This is not a study of politics, but this study is anchored in this moment in history. Certainly, the political landscape shaped my own subjectivities. For example, I often spoke to mothers and program leaders about what they thought of the political climate. It seemingly shaped the youths' subjectivities as well, as the president's name would come up in conversations among each other, and they often had political conversations at school which they revisited in program. The methods I employed (discussed in the following section) stay focused on youth agency and aspirations related to education and as such, political topics only came up when mentioned by the participants. However, this backdrop seeped into their everyday lives, and QLR allowed me to capture youth experiences in this moment of history.

Finally, QLR also has practical benefits—especially as an adult researcher from outside the community I studied. With time and a steadfast presence, I was able to increasingly build trust and rapport with youth participants, which helped them share their experiences with me in more detail. For instance, I would return to the same question at each interview to see if responses changed. While in some instances I noticed change or contradictions, and repeat questioning over time more commonly elicited deeper and more personal responses. For example, the first time I interviewed Faiza in the summer 2016 and asked her to tell me more about how her mom supported her, she offered a broad example of the way she encouraged her: “She gives me dreams like ‘you can do this.’” Because our relationship deepened over time, by the third interview (in April 2017), I learned more about her love for her mother through intimate stories about

supporting her mom through her brother's health scare, and she gave specific examples of how her mom helped her and others.

In addition to giving participants and me the time to develop trust and rapport, the QLR design was also practical because it allowed me to continually rethink my choice or delivery of methods and to improve my research skills. For example, during my first set of interviews, I brought a typed interview protocol with me. While I did not rely on it exclusively and attempted to speak in a more conversational tone, I believe the presence of a typed protocol created a formalized and even nerve-wracking interview setting. I often noted youth eyeing my paper. In the subsequent interviews, I would bring a scrap of paper with scribbled prompts to remind myself what I wanted to ask the young people (which was previously typed and is Appendix D, but I primarily focused on my tone and creating a comfortable, nonformal setting for the young people, which I believed contributed to young people speaking more freely to me.

Finally, Yates and McLeod (1996) emphasized that QLR can “allow participants to modify our concerns [and] to prompt other questions” (p. 91). Long-term immersion enabled me to steer away from my first instinct to deeply explore youths' experiences with discrimination (which was still explored) and to instead more deeply try to understand how youths' Muslim faith and connection to their Somali culture guided their educational decisions. Long-term immersion enabled me to pay attention to how young people and their parents talked about religious school, observe youth make time to pray, listen to how youth explained and embraced myriad components of their faith, and prompted me to explore this faith as related to agency and aspirations more deeply than I would have in a “one-off” attempt to collect data.

In the following sections, I lay out my data collection methods and procedures and explain the ways in which I captured participants' experiences, perceptions and actions using QLR methodology.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

While Saldaña (2003) suggested that at a minimum, QLR ought to occur through at least nine months, the core characterization of these studies is that they take place for a “lonnnnnnnng time” (p. 7) with multiples waves of data collection points. In this study, data collection occurred through a 10-month time period (July 2016-May 2017) with multiple waves of data collection and with nine number participants. Each wave of data collection is described in Table 3.

Merriam (2009) described data collection as being “guided by questions, educated hunches, and emerging findings” (p. 150). QLR allowed me the duration and depth of interaction to enter the field guided by my research questions, while also allowing me to pursue findings as they emerged. To this end, each step in collecting data was followed by a preliminary analysis that informed my subsequent step in the process. For example, I developed personalized interview protocols based off of my previous interviews with a young person.

The following sections describe and justify my data collection methods and procedures. I employed four different methods to answer my research questions: interviews, a parent focus group/parent conversations, field-based observations, and nonformal educational activities. The use of these four methods ensured rigor and trustworthiness of my findings, because it helped me capture divergent and differing perspectives on my research topic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Interviews

Semi-formal interviews with youths were the primary sources of data. I conducted interviews with nine youth at three different points in time. Qualitative interviews were helpful in understanding agency as a process in complex contexts as experienced and exercised by the youth participants. At the beginning of the study, I conducted short interviews (ranging in time from 8-15 minutes) with each youth participant (see Appendix C). These early interviews yielded baseline data—I learned about their family structures, their educational aspirations, and what they viewed (at that point in time) as the ways in which they were working to achieve their aspirations for the future. These interviews also functioned as way to establish a relationship with the participants. Even though I had met over half of the participants prior to beginning the study, I had never sat down with them one-on-one to learn about their lives.

For each of the three interviews (see Appendices D and E), I asked youth for a description of self and a projection of self into the future. I asked young people to reflect on what they perceived to be the obstacles as well as social supports to reaching their aspirations that they experienced in their multiple contexts (e.g. school, home). Having multiple waves of interviewing the same youth throughout the study allowed me to follow up more deeply on findings that emerged. Further, while interviews yielded primary data, these were highly dependent on the data yielded from other methods. In the final wave of interviews in particular, I used interviews as a method to explore specific topics I learned about through program activities and observations. For example, in my first interview with Layla, I asked her tell me about some of the things that made it hard for her to achieve her educational aspiration and she spoke about getting distracted. In her

final interview, approximately ten months later, I was able to ask her about a specific obstacle I learned about from observing (and participating in) a conversation that took place during program and asked: “What was it like when . . . they put you in ESL?” Table 3 shows when each youth was interviewed. It also indicates the other methods employed with each youth throughout the study.

Table 3

Waves of data collection

	Baseline Interview	Second Interview	Final Interview	Parent focus group (Y/N)	Educational activities	Weekly Field-based observations:
Marwa	7/26/16	10/20/16	3/23/17	Y	Identity wheel, vision board, privilege walk, college essay	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Layla	7/26/16	10/25/16	3/21/17	Y	Identity wheel, vision board, privilege walk, college essay	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Khalid	7/26/16	11/1/16	4/11/17	Y	Identity wheel, vision board, privilege walk, college essay	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hamdi	7/26/16	11/3/16	3/28/17	Y	Identity wheel, vision board, privilege walk, college essay	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Faiza	7/26/16	11/1/16	4/18/17	Y	Identity wheel, vision board, privilege walk, college essay	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Abdi	8/23/16	9/14/16	3/14/17	N	Identity wheel	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Ahmed	8/16/16	None	3/14/17	N	None	✓
Hodan	8/17/16	9/15/16	3/14/17	N	Identity wheel, vision board	✓
Roodoo	8/17/16	9/15/16	3/29/17	N	Identity wheel, vision board, drawing of how she feels in school	✓

All interviews were recorded and transcribed prior to the next wave of interviews.

I did not correct grammar when transcribing youths' voice in the interviews because I wanted their authentic voice and ways of expression to be part of the narration.

Focus Group and Conversations with the Mothers

In December 2016, I conducted one focus group (see Appendix F) with each of the three mothers (Nimo, Hibaaq, and Fatima) of the children in the Savanna Hills program site. Fatima attended (and still attends) the program weekly and has been the most engaged parent of the program participants. When I talked to her about wanting to conduct a focus group, she called the other mothers and invited them to participate and have a meal. At Cedar Riverside, the mothers preferred not to participate in anything formal. Sahra said to me in September: "We Somali women, we talk, talk talk, but when it's an interview, like a job, we become nervous." While I assured her it was not a job interview, I sensed that at this program site, having conversations with mothers would be more productive and comfortable than focus groups. As such, I spoke informally with two mothers (Sahra and Fartun) and the program leader, Kowsar, who is also Hodan's aunt. Our conversations were frequent and often occurred over "Somali tea" at the program site while the youth worked on their homework. If I heard something I did not

want to forget, I would sometimes say, “Do you mind if I write this down?” and reminded them that I was conducting a study. Mothers of the participants were the ones who brought them to and at times, participated in, the youth programs and were therefore the parents who participated in the focus groups/discussions. I was able to meet and have a conversation with Roodoo’s father one time at a home visit.

As Biggeri, Libanora, Mariani, and Menchini (2006) emphasized, the capabilities of young people cannot be considered independent from their parents. The range of options a young person has to pursue future aspirations is inextricably tied to their parents. With this in mind, I deemed it necessary to understand the perspectives and lives of the parents. Having in-depth conversations with them helped me understand how parents’ values, experiences, and choices shape youth aspirations and influenced their children’s capacities to exercise abilities in educational contexts. Like the youth interviews, the focus group transcripts and the direct quotations I documented were not edited for grammar.

Field-based Observations.

Throughout the study, I took field notes when observing the youth participants at their youth program activities. I did not observe elements of the program, but rather used the programs as a field site to observe participant behavior and interactions. After I finished the second set of interviews with all youth participants in December 2016, I spent one day (approximately two hours) at the Savanna Hills site a week and one day/two hours at the Cedar Riverside site. I went to each program once a week until the conclusion of the data collection phase.

Observations of participants, and informal conversations with them in their program, allowed me to understand more of the entirety of the youths' lives and experience—knowledge that I may not have sought to gain through formal methods, but that surfaced through natural interactions with each other and with me. The major strengths of this method were twofold: First, it enabled me to see things that “routinely escape(d) awareness” of the study participant (Patton, 2015, p. 333). For example, I observed so many youth leaving program early, arriving late, or missing program altogether in order to meet with tutors. This seemed routine to them, yet I observed it as noteworthy approach to education that I chose to explore more deeply. Secondly, field-based observations allowed me to be open to inductive discovery. For instance, only by casually talking to Ibrahim about his family's move to Kenya did I realize how commonplace it was for children to temporarily live in African countries. From this observation, I was able to discuss this topic in interviews with five of the participants who had at one point temporarily lived in an African country. In other words, knowledge I gleaned from field-based observations helped me be led by participants' realities and knowledge and negotiate these meanings in interviews.

In addition, field-based observations allowed me to note discrepancies in what young people told me in interviews and what they actually believed or did. For example, Ahmed said in an interview that that nothing gets in the way of his learning, but I learned through field-based observations that he was getting in fights and was suspended from school. Throughout the study, I not only documented what I observed at each time of data collection, but also compared and/or connected my findings to what had been previously documented—collecting cumulative field notes (Saldaña, 2003).

Nonformal Educational Activities.

Multiple times throughout the study, I led the youth in nonformal educational activities with the approval of the program leader. These activities included: designing a wheel that depicts youth identities, (see Appendix G), having youth find or draw images to build a vision board depicting their “perfect future” (see Appendix H), writing practice college essays (see Appendix J), and doing a “privilege walk” (Savanna Hills group only; see Appendix I). Because the youth were participants in a nonformal educational program that focused on STEM learning and making a plan for higher education, developing and delivering youth program activities focused on youths’ future orientations was in line with youths’ expectations of what they would be doing in their program regardless of this study. Leading youth-centered, experiential learning activities enabled my presence as a researcher to be unobtrusive and arguably of benefit to the youth participants. I developed (and modified previously developed) activities that enabled youth to explore their identities and values and engage in critical thinking about the world around them. I initially anticipated these activities to function solely as secondary data sources, but documented output of these activities (e.g. the identity wheel) emerged as less important than the conversations they opened for me and the participants. Youth-centered activities effectively moved the focus away from me and the questions *I* primarily wanted to ask them and instead invited the youth to lead the narration of who they were and who they hoped to become. Futch and Fine (2014) advocate the use of “mapping” methods and relay that in their research with Muslim youth, having youth map out their identities “disrupts the impetus for a dominant narrative” (p. 49) and essentially creates a platform for youth share an authentic sense of who they are. The activities I conducted with the

youth served the same purpose. For example, the identity wheel activity took place before the first baseline interview with Cedar Riverside youth in August 2017. The Savana Hills youth did the activity as part of their campus immersion program in July 2017. I gave youth the following prompt in a group setting: *Divide this blank circle into sections that show the different parts of your identity with the size of each section showing how much you think about each identity on a daily basis.* The youth then created their wheels.

As a reflection activity, youth were asked to share them with each other, giving explanations as to why they created their identity wheels as such. When I interviewed individual youth participants, I started the interview by simply asking each participant to “tell me a little bit about your identity wheel” (I kept a copy of the wheel with me). Sometimes, I would refer to a comment they made during the reflection and ask them to say more. Youth would describe to me what they drew/documented, usually offering a small explanation. Then I would probe further asking questions like when I asked Faiza: “Say more about being a ‘proud Muslim’ and why that’s such a big part of your identity?” Or when I asked Hodan (and all participants with similar phrasing): “Do you ever feel like there are any parts of your identity that make it easier for you or harder for you to reach your goals and aspirations in education?” The identity wheel allowed youth to initiate the narrative about their identity, rather than have me dictate the dialogical trajectory. I could then follow this trajectory set forth by the youths’ explanations of their identities.

Only Ahmed, because of his sporadic program attendance, did not complete an identity wheel. In my first interview with him, I asked him to tell me about how he would describe some of the important things about him without the identity wheel as an entry

point to the conversation, and he responded: “I see myself as a future student that. . . has a successful . . . college life”. This is, in many ways, an authentic response because as I came to know Ahmed, this imagination of his future was reiterated many times. However, it can also be interpreted that because I initiated the conversation, he was offering me parts of his identity that he thought I would value (as an adult affiliated with the University), rather than all the parts of his identity that mattered to him—much like a person might do in a job interview. It was after my interview with Ahmed that I especially recognized the value of using program activities as a way to “de-center” myself from youth narratives.

Group reflections that followed the activities also functioned as mini-focus groups. For example, in order to try to explore youths’ educational experiences in a less confrontational and more reflective way, I led them through a privilege walk (Hixon & Lorah, 2006). The reflective discussion after the activity prompted youth to discuss discrimination with each other based on their actions in the activity—not based on direct questioning from me. These reflection sessions after the activity served as a mini-focus group because as Patton (2015) suggested, focus groups offer an opportunity for participants to feel a safety among their peers to share experiences that they might have felt too vulnerable to share in a one-on-one interview. These activities surfaced more sensitive or even private experiences, and I was then able to follow up on these experiences in the final interview when I had a more established relationship with the youth.

Analysis

The analysis of this longitudinal study was an ongoing process. Saldaña (2003) referred to longitudinal analysis as “assertions-in-progress” (p. 168), claiming that because change is constant, analysis should be as well. As such, after each round of interviews and transcriptions was completed, I made initial assertions which would prompt me to investigate what I garnered as a theme and investigate it further, which in turn prompted me to refine or revise my initial assertion. This ongoing interplay of the research and data is a necessary process to add rigor to a study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Memoing

Data were analyzed after each instance of data collection. One way I did this was through memo-writing, which allowed me to analyze ideas each time I collected data (Patton, 2015). Corbin and Straus (2015) described memo-writing as “dialoguing with the data and moving the analysis further” (p. 106). After each interview or observation, I wrote up a short memo which captured what I believed to be the key concepts and possible relationships between concepts (e.g. “faith” and “values around education”). I also came up with questions and inquiries to be further explored in future waves of data collection. For example, because I noticed youth mentioned that their faith told them how to behave in many ways, in follow up interviews, I explored that more deeply and in the context of education.

Member Checks

Member checks, which involve sharing data and initial analyses with participants so they can “verify that the research adequately represents their perspectives and experiences” also occurred (Stringer, 2007, p. 58). I aimed to make sure my early

analyses resonated with the youth and worked to support the credibility of my co-construction of the participants' realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checks occurred in multiple ways:

- 1) I summarized what I learned from previous interviews at the current interviews and asked the youth participants if this was accurate or if they had anything to add.
- 2) I presented my "analyses in process" to program leaders throughout the study. For example, I asked Kowsar and Fatima (Marwa's mom who frequently attended program) what the Quran said (if anything) about personal responsibility. They would help me think about what I was learning and offer their interpretation—whether different or deeper than my own.
- 3) I returned to the Savanna Hills site on February 22, 2018 and offered three assertions about what I felt we discovered together through our conversations. I then allowed youth to refute, confirm, or elaborate on the meaning I felt we constructed together around certain topics. The youth at the Cedar site attended too sporadically, and Kowsar, who would normally encourage attendance on my behalf, was on parental leave with a new baby, so I only returned to Savanna Hills.

Coding

I used a comparative method of analysis as my primary analytical strategy after all data had been collected. Corbin and Strauss (2015) described this analytical strategy as "the act of taking one piece of datum and examining it against another piece of datum both within and between documents" (p. 93). This strategy helped me to determine if

pieces of data were conceptually the same or different. I accomplished this analytical strategy by means of coding, which is used to “retrieve and categorize similar data in chunks” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 72). I began analysis with open-coding using Nvivo. My theoretical framework influenced the ways in which themes and codes were identified. Broadly, I looked for youth expressions of aspirations, action, and the ways in which they identified their social worlds. Even with this guidance from my theoretical framework, my initial analysis of the data was fairly inductive. Saldaña (2003) warned “if you go looking for something you’ll find it” (p. 17). For example, my positionality led me to be curious about how young people viewed (and probably disliked) the current political climate, but the data suggest politics were a noteworthy backdrop, but not a dominant narrative. Because I wanted to avoid allowing my preconceptions or biases to distort what was actually happening in the data, I did not look at data with codes already established. Instead, codes were generated from the data when I noted ideas, concepts or phrases that appeared. I revisited this initial coding until I recognized patterns with the coding.

For instance, one initial NVivo code was: “Feelings/attitudes about education”. This was a broad category or “parent node.” In subsequent rounds of analysis, I created child nodes under this category: 1) Alone and 2) Rigor. In a third cycle of coding, I compared data with the same codes, recoding as necessary, and then was able to describe the interconnections of the codes to form a core storyline describing youth agency and aspirations in the Somali diaspora (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For instance, I was able to connect the nodes “Being Somali and Muslim/Faith,” “parents/connecting to experts,” and “feelings/attitudes about education/alone” to create a storyline about young people

being pressured by their parents to be a successful Somali and Muslim person by approaching school work with rigor and personal responsibility.

Because this is a longitudinal study, I was looking for the possibility of change or contradiction over time. I tuned into the temporal and/or contradictory nature of youth agency and aspirations during the analysis. For example, in all data, I paid attention to language, particularly looking for words that indicated time so that I could note any shifts in perceptions of what youth felt was possible for them (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I also noted when youth said something in program (e.g. Roodoo suggesting at one point she wasn't smart) that diverged with what I learned through other methods (e.g. Roodoo creating an identity wheel in which she labeled herself as "smart".)

Limitations and Delimitations

This study explored how young people living in the Somali diaspora acted to navigate barriers, make use of opportunities, and achieve the aspirations they had for themselves. Because this was a narrowly defined target group and this study did not involve an experimental design, the findings from this study are not intended to be generalizable to a larger population. Rather, this study explored youth agency in a specific context so that it could illuminate larger lessons regarding how youth in the Somali diaspora navigated their educational pathways towards their aspirations within social, cultural, and temporally-situated contexts. The findings provide insights into a group of people about which there is little empirical knowledge (Bigelow, 2010).

A methodological limitation to my study is that with some of the data I was asking youth to self-report. It could be possible that youth answered some interview questions with responses they thought I wanted to hear, rather than giving me responses

based on their actual experiences and aspirations. They also might have withheld experiences they did not feel comfortable sharing with me. However, because, I had a preexisting relationship with many youth and with their clubs, and because I spent an extended period of time with them, I was able to establish a trusting and sincere relationship with the young people. This likely reduced the need for youth to feign behavior and responses (Patton, 2015). I also interviewed youth multiple times throughout the year and triangulated methods (using methods intended to decenter my role as a researcher from the dominant culture). I had opportunities to follow-up with any questions if the data seemed contradictory or if clarification was needed. A delimitation to this study was the elected time frame of this longitudinal study. I am not continuing the study and “walking alongside” the youth as they go through high school and hopefully on to college and meaningful careers. Time will tell if the youth study participants actually reach their aspirations, if aspirations change, *or* if additional factors will eventually impede or facilitate their abilities to achieve futures they consider valuable. However, this study offers an understanding of what young people can and are doing at this pivotal stage of their educational and developmental trajectory. This is particularly important for young people living in the Somali diaspora, as data suggest that many young people who belong to the diaspora disengage from their education and become increasingly isolated as older adolescents and young adults (Minnesota Student Report, 2016; TAYO Consulting Group).

Conclusion

This chapter described and justified the research methodologies used in this dissertation. Multiple waves of interviews, field-based observations, nonformal youth

activities, and a focus group were the main methods of data collection and were conducted through ten months. Data were analyzed using memoing, member check, coding techniques. In the following chapters, I present my findings. In Chapter Four, I demonstrate the ways in which youths' aspirations were continually shaped by their many—and often times, contending—social worlds. In Chapter Five, I share youths' narratives that demonstrate the ways in which the youth in this study continually navigated contradictions because their social identities concurrently presented them with their greatest supports and their biggest constraints. In the final chapter, I discuss the implications and contributions of these findings and identify areas for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SHAPING OF ASPIRATIONS IN THE SOMALI DIASPORA

In this chapter and in Chapter Five, I report on the findings of this qualitative longitudinal research study examining youth agency and educational aspirations in the Somali diaspora. As such, I share the narratives of nine youth living in the Somali diaspora—Hodan, Ahmed, Abdi, Roodo, Khalid, Marwa, Hamdi, Faiza, and Layla.

My findings are situated in a particular developmental period of youths' lives—early adolescence and for Marwa, Khalid, and Roodoo, a transition from early to middle adolescence. My findings are also situated in an historical period of time—the election of a new American president who (among many disparaging claims) asserted that Minnesota had “suffered enough” on account of the large population of Somali people in the state (Berenson, 2016). The findings I put forth in these two chapters offer insight into the ways in which faith, family, and school shaped the educational aspirations and strategies of these nine American youth in the Somali diaspora. Specifically, my findings in this chapter highlight the important role social field—a network of relationships and social rules—had on shaping the future aspirations of these youth. My findings revealed that when young people described their aspirations for the future, they conveyed more than what they hoped and desired to do and become; their aspirations also conveyed how they embodied the cultural logics of their parents—who are Somali refugees living in the United States of America.

The findings I put forth extend the current research about Somali youth, which tends to focus on the important and complex process of identity formation, by offering insight into the ways in which their belonging to the Somali diaspora influence what type of futures they imagine and guide their educational strategies. It is my hope that this

dissertation highlights youths' abilities to act toward valued futures in the Somali diaspora so that there may be more opportunities to support their pursuit to achieve their aspirations.

The subsequent sections are dedicated to understanding and explaining youths' educational aspirations. Recall that in Chapter One, I offered evidence from the Minnesota Student Survey that Somali youth self-reported to have hopes and plans for their educational futures, but youth living in the Minnesota Somali diaspora, as a collective, tend to have lower educational outcomes, suggesting a disconnect between aspirations and achievements. In the sections that follow, I present findings that primarily answer the first set of research questions—*How do youth (in grades 6-9) in the American Somali diaspora describe their educational aspirations for the future? And, in what ways do social conditions influence their aspirations?* The findings I present emphasize the sub question in order to draw attention to the social situatedness of aspirations and the conceptual connection to youth agency.

Imagining Futures Tied to Their Parents' Refugee Past

"Without parents, you cannot do anything." - Hodan

Hodan's succinct description of why she included parents as core to her identity, illuminates the way she, and all of the young people in this study, described their aspirations for the future. My findings show that when young people in the Somali diaspora expressed what they wanted to do or be in the future, they were not only expressing academic or career interests, they were expressing in covert ways, who they were in the present—American children of Somali refugees. Each of the youth in this study were children of Somali refugees; they were living and receiving an education in

the United States and their aspirations for the future were cultivated in these different contexts. Their expressed aspirations are embodiments of the dominant cultural logics within the Somali diaspora, but these aspirations changed as youth more actively engaged in social fields outside of their family.

Aspirations to Help People in Somalia: “When I become a doctor.”

Before I asked the young people in this study to tell me about how they imagined their futures, I asked them to describe their identities and their lives in the present. This was primarily accomplished by asking the young people to share their identities wheels with me—and through this exercise, I learned things about the young people that I perhaps would not have thought to ask them. I learned that Faiza was an athlete and loved track and field. Quiet, focused Marwa saw herself as an activist, and Khalid was a soccer player, who like me, played in the midfield. I learned about the unique interests and personal identities of each of the participants. One identity piece all of the young people shared in common was that of being Somali and Muslim. Often these two parts of their identity were combined—Layla wrote “Somali Muslim”—sometimes they were separate—Marwa had one piece for Muslim and one piece for Somali American. These pieces of the young people’s identity wheels were also consistently the biggest, suggesting it was part of their identities that was most important to them. Understanding youth identities from the youths’ perspective swung open the door for me to understand the how youths’ families, faith, and ethnic identities—and the relationship among them—shaped aspirations. Each young person, at least once during the study, expressed that they wanted to become a doctor or enter the science field. Only Abdi and Ahmed wanted to pursue engineering and biology; the others wanted to become doctors. The young people

explained to me that their parents advised that by becoming a doctor they could help people living in Somalia. Hamdi in particular made it clear to me that who she was in the present was inextricably linked to who and what she hoped to become in the future. She wanted to become, and was encouraged by her parents to become, a doctor so she could help others in Somalia:

Joanna: Can you tell me why [being Somali] is so important to you?

Hamdi: Because my parents are from there. When I become a doctor and I want to go help the less fortunate people that are there and they can't afford to get a doctor—like the younger kids.

Joanna: Tell me more about that. So you want to become a doctor so you want to go and live in Somalia or do you want—

Hamdi: Visit.

Joanna: Visit.

Hamdi To help people that can't afford doctors. It's hard for them because like when my mom was living there, there's a war. Some of the people they lost all their money by the bombing; so it's hard. They had to move to different countries, like a few Somalis moved to Kenya. It was hard for them to get used to it and they can't afford doctors because they lost all their money.

Joanna: Why is it so important to you to go back and help people in Somalia?

Hamdi It's like good and because I want to help others. And not be selfish and just take all the stuff for me.

Hamdi had never been to Somalia. While she had spent six months in Egypt, at this moment in time, she had spent the majority of her life living in Minnesota. Her aspirations were situated and constructed in the values (e.g. to not be selfish) instilled in her by her parents—values that were related to her parents’ experience and knowledge of the civil war in Somalia and its lasting ramifications on the country.

This following thread from the focus groups with the mothers upholds this idea that these Somali mothers encouraged their children to become engineers and doctors so they could benefit those affected by the civil war in Somalia.

Joanna: If you could imagine your perfect future for your children—what do you want for them as their parents?

Hibaaq: We would like you to repeat so that -- mostly we are all Somali, we like doctors, engineers. [All laugh.] We like, I would like [them to] become a doctors or engineers.

Joanna: I hear because “I’m Somali we want.” Why do people who are Somali want those specific careers for their kids?

Nimo: Because our country we don’t have a lot of –

Hibaaq: Enough doctors.

Nimo: Enough doctors. We have a civil war and I always tell my kids, when they speak more English at home, I tell them, “Speak Somali because when you becoming a doctor you’re going there and help the community.”

Fatima continued this conversation thread asserting that now that they were raising their children in the United States, they had an opportunity that those in Somalia did not have.

In their view, their children especially had educational opportunities that they as parents did not have and that those in Somalia likely do not have. From their view, with these new opportunities came a responsibility to help others in the mothers' home country:

You get the education, you don't want to keep it for yourself. There so many people needs that from you, you want to help them once you get there. Most of us who are here we're so lucky . . . getting education. There are so many families they don't have this opportunity. So we always encouraging, we want our kids to be role model for others for them to get this opportunity and now when they go back at home they can be more beneficial to the society.

At this point, it is important to examine word choices. Fatima said, "...when they go back home," referring to Somalia as her children's home, even though her children, at the time of this focus group had never been to Somalia. As the interviewer, I caught myself saying "go back" (see Hamdi above and Hodan interview below) to Somalia often, even though I knew that the young people had never lived there. Part of this is likely my own assumptions of Somali youth being tied to the country Somalia. But Fatima referred to Somali as her children's home as well, suggesting that she was raising her children in a way that connected them to her home country, obliging them to benefit society in Somalia. The young people on the other hand, were quick to assert that they did not plan to move to Somalia, but instead imagined their futures in the United States.

Hodan also expressed an aspiration to become a doctor who lived in the United States, but who served others in Somalia. When I met Hodan in August 2016, she had just moved to the United States from Kenya only three months prior and was about to start seventh grade. Her father had lived in the United States for the entirety of her life

(she was 11 at the time of the study). He only recently was able to sponsor Hodan and her mom to move to the United States along with him. Hodan struck me as curious and a bit overwhelmed being in this new country. She seemed to find comfort in spending time with her aunt, Kowsar, who led the program and Kowsar's nine-year-old daughter, her cousin. For her, the United States was brand new and a little disquieting. And yet, she told me in this first interview that she wanted to make this country her permanent home along with her other family members—who she hoped to help bring to U.S. in the future when she was a doctor. Hodan expressed at each sit-down with me that she hoped to become a doctor in the future. In my final conversation with Hodan in April 2017, I became more tuned into the importance of place for these young people living in the diaspora. Before our conversation, I had asked her and others to draw a picture of their perfect futures. Hodan drew the picture in Figure 2.

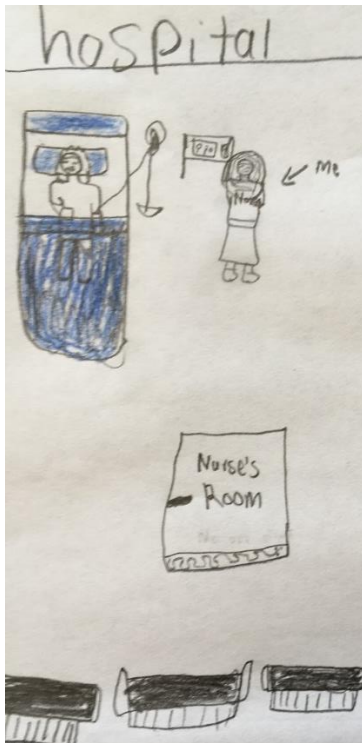


Figure 2. Hodan's perfect future.

I asked Hodan to explain this picture to me and she subsequently described it as a hospital in Somalia where she was working as a doctor. Like Hamdi, she only wanted to visit Somalia—where her grandmother, who she had only met once, and her grandfather lived—but imagined the United States as her permanent home. I asked her why she imagined herself going to work in Somalia, a place she had never been before. She told me, “Because I wanted to know. A lot of people talk about it . . . there are a lot of patients there.” Like Hamdi, she wanted to be a doctor so that she could help others in Somalia. She knew she had family members there and tied her future to that place because of it. Hodan also implied that she had been told that there was a need for doctors in Somali and imagined herself addressing this need through her future career. She, like most of the young people in the study, aspired to become a doctor in order to help people living in Somalia.

Criticism of Parents' Influences on Aspirations: "Do you actually want to be a doctor?"

I learned while spending time with the young people, their families, and the program leaders that being of service to those in Somalia is a widespread expectation of youth in the diaspora—a youth aspiration that should go without saying. Sometimes it was treated like a bit of an inside joke. The previously shared focus group snippet illustrated that the mothers snickered when Nimo told me that they wanted their children to be doctors and engineers to help people in Somalia. One day at program, I asked Kowsar her view on what Somali parents wanted for their children and she relayed to me with a literal wink and smile that “all” Somali parents want their children to “know the Quran, get a good education, and be a doctor, nurse or engineer.” Kowsar laid out the tenets of raising a good Somali young person in the Minnesota diaspora: faith, education, and service to those in the home country. Ibrahim also illustrated how taken for granted these tenets shaping youth aspirations were while leading the Savanna Hills youth through a brainstorming activity about a community service project they could do. Young people were coming up with something they could do locally (e.g. garbage pick-up in different neighborhoods). Ibrahim encouraged them to think about how that service could be extended to Somalia, reminding them: “Parents want to help their kids to be lawyers or doctors so that they can help people of their kind.” In many ways, it is a taken for granted assumption that young people should aspire to have a profession that would enable them to help others in Somalia.

Yet, while some people living in the diaspora treated this shared value as a bit of an inside joke worthy of a chuckle, others, like two Somali colleagues of mine at the

University of Minnesota, perceived encouraging Somali diasporic youth to become engineers or doctors as problematic because it constrained youths' freedoms to make their own choices of what to do and be in the future. For instance, while discussing this study and my initial findings with my colleague, Zakariya, who also is the executive director of Somali Youth Strength, he relayed to me:

I'm all about, let's keep our culture and our religion, but let your girl be whoever she wants to be. . . I understand where they are coming from. They grew up in world where they've done things a certain way, culture, religion, religion, culture are so intertwined. I can't tell what's what sometimes. [Parents] will do whatever they can to fit their kid into that picture. Somali culture from A-Z. Engineer.

Doctor. That perfect person.

Zakariya spoke with frustration about what he viewed as both an identity and an aspiration that was being imposed on young people. In his view, Somali parents' expectations of their children made it so that that youth were not free to be who they wanted as they grew up in the United States.

My second conversation with Hamdi was interrupted by a colleague of mine, Zeinab, who is Somali. Zeinab overheard Hamdi telling me she wanted to be a doctor as she was walking by the space where we were having our interview. She felt compelled to insert herself in the conversation and to scrutinize the authenticity of Hamdi's aspiration. This thread begins after Hamdi told me that she preferred social studies to science, and I asked her why she wanted to be a doctor if she was not particularly keen on science:

Joanna: Why do you still want to do it then if you don't like it as much as?

Hamdi: Because it's good for others and you can help others.

Joanna: That's very selfless.

Zeinab: May I interrupt a little bit?

Joanna: Yeah.

Zeinab: You want to become a doctor because parents emphasize becoming a doctor or lawyer or going into the health profession or do you actually want to become a doctor?

Hamdi: I actually want to because I want to and I want to help other kids like become doctors too.

Zeinab: The reason I asked it is that I was just talking my niece the other day and she wants to switch schools—I don't want to take time away from you.

Joanna: No. This is interesting.

...

Zeinab: In Somali- The parents emphasize becoming a doctor, pharmacy

Joanna: Doctor, lawyer, engineer.

Zeinab: They make more money is the assumption of it, obviously some of it is true. And just the status of it...When I talk to some of the Somali teens I always ask: Do you actually want to do it or are you trying to please or following the parents or the footprints of the parents? Or do you actually want to do that?

Zeinab's unplanned presence in my interview with Hamdi prompted me to further investigate the social conditions that shaped Hamdi's (and all the youth participants') aspirations for their futures. It is evident in the transcript that I was initially impressed by

her desire to help others and only found it interesting that she wanted to become a doctor even though she preferred social studies to science as a school subject. Zeinab confronted a tension that is seemingly omnipresent in the diaspora: youth trying to please their parents and become “that perfect person” while also living in a society that offers alternative or different perspectives on who they should become. My colleagues, who also belonged to the Somali diaspora, took umbrage with what they viewed as a parental imposition of aspirations; they were frustrated that young people were not individually choosing what they wanted to do and be in the future. Hart (2012) might be aligned with the criticism of my colleagues as her research suggested that the parents’ roles in forming youths’ imagination for their futures will diminish their agency to achieve their desired futures because it was not individually imagined. Yet the research of DeJaeghere (2016) and Deneulin and McGregor (2010) would suggest that aspirations are not and cannot be individual or inherent, but rather formed with others as youth interact with the world around them. At this stage in these young people’s lives, early adolescence, they are more inclined to have their values and view of the world facilitated and informed by their parents—which is a child’s first confirmation of their existence and their value (Czikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Spindler, 1967). In the case of the youth in this study, their parents all shared a common experience of being refugees from Somalia and so from the perspective that aspirations are socially embedded, it is logical that the conditions embedded in their family network are the primary force shaping their aspirations in these middle years.

It is important to note that youths’ connections to their cultural history was not limiting youths’ aspirations, but rather prompting them to consider alternative futures.

Their future hopes were informed by their parents' past—desiring what was not possible for their parents on account of the civil war. The youth responses during the privilege walk activity reflection demonstrate the role youth's cultural histories played in shaping their aspirations. The privilege walk was an activity I facilitated that is designed to help people reflect on and recognize the areas in their lives where they have privileges and areas where they do not. I facilitated an abbreviated version of a privilege walk activity from an online power and privilege workshop developed by faculty at the Pennsylvania State University (Hixon & Lorah, 2006). The protocol I used can be found in Appendix I. When carrying out this activity with the Savanna Hills youth, I asked the participants to line up at the end of the hallway. I read them a statement, then instructed them to step forward or backward if the statement pertained to them. A forward step symbolized privilege, a step backward symbolized a social obstacle. For instance, parent support is deemed a form of privilege by the activity; all youth stepped forward when asked if their parents called them smart and capable and if they were encouraged to attend college by their parents. Also, all youth took a step backwards when I made the statement "*Take a step backwards if your parents were not born in this country.*" However, in the reflection after the activity, the young people stated they disagreed with this activity stating this was an obstacle in their lives. From their view, their parents' refugee status helped them work to achieve desired futures. Layla encapsulated this in the group reflection and her comment offers insight into how, in this study, youths' aspirations were shaped by their parents' pasts and suggests that this same cultural logic also better positioned parents to support their children in achieving their aspirations:

I noticed that everybody stepped back when they said their parents weren't raised here. I think that like in Somalia they didn't have the opportunities that we have right now and they encourage us to . . . actually go for the gold, you know?

The youth in this study shared that their parents' ties to Somalia shaped their future aspirations—creating aspirations that counter their parents' past. They felt encouraged to aspire to have what their parents did not have. In the final section of this chapter, I offer a glimpse into how these imagined futures may change as youth transition to middle adolescence and begin to depart from the protection of their parents and families—interacting more with new people, environments, and varied subject matters at school. Yet, at this particular stage of the youths' lives it is important to understand their aspirations in the contexts of their families because it brings to light conditions within this social context.

Aspirations to Help Parents: “They were there for me, so I’ll be there for them.”

The young people in this study not only aspired to have what their parents did not have a chance to achieve, but they also aspired to be able provide various things such as opportunities, money, and housing to their parents as an expression of gratitude and family obligation. An important analytical asset of the capabilities approach is that it recognizes that individuals have varied goals for themselves and do not necessarily aspire to maximize their economic self-interest (Alkire, 2005a; Hart, 2012). Aspirations are often tied to improved wellbeing, not only that of the individual, but of others (Deneulin & McGregor, 2010). Whereas some young adults in the Somali diaspora worried that parents were unfairly pressuring their children into specific careers, in their middle years, these youth in the Somali diaspora lifted up their parents as their primary source of

support in helping them reach their educational aspirations. Because of this, youth felt indebted to them and imagined futures in which they could do things that would help their parents who were denied opportunities on account of the Somali civil war.

In this next thread, I show two different interview clips from Layla who connected her aspirations of being physician to helping her family in the future. She shared with me the ways in which she discussed her aspirations with her mother:

I talk about first of all, how I want to be a cardio surgeon, I always talk about how I want to touch a heart [a little laughter]. I talk about how I'm going to believing by myself one day. I'm going to be probably sending [my parents] money occasionally, maybe because they need to pay off a loan. Maybe because they need to get something. Just anything really. They were there for me, so I'll be there for them.

Layla's expression to be there for her family especially stood out to me because when I first got to know Layla, I did not paint her as someone who would extend herself in any way to help others. She seemed to have a great relationship with the other members of her youth club—I would often see them laughing together and sharing goofy, fun moments. But Layla had this unapologetic and unaccommodating presence that was both refreshing and intimidating. It was refreshing because I knew I could always rely on Layla's authenticity. But she was so straightforward in expressing her opinions she bordered on being rude. Sometimes, she would command my attention, like when she wanted to show me her science journal from school. Other times, she would seemingly ignore me and others if the topic did not interest her or if she was not in the mood to engage. For instance, while I did not hear the entirety of the conversation, I once

overhead a discussion at the youth program during which I heard Marwa call Layla “honest,” Ibrahim said that she was “blunt,” and Marwa’s little sister added “she can hurt your feelings!” Layla remained deadpan and kept working in her notebook. From my view, she could never be bothered to appease others for the sake of niceties. Nonetheless, there was this nugget of compassion within her that especially emerged when talking about her mom. For instance, through conversations with her mother, I learned there was another layer of influence shaping Layla’s aspiration to work in medicine. Layla’s mom, Nimo, was on dialysis and needed a new kidney. She was also parenting her five children by herself because their dad was living in and running businesses in Africa. I asked Layla about how her mother’s health influenced her future aspirations and she stated that wanted to make sure others did not struggle like her mom:

Layla: She waited three years to get a kidney and still doesn’t have a kidney right now and I kind of want to become like a nephrologist, a kidney doctor, but that’s like one of my choices. This influenced me to try and help other people so they don’t live a struggling life like she has right now.

Joanna: She’s struggling right now?

Layla: Yeah, because it’s just her and my dad works in another country so he’s not here to help her. My grandma is but she lives somewhere else so she’s basically not there the whole week.

Layla also babysat her youngest twin sisters often and said she tried to help her mom with chores as much as she could. Her mother once told me (presumably out of guilt because she left Layla at home to babysit instead of bringing her to program): “I’m alone. It’s hard

to get them here.” Layla, worked to make her mom’s life a bit easier in the present, while also aspiring to one day be in the position to support her more financially and possibly help resolve her health issues.

Next, I depict a thread of my conversation from my second interview with Faiza, who, like Layla aspired to give back to her mother. Faiza is the oldest of six children (her sister, Hamdi is also in this study). She seemed to take on the role of helping her mother ensure her siblings completed their schoolwork. For instance, one day at program, her mother, Hibaaq, dropped off all of her children at the program—even the younger boys who were technically too young to be members of this youth program which was for sixth grade and above. She had some obligations to tend to and was not able to bring her children, so she relied on the Ibrahim and Faiza to watch the younger boys. Faiza was standing with her mother getting all of the boys’ Kumon (a program that helps youth with math and reading) activities out of their backpacks. Faiza seemed to be in command of her brothers’ workloads and even directed her mother to retrieve a forgotten activity from the car. In many ways, like Layla, she positioned herself as her mother’s helper, in part because her dad was a truck driver and gone for weeks at a time.

When I asked Faiza how she imagined her future, she immediately responded with her career choice (a doctor), but in the same breath, said she relayed that she wanted to give her parents, particularly her mom, an opportunity she never was able to have:

Joanna: What do you imagine yourself doing in 10 years? How do you see yourself? What would you be doing? Who will you be with?
What’s your future looking like?

Faiza: Me as a doctor and then at least taking—I'm trying to promise my parents to take them to Hajj.

Joanna: To where?

Faiza: To Hajj.

Joanna: Can you tell me what that is?

Faiza: It's where all—I'm not really sure. It's where all the Muslims come together and pray lots of times and read the Quran and go around the Karah I think that's what it's called.

Joanna: Why is that important for you to do in the future?

Faiza: Because if you go there and touch the black stone and my mom really wants to go there. She's always wanted to go there but she didn't have the time to get there. Her mom has been there a couple of times. I'm trying to get my mom to go there and if she touches the black stone she goes to heaven. And if she dies there she goes to heaven. So that's why I want my parents to go there.

Like Layla, Faiza felt obliged to look out for her mom and ensure her well-being. At the time of the study, Faiza was helping her mother manage the household in many ways, but also aspired to help her in the future by being able to fulfill a promise of taking her parents, and her mom in particular, to go on the Hajj. Her mother did not have "time" previously, presumably because she spent many years in a refugee camp and then moved to the United States where she had been raising her children. Faiza's future aspirations included helping her mother to achieve her own desires.

The boys in the study, while they all stated career aspirations to be either doctors or scientists, more explicitly tied this to a desire to be rich in the future. From their parents' perspectives, this was because they were "American kids" who cared more about material things than helping others, but my data suggest this aspiration is also connected to their aspirations to help their moms. Next, I share an extract from Khalid's third interview which took place near the end of the school year. Khalid, like his sister, Layla, was not the most verbose study participant. In each of our three sit-down conversations, he offered succinct, yet self-assured responses. He carried an air of confidence with him always. For example, if I asked him whether an exam went well, he would respond, "*oh yeah*" as if excellence was the only option for him. I found his quiet confidence interesting, but also limiting, as it was difficult to learn about more nuanced elements of his educational aspirations and experience: He was going to work hard, do well in school, and ultimately be a rich doctor. In fact, at each previous interview, he mentioned a desire to be rich and live in a mansion. I initially dismissed this response as typical teenage desire and did not probe or follow up as to why that mattered to him. It took me hearing him say he aspired to have "money" in his future for a third time to try to understand why being rich was part of his future desire:

Joanna: That's what you said before, why is money so important to you?

Khalid: Because I can get anything I want with it.

Joanna: Yeah, like what?

Khalid: Anything.

Joanna: Respect and responsibility? All the values you care about?

Khalid: No well that's a different story.

Joanna: Tell me more about it because you said this before and I have yet to understand why this is so important to you . . . So what really—like money matters to you, what else will come in your life once you have the money?

Khalid: Respect, fame and something like that.

Joanna: From whom?

Khalid: Everyone.

Joanna: Everyone? Do you think your mom will respect you more if you have more money, why? You are smiling.

Khalid: Because if I get money, I can really give some to my mom.

Joanna: Okay, and so what would you want to do with all that money you earn?

Khalid: Buy my mom a house.

While Khalid went on to explain that he also wanted to have a PlayStation in the future, indicating a desire to indulge in material items, his future aspirations included helping his mother financially and buying her a home.

Next I share Abdi's description of his aspirations for the future. Abdi, like Khalid, stated he wanted to be rich. Abdi was one of the younger participants—he started seventh grade at the beginning of the study. He was an unpredictable participant in this study. Some days he was an active program participant who would work well with others. My first interview with him in August caught him in this mood and it was an informative and easy conversation. Other days, he would be a bit recluse and seemed like he would rather be anywhere but the program. My second interview, (from which I extract the following

thread) caught him in the latter mood. He was uninterested in my questions and kept asking if he could “leave yet.” He mostly gave me one-word answers and was unengaged until I suddenly rattled him by betraying a core value of his—I suggested that children need not feel wholly obligated to financially support their parents when they were adults. The following narrative begins after he told me that he no longer wanted to be an engineer (like he did in his first interview), but instead wanted to be an “agent of the bureau” like the character Morgan from the show *Criminal Minds*:

Abdi: I think Morgan has lots and lots of money. So I can help my family.

Joanna: In what ways will you help them?

Abdi: By paying for their house, paying for college if my mom has a new baby. Paying for their college.

Joanna: Okay. Paying for your own college or paying for the baby's college?

Abdi: Baby's college.

Joanna: You think your mom is going to have another baby?

Abdi: Maybe.

Joanna: Maybe, you never know, right?

Abdi: Yeah.

Joanna: That's very interesting to me to hear because you're 11 years old and you're thinking about paying for your family. Where did that come from? I never thought about that when I was 11 years old.

And I don't pay for things for my parents now. [He looks at me with a dramatic face.] Are you in shock?

Abdi: How *dare* you?

Joanna: You're goofy today, aren't you?

Abdi: No. How dare you?

Joanna: Say what you mean by that.

Abdi: Your parents are supposed to pay for you when you were a little child.

Joanna: Okay, but when you're older?

Abdi: You're supposed to pay for them.

Joanna: What if you have kids of your own? Do you pay for both?

Abdi: Yes, of course

When Abdi learned I did not share that value of paying for my parents as an adult he was genuinely (albeit dramatically) appalled. From his view, it is a presumed value to financially support your family members, especially your mom, and help them in any way possible in order to reciprocate how they supported you as a child. I learned from Zakariya that many of these parents were regularly sending money to their family members in Somalia or elsewhere, so this is modeled behavior in some regard. But different from their parents, at this point in their lives, these young people imagined one day having a lucrative career, something their parents did not and likely would not have, which would enable them to help their parents to whom they feel indebted and grateful.

Changing Aspirations through Time among the High School-aged Youth

I made the methodological decision to carry out a longitudinal design in order to capture and account for the temporality of young people's lives and to be able to depict change in their aspirations and agency, if change occurred. In this section, I highlight the changing aspirations of three youth, Khalid, Marwa, and Roodoo. These three young people were the only participants who were in high school during the study. At the beginning of the study, each of them were on the brink of their freshmen year. As the study concluded, they were concluding their first year as high school students.

Khalid, Marwa, and Roodoo each expressed in their first interviews, which occurred in the summer before their freshmen year, or in Roodoo's case the first day of her freshman year, that they wanted to be doctors. At end of their first year of high school, they had abandoned their initial career aspiration that so closely matched with what their parents' desires for them and instead described aspirations to explore different interests and ways of life in the future.

New Influences, New Possibilities: "I've been exposed to so many environments.

First, I report on Khalid's changing aspirations. As previously described, Khalid was often succinct and undetailed in his responses to my questions as well as in his engagement in group discussions. In his first two interviews, he said that he wanted to become a doctor in the future because he wanted to "touch a needle," have money, and live in a mansion. Again, as a young person who was inclined toward brevity, it was a challenge to have him express why these things mattered to him. Nonetheless, the following excerpt from my first conversation with him suggests that his father's desires

for him were a guiding force in the shaping of his initial future aspiration. When I first asked him why education, career, and money were important to him he credited his dad:

Very important because my dad is like that, if you don't get going to college while you're in your third-year high school, like if you don't take classes like that for college, I don't know what's going to happen.

Khalid felt pressure from his father to have a successful future and said that his father told him that going to college was an indispensable step in achieving that future. He went on in that conversation to describe his aspirations to become a rich doctor. In my final sit-down with him, while he still desired wealth, he had begun to imagine his future differently and credited influences outside of his family to shaping his more open-ended aspirations. Here, I report on a conversation around Khalid's study habits that we had at the end of the study. In this conversation, he talked about how he wanted to work hard in school so he could have a new career in the future:

Joanna: Tell me what job you want now?

Khalid: I don't know. I'm undecided right now.

Joanna: You are undecided. So it's changed because it used to be a doctor

Khalid: Yeah.

Joanna: Why are things changing?

Khalid: I don't know. I've been exposed to so many environments like taking some math classes, some business.

...

Joanna: So why did you want to be a doctor before, what was the information you had that made you want that, to be that?

Khalid: I don't know, it's just because my mom was a nurse and my aunt is a pharmacist.

Khalid clearly and concisely said his aspiration was initially informed by his family. Previous interview data demonstrated his father's influence in shaping his aspirations and here he said his mom and his aunt had shaped his aspirations for becoming a doctor. However, at the end of his first year in high school, he became open to doing something different in the future. In high school, he more deeply engaged in different subjects at school and because of this, he began to reimagine his future.

Like Khalid, Marwa's future aspirations changed through time during her first year in high school. In my first interview with her, I asked her to describe her educational goals and aspirations. She responded by saying, "I want to do things that involve math and helping people I guess. I don't know, something in the scientific or medical field." She also at the time (in July, prior to her freshman year) created a "vision board" of her "perfect future" on which she pasted a photo of a physician with a stethoscope and wrote "be a doctor" near that photo. In my second interview with her, I asked her how she imagined having a career that would allow her to both help people and incorporate math. She responded, "Um a doctor would do that, I guess".

Marwa's early narrative of having a job that would help others fits with the previously described values encouraged by Somali parents and embraced by many of the young people in this study, although her hesitant description of her aspiration (saying "I guess") suggested she had a wavering conviction about this aspiration. Throughout the year, when I visited her youth program, I noticed that Marwa was often working on homework for her business class and her social studies class. She seemed interested in

these topics, often sharing what she was finding aloud to the other youth. She even spent one day convincing Faiza to sign up for the same business class when she started high school the following year. I also learned Marwa was earning As in all of her classes. When I revisited her future aspirations at the end of her first year in high school, Marwa's new subject interests seemed to have made her confidently undecided about her future. She told me she no longer wanted to be a doctor, and in the following thread, she described her reasons why:

Marwa: I really like business I guess. I really like accounting and stuff, so I don't know. Then what's it called—I really like Social Studies now because we do other stuff other than mapping.

Joanna: What are the things that you're doing?

Marwa: We learn more about the government stuff and I was really into that. And in geography we didn't do mapping instead we learned about culture and stuff that's when I realized –

Joanna: You're interested in those.

Marwa: I think it's just because in middle school they weren't like really broad. They were like tubes like narrow with everything. I think that's why I only had one thing I was set on, but now in high school it's like more broad.

Marwa felt that high school was a place to discover new subject interests and ultimately explore new future possibilities. One day in February, she was using program time to sign up for her tenth-grade classes. I noticed she enrolled in advanced placement history, honors English, and body shop. She told me she still needed to select an electives course,

but she did not know what she wanted to take. Her mother, Fatima, per usual, was at the program that day and interjected when she heard her daughter articulate her uncertainty. In that moment, Fatima told me that she had a meeting with Marwa's counselor and that that counselor mentioned that electives "could help her in the future" because they would demonstrate to college admissions staff that Marwa had knowledge and experience in a topic area that Marwa could further study in college or they might be counted as college credit. She then said, "So come on, Marwa!" Then she urged her to "Show Joanna! Show Joanna!" meaning she wanted Marwa to show me the electives she should could possibly take in tenth grade. Marwa further expressed that she did not know what she wanted to study in college. She did not seem stressed about it, but instead she was seemingly just stating a fact. During this exchange, I instinctively inserted my own world view and experience and told Fatima that some colleges (like the liberal arts one I attended), appreciated students who explored a variety of topics and had multiple interests. I pointed out that her involvement in this youth group and that fact that Marwa started a Muslim student group in middle school was something she could put on her college application. After I inserted my views, Marwa said to her mom, "See?" which to me suggested she shared my views (which were based on my own educational experiences in the United States) and she felt it helped her convince her mother of her own view of education and her future. I later learned she elected to take a media and film class in tenth grade.

I referred to this interaction in my final sit-down with Marwa when she told she no longer knew what type of career she wanted to have in the future:

Joanna: Do you feel stressed about it not knowing?

Marwa: Not right now because I'm only a freshman, but if I still don't know when I'm applying for college and stuff I might, but right now, not really.

Joanna: So I'm remembering when you were trying to pick your elective and your mom was saying 'figure it out because it helps you in the future.' Does that put pressure on you?

Marwa: Kind of because I don't know what to choose to help me with my future if I don't really know what I'm going to do in the future.

Joanna: Do you feel like that that was really that big of a decision to pick the elective?

Marwa: Not really because I could choose anything and it could help me with my future. . . I might just like branch out to other stuff.

Marwa departed from initial aspirations and set off on an educational pathway to "branch out" and explore her interests, while her career remained unclear. Like Khalid, she credited the interesting and different classes she was taking in high school to broadening her future options. By engaging more deeply in classes and other social opportunities her aspirations were not so deeply constructed in the context of her mother's experience and desires as a Somali refugee. In Marwa's case, by the end of her freshmen year, she moved away from her initial aspirations of being a doctor so that she could be "beneficial to the society," which is what her mother aspired for her, and instead she told me, "I just want to do something that makes me happy in the long run. That's all I want I guess."

Challenging Family Expectations: “I get to do whatever I want.”

I first got to know Roodoo the afternoon after her first day of high school. I learned that she took a one-hour bus ride to a western suburb in order to attend a small charter school that focuses on medical studies and at which the student population was comprised only of Somali youth. She was smiling when I met her; she seemed to have had a good first day. When I interviewed her that same day, she expressed her optimism and excitement for the school year. She relayed to me that she was hoping to stay focused and not get in any trouble this year because it was “not worth it.” From what I gathered throughout the year, prior to the study, she had failing grades, which her parents attributed to her “not focusing” and to her involvement with sports—which kept her from completing her homework. When I first met her, she seemed excited to have a fresh start and explained to me why she wanted to do better in school:

Roodoo: I'm hoping to become a doctor when I grow up and . . . I'm trying to get everything like As and that's going to be really hard to do, because I usually don't get As in any of my classes. . .

Because I'm usually talking to my friends and maybe causing trouble and stuff and then -- and I don't do my homework either, it's going to be really hard to do, but I'm going to try.

Joanna: Okay, so what's making you decide now that you need to start trying to get As?

Roodoo: Because I don't think my parents can afford to pay a lot of money to go to my college and stuff and I really have no scholarship, but I

want to make my parents proud. . .I just like to make my parents happy.

This extract from my first conversation with Roodoo shows another youth in the Somali diaspora who aspired to do well in school, become a doctor (specifically, a surgeon), and please her parents. My second interview with Roodoo occurred only a month after her first one. At this point in time, her grades were already not good and she was failing some of her classes. Her academic performance was prompting her to imagine her future differently because she doubted her abilities to do what was required to become a surgeon. She told me she no longer wanted to be a surgeon because it was “too hard.” She said she instead wanted to be a veterinarian, which in her view would require less work. She also mentioned an interest in becoming a fashion designer and interior designer because she loves to draw “and can’t give that up.” A couple of months later, I checked in with Roodoo when I was visiting her program. I asked her about how she was thinking about her future; she told me that she still wanted to be a vet, but then followed it up with “but I don’t think I will.” When I asked her why she said, “Because my grades are like suck.” Roodoo, unlike Marwa and Khalid, struggled academically. While she hoped she would do better this year, she had many failing grades—claiming she just does not understand the material and would become distracted in class and while doing her homework. Roodoo’s aspirations shifted as she doubted her abilities to achieve them. And yet, while she struggled to get good grades, Roodoo seemed to excel in both art and sports. While I know little about drawing or makeup, from my view, she was good at both and she enjoyed them. And even though I never saw her in action, she seemed to be

a talented athlete as well. She told me about in a previous year when she finished a race at her school in first place.

In the following excerpt from my field notes, I described a scenario when I was visiting programming, sitting next to Roodoo, her mother, and Kowsar during what was intended to be homework time. Roodoo had spent the majority of the time looking at makeup tutorials on YouTube:

She [Roodoo] went to pray (after her mom, Sahra returned to the table). Sahra walked by [Roodoo's laptop] and rolled her eyes at what she saw on her computer screen—YouTube make up tutorials. I can't recall all of the conversation, but I asked if she would be okay with Roodoo being a makeup artist for a job. She gave me a look like "yeah right." She told me, "I want her to do something real."

Roodoo had talents and interests that could presumably be developed into a career, but these were not interests that were supported by her mother. Her mother often told me that the most important thing she wanted for her daughters was an education. I am fairly confident that at the beginning of the study, before our relationship was established, she only consented to have me interview Roodoo because I was talking to her about her education. At one point, she asked me to provide her with a document that laid out her daughter's educational and career aspirations; with her Roodoo's permission, I obliged.

Roodoo felt the weight of her parents' expectations for her life now and for her future, but she doubted her ability to meet these expectations. I also observed a desire from her to experience social worlds which her mother discouraged: In my time with her, she mentioned a desire to play on the basketball team, to get a job at the mall, to go to a different (non-chartered) school, but her parents did not allow her to experience these

things—this is something I explore more deeply in the final chapter. In my final conversation with Roodoo, she no longer discussed an aspiration to have a career that would help or even please her parents. Instead she discussed the tension she felt trying to uphold her parents’ expectations of the person they wanted her to become:

I hate it when people give me these things. . . Like when my parents pressure me so much to go to school and stuff because I feel like I’m pressured to get it right and I’m normally going to get it wrong. . . I hate when they give me things and they talk to me like, “I want you to be good.” I’m just like, “I don’t know if I can do that.” You know, I don’t want to disappoint people. I hate disappointing people.

Roodoo understood that her parents wanted her to learn the Quran and do well in school. But because she doubted her abilities to “be good” she felt unable to fulfill their expectations of who they wanted her to become. Yet, at the end of her freshman year, Roodoo seemed to release herself from this parentally influenced future started imagining her future differently than she did when I first met her. At this point in time, she was not sure what she wanted to pursue as a career, but college remained something she aspired to have in her future—even though she was not confident in her abilities to achieve this aspiration. I learned this when I asked her to draw a picture of her “perfect future.” Roodoo’s vision for “perfect future,” depicted in Figure 3, included being on a college campus with new friends.



Figure 3. Roodoo's perfect future.

Roodoo explained to me that this was her in college in Florida or California. She has “money and a nice car.” I find the basketball court interesting as Roodoo often talked to me about her talents in basketball, but her parents did not support (but sometimes tolerated) her playing basketball. One of the youth club leaders, Mahamud walked by while she was sharing this to me and he said “so your friends are not Somali?” Roodoo was imagining a future that included playing basketball, living in a state far from family, and having non-Somali friends—social arrangements her parents had fervently discouraged from her life and her engagement in them might disappoint them. This was a shift from August when she aspired to have a future that would make her parents “proud” and “happy.” I asked why she aspired to go to college someday. She replied: “Because it’s where people find themselves. It’s like I’m going to be free and I get to do whatever I want.” She went on to tell me that she “felt trapped in Cedar” and wondered what life might look like if she interacted with non-Somali people. Roodoo’s aspirations changed from being something that would make her parents happy to something that countered

their views of the person she should become.

The narratives of Khalid, Marwa, and Roodoo demonstrate that as these young people entered middle adolescence and began high school, they began to more deeply engage in social fields outside of their families and resultantly began to reimagine their futures in these contexts. This finding is further illustrated by Layla, who told me during my member check session in February 2018, midway through her first year in high school, that she no longer wanted to be a doctor. These findings suggest that family, as a social setting, became less primary in the shaping of youths' aspirations for the futures through time. This is especially noteworthy in the Somali diaspora because Somali parents prioritize keeping their children connected to Somali culture. Encouraging them to have a career that benefits others—particularly those in Somalia—is an essential way in which the parents aim to achieve this.

Both of the sections in this chapter highlighted the social-situatedness of these youths' aspirations. Youths' parents promoted and mediated the cultural logics of the Somali diaspora to their children. These cultural logics included using one's education to benefit others in Somalia and in their families. Their children embodied these logics and it shaped the ways they imagined their aspirations for the future. As youth more deeply engaged in school—a social field with different cultural logics—they began to reimagine their futures so that they included careers and social lives that were related to their personal interests and talents.

In summary, my findings reveal that youths' aspirations were imagined and reimaged in multiple social fields to which they belonged—including their families and schools. These social fields— and the relationships, structures, and other spheres of

influence within them—are also the contexts in which they enacted agency toward achieving their aspirations. In the next chapter, I give attention to the ways in which these young people in the Somali diaspora navigated these contextually specific social and cultural conditions as they pursued aspiration achievement through education.

CHAPTER FIVE: AGENCY AS NAVIGATING CONTRADICTIONS

“I wake up every morning saying today is a new day. Today is a day to show the world who I am.”-Layla

Layla shared this mantra with me in order to describe why being Somali and being Muslim were the “most important part” of her identity. She encapsulated so succinctly (and optimistically) the ways in which I came to find out that the young people this study acted on the world around them in order to achieve their educational aspirations. The youth in this study felt compelled to “show the world” who they were as Somalis and Muslims, trying to do good things with their life. They also felt compelled to demonstrate to others who they were *not*—often countering stereotypes in school or challenging the expectations of their parents. In this chapter, I answer the research question: *In what ways do youth (in grades 6-9) in the American Somali diaspora exercise their abilities to achieve their educational aspirations amidst obstacles and opportunities?* Answering this question requires an exploration of contradictions of belonging that occur when youth attempt to mobilize resources and gain status at both home and at school. In the Somali diaspora, these young people found their biggest sources of strength and support in who they were as Somalis and Muslims and in their network of people who were a part of the same social network. Concomitantly, this “most important part” of what made them who they were also made them a target for discrimination and provided them with a value system, social network, and norms for behavior that conferred them little social status or power in their educational pursuits. This chapter explores these contradictions—of concurrent support and constraints—these

young people navigated on their educational pathways as they strived to achieve a future life they considered valuable.

Confronting Discrimination and Correcting Stereotypes

Bourdieu (1990b) made the argument that what youth desire for their future may or may not be easily achievable because of the social, cultural, and economic arrangements in which they live. Youth agency—as it is related to their future aspirations—can be constrained in the face of powerful structural limits and a dearth of real opportunities available to them along their educational pathway (Sen, 1999.) The findings from the previous chapter in many ways echoed other studies on Somali youth and education (e.g. Abdi, 2015; Bigelow, 2010) by showing that Somali American youth and their parents tended to have positive attitudes toward education and a hopeful outlook for Somali children’s educational futures. It is equally well-documented that Somali youth encounter a unique set of constraints on account of their racial, ethnic, and religious identity (Abdi 2015; Bigelow, 2010). Youth in the Somali diaspora find themselves fending off Western perceptions and stereotypes of their identities as Somali and Muslim. They are embedded in anti-Muslim and culturally discriminatory social structures that constrain their abilities and strategies to achieve favorable educational outcomes and ultimately achieve the future life they value (Abdi, 2015; Bigelow, 2010).

The findings I put forth in this section explore youths’ experiences with anti-Muslim racism and cultural discrimination in education. It adds to the literature by further demonstrating the ways in which youth responded in the face of powerful and constraining social structures and adversity. The youth in this study shared stories in which they enacted agency by decidedly keeping and claiming their faith in the face of

systems who denigrated it and by categorically insisting to others (and themselves) that stereotypes about their abilities were untrue.

Facing the Trump Factor: “He thinks that we can’t have the same opportunities.”

It is incumbent on me as the researcher to acknowledge the sociopolitical climate of the country during this study. My time with the young people took place during the tail-end of the campaign and subsequent election and inauguration of the United States’ 45th president, Donald Trump. Politics were infrequently explicitly mentioned by youth. As is characteristic of youth in early and middle adolescence, the young people were primarily consumed with school, family, and friends (mainly via social media) (Caskey & Anfara, 2007). In fact, when I visited the Savanna Hills youth in February 2018, they seemed to have forgotten about the election—Layla told me she was “over it” and Khalid said “Oh yeah. With Hillary,” giving me the impression he had not given thought to the campaign since the moment in time when it was occurring. Yet, during the time of the study, the greater social climate and political rhetoric seeped into the everyday lives and interactions of the young people.

As a candidate, President Trump had visited Minnesota proclaiming to citizens in the state: “You’ve suffered enough in Minnesota,” (Berenson, 2016) referring to the state’s large Somali community and implying that it was a hotbed for terrorist recruitment. From many of the youths’ perspective, President Trump was the figurehead of anti-Muslim racism that arguably first emerged in the United States after the terrorist act on the twin towers on September 11, 2001—before any of the youth in this study were born. From the youth program leaders’ and parents’ perspective, anti-Muslim racism had hit a resurgence during the time of this study, in part because of the 2016

political campaign. Kowsar relayed to me that she felt it was “worse” now than after 9/11. Many of the young people in this study blamed Donald Trump for the anti-Muslim racism and “otherism” they experienced, even though the stories they shared with me were not explicitly connected to him or his election. I had asked Hodan, who was new to the country, what it was like being here for the election of a new American president. She told me that it was “kind of scary” because President Trump was “trying to take all the people away” and it made her feel like she did not want to stay here. In September, during the campaign, Abdi expressed his disdain for then candidate Trump telling me that, “When he becomes president he’s gonna to try to get the Muslim and Jews away.”

The young people in the Savanna Hills club told me on multiple occasions that President Trump was a “hat-a” (hater) who created a culture in which their peers felt emboldened to tell them they were not good people or that they did not belong in the United States. This became especially evident during the privilege walk activity with the Savana Hills youth group. About half of the youth would jokingly say “Donald Trump” as the reason why they stepped back in the activity (which symbolized an obstacle to aspiration achievement). After multiple instances of his name being mentioned, I asked the youth why they kept saying his name. The following thread from the activity’s reflection encapsulates how they believed Trump’s presidency interfered with their educational opportunities in a school setting and highlights the livid voices of Layla and Faiza:

Faiza: We don’t like him!

Layla: He thinks that we can't have the same opportunities as other people. And he thinks we don't belong here. Even though we were born here.

Joanna: When you say "we" who do you mean?

Faiza: Us Muslims! Somalis.

Layla: Somalis.

Layla: Every race that he has targeted.

Faiza: Everyone outside.

Joanna: When you were stepping back about being treated unfairly because of what you believe and what you look like, were you are talking about Donald Trump or other people in your life?

Many in chorus: Donald trump!

Layla: Donald trump and his supporters.

Faiza: Our amazing president [sarcastically].

During the time of the study, the youth participants blamed Trump for their experiences with racism and discrimination. And while they often spoke in jest about the president's negative influence and derided him frequently (e.g. calling him "cheetoh-head" and "orange peel"), the issue of being "targeted," treated as "outsiders," and seen as less deserving of opportunities surfaced in subtler and more somber ways as they discussed their own personal encounters of anti-Muslim racism in their school settings. Youth described experiences of their cherished identities being tied to hurtful stereotypes. In response, youth were compelled to invest their energy and agency into convincing others that they were inherently good and intelligent young people. This included

confronting explicit experiences of anti-Muslim racism with peers and school administration as well as more placidly correcting misperceptions of their own abilities and talents.

Keeping Faith amidst Adversity: “I can’t let go.”

Each of the youth participants told me that they identified as Somali and Muslim and that they felt that these parts of their identities were the most important parts of who they were. When I would ask youth to describe why these identities were so important, many of them referred to their religion, or their identity as a Muslim. Young people explained to me that their faith was core to their identity because it guided their behavior in various contexts and instructed them on how to be a good person. Faiza told me, “It’s like me leading my own body to telling me this is what I believe,” and Khalid told me that his identity as a Muslim was important to him because:

It defines my actions, my religious faith, it does like, it controls my actions, what I do . . . here is what I am supposed to do and what I am not supposed to do, it’s all in the religion. . . . And my culture too, all things I do.

Young people in this study attributed their faith and their culture as their arbiter of their good actions. They expressed to me that the rules and teachings of their faith and cultural traditions manifested in behaviors that made them better students, family members, and morally sound young people. For example, youth stated that because of their Somali and Muslim identities they: “pray every day” (Layla); “stop slacking” and “do my homework before everything else” (Khalid); “wear a head scarf on my head” (Roodoo); avoid “drugs and stuff” (Faiza); “respect elders” (Khalid); and bring gifts to ill family members

(Layla). Their faith provides a template for positive behaviors important to Somali culture and identity.

My data further suggest that being Somali and Muslim were pieces of the young people's identities that they were unwilling to compromise or conceal. Their need to adhere to their beliefs and values emerged voraciously as they interacted with others who did not share their social identities and accompanying social and cultural behavioral guidelines. The youths' social world, especially the school environments of the youth who do not attend "culturally specific" charter schools (Basford, 2008)—the Savanna Hills youth, Ahmed, and Hodan— were fraught with biases, stereotypes, and racism toward these core pieces of their identities. The young people in this study shared recent experiences in which they confronted their peers in order to defend and explain who they are.

I begin by highlighting Faiza's narrative. Faiza, as previously explained, was in eighth grade and the oldest of six children who helped her mother take care of the younger children as her dad worked as a truck driver and would be absent for weeks at a time. She loved running track, watching crime shows, and most evident of all, she loved her faith. In my first interview with Faiza in July, I asked her why she included "proud Muslim" in her identity wheel and she replied by expressing her love for her religious identity: "It's like something that I've had in me for a long time so I love praying, I love reading Quran, getting learned in Quran and stuff like that." In addition to cherishing it, she also saw it enabling her to do good in the world in the future. She mentioned how in addition to wanting to be an FBI agent or doctor, she hoped to become a Muslim leader in the future so she could help others "be respectful to your neighbors and stuff because

most people are starting to kill others,” and she wanted to help guide girls to act like “they’re supposed to be” according to their religion. Her faith was core to her identity and governed her moral behavior. She also suggested that others may view it as risk factor asserting, “I don’t want anyone else to take it away from me.” Faiza clung to her faith as good even though others attempted to tell her otherwise.

It was during the privilege walk that I first noticed her become angry as she discussed times when others disrespected her faith, race, and ethnic identity. For example, in response to the statement, *If you were ever treated unfairly because of your race, ethnicity, gender or religion, take one step back*, most of the young people took a step backward. When I followed up on this question during the reflection, Faiza was the first to contribute to the conversation:

It’s like kids at our schools. I’ve seen this at our school. They think that they have the right to say—that white people can say the “n-word”, when they can’t because it’s kind of rude to us and they say it in front of our faces as if it was a joke or anything . . . Well the person I was talking about has said it like once and then we’ve told that person to stop saying it . . . but then they said it again. We started to get mad because they’re doing it on purpose after we’re telling them it’s not okay to say.

Faiza further described that, “A lot of white kids think they have the privilege into saying the N-pass, when it’s not fair or it’s not kind to us black people.” During this conversation, other youth said they had similar experiences with white peers, some of whom they considered friends, who believed that because they had black and Somali friends, they had permission to use the n-word (i.e. the “n-pass”). For Faiza, in the case

she described, in addition to feeling the pain of that word, she felt obligated to educate this person of the pain that word engendered.

I then steered the conversation back to the learning objective of the privilege walk—how power and privilege affected their abilities to achieve their aspirations. I asked them why people being treated unfairly because of who they were would be a “step back.” Again, Faiza was quick to offer an impassioned response:

Joanna: If stepping back means an obstacle why would someone swearing at you in that [Somali] language or using the N word be a step back. Or is it in your opinion?

Faiza: It is a step back because if you don’t feel comfortable getting called a name you don’t like, I wouldn’t –

Layla: It’s pretty much bullying. It’s bullying.

Joanna: But how does that affect you and your ability to reach your dreams?

Faiza: It does because if people are going to do it all the time to you and you’re just trying to make them—“you’re black, you can’t do this!” Or “you’re Somali you have no privilege nana” Then . . . why wouldn’t you take a step back from your dreams or your goals?

In her response, Faiza relayed that in school she received messages from her peers that she was less able or less deserving of opportunities because of her identity as Somali, black, and Muslim. She recognized this was a disadvantage and confessed it was painful

for her, yet as the next thread will demonstrate, in the face of this discrimination she confronted and countered these messages.

In my final one-to-one conversation with Faiza I once again asked her describe to me why she identified as a “proud Muslim.” As a way of depicting her pride, she told me about a time she confronted a peer who called her a terrorist:

These days people make fun of Muslims. Like say that Muslims they're like terrorists and stuff like that. But just because you're Muslim doesn't mean you're a terrorist in a way. Because it was, when I got really mad at school and we had to even tell the principal like it was bad. So we were at this—it was this school like the school was doing an introduction and all the students had to come together and like the big gym and the principal was talking. And this girl walked passed me and my other friend she was like, "You terrorists." And then we turn around and we were like, "What?" And she goes like "Yes, you Muslims people are going to bomb this place today." And we were like really mad and we went to the principal and we told him everything and she apologized. But she still got suspended because it's rude and like you can't tell a Muslim person just because they're Muslim does mean that they're terrorists. It just doesn't--that's rude, that's disrespectful . . . I was screaming that day . . . I just said, "You have no right to say that just because I'm Muslim doesn't give you the right to just call me that."

Faiza was fiercely protective of her faith (as demonstrated by “I was screaming”)—a part of her identity that compelled her to do good, but because of stereotypes and anti-Muslim racism, it also prompted others to associate her with negative things. Faiza emotionally confronted, defended, and corrected destructive stereotypes at school.

Next, I share part of Layla's narrative. Like Faiza, she cherished her faith maintained that it was core to her identity. Specifically, she shared with me that her hijab was a "symbol of her Muslim nation." She explained that she did not wear because she was "forced" to do so, but instead said she "chooses" to wear it for "modesty" because as a Somali and Muslim girl, she preferred to be "secretive" and "private." I found it striking that Layla offered me this explanation without prompting. I never asked her why she wore a hijab, but she felt compelled to tell me that it was a choice, not an oppressive obligation. Her explanation felt rehearsed, like she had had to defend the way she practiced her faith to others (who likely looked like me) many times before. Layla felt compelled to counter a negative stereotype associated with "her Muslim nation."

Further, when I asked Layla to tell me more about why her Somali and Muslim identity was so important to her, she preemptively referred to how she refused to relinquish her faith from their identity—as if it were threatened.:

I grew up with this religion and I can't let go of it. If I did, I'd be just like a really bad thing, really sad thing to do because I grew up going to the mosque and reading Quran and stuff like that so that's why I'm used to being a Muslim and wearing my hijab and respecting God.

One interpretation of such statements from both Layla and Faiza ("I wouldn't want anyone to take it away from me") is that because they had faced enough adversity on account of their identity, they were acknowledging that if they relinquished or concealed that part of their identity they may save themselves some hardship. Layla once told me she knew Somali girls who did not take part in their tradition, Marwa said she had friends who chose not to wear "wear the hijab and like skirts and stuff," and Faiza said she knew

many Muslims who did not pray. The young people had friends who attempted to blend in more with their non-Muslim peers, whereas the participants of this study seemed to have made a conscious choice to persist in their faith despite the adversity they faced because of it.

I was offered a deeper glimpse of Layla's experiences with prejudice against her religion in a mock college essay I had asked the youth participants at the Savanna Hills club to write as a program activity. Layla answered the prompt that asked her to describe a time she "took action." In her essay she described a time she confronted a male peer who pulled off her friend's hijab. She described this boy's actions as "reckless," and she felt he was emboldened to behave this way toward Muslims because of the president: "People think that just because Donald Trump is president they can do what feels right." She wrote in her essay that this action disrespected her faith and that her friend was treated like she did not have any feelings. In her final interview, I asked her to describe her feelings around this poignant experience in more detail:

It [pulling off the hijab] basically hurts every—not Somali kind of—but Muslim, it hurts every Muslim woman who wears a hijab because I mean they wear the hijab for modesty, but if people think that it's a prank for pulling off that one thing that actually hides like the one thing of modesty that they have then what's the point? ... Then you know how you're supposed to apologize for doing something like that? He never apologized. Nothing was basically ever done about it. I'm still mad at him to this day.

Layla continued to explain to me that she and her friends brought this to the attention of the school's dean, but the boy who did it received no punishment. Layla was also upset

that that her friend had to continue to do partner work with this boy. She felt the teacher and the dean did not understand the severity of the boys' actions, but instead addressed it like a minor behavioral issue. She said in the preceding excerpt that the boy viewed it as a prank—something silly and funny done to elicit a laugh—he was unaware of the grave offense he caused. Layla, on the other hand, (and presumably her friend as well) felt the offense deeply. It was this offense (and defense of her faith) that prompted her to confront his disrespectful action. I asked her to describe what action she took in response to this experience and she described the following:

I actually started screaming at him . . . I was like why did you do that? Basically I just screamed at him like it was wrong, that's mean. Hijab is all about modesty. You just destroyed the one thing that showed that and then I told him about the same comparison about how you would feel if I pulled down your pants. He said, "Okay, okay." He left but he never said I'm sorry.

Like Faiza, Layla, found herself "screaming" at a non-Muslim peer for disrespecting the hijab and her faith. She confronted this boy by reprimanding the behavior and educating him on why it was not okay to do it. Finally, I asked if wearing her hijab made her feel "different" than others at school and then how that affected her everyday life at school. Her response further demonstrates her unwillingness to conceal parts of her identity, even if it invited discrimination:

Well it kind of makes me feel different but it doesn't really affect me because this is part of who I am and I really shouldn't change for other people. This is like part of me, my religion. This is like a symbol of me; like I shouldn't change for anybody. I'm really fine wearing this.

Finally, I highlight Ahmed's experience with confrontational discrimination. Recall from Chapter Three that Ahmed dropped out of the program for many months. I had not spoken to him much since my first interview with him in August. During the beginning of the program and school year, when he attended regularly, he often kept to himself. He would play on his phone or computer and barely wanted to look up to say hello to me when I greeted him. His mother, Fartun (whom he would always greet with a kiss) told me in a one-to-one conversation that Ahmed "doesn't like to talk"—even to her. She described times during the school year that she would see him crying and she asked him what was wrong she would tell her that he just wanted to be left alone.

Different than Faiza and Layla, Ahmed lived in a community primarily comprised of other Somali people. His two younger siblings had attended a charter school—Austad Academy (pseudonym)—at which most students are children of East African immigrants. Ahmed on the other hand, began the school year attending Kalama Middle School (pseudonym) within the independent school district associated with his neighborhood. The reason why he made this school choice was unclear to me. His mother said it was something he wanted. He claimed it was something his mother wanted for him. Regardless, by the second semester, he had joined his siblings at the charter school because he said wanted to be around other Somali youth. According to him, he had more friends and his grades had gone from Cs to As because of this school change. In this next thread, Ahmed described why life for him was better at the charter school addressing a safety he felt being around other Somali students:

Ahmed: I have people like, we are the same culture and like mostly everybody at school like we speak the same language. I don't have

to like to talk in like one language and some people don't understand.

Joanna: Like speaking in Somali?

Ahmed: Yeah.

Joanna: So, you like being around more Somali people than before.

Ahmed: And there was like kids that are like picking on me.

Joanna: Okay. Why were they picking on you?

Ahmed: I don't really know.

Ahmed went on to tell me that now that he attended Austad Academy, he had more friends:

Ahmed: Because like I can like have fun with them and like at Kalama Middle School kids were like bullying me every single second.

Joanna: Do you think it was because you were different from them?

Ahmed: Yeah.

Joanna: How did you know it was because they were different?

Ahmed: Because how they react— like everything that I said like they thought it was like something bad...Like if I said something and like they would like say something really bad about me.

Joanna: Do you have an example?

Ahmed: I don't want to.

By switching schools, Ahmed was able to unload the burden of being different. This change of school environments seemingly facilitated his ability to foster a sense of belonging in his school and rid him of the need to respond to and experience “bullying”

on account of his identity. From his perspective, this is why his grades improved and why he simply enjoyed school more. Notably, he did not feel comfortable sharing the “really bad” things peers at his former school would say to him. I assume from his assertion that he feels safer with Somali boys, that these “really bad” things said about him were words that denigrated his Somali and Muslim identity.

Prior to my final interview with him, I learned from his mother (and then him) that he had been suspended from Kalama Middle School for getting in a fight and this was the impetus for him to switch schools. Fartun relayed to me that Ahmed was “slapped” by two other boys when no one was around. He then retaliated and was punished for it, while the other boys involved received no punishment because the teachers only witnessed the retaliation from Ahmed. This entry from my field notes encapsulates Fartun’s understanding of Ahmed’s sense of isolation and being different:

He said he started to feel that at Kalama Middle School no one looked out for him. At Austad Academy, he may fight with the Somali boys, but people would be there for him and ask if he was okay. He felt alone and like he didn’t belong in Kalama Middle School. No one checks on him if he gets hit. No one asks if he is okay.

This fight is a different example of a way in which a young person is put in a position to defend himself when targeted by someone who holds a derogatory view of his identity. At the same time, Ahmed felt a sense of safety and belonging among other Somali youth. He felt that his peers at Kalama Middle School thought it was “okay” to “call people names” and that there were no other friends or staff (who according to him would “ignore everything” when he asked for help), to have his back

The narratives of Faiza, Layla, and Ahmed illustrate how, as members of the Somali diaspora in the United States, young people's educational experiences can be disrupted, distracted, and undermined by anti-Muslim acts—cluttering their educational pathways with environmental impediments. In the face of such acts, the young people in this study took action against these educational constraints by defending themselves and their identities by “screaming,” fighting, educating peers, and telling adults about the confrontations. And yet, in many ways, their actions against constraints were futile. Teachers and administration, in the youths' views, did not make efforts to ameliorate the issues when they were brought to their attention, and peers never apologized or changed their behavior. Being Somali and Muslim made them targets for discrimination, but at the same time, these parts of their identities offered them a sense of security. They continued to rely on their faith and culture to guide their decisions, behaviors and actions and to make them feel safe—despite the painful discordance/lack of ease they experienced in schools setting.

Insisting on Abilities: “I’m motivated to prove them wrong.”

The previous narratives demonstrated explicit confrontations with peers and school staff around their Somali and Muslim identities. My data show that youth also experienced subtle or even unintentional discrimination because of their identities as both Somali and Muslim—particularly around their abilities to do well in sports or school. In these cases, youth made an effort to reject adopting any self-view of inferiority, but experiencing these subtle insults sometimes contributed to youth feeling excluded, different, and discouraged in school. To begin with, both Layla and Hodan shared

examples of times when they countered their peers' misconceptions about abilities to participate in athletics:

[Others would say to me] “‘Aren’t you going to be hot in the swimming place?’

I’m like, ‘No, I’m not,’ and they’re like, ‘This thing, are you actually going to swim with it?’ I was like, ‘I’m going swim with that unless the boys get out.’”

(Hodan)

“Like for example, like, ‘Oh, you can’t run like very far because you’re wearing like a big skirt and you’re gonna get really hot in your hijab.’ I don’t really care because that’s just the way of life.” (Layla)

Dismissing or correcting passing remarks about their abilities from their peers seemed to be a regular occurrence for the young people in this study—especially the girls who had to fend off misconceptions surrounding their hijabs and skirts. As Layla said, “That’s just the way of life”; misconceptions were something the young people learned to buffer or endure regularly. These examples illustrate the smaller moments in which the young people in this study countered other people’s misconceptions on their abilities—in this case in athletics. Next, I provide examples in which the young people more deeply interacted with institutional power relations and asserted their abilities to meet or exceed the academic standards of their schools.

Enrolling in Enriched Classes

The young people in this study faced stereotypes that because they were Somali, they were not smart. Marwa and Layla were both A students who enrolled in multiple enriched courses in school. They both mentioned to me they felt conspicuous in their classes because they were the only Somali and persons of color in that class. Layla

explained that when in enriched classes she would sometimes “wonder why I’m the only one in here. But then I work harder.” One interpretation of this comment is that Layla had taken pause in those moments of feeling-out-of-place and questioned her belonging in the more difficult courses. Yet, she emerged from these moments of reflection with the decision to demonstrate her belonging by her work ethic. The question of whether or not she belonged in enriched classes seemed to extend beyond being different than other students in the class and had more to do with facing the stereotype of Somalis not being intelligent. In the following thread, she shared her perception of this stereotype:

This is kind of like stereotyping. I know it sounds like Somali people are like stupid but really not. They just don’t want to . . . join other classes because their friends are there. They don’t really want to rise to the occasion and actually do something that they can do because I know most Somali girls think that their homework is super easy; that’s why they took this class. If you think your homework is super easy then if I were you I would challenge myself because that’s basically what English classes are about.

Layla’s choice of language (i.e. referring to Somali people as “they”) suggests that she had separated herself as unique among other Somali girls because she believed she was smart and capable of meeting challenges, whereas other Somali girls took an easier route.

Marwa explained the division of obstacles associated with her identities to me. She felt others associated her faith with terrorism and her identity as Somali with a lack of intelligence—suggesting a double constraint faced by young people who are both Somali and Muslim:

Marwa: Like for Muslims and stuff— [people think] “oh, they’re all like terrorists or something. And for like Somalians, they’re like. . . “They don’t know anything.”

Joanna: How does that make that hard for you?

Marwa: I don’t know. For like Somali and stuff, people think that we’re really stupid and stuff. So then whenever I’m in classes and stuff, most of the Somalis aren’t in there because they think that “oh, since they’re saying that, we probably are.” And then I’m mostly like the only Somali in most of my classes . . . because I signed up for all the harder classes and stuff.

Marwa also positioned herself as unique among other Somali peers in that she still believed that she was intelligent despite persistent social messages to the contrary. She shared that she had a friend who once told her tell her that “she wasn’t cut out for” accelerated coursework because she was Somali, but that she felt “motivated to prove them wrong.”

She also shared with me that she once found herself in a class sanctioned activity that allowed her peers to document hurtful stereotypes about her identity. A teacher had asked the students to write stereotypes attached to groups of people on a whiteboard so that they could candidly discuss and confront stereotypes together. In our second interview together (in October), Marwa was brought to tears recalling that day in class when her peers wrote the word “terrorist” under “Muslim.” Emotions prevented her from telling me (and me from asking) why this was so painful for her. She just muttered through tears and sniffles that “it was hurtful.” I put a pin in this topic, but returned to it

once again in my final time with her six months later. I asked her again why stereotypes about her identity—Somali and Muslim—made her sad. She told me the following through tears:

Marwa: I don't know. I think it's because I feel like we can do more. Like Muslim people could do more, or like women can do more in society.

Joanna: Are people not doing enough or you just think that people have views that they're not doing enough?

Marwa: Yeah people have views that they're not doing enough. I think it's like you know how people say like Mexican people are like lazy, but then they say that they're taking all their job and stuff? It's kind of like that. So it's like if you think that they're lazy, how are they taking your jobs? I think it's like that. We're trying our hardest and people say negative stuff. It doesn't make sense.

Marwa talked about trying her “hardest” to change people’s hurtful and constraining misconceptions of her identity and she also tried to position herself as a role model to other Somali girls writing in her mock college essay about how she challenged a belief by taking enriched classes, “I hope other Somali girls push themselves and try to change what people think about Somali people in school.” So while Marwa’s grades were stellar, she achieved them while bearing the burden of trying to change a stereotypes associated with an entire group people, instead of simply trying to do well for the sake of doing well. Her tears suggest the path she was taking to achieve these educational

outcomes had been arduous. Marwa credited the emotional encouragement and support her mother provided her as what most helped in her education.

Challenging ELL Placements

The young people in this study also navigated more deeply institutionalized forms of discrimination. Every young person in this Savanna Hills club except for Marwa, were at one time placed in courses for English Language Learners (ELL). However, Marwa's younger sister and brother were placed in ELL courses. This information surfaced in a conversation among the young people during their program time; it never occurred to me to ask about their language abilities because they were all native English speakers. Marwa and her siblings were born and raised in Minnesota and actually had limited proficiency in Somali. Marwa and I had multiple conversation about how frustrating it could be not being completely bilingual in our parents' native language. Faiza and Hamdi were born and raised in Minnesota and spoke both Somali and English at home. Layla and Khalid were also born in the United States, moved to Kenya for three years, and then returned to the US. They had been back living in the United States for over two years at the time of the study. In other words, they were all highly proficient English speakers, while some lived in bilingual homes. At the Cedar Riverside club, the young people were all native English speakers except for Hodan, who was the only youth participant not born in the US and had only recently moved to the country from Kenya. She was enrolled in ELL courses and perhaps rightly so, as I noticed her English improved each time I met with her throughout the year. The Savanna Hills youth on the other hand, did not seem to

belong in these remedial courses. Most youth and their mothers were angry that they were unnecessarily placed in these courses. Layla, on whom I could always rely to be blunt and candid, explained her experience in ELL:

Joanna: What was it like when you got here and they put you in ESL? I remember you were like ‘what the heck’ when you told me about it at first.

Layla: Yeah. Maybe it’s because—you know how they give you this form and they ask you what language do you normally speak in the household and some people write down Somali? Maybe it’s that one thing. They think that we don’t know the English language but we really do because I lived here for six years of my life and I think I know pretty much— like I talked in English over there too. I actually got a good English education over there because I had an English class and it was pretty intense so we were good. I think we were good.

Joanna: When you had someone say you need extra language how did you react to that?

Layla: First I was like what am I doing here? I think I’m perfectly on pace.

Joanna: How long did you stay in there?

Layla: For like the beginning of the school year for sixth grade and then my mom talked to the ESL teacher and . . . she talked to my

[homeroom] teacher Mr. Fuhrman and he didn't let me go to ESL after that.

Joanna: Since you didn't belong there.

Layla: Yeah because I missed every—like they took me out of science so I basically missed all the experiments and I had to copy notes of other people when I can't be there and do the notes myself.

Joanna: And science is like your favorite subject right?

Layla: Yeah.

Layla missed core coursework—in her favorite subject—because she was unnecessarily placed in these classes. She missed out on learning and had to invest additional time outside of class to receive less information on the learning of that day than she would have if she had been able to be an active learner in the classroom. She also brought up a point which I brought to someone I knew who taught ELL. This person explained to me that when students or parents mark that they speak another language at home (which all the Savanna Hills youth do to some extent), this prompts administration to measure their English language proficiency. Fatima, in fact, was the only Savanna Hills mother who was not angry about her children's placement because it was determined by a test score. She told me:

For me, my kids I think two of them were being placed at ESL. When they told me that they have been placed, I asked why? Then they [the school] show about test result. So there is no way I can argue and say 'no' because it was misleading or something. Since they show me the test I accepted. When we worked at it to do extra reading then the next test was exceeded you know?

Fatima accepted the test score and had her children work on their reading abilities so that they could test out of ELL. Hibaaq and Nimo, on the other hand, were not accepting of their children's ELL placements. They counteracted in two ways: They confronted the school to fight to have their children taken out of ELL, and they paid for their children to go to a tutoring program to compensate for what they missed in school:

Hibaaq: Especially the conference plan, sometime is the teacher that say, oh because you speak a different language at home, the kids need like ESL class . . . because you guys you speak home Somali. I say we speak at home English, kids do speak English. They put me sometimes ESL right? So that's why we don't want really kids to feel low. Sometimes the kids they don't really got to different classes [because they go to] ESL classes. That's why we really let them to go a lot of tutor.

Joanna: When the teacher tells you that does that bother you does it—do you feel like that's insulting?

Hibaaq: Yes, why not? I say my kids, they born here.

Nimo: I'm fighting; I don't accept that word. I always go to conference . . . they [teachers] say, 'your kid you speak second language.' I say 'My kid they born here they know better than English I know. They . . . speak very good English. They missing eight hour. She is staying with you, teach them! Why you take them to the ESL?' That's what I tell her. I swear to God I tell her.

Joanna: I know where your kids get it from now.

Nimo: I tell her face to face one day. I said why? They born here, did not come in old age.

Hibaaq: They start in preschool.

Nimo: How come and they like ESL for eight years, seven years? Kids start first grade to high school ESL. Is not like ethical in those thing. It's not like—there are some people doing business that's what I told them. The teacher, ESL teacher he want to get paid. So you want to put couple kid right there; not my kid. That's what I always tell them.

Joanna: Especially it doesn't seem to make sense.

Nimo: Because the kid they read books. If you bring them any kid Somali kid they read books . . . Every night when they come home they read book, how come they ESL?

Hibaaq: Even though we pay a lot of tuition.

Nimo: They say kid need it though.

Hibaaq: Most of our kids slow blah, blah you know?

Joanna: Even though you're taking them to all these tutors and all.

Hibaaq: Yeah, then we have to find the teacher--like my daughter Hamdi. We are going Kumon [an afterschool program that teaches math and reading] and they say she is very high levels for reading, but the school say no. Then I say okay take the test. I don't want ESL anymore and she passed.

These responses from the mothers and Layla suggest teachers made assumptions about their abilities based on the knowledge that the youth speak Somali at home. Hibaaq referred to teachers believing the same stereotype Marwa and Layla's narratives demonstrated previously—the belief that Somali youth are not as intelligent as their non-Somali peers. Marwa and Faiza framed it as a stereotype they boldly counter, whereas the Hibaaq brings attention to how this would deflate the youths' self-esteem and make them doubt their abilities (i.e. “they feel low”). The mothers, Fatima, Hibaaq and Nimo, took action and contested the teachers' placement of their children in language learning classrooms. They were resentful that their children missed coursework, which prompted their mothers to spend additional time and finances in order to compensate for the courses they miss for ELL coursework. Nimo was seemingly able to convince the teachers to remove her children from these courses. Fatima and Hibaaq sought out additional help and work to help their children achieve a higher test score and test out of the program.

This section has given attention to the discrimination the young people in this study faced together with their parents as they attended school and strived to do well in their education. The following sections more deeply investigate the cultural underpinnings of the youths' and parents' educational strategies and the ways in which these strategies play out in different settings.

Applying the Muslim Work Ethic in the United States

The previous section demonstrated the discriminatory social structures that both activated and constrained the agency of the young people in this study. In this next section, I put forth findings that further complicate the educational pathways of youth living in the Somali diaspora by describing and illustrating a culturally-based work ethic

and repertoire of educational strategies youth and parents employ. These findings provide insight into one educational conundrum in the Somali diaspora described in Chapter Two. Minnesota Somali youth reported the highest commitment to learning and reported the highest family/community support than any other social group, but have poorer educational outcomes than most (Minnesota Student Report, 2016). The following presentation of findings shows that Somali youth and their parents care deeply about their education, but the values, norms, and worldviews that parents feel about how young people ought to approach their education is either discordant with or dismissed by the institutionalized values, norms, and worldviews in the United States school settings.

Somali parents in this study were strategic in the way they supported their children's education—they connected their children with experts and encouraged young people take personal responsibility for their education. Youth for the most part, embraced the educational values their parents instilled in them. But my findings suggest that when the young people interacted with more US sanctioned educational values and norms, they expressed they felt out-of-place and reluctant to seek help or mentorship. Considering these findings together with the findings of the previous section, young people seem to be entangled in a double constraint. They were excluded institutionally on account of their religion, nationality, and language. And their attempts to rely on these identities to inform their educational strategies led them to self-exclude from opportunities or supports outside of the diaspora. These exclusions had consequences for their educational experiences, while at the same time, secured their connection to their Somali and Muslim identity instilling a positive sense of self.

Following the Teachings of the Quran in Education: “You got to step up.”

For the youth in this study, educational strategies were heavily guided by the rules of their faith and culture. Faith in particular, not only guided youths' moral behavior as demonstrated in the previous section, it governed the decisions and behavior they exerted to do well in their education. Consistent in my findings was a theme of Islam and Somali culture prescribing youth to take personal responsibility for their education and to approach education with focus and discipline. For instance, Khalid explained to me that in "religious school" he learned about "responsibility, discipline." I asked him how that played out in school and in life and he told me:

You got to step up for stuff that you have to do. No one is going to be after you in the real world. So you are going to have to do it and make sure that you do it because no one is going to tell you do this or do that.

Khalid went on to tell me "I do my homework on my own and no one tells me. I just go in my room and start doing the homework." Khalid described, and I will illustrate in the sections that follow, that youth are instructed by their faith and impelled by their parents' cultural ties to Somalia to be held personally responsible for their educational outcomes and to live a life in which they do not "need somebody" (as described by Sahra). Youth were pressed by their parents, especially their moms, to approach learning with discipline and were expected to have an inner drive to succeed. These cultural values, on the surface, seem consistent with the prevailing achievement ideology in the United States which touts individual talent and effort as the key determinants of one's chances to succeed in school (Lareau, 2003). Yet the ways in which the young people acted on these values (or were encouraged to act by their parents) were discordant with commonplace strategies in US that encourage exploration of various academic subjects, group work,

elective coursework, and extracurricular activities. Mothers interpreted these US-based strategies as ineffective and leisurely, and their parenting strategies included countering these American values with Somali cultural values. For example, each of the mothers told me they worried about their children becoming “lazy” because of the American school system. Nimo explained to me that while she was living in Kenya with her family, her children learned to be independent and responsible from the teachers and implied that this is something American teachers do not teach:

[While living in Kenya] I never tell them ‘Do your homework’ or ‘Where’s your pen?’ or ‘Where’s your shoes,’ or ‘Where’s this?’ They’re doing it. That’s what the teacher [in Kenya] teach them. And we’re not saying American teacher is bad because. . .they teach. . .the kid.

Nimo suggested that American teachers, while they taught children important content, did not teach children discipline and responsibility. She believed these values were foundational to success—so their absence from US teaching practice created a learning environment that enabled laziness. The mothers’ shared concern of their children being lazy, was initially surprising to me. My first impression of the youth was that they were disciplined and with little free time. I learned in the first round of interviews with youth that weekend schedules were full of religious studies and weekdays were full of school, tutoring and homework. Take for example, my first sit-down conversation with Faiza, in which she explained to me what a typical day in the summer was for her:

A typical day would be for me, would be like waking up, reading some Quran, then eat-having breakfast, and then going to tutoring, coming back and like

getting my mom—we do chores every night. So like not at midnight but like before midnight. And then we have dinner, breakfast, and then pray again.

Layla also described a typical day (during the school year) that included multiple tutors during the week:

I get up, I eat breakfast, I get ready and then I go to school. Then after I go to school, I go to my classes. First I go to advisor, which is just like classroom like study hall. And then I go to first hour until sixth hour and sixth hour ends at 2:13 then I go on my bus, I come home, and then I sit down for food, relax, cuz my lunch is like at 10:30 in the morning and then so I come home and I eat food and then I sit down and probably watch Netflix or something like that. Right now I'm watching Supergirl. And after that around 4 o'clock cuz I get home at 2:30, so around 4 o'clock I start my homework and I usually get done with it around 5:30 or if it's a little homework then 5. I don't do Kumon, but I go to this tutor place that actually helps me a lot with math because math is really confusing. I go Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays.

Parents in the study wanted their children to approach education with discipline. In order to support this approach to education, mothers structured their children's days so that academics and religion dominated their schedules. This seemed to be because there is an expectation in the Somali diaspora that young people should focus much, if not all, of their free time on religious studies and academics. Parents discouraged aspects of school that were not directly related to academics. Sports were at best tolerated, and elective coursework seemed needless from the parents' standpoint. Anything non-academic was viewed as distracting to their children's learning. Out-of-school time was rarely spent

doing anything recreational; instead they went to *Dugsi* for religious studies and tutoring for academic advancement. Parents frequently referenced Somali youth living in either Kenya or Somali as exemplars of the ideal student—one who is driven to excel without prodding. They were raising their children with these values and expectations and felt frustrated and concerned when their children did not seem to exhibit these model behaviors. Take for example my conversation with Sahra (documented in field notes) that occurred during a moment when she was expressing frustration with her daughter's (Roodoo) educational efforts:

Sahra said: "These kids' first priority is playing. Here it's A, B. In Somalia you have to be on top." She started to refer to her childhood/upbringing, saying that in Somalia "You have to look to the future. Not playing outside. You have to fight to be number 1. Who will be first?"

I told Sahra that it was clear to me that Roodoo was a smart girl. Sahra didn't disagree but said, "Allah gave you something good. You have to use it."

Sahra then told me about a cousin, who was born here, but now lives in Somalia; he is first ranked in the state. [She did not explain what this means.] Sahra says that his parents never have to say "go study. He just goes. He wants to—" "that's what Somali people are."

This field note excerpt especially demonstrates how the parents wanted their children to approach their education; with an inner determination to do what it took to excel. In her view, that type of drive is characteristic of Somali people. She also juxtaposed this approach to education with her view of American strategies. She referred to how children

in the US prioritized “playing” too much, whereas in Somalia, children only focused on religious studies and education.

Each of the mothers echoed Sahra’s point that it was inherent in their value system as both Somalis and Muslims that children should assume responsibility for their actions in education. Parents relied most heavily on the teachings of Islam to teach this particular value and guide their children to educational success. As an example, Fatima shared with me that her brother did well in his US education solely because he memorized the Quran. My field notes best share Fatima’s perspective:

Her brother came to the US at age 12. He hadn’t been in school for a while when he came; he had only been learning the Quran. When he started 5th grade in the US his teacher was impressed and would ask Fatima; ‘Tell me, what is he studying?’ He [the teacher] didn’t believe Fatima’s brother didn’t have a background in traditional academics. He was an A student. According to Fatima, he was one of the “most intelligent” kids in the class because he memorized the Quran.

Fatima went on to tell me that the Quran teaches that “When you do wrong, you can’t blame others . . . It’s your responsibility,” which in an educational setting could be interpreted to mean that if an individual does not achieve positive outcomes, it is because that person did not do what was necessary to achieve them.

Kowsar also shared with me her view on the educational benefits of memorizing the Quran, which I documented in my field notes:

She said that learning the Quran is important because it sort of clears your head and makes room for good stuff. She also pointed out that it can help you do well in school because the Quran talks about social studies and science.

Among the parents and adults in my study, the Quran was viewed as among the most essential resources that young people needed to be successful in education. Parents ensured that youth spent a better part of their Saturdays and Sundays attending *Dugsi*—an Islamic school at which the youth learned and memorized the Quran. And yet according to Ibrahim, attending *Dugsi* on the weekends was “not enough.” In a conversation among me, him, and Fatima, he went on to say that there was “too much free time” for youth in the U.S. Fatima piped in and said “recess” and Ibrahim added “lunch.” From the perspective of the mothers, (and the program leader Ibrahim who is a father of four young boys), if their children too strongly embraced and practiced American educational strategies, they risked becoming lazy. As such, parents encouraged their children to stay intimately connected to their faith, which teaches them to approach education with rigor and focus and to take personal responsibility for their educational outcomes.

In fact, at the end of the program year, Ibrahim was in the process of moving his children and wife to Kenya (while he stayed in Minnesota). He told me he and his wife made this decision because people in Kenya “have better drive, are more honest, have more integrity and respect” because of their emphasis on Islamic studies and he and his wife wanted his children to learn these values. He referred to Layla and Khalid as examples of children who embodied these cultural values and credited this to the two years they spent living in Kenya. This prompted me to further explore this commonplace

educational and parent-rearing strategy. In the next set of findings, I share some of the youth participants' experiences living in Africa. Among these narratives, I located a theme that through these experiences, young people felt that they were capable of doing well in school (e.g. getting good grades), but it often had to come at the expense of friendship and socializing.

Focus over Friends: “I’m just here to learn”.

The previous section illustrated how parents correlated keeping Somali culture and living out the teachings of the Quran with supporting their children's success. As such, the youth seemingly embraced the same values (e.g. Khalid saying his religion teaches him discipline), but the parents suggested that their children might be veering away from these essential values because they are “playing” too much. Parents wanted their children to stay focused and disciplined. The young people wanted to please their parents, and in order to do so, the next set of findings suggests they withstood varying levels of social exclusion. Perhaps the most illustrative strategy of parents instilling a culturally endorsed worth ethic in their children, is parents making the decision to temporarily move their children out of the United States to an African country in order to hone their religious studies and become more responsible and disciplined.

I will first share parts of Roodoo's experience in Somalia. I learned in our first one-to-one conversation that Roodoo had spent a year living in Somalia with relatives. I learned this before I gained any understanding of the cultural and religious views around education in the diaspora. At that early point in the study, from my point of view, it

seemed like an adventure, and I asked her what she did for fun—learning quickly that recreation was not a part of her experience:

Joanna: Was it nice to be in Somalia though? Forget about school. What was it like? What would you do for fun and stuff?

Roodoo: I wasn't really allowed to go outside because I was usually busy.

Joanna: With school or with what?

Roodoo: So the school I was at, so basically I go to one and I come back in the morning, around 1:00, then we go to other school right across from our house, and then we'd come back home, and then we'd do our homework. By the time we're done with our homework, it's already nighttime, and it's just like "Oh, it's time to go to bed." So I went to bed.

Roodoo later explained to me that her parents "sent" her to live in Somalia because in the United States she was getting in "so much trouble." Later in the study, I learned that she had failing grades before she left and was often getting in trouble for "talking too much." Her father told me when I visited their house one day that Roodoo was able to find success in school while in Somalia (unlike her failing grades in the US.) "Because she had less things to be busy there." He went on to describe that in Somalia: "They mostly focus on education. . . Here there are games." I wondered in that moment if this was in reference to Roodoo's desire to run track and play basketball, which she told me her parents did not want her to do.

Roodoo explained to me that her school in Somalia was "tough" and they did "harder things" than in her US schools. She also mentioned that "it was hard to fit in" and

that she was “picked on” because “I didn’t speak our language the same way they did.” So, while I never learned her grades, she and her dad both told me she did well in school there—a stark contrast to her failing grades in the United States. She suggested she had become more disciplined and focused in her approach to learning, but it was seemingly at the expense of friendship and a general sense of belonging among her peers. But according to Roodoo, her mission in Somalia was to get an education, so her lack of a social life did not matter: “I didn’t try to become their friends, you know. I was just, like I’m just here to learn. I won’t talk to you, don’t talk to me.” Notably during the year of the study, when she returned to the U.S., Roodoo’s grades slipped again.

Hodan, offered a different perspective on the same theme. She was not “sent” to live in Africa, but instead had been living in Kenya for most of her life and had been raised with the educational values Roodoo was sent to gain. She shared with me that in Kenya, her social arrangements only made room in her life for faith and education, whereas in the United States, there was more free time, which was a difficult adjustment for her.

Hodan: In here, we usually have lot of times like sleeping over, and like hanging out with friends talking, and like changing classes; but in Africa, we usually don’t hang out. Well, we hang out during recess, and not most of the time because like we practice our Dugsi work—like the Islamic class. And then we come back, tutor, and sleep.

Joanna: So, you had a much busier schedule then. Do you do Dugsi or anything here?

Hodan: Yeah, well only Saturdays and Sundays.

Joanna: Do you like having more free time? Do you not like it? What's it like?

Hodan: It's kind of okay because like when we were in Africa, you don't usually have a time to like feel sad . . . When you're feeling sad you do more learning, so you can forget about it.

Notice that Hodan said she “only” had *Dugsi* on Saturdays and Sundays, implying that it was not often. Further, she mentioned she had more time to be sad here in the US, which fits with some of the stories she had told me about not making a lot of friends in the US. She was used to life that was packed with religious and academic studies, and never needed to engage in as much socializing as she was nearly required to do within the US educational system. She mentioned to me that she met one friend, who is also Somali and once lived in Kenya, but for the most part, she did not have friends in school. She reconciled this much like Roodoo did—insisting friendship and socializing were superfluous to learning: “Learning is important to me . . . When I see a lot of people like hanging around, I’m like, ‘It’s okay. You may not have friends, but you’re not here to have friends.’” I was not convinced she felt like it was “okay” to not have friends. It almost sounded like she was reciting a mantra that redirected her focus from loneliness to academics.

Other youth in the study had left the US for a period of time for only religious studies—stopping their academic studies for an extended period of time. For example, Faiza, Hamdi, and their family spent six months in Egypt the year prior to the study.. Faiza explained to me that, “We just went to go and visit Islamic country and stuff and

learn more education because their education there's really higher.” The girls and their siblings solely attended religious school and had academic tutors. Layla and Khalid and their family lived in Kenya for two years and had been back in the US for two years at the time of the study. Layla’s reflection on her two years in Kenya validated the perspective of adults that knowing the Quran can improve academic outcomes. She explained to me leaving the United States to focus on religious studies pushed her ahead of her peers:

Layla: The government in Kenya . . . they’re not really strict on going to school and I went to Islamic school though and I finished this thing called the Quran which was really important to my parents. This is the main reason why they sent me there, plus Kenya actually has a good education. I actually learned a lot.

Joanna: You went to school, the grade school.

Layla: Yeah. So fourth grade we learned like fifth grade stuff and fifth grade we learned sixth grade stuff so I was kind of ahead when I came back in the sixth grade.

Layla prioritized her Islamic studies while in Kenya, and according to her, when she returned to the United States she was ahead of her peers in school. Like Roodoo and Hodan, Layla felt studying should always come before socializing. She described to me how this educational strategy played out here in the United States:

Layla: My mom says that always school comes first. Pretty much she wants us to get a good education so I kind of take that to heart.

Joanna: Tell me more about some of the things you do to get a good education and to reach your dreams?

Layla: If a friend asks me to hang out I'd rather stay home and study for a really important test that's actually huge part of my grade than going and hanging out with my friends because there are other times for that. But this is more important because it's coming up right now. After the test maybe I could go, but not now when I have something. Discipline.

Layla provided an example of how to be disciplined in her education, and she credited her mother for teaching her this value and shaping her educational strategy.

My findings suggest that youth in the Somali diaspora are raised by their parents to stay connected to their culture—which includes knowing their faith intimately because it teaches them discipline and enforces the idea of personal responsibility in their education. The next section explores the second part of this strategy—applying this work ethic while in the United States—a country of “opportunity.” Youth were expected and encouraged by their parents to reap the benefits of their intense religious studies and strict adherence to their Somali cultural values as an American because of the plentiful educational opportunities in the US.

Connecting Children to American Opportunities: “Don’t miss what I missed.”

The previous section demonstrated that parents in the Somali diaspora held an expectation that if their children understood their faith, they would have the clarity of mind and discipline needed to be motivated to take on their academic studies with rigor, discipline, and personal responsibility. While the parents insisted that a disciplined

approach to education was superior to the more mainstream, American way, they still believed there were more opportunities and helpful resources for their children to transform their cultural approach to into educational and subsequent career success in the United States. Nimo explained that she was determined to connect her children to anything in this country that would help them succeed:

When I was in Somalia I went up to eighth grade. I was planning to go high school and college. My family pretty much they was educated; my uncle and my cousin, my mom, two brothers. They finished University of Somalia. The one who teach us English in Somalia even before the civil war happened. One [brother] is [at] the University of Italy. He speaks Italian. . . . And the other [brother] he go another University; he graduated from there. He teach them. So my plan was to be like them, but civil war happened. So I always tell my kid, “Don’t miss what I missed. Yeah, you have to have everything. Here we have a car, we have everything.” I can take them library, everything there. We don’t have that much. That opportunity even the financial more we have it here. So I always talk to them. “Everything I’m ready. Just ask me what you want. If your homework is hard, just ask me. I will get it somebody help you. No, matter where I get it; don’t worry about it.” . . . My sister is pharmacist and other sister. My uncle, my other sister, she is full nurse and everything. I can go them their home, drive you there to teach you. But the kid in here they don’t see that opportunity. I don’t know why.

Nimo believed that her children had access to the material resources (e.g. car, library), social resources (e.g. educated relatives); and economic resources they need to succeed—

a stark contrast to her own, and the other mothers' life experiences in their middle years. Each of the mothers in the study fled Somali in their early teen years and spent most of their adolescence in refugee camps without access to any of the resources Nimo mentioned her children now had. When I asked the Savanna Hills mothers to describe to me the ways in which they supported their children in their education, they each explained to me that they drove them to educational and career experts. When I noticed it was only mothers driving young people to the youth program and driving their children to other educational programs, I asked Ibrahim to offer his perspective on why this was. My field notes show his explanation for the youth's mothers' strategies for helping their children:

Ibrahim explain to me that moms don't get hands on, but will ask, "What does my kid need?" or "What can you do for my kid? I'll drive all the way from Minneapolis" He explained that they [moms] rely on school or programs to meet the needs of their young people, but the moms make sure the child is participating in what the parents believe to be what is best for their kids and their future.

Youth from both sites often missed program because they were going to see tutors or staying after school to get help from their teachers. Marwa, Layla, and Khalid would often go to a tutoring session immediately following the youth program, and the youth program itself was initially developed as a homework help center, as parents wanted educated people helping their children with their academics. During interviews, when I would ask the young people to name some of the things they were doing to reach their goals and aspirations, many would tell me that they went to tutors or spent extra time with teachers—an educational approach their mothers encouraged and arranged. Khalid

told me that his mom took him to tutors where he could “get ahead” and Fatima explained to me that she took her children to tutors because, “I don’t want them to be behind.” Mothers structured their children’s time so that they could connect with experts and gain the skills and knowledge they needed to do well in school; their children carried out this obligation set by their parents and embraced it as their own educational strategy.

Faiza’s narrative perhaps best illustrates this educational strategy. During the youth’s spring semester, I hardly ever saw her as she was regularly seeing a tutor during program time. I should preface this saying, that prior to her missing program to attend tutoring sessions at a learning center that her mother described to me as “so expensive” she had already been attending two other tutoring places *after* the youth program and other the non-program evenings. Her mother signed her up for a different tutor because she felt Faiza was not going to graduate because of her grades and whispered to me during as she was picking up her children from the program, “I need to push her.” When I finally had an opportunity to sit down and speak with Faiza after her long absence from program, she explained why she had been spending so much time with a tutor:

Joanna: So okay, first tell me what happened. Is it like you came home with the report card or your mom looked at your portal or whatever and said, "Oh we got to—." What was the process that made you decide or did your mom decide it all?

Faiza: It was like I had MCA scores and you know, what the MCAs are?

Joanna: Yeah, shouldn’t that have happened now?

Faiza: Yeah, it’s happening now but last year I kind of flunked and they put me in a class named the Northstar room. It’s like English but

then you—but just like in small individuals [meaning a smaller teacher to student ratio]. So there's like 10 kids in the class. And so you have more attention from the teachers and stuff like that. So that's the classroom and then my mom didn't want me to be in that class and she wanted to go higher than that, show them that I'm good, and that's why I go to Sylvan [a corporate and franchised learning center that offers tutoring and academic support].

Joanna: So what did she say to you? "Hey we're going to do this?" Or how did she come to you with that?

Faiza: I think she Googled the website and stuff like that and people told her about the program . . . I went there and I took a test and then I just started in the beginning.

Joanna: Were you okay with going? Did you want to go?

Faiza: I wanted to go because I wanted to improve myself. Because I want—I don't why, but I think I zone out when I'm getting taught something.

...

Joanna: And why does it matter to you to even --?

Faiza: Because I wanted to become -- like I said, I went to become doctor. And my mom wanted me to have good grades and high standard vocabularies when I'm speaking.

Faiza went on to tell me that before she started getting extra academic support at Sylvan (earlier in the semester), she had a C in English class; in April, she told me she had an A.

But, Faiza did not enact her agency by herself; her mother was critical to what she did. Her mother “pushes,” and Faiza asserted that she wanted to go to the tutor so she could “improve herself.” Layla described a similar linked agency in her educational approach with tutors telling me “She [her mom] does sign me up [for tutors] and I just respect her decision.” Faiza’s agency was also tied to her mother and her aspirations—she connected her and her mothers’ decision to go to a tutor to her aspiration of being a doctor, which is in turn connected with her mother’s expectations that she be academically astute. The strategies and decisions young people made toward aspirational achievement were entangled in the strategies and decision of their parents. Roodoo’s father explained to me that the reason he “pushes” his children so hard is because if they did not succeed, then he and their mother would be to blame for their failure. My findings suggest that in the middle years, youth agency and aspirations in the Somali diaspora are not individually enacted or possessed, but occur when youth interact with their parents and the cultural values they espouse (DeJaeghere, 2016).

This section demonstrated that with the urging of their parents, youth were meeting with academic experts to presumably gain the knowledge and skills they needed to excel in school. The youth participants considered working with tutors a primary way in which they exercised their abilities to achieve valued outcomes in education. Yet, the capabilities approach does not equate access to resources like tutors to young people’s abilities to turn these resources into aspiration achievements. Young people employed a work ethic that emphasizes personal responsibility, focus, and discipline. They also were faced with and confronted discrimination and stereotypes while working toward their educational aspirations. This dissertation’s final theme deeply explores the narratives of

Marwa and Roodoo and shows the ways in which they struggle to bring their Somali cultural resources (e.g. the need to “step up,” rigor, and adherence to faith) into non-diasporic social fields. While these two young teens had completely different educational outcomes, they both were navigating a concomitant sense of belonging and isolation as they sorted out ways to achieve their evolving educational aspirations.

Pursuing Aspirations amidst Belonging and Isolation

My findings thus far have demonstrated that the young people in this study have a strong sense of connectedness to the Somali diaspora. In this final section, I explore the educational pathways of Marwa and Roodoo in order to give attention to the ways in which young people navigate both belonging and isolation in the diaspora as they strive to live a life, and pursue a future, they consider valuable.

The capabilities approach is a useful framework for understanding these pathways because it focuses on whether a person is placed in conditions in which she can pursue her ultimate aspirations. Sen (1995) asserted that understanding the resources and even achievements a person has may be “imperfect indicators of the freedom the person really enjoys” (p. 37-38). It is more critical to evaluate the personal and social factors connected to that individual in order to understand if she has the opportunities to achieve her aspirations. In this final findings section, I investigate youth agency as enacted within personal, environmental, and social conditions. The narratives of Marwa and Roodoo are particularly compelling because in many ways, they are totally different young people with different educational outcomes: Marwa ended her freshman year with a 3.9 grade point average and is described by her younger sister as a “brainiac.” Roodoo ended the year with failing grades and needed to enroll in summer school. And yet they both were

navigating similar conditional contradictions as young people connected to the Somali diaspora. This suggests that their agency cannot be fully understood in terms of their grades or other educational outcomes (Hart, 2012). It requires an understanding of the ways in which they exercised their abilities within certain contexts.

To demonstrate their agency in navigating contradictions, I first will provide deeper biographic backgrounds of these two young teens. Marwa attended a high school at which the student body is predominately white, and she shared tearful stories of feeling marginalized on account of her identity with me. She did her homework every day in program, with a headset on—blocking out the sounds of her peers. She found coursework easy—even her enriched classes. She was often quiet, but not shy. She told me she preferred to not talk often and worked alone, even when among friends. She told me, “I don’t really like speaking in public, but then I have these really good ideas. I put them down but some other people will say it.” Despite the fashion mockery of her younger sister, she was usually clad in a hoodie sweater and never wore make-up. Roodoo, also a freshman in high school, was failing many of her courses and admitted that she was “not really a responsible person,” that she did not study, and she sometimes slept in class. She told me she had “never had a problem with racism” because she lived in a predominately Somali/Muslim community and attended a charter school—at which the majority of the student population is Somali and Muslim. Unlike Marwa, who preferred to keep to herself, Roodoo described herself as “an open book” who “tells everyone her secrets.” She loves fashion and make-up and was often experimenting with her look. Yet, despite these differences, my findings show that both Marwa and Roodoo encountered similar structural limitations sets on their opportunities to achieve their educational aspirations.

They both navigated a sense of isolation outside of and within the diaspora, were hesitant to seek educational help, and identified their mothers as their biggest educational supports.

Taking Lonely Pathways: “On an island by myself.”

I begin by visiting a practice college essay I offered to the all the youth participants in both programs. For her college essay, Marwa answered a prompt asking her to identify a time when she challenged an assumption or belief. She wrote about how she signed up for enriched classes and expressed a feeling of solitude from being the only person of color in her class:

When I got to those classes there weren't any other Somali boys or girls in there. I kinda found that disheartening because there weren't many or close to none people I could be friends with. Also being the only person of color in my classes was also hard because I often felt like I was on an island by myself.

Marwa felt alone and isolated among students and felt that their different identities served as a barrier to friendship, but that is not the complete picture. She also felt isolation among her Somali friends. She went on to write that she felt like she was being “discouraged [to take enriched courses] just by my ethnicity.” While she alluded that many people feel Somali youth are not smart (e.g “It is a popular belief in my school that Somali people weren't able or smart enough to be in higher level classes.”), the examples of discouragement she offered pointed to interactions with her friends who also are part of the Somali diaspora. I had already learned in an earlier conversation (in October) that

most of Marwa's friends were Somali and that they felt that Somali youth did not belong in enriched classes:

Joanna: Are most of your friends Somali American too?

Marwa: Most, yeah.

Joanna: Did you meet most of them [of your friends] at school?

Marwa: Most of them. They're not like mostly in my classes and stuff, cuz like I take mostly honors stuff and then they don't want to like do that.

Joanna: So are you unique among your friends then with all your honors classes?

Marwa: Yeah, they're mostly like "Why are you taking that? You don't really need it." And I'm like "um, I dunno. I just want to take it I guess."

Marwa was racially and ethnically different than other students in her enriched classes, but she also separated herself from her friends who shared her Somali identity by challenging social expectations and taking enriched classes, suggesting she did not quite belong in either social settings.

Like Marwa, Roodoo also felt lonely in her education. Different than Marwa she was, according to her, "surrounded by Muslims," so being racially or ethnically different than her peers is not a contributing factor to the isolation she felt in school. One evening I arranged to meet Roodoo and her sister at the program, but they were absent, so I called their mother because I wanted to follow through on the promise I made to her to help her daughters with their writing. Since the girls said they were too tired from staying after

school for extra help, we arranged that I would come over to her house to help them. Upon arrival, I noticed immediately Roodoo was despondent and seemingly exhausted. When I prompted her sister and her to write an essay, Roodoo just stared at the paper and said, “I don’t get it.” I knew at that point she was struggling in school, so I asked her to draw what and how she was feeling in school. Figure 4 is what she created while I was at her home talking with her parents.

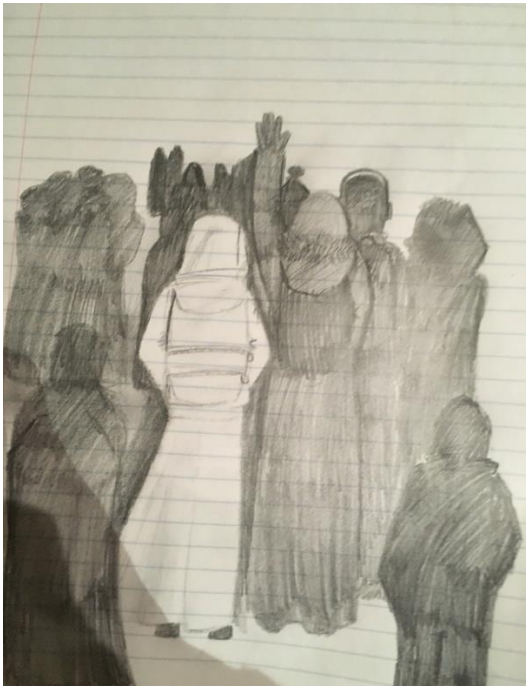


Figure 4. How Roodoo feels in school.

Like, Marwa, Roodoo felt lonely among her peers who belonged to the same the diasporic community as she did. In almost a reverse situation as Marwa, Roodoo felt as though she was the only one among her peers who was not smart. This entry from the field notes I took after my visit at her home illustrates why Roodoo felt this way:

After the long conversation with her parents, I went to sit next to Roodoo to learn about her picture, [which she explained it depicted that] she felt all alone at school. Like everyone knew the answer and she didn’t. Everyone understood

things but her. I asked if there were friends who could help her, she said no. I questioned whether they all really understood things better, but perhaps Roodoo just had the perception of that. She said no because they all know each other's grades. She said there are girls with more than 100% and "I can't even get a passing grade."

Marwa felt like she was the only one who gave herself permission to be smart among her Somali friends. Roodoo felt like she was the only one who was not smart. What these young teens shared in common is a feeling of isolation within a place or community where they also claimed they most belonged. Specifically, they felt like there was no one on whom they could rely to receive help in their school settings. Roodoo, felt like no one could help her understand content. Marwa felt like she had no one before her who accomplished what she hoped to accomplish in school. In the next section I demonstrate that a contributing factor to this loneliness is that they both felt like they were without people who could help them engage in their educational settings with ease.

Noting an Absence of Mentors: "There's no one to help me."

This sense of loneliness youth felt is striking when situated in the cultural context of the values of personal responsibility. The youth in this study had been raised to take personal responsibility for their education. This is not to say parents were refusing to help. Recall Nimo saying she wanted her children to "just ask" and she would take them to whatever help they needed. One way mothers supported their children was by connecting them with experts who could provide them with the knowledge and skills the parents felt their children needed to be successful in school. Roodoo's father further suggested that connecting his children to teachers is one of the best things he as a parent

could do. He explained to me that in Somalia they believed that in order to help your children it must be “Teacher and kid. No parent in between them.” He did not believe there could be a bad teacher because of the high level of training they received to become teachers. He and the other parents in the study believed that if young people were connected to these experts, then they had what they required to be successful in education.

And yet, it seems as though experts to help with knowledge and skills were not what the youth in this study—and Marwa and Roodoo in particular—were craving. Both Marwa and Roodoo shared narratives in which they felt they were without mentors—specifically mentors who could help them navigate their dual lives of being both Somali and American. For example, the first time I interviewed Marwa we discussed her identity wheel. She told me that in the future, she wanted to pave her own path, knowing that there were few people who shared her identity living out the life she hoped to live in the future:

Marwa: Like most people only see themselves as like American or Somali. But as a mix of them . . . if you combine both cultures, that’s what I really am. I probably want to be like the first person to be like where I am.

Joanna: Like with this identity? Do you have any role models, like maybe Somali American, female, Muslim math activists in your life?

Marwa: Not really. So I guess that’s like why I feel--

She later named role models like Michelle Obama and Malala, but of course these are not role models with whom she had any interaction. When further explaining why she

thought there are few Somali youth in enriched classes, she again pointed to the lack of mentorship or role models in her life and how this could be an obstacle to trying to achieve something no one who shared her same identity had done before:

If you look at who's like in the enriched classes in our school system, there's not many Somali people or other people that aren't white in general in the classes. I think it was just like something people thought. They were like "Other people before us didn't do it, so like it's probably not for us". . . They were like "our cousins or our friends didn't really do it so then I don't think we can do it too and stuff."

While Marwa found resolve within herself to take enriched courses, she still found herself wondering what her pathway might be like if she had mentors. At an industry visit to 3M, one of the speakers spoke about how, as an African American young boy interested in science, he had a mentor who believed in him. Marwa, who had admitted that she preferred to be quiet in larger group scenarios, raised her hand and asked him, "Do you think you'd be doing what you're doing without mentors?" Then, when her youth group reflected on the experience the next week, she stated her biggest takeaway from the field experience was that "you need mentors." When I asked her why that topic interested her, she replied, "I guess because I never ask for help." Marwa did not need help improving her grades or doing well in school, but was curious about how mentorship might help her transform her academic accomplishments into achieving her aspirations of going to college, having job, or just being the "first" to achieve something and live a future life she valued.

As previously stated, Roodoo was not doing well in school and had many failing grades. She blamed her educational performance on own inability to focus and on her lack of understanding around the content. I asked her what she did when she was studying and did not understand something and she said, “There is no one there to help me, so I just exit out.” Like Marwa, she did not ask for help. It is worth noting that there were about two months during the school year that Roodoo would stay after school in order to receive help from her teachers, but it seemed a futile effort—an extension of the frustration she was already feeling during the school day. She told me that when the teacher talked she just heard “blah blah blah,” did not understand what they were saying, and remained confused.

I asked her why she did not ask for help and she said it was because “I’m wack.” In my final conversation with her, Roodoo explained in more detail her resistance to seeking help saying, “I don’t like getting help from other people . . . I like being independent. I hate people telling me ‘Oh my god, you can do this.’ I’m just like, ‘I don’t need your help. I got this.’” Roodoo dismissed educational encouragement from others. This could be because despite encouragement, she still had not been able to transform her educational outcomes. And yet, she seemed to crave a different kind of help outside of academic support. I would often see Roodoo going to Kowsar for advice in her life outside of school. For example, she wanted Kowsar to help her get a job at the Mall of America, or at the very least, at a place outside of the Cedar Riverside neighborhood where she could hang out with her friends and earn her own money, but Sahra, her mom would not allow it.

Marwa and Roodoo were resistant to seek help in their education, likely because they had been taught to carry the onus of their educational performance on their shoulders. As Roodoo's dad said as he stopped me from trying to schedule a time to help Roodoo with her schoolwork, "The person seeking knowledge must follow. Not the person giving it." These two youth both navigated their educational pathways resistant to seek help (yet were expected to ask for it), but with a quiet pining for a specific type of mentor—someone who could help them live out dueling expectations in their different social worlds. Accompanying this want for a mentor was also a curiosity to do things in (and outside of) education that transgressed the values upheld so fervently in the diaspora. This final section explores this contradiction the young people in this study navigated as they stretched the ways in which they exercised their abilities to achieve their aspirations beyond diasporic borders.

Keeping and Resisting Family Values: "It's not like I don't like it, but I want to try new things."

I once heard a SYS staff member explain that parents in the Somali diaspora put their children in a "dome"—meaning they place geographic, social, and cultural boundaries around their children in an effort to keep them connected to their Somali culture as well as to prevent them from harm. This has foundations in cultural and religious beliefs about how to raise children that trace back to Somalia. Many of the Somali adults told me that in Somalia, childrearing was a community undertaking. Fatima shared with me that she was only five years old when she first was left to stay home by herself in Somalia, but she was fine because the neighbors would check in on her. Ibrahim, who was a part of my conversation with Fatima chimed in to explain that most

mothers would prefer to raise their children with this “community approach” here in the United States, but it could not work because of the “different religious philosophy.” Sahra one day explained why this approach to childrearing did not work in the United States. She told me that in Somalia “everyone is an aunt” and that kids “here” are “on their own,” meaning no one watches out for them, which is why she believed everyone Roodoo’s age was doing drugs or doing other “bad things.” Because the Somali parents in this study wanted to uphold their “religious philosophy” when raising their children, they tried to keep their children from venturing into more mainstream things (e.g. neighborhoods, friend groups, dress codes). This accomplished two things: It helped their children stay safe (e.g. Faiza and Hamdi’s mom were often worried about them getting kidnapped). And, keeping their children enclosed in diasporic values would help their children become “successful” in the future. That is why the moms saw it as their job to get their children connected to Somali culture—as explained by the Savanna Hills moms in the following thread:

Hibaaq: They [their children] say we’re not in Somalia. When they grow up usually and become in high school, you can’t do anything. They wear whatever they want.

Nimo: You just tell them, don’t tire. Just tell them who you are, where you’re from, what your culture, how you succeed; that why we are parents. That’s what we do our job.

Hibaaq and Nimo predicted almost a loss of control that might happen as their children got older and a concern that their children might deviate from the path they set out for them. I caught small glimpses of youth expressing themselves in their ways countering

parents' view of who they should be: I saw Nimo roll her eyes when people commented on the length of Khalid's hair. Roodoo's mother often rolled her eyes when she saw Roodoo experimenting with her make up.

It is important to emphasize at this point that young people in this study did not see their parents as holding them back, and that is not my interpretation either. In a previous section, I shared how they all felt their parents (as Layla) described encouraged their children to "go for the gold." Every youth in this study identified their parents (mostly their moms) as the people who most supported them in their education and helped them work toward achieving their dreams. Both Marwa and Roodoo made it abundantly clear that their moms kept them heartened on their educational pathways and were indispensable sources of support for them. Marwa talked about how her mother held check-ins with her to assess her progress on thinking about her future:

She really loves helping us. She's like, if you want to do something, then you should look more into it. And then she asks us a lot about what we want to do.

Like every other month, she's like, "Have you thought about any stuff?" Then we just talk about it.

Roodoo, in the same conversation in which she expressed she felt pressure from her parents to do well and be a good person, also expressed that her mom was the primary person who had kept her on a positive educational path. She shared with me:

She's always telling me to do the best job I can and that really helps me sometimes. Because with my friends, you know when I get Fs and I get really upset. I get frustrated because it's really hard when you think you passed, but you

didn't actually and I just get really frustrated . . . [She tells] me, "It's going to be okay, you're going to be better next time."

Their mothers' encouragement kept them heartened in their educational pursuits.

However, the ways their moms supported them was at times a bit of a mismatch with the norms and institutional culture in American schools, and their moms were not and likely could not be their mentors to navigate the challenges they faced in school. Case in point, Marwa and Roodoo invested time trying to convince their mothers of the validity to approaches to education that differ from the rigor and personal responsibility they instilled in their children. For example, Marwa had to convince her mother that electives were not needless and that it was in fact okay to have some fun while in school:

Marwa: My mom she wants me to take like core classes and stuff and no electives and stuff, but I'm like, oh yeah, I have to take electives because if I'm just like taking the core classes, that's only two years and I need to like take electives.

Joanna: Electives like Phy Ed and those type of things?

Marwa: No um, Phy Ed is like a core class. Electives is all the things that you want to do to get ready for college or just like for fun.

Joanna: Why do you think she doesn't want you—

Marwa: I dunno, cuz like she sees it as not having any work in that class, I guess. And then I have to explain to her that if I only have work that is really hard.

Marwa explained to her mother that having fun in school would not be detrimental to her educational success—feeling the need to help her mom understand that there were

approaches to education that were different than what Fatima encouraged and endorsed. Fun in school transgressed the aforementioned Somali approach to education that emphasizes rigor and discipline.

Like Marwa, Roodoo tried to counter her mother's view of what her educational pathway should look like. She craved social engagement outside her academic and religious life. In fact, Roodoo said she wanted to leave her charter school and attend a high school that was part of an independent district in a nearby suburb. One day at program, I noticed she was looking at this suburban high school's website. I asked her why she was looking at it, and she said because she wanted to go there. This led to a tense conversation between her mom and her. Roodoo argued: "You can pick your own classes, Hooyo! . . . I like interesting topics. We have [a college prep program], but that's it. . . . I want to do stuff." Sahra dismissed her daughter's plea and insisted Roodoo should focus on being the best in her education—not on "playing." Roodoo enacted agency by trying to gain entry into social worlds outside of the Somali diaspora (e.g. a new school, a job at the Mall of America). But from her mother's view this would distract her from being a good Somali and Muslim person and from doing well in education. In my final interview with Roodoo she explained to me that she was trying to find ways to spend time with people from "different cultures" and to have "friends who are not Somali." I asked her why that was, and she said, "Because it's like I feel like I've never been to the actual outside world. I'm always around Somali people . . . It's not like I don't like it, but just I want to try new things." Roodoo did not want to completely abandon her life in the Somali diaspora, but wanted to feel free to interact in and experience social worlds outside of it. Herein lies the contradictions youth faced: Young people were

navigating ways to act in accordance with their religion and to meet cultural expectations because these were things that were important to them and helped them achieve their aspirations. But in acting in accordance to diasporic norms and expectations they struggled to fully engage in the other aspects of mainstream culture and education systems that might have helped them do or be things that they considered valuable.

The findings from this chapter brought attention the varied ways in which young people acted, reacted, and interacted with others in order to navigate contradictions that occurred in their lives on account of being American youth who belong to the Somali diaspora. These findings showed that social fields—namely, school (where Western values dominate) and family (where Somali diasporic values dominate)—were key influences on youth agency. These youth experienced belonging differently depending on what field they found themselves in and enacted agency by trying to gain status or secure resources in these multiple fields. Youths' abilities to freely act toward achieving valued beings and doings was made difficult by the contradictory cultural logics and sets of relationships across their multiple social arrangements. In the next chapter, I discuss the implications of these findings and make suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This dissertation was rooted in the belief that education can transform youths' lives. Its purpose has been to understand the ways in which young people who belonged to the American Somali diaspora were acting upon and within their social worlds while striving to achieve their aspirations for a valued future through educational attainment.

As such, I aimed to answer two core research questions:

1. How do youth (in grades 6-9) in the American Somali diaspora describe their educational aspirations for the future?
 - a. In what ways do social conditions influence their educational aspirations?
2. In what ways do youth (in grades 6-9) in the American Somali diaspora exercise their abilities to achieve their educational aspirations amidst obstacles and opportunities?

Answering these questions is critical because youth in the Minnesota Somali diaspora have been disengaging from their educational pursuits in droves and are among the lowest achieving social groups in the state (Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2016; TAYO Consulting Report), despite their beliefs (or at least early beliefs) in education's ability to improve their lives (Minnesota Student Report, 2016). While most studies about youth in the Somali diaspora demonstrate that young people face a slew of obstacles in their educational endeavors on account of their Somali and Muslim identities, there has been little empirical understanding of the strategies they employ in their educational settings in the face of these obstacles. There has also been a disproportionate focus on the challenges youth face; little has been written about the social supports on which they rely. Disengagement from education has been a reasonably assumed result of discrimination,

but this study examined those possible instances or processes that led to disengagement (and engagement) by looking at youth agency and bringing attention to what Lareau and Horvat (1999) would call “the process through which individuals activate” their cultural and social resources in contexts like school and home (p. 38). There is also little empirical understanding of the ways in which Somali youth think about their futures and how their agency in educational settings is connected to the ways they imagine their futures. Young people and their families bank on the idea that educational attainment can bring youth a future that is better than previous generations were able to attain. And yet, there is little understanding of youths’ aspirations and the social conditions that form aspirations for young people living in the diaspora. In the next sections, I summarize the findings presented in Chapters Four and Five emphasizing the contribution of this research as well as its implications for practice and future research.

Summary of Findings

Youth in this study had aspirations for a future that included living a life that could benefit others—particularly their families and those in Somalia—as well as one in which they could use their talents. These aspirations were imagined in an enmeshment of values and expectations prevalent in the Somali diaspora and then reimagined in non-diasporic social settings. My findings also revealed that youth faced anti-Muslim racism and discrimination that placed structural limits on their ability to act toward valued outcomes in education—such as being taunted by peers or wrongly placed in remedial coursework. In response to these structural limits, youth asserted and defended their social identity to those who denigrated it. Youth also acted to achieve their desired educational outcomes by espousing and carrying out the cultural values of their parents:

relying on their faith and on experts to inspire an inner drive to succeed. The young people in this study had social (e.g. parents, tutors) and cultural (e.g. religious, educational values) resources they invested in their education, but not all these resources aligned with the norms and expectations of the school or other social contexts outside of the diaspora. Because of this, youth navigated trying to belong both in the Somali diaspora and in mainstream American society so that they could create and achieve a life they valued in and through education.

Aspirations in the Somali Diaspora

The findings put forth in Chapter Four answered the first set of research questions and investigated aspiration formation among young people in the Somali diaspora. The findings revealed that when young people described their futures, they were not just expressing who they hoped to become, but they were expressing who they were in the present—American children of Somali refugees. Most of the young people in the study, at one point in time, said they aspired to become a doctor. This aspiration was not connected to an individual interest in science or medicine, but instead to an acquiescence to their parents' hope and encouragement that they should receive an education so that they can obtain a job that will be beneficial to those living in Somalia. While some of my colleagues viewed this as problematic because these aspirations were not individually chosen, at this point in their lives, young people saw the influences of their parents' cultural background as advantageous to their educational pursuits. Appadurai (2004) argued that culture (which is often mediated and upheld through family networks) can enable youth agency towards a new future that “contest and alter the conditions” of their past and present (p.54); the young people in this study aspired to achieve what was not

possible for their parents and to people who are currently living in what is still considered to the youth a homeland—Somalia. Understanding this matters, because as DeJaeghere (2016) points out, culture need not be an “inhibitor of change” (p. 3). In the case of the young people in this study at this moment in time, their social and cultural identities activated youth agency to do well in school and to fervently defend their identities and abilities. It was because of their belonging in the Somali diaspora that they aspired to do well in school.

Scholars like Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and Omar (2011), or scholars working in the traditions of Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) early work on social reproduction, might tread cautiously with these optimistic findings—concerned that the young people were aspiring for things that were out of their reach because of the structural limitations of the opportunities available to them to achieve these aspirations. Yet, while there is certainly evidence (e.g. Hart 2012, Kao & Tienda, 1998) that aspirations can be tempered or quelled as youth who are marginalized become more keenly aware of the structural barriers along their pathways, this should not mean that this optimism for a valued future should be viewed as “blighted hope” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 150). Instead, I argue it points to the urgency of addressing issues of educational disengagement while youth are in their middle years. It seems that this point in time of these young people’s lives and development might be a key time for teachers, administrators, community leaders, and policy-makers to concentrate efforts on supporting youth thriving in the Somali diaspora. This leads to my recommendation that US educational policies need to move beyond the encouragement of aspirations among youth who are marginalized (e.g. initiatives to get more marginalized youth interested in STEM fields). The Minnesota Student Survey

(2016) showed youth in the Somali diaspora are committed to education in eighth grade and my findings further suggest that the young people in this study aspire to attain higher levels of education so that they can help others and they have family members who encourage them to achieve this aspiration. Young people in the Somali diaspora were not lacking aspirations, but instead faced constraints acting toward aspirations achievement. Policy and practice should be geared toward alleviating these constraints.

It is important at this point to emphasize that analytically, the capabilities approach is less concerned with which valued aspirations youth elect. Sen (1999) argued that the acquisition of certain capabilities may not necessarily lead to a direct achievement or functioning—such as a career as a doctor. And yet, aspiring for the future matters because it can promote the development of more complex capabilities that can position them to improve their livelihoods as adults (Terzi, 2007). Having aspirations—the ability to imagine alternative futures—therefore is foundational to the expansion of opportunities for youth (Conradie & Robeyns, 2013; DeJaeghere, 2016). So even with changing aspirations through time, like what happened with Marwa, Khalid, and Roodoo, having the capabilities to aspire for valuable futures through education “unlocks” (Conradie & Robeyns, 2013, p. 565) Somali diasporic youths’ abilities to act on behalf of their aspirations as long as they have the opportunities to do so (Alkire, 2005b). Further, the core contribution of Chapter Four is that it shows youth imagining futures in multiple contexts. The changing aspirations of the three older youth does not necessarily indicate that they are rerouting their educational plans, but instead is a signal of their evolving engagement in their multiple social fields. As they entered the next stage in their adolescent development they were more deeply engaging in arrangements that existed

beyond the confines of the diaspora—the changing aspirations signal the complex and varied social field, such as higher education and work opportunities (with varying sets of values, norms, and expectations) they must navigate. The many and varied conditions that shape (and reshape) their aspirations are also the same social and cultural conditions they must agentially navigate as they aim to live out a life they consider valuable. Understanding aspirations as socially-situated allows for an understanding of the amount of freedoms youth in the Somali diaspora have to pursue the educational goals and aspirations they view as important (Sen, 1985). The next section discusses the findings that demonstrated the ways in which youth acted within these conditions—exploring youth agency.

Agency in the Somali Diaspora

Chapter Five was primarily dedicated to understanding youth agency in the Somali diaspora—the ways in which youth acted toward achieving their educational aspirations. Within the capabilities approach, agency is concerned with an individual's ability to achieve something that they value. Yet this agency is complicated by the idea that Somali diasporic youth found themselves interacting in “multiple and competing social locations” (e.g. family to school) that influenced their everyday practices, interactions, and overall educational strategies. (Decoteau, 2016, p. 303).

These contradictions embedded in youths' social arrangements has theoretical implications for the capabilities approach. Sen (1999) would posit that once barriers were removed and freedoms were expanded, then an individual would be capable of acting on behalf of her aspirations. But this study suggests that supporting agency toward aspiration achievement in the Somali diaspora is not as straightforward as decluttering and/or

paving one's educational pathway and putting upon youth "the responsibility to act." By situating this framework sociologically, relying mostly on the conceptual framing of habitus, I have been able to demonstrate that young people in the diaspora enter school with ways of being, daily practices, and explicit educational strategies that were acquired primarily from their parents and other members of the Somali diaspora. But at the same time, as American youth, they also acquire ways of being, daily practices, and educational strategies from peers at school, American television and social media, and non-school settings (e.g. the mall or basketball courts) that are different than those inherited from their families. Obstacles function as supports in certain social fields and vice versa. When it comes to their education, the youth in this study acted as reflexive agents—particularly the three high school youth. By this I mean they *recognized* the competing structural influences shaping their educational strategies. They enacted agency by attempting to create a space of belonging in two important social fields: home (where diasporic values were strongest) and school (a place systematically disadvantaging their Somali diasporic ways of being). This belonging in both spaces mattered for their educational attainment and engagement because they had opportunities to gain advantages from and within both spaces. However, when acting in either space, they navigated complicated contradictions where their biggest social supports also invited impediments to their abilities to pursue aspirations. This suggests that supporting youths' future thriving might not primarily demand the removal of structural constraints or the expansion of structural opportunities, but the furnishing of support for youths' agentic abilities to navigate the contradictions that they face as they try to achieve valued futures within and across discordant social fields.

Perhaps the most conspicuous challenges, and most unambiguous barrier, to youth educational engagement presented in these findings are the encounters of discrimination and anti-Muslim racism they experienced. Youth faced up against being viewed as threats, having their religion be disrespected, and being systematically denied opportunities by being wrongly placed in remedial language courses. Many of these structural obstacles have been written about previously in other studies about Somali and Muslim youth. But this dissertation extends this research by examining that ways in which the young people enacted agency in this face of these obstacles.

Bigelow (2010) made the argument that it is “difficult to be agentic in the face of such a powerful system” (p. 155), referring to similar instances of discrimination I found in my study. I offered evidence to support this claim to an extent; it was *difficult* for the young people to simply carry on and focus in class when they felt compelled to stand up for themselves against name-calling. Take for example, Marwa’s tears around a classroom-endorsed exercise in which peers associated Islam with terrorism. Or consider Layla’s friend needing to do partner work with the boy who pulled off her hijab. But whereas Bigelow might be arguing that agency is being stymied by obstacles, I argue they young people *are* being agentic in the face of obstacles. Though not celebratory or emancipatory, they are indeed exercising their abilities to pursue a valued future in school. Little systems change resulted from their agency against constraints. To quote Layla, “Nothing was ever done about it” (referring to when she sought help from an administrator in the hijab-pulling incident). Their agency in the face of obstacles was indeed difficult and hard fought. The youth in this study asserted their Muslim and Somali identities in spaces where people denigrated it and used it as a proxy to limit their

educational opportunities. Yet youth refused to “let go” of their identities despite the structural disadvantages and pain it inflicted on them in school. This is because for the young people, being Muslim is what guided them to be a good person, to strive to do well in school, and kept them connected to their parents.

My findings also suggest that their parents were “fighting” (as Nimo explained to me about her children’s ELL placements) along with their children, butting up against disadvantaging systems, enacting agency together. These findings lead to the recommendation that teachers and administrators could support youth and their families by systematically valuing the religion and cultural strategies of Somali diasporic youth. For example, teachers and administrators could recognize pulling off a girl’s hijab is a grave offense, not a youthful prank, even if that was what the perpetrator thought. The agency among the young people in this study who attended more white, middle-class schools might have been more effective if they felt their teachers and administrators were on their side and had their back. This also points to a limitation of my findings: I never observed youth (or parents) interacting in youths’ school environment—a primary social context for the young people. This prevented me from understanding more detailed or discrepant information about the ways in which young people enacted agency in these settings. While the self-reported accounts of agency I presented in my findings are important because they privilege the experiences of the youth participants, this self-reported data about in-school interactions in particular is also limited because it cannot be independently verified. I recommend that future research investigate the ways in which young people employ educational strategies, confront discrimination, and regularly

interact with their peers and teachers *in school* in order to have a clearer and thicker description of young agency in each of youths' varied social contexts (Geertz, 1973).

My findings also suggest that youths' enactment of agency was emotionally draining. Marwa cried. Layla and Faiza screamed. Ahmed physically fought peers and according to his mom, cried alone in his room. Youth were fighting to assert their worthiness of an education in the United States, and it evoked emotions and passion within them. Future research might more deeply consider the role emotions play in youth agency and youth disengagement from their educational pursuits. For instance, consider how at age 15, Marwa exhibited a hard fought commitment to changing people's false perceptions of her and Somali girls' intelligence by enrolling in enriched classes. Yet, research on microaggressions might suggest that others' persistent doubts about her intelligence could lead to feelings of helplessness, lack of motivation, depression, anxiety, or even diminished cognitive abilities—all personal factors that could eventually hinder her ability to act and achieve her desired future (Banks, 2015). Emotions might weigh on youth cumulatively, constraining their abilities to achieve their educational aspirations.

Further, it is important to consider these more covert moments of agency in the context of feminist interpretations of habitus and reflexivity. Both Marwa and Layla enrolled in enriched classes, refusing to believe stereotypes that they could not “cut it.” Marwa and Layla both said most of their Somali friends believed the stereotypes that Somalis were less intelligent and as a result self-excluded themselves from this educational opportunity. Kenway and McLeod (2004) might argue that the habitus of Marwa and Layla's friends was “reducible to the effects of the field” (p. 528). They had

internalized institutional power relations in the school and taken on this habitus of seeing themselves as less intelligent, whereas Marwa and Layla recognized the structures shaping the embodiment of such a disadvantageous disposition and asserted their belonging in enriched courses. The school as a social field stymied agency, but the family of the youth supported it.

The religious foundations of Somali diasporic youths' educational strategies and work ethic exemplifies other ways in which agency is enacted within constraints in school as a social field. Bourdieu (1990b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) argued that people do not make choices freely, but rather people's agentic freedom is influenced, and often limited, by culture and society. Positive educational outcomes are contingent upon the ease with which students can follow rules of the dominant social group. This implies that if youth enter their educational setting with cultural assets that are discordant with the dominant group, their abilities to translate their assets into achievements are constrained. However, Bourdieu (1986) was concerned primarily with the transaction of cultural capital and its embodied practices into academic outcomes like grades; my findings reveal how youth's family mediated acts of agency made it difficult for young people to contend for a place of belonging in school. My findings also show that when the influence of non-diasporic fields, like school, heightened in young people's lives, they also felt a lack of belonging in the diaspora.

In many ways, the culturally endorsed educational strategies these youth enacted—which entailed prioritizing religion above anything else, getting help from experts, such as tutors, and the value that youth should take personal responsibility for their educational outcomes—paid off for the young people academically. Youths'

outcomes somewhat resembled the findings of Coleman's (1988) study of Catholic schools: The transmission of knowledge from adults and parent-child communication about educational progress and expectations helped the young people do well in school. Faiza improved her grades as a result of intensive tutoring sessions, Khalid and Layla claimed to return to the United States "ahead" of their peers after focusing on religious studies, Roodoo fared better grade-wise in Somalia, and Ahmed's grades improved when he went to a charter school that facilitated close social bonds with teachers and peers. In this regard, the Muslim work ethic, as I referred to it in this study, rendered educational benefits for many of the young people. However, the capabilities approach provides a framework for understanding that outcomes do not give enough information about how well a young person is really doing. (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015).

My findings show that youth were earning these outcomes in social isolation—whether it was leaving the country, leaving a school, or simply coming to terms with the idea that it was "okay" to "not have friends" as Hodan reluctantly confessed. This might again point to the importance of understanding, through future research, the cumulative role of emotion on youths' agency. Studies in youth development suggest that adolescents need to feel a sense of belonging in order to function successfully as an adult (Konopka, 1973; Pittman, 1991). These findings about their strategies and work ethic again point to contradictions in belonging—as their agency keeps them connected to a culture and religion from which they derive safety, support, and a healthy sense of religious and cultural identity, and for many, good grades in school. But it also prompts them to distance themselves from many other peers in their educational settings—fostering isolation and severed engagement from parts of society.

The young people in this study also faced expectations from parents and possibly from school social networks as well, to use the knowledge and skills they seem to successfully acquire through their educational strategies (with the exception of Roodoo who despite getting academic support struggled to improve her grades) to go on to achieve higher educational attainment and a good job that will allow them to be beneficial to society—both in Somalia and in the United States. The capabilities approach offers a framework to assess the distribution of opportunities these youth had to support their agentic abilities to convert these knowledge and skills into achievement. Deprez and Butler (2007) explained that “Sen’s core concerns are grounded in a deep understanding that social and institutional arrangement limit people’s ability to realize a life they value” (p. 216). Situating habitus within this framework is helpful in this study because it demonstrated that being able to achieve aspirations is not as simple as removing obstacles or expanding freedoms because structural barriers are embodied and “continue to work long after the objective conditions of its emergence have been dislodged” (McNay, 1999, p. 103).

In order to further theorize habitus as related to agency toward desired futures, it is important to keep in mind that using habitus as a frame for understanding cultural and religious based strategies and behaviors (as I have in this study) is different than Bourdieu’s initial theorization of class-based habitus. This is because moving out of a social class is, in a sense, youths’ desired achievement within this interpretation; whereas, the youth in this study want to leave poverty, not their religion. In the diaspora, youths’ identities as Somali and Muslim were core to who they were and was not social field they wanted to abandon, even if they wanted “try new things.” They were striving to engage

and belong in both fields with ease, not one or the other. My findings suggest youth might benefit from a mentor outside of the family to help them do this and conceivably lessen the possibility of youth disengaging from school for want of belonging. Experts who can transmit knowledge, which Coleman (1988) might suggest is a precondition for effective youth agency, were not lacking in these young people's lives. They saw tutors regularly, as their parents had high regard for the status of such educators. Stanton-Salazar's (1997, 2011) concept of an institutional agent is helpful for thinking through youths' desires for mentors, but it is limited still in this context. Stanton-Salazar pointed out that youth agency can be supported by someone who can teach and empower them on how to navigate the institutionalized Western values of school systems or social fields outside of the diaspora. However, this would seemingly require these youth to distance themselves from their families—a core source of support.

My findings suggest that the youth in this study do not need someone to translate the dominant ways of being and acting in school, but need a mentor who could help them navigate the dual life of being both Somali and American. Marwa's and Roodoo's narratives demonstrate the dual desire among young people to stay close to their families and their culture, but also to engage more deeply in other fields—by taking film and media courses or working at the Mall of America. This has implications for practice and future research. If Somali diasporic youth could benefit from caring adults or mentors who can support their agentic abilities to navigate contradictions across social fields, this gives prominence to role of youth workers and other mentors within the Somali diaspora. It suggests youth programs might best benefit young people if they were designed to foster relationships with adults (as well as peers) that could foster belonging and support

agency amidst competing social fields. It also calls for ongoing training and support for mentors/youth workers spending time with youth. However, implementing this practice effectively would require an empirical understanding of the role and potential role of youth development practitioners as they interact with young people who navigate contradictory facets of their lives that are unique to young people living in the Somali diaspora.

Transitioning from this Moment in Time in Youths' Lives

These American youth living in the Somali diaspora negotiated educational pathways full of contradictions as they strived to achieve futures they considered valuable. This study begins to illustrate the ways in which youth in the Somali diaspora activated their family mediated cultural resources and strategies in a society that favors Western values. It also begins to illustrate the ways their agency and aspirations evolved as they more fully engaged in social worlds outside of the diaspora. At this moment in time, the youth were committed to school and to their families and strived to achieve valued futures through education. Yet, the stories I shared are not over. The study concluded, but what comes next on the educational pathways for Marwa, Khalid, Layla, Faiza, Hamdi, Ahmed, Abdi, Hodan, and Roodoo is unclear. Time will tell if these young people achieve their aspirations or continue to enact agency in an effort to defend their identities and belonging in school at home. Time will also tell whether people can uphold the stamina of navigating the social conditions that belie their opportunity sets to act toward their aspirations. The temporality of this study calls for more longitudinal studies that investigate youths' agency and aspiration in subsequent stages of their development and education. This study also points to the need for educators, researchers, and

community members to better understand the culturally influenced strategies and aspirations Somali diasporic youth bring into their educational settings and to their homes. It is my hope that the understanding of agency and aspirations in the Somali diaspora presented in this dissertation will make it possible to better support young people as they strive to transform their lives and the lives of their families through education.

References

- Abdi, N. M. (2015). *Race, and religion in the making of Somali youth identities* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses @ CIC Institutions; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I. (1749792877).
- Abdi, N. (2016, December 30). How to improve education for immigrant students by ending deficit thinking. [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://cehdvision2020.umn.edu/blog/improve-education-immigrant-students-ending-deficit-thinking/>
- Adan, S., & The Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights. (2007). *Report on Somali issues*. Retrieved from http://www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@council/documents/webcontent/convert_272143.pdf
- al-Huraibi, N. (2017). Navigating the cultural divide: Islam, gender, and the integration of Somali immigrants. *Sociology of Islam*, 5(1), 56-93.
- Alkire, S. (2005a). Why the capability approach? *Journal of Human Development*, 6(1), 115–135. doi:10.1080/146498805200034275
- Alkire, S. (2005b). Capability and functionings: Definition & justification. Retrieved from <https://hd-ca.org/publication/capability-and-functionings-definition-justification>
- Alkire, S., & Deneulin, S. (2009). Human development and capability approach. In S. Deneulin & L. Shahani (Eds.), *An introduction to the human development and capability approach: Freedom and agency* (pp. 22-48). London, United Kingdom: Earthscan.

- Almond, K. (2017, February). Somalis finding their place in Minnesota. *CNN U.S. Edition*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2017/02/us/somali-minnesota-photos/>
- Alvermann, D. E., O' Brien, D. G., & Dillon, D. R. (1996). On writing qualitative research. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 31(1), 114-120.
- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso Books.
- Anyon, J. (2014). *Radical possibilities: Public policy, urban education, and a new social movement* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Apple, M. W. (2001). Comparing neo-liberal projects and inequality in education. *Comparative Education*, 37(4), 409–423.
- Apple, M. W. (2012). *Can Education Change Society?* New York, NY: Routledge.
- Appadurai, A. (2004). The capacity to aspire. In V. Rao & M. Walton (Eds.), *Culture and public action* (pp. 59-84). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Archer, L., Hollingworth, S., & Mendick, H. (2010). *Urban youth and schooling*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill Education.
- Marchal, R. (2013). Islamic political dynamics in the Somali civil war. In P. Badru & B.M. Sackey (Eds.), *Islam in Africa south of the Sahara: Essays in gender relations and political reform* (pp. 331-354). Plymouth, United Kingdom: Scarecrow Press.
- Bajaj, M. (2009). 'I have big things planned for my future': The limits and possibilities of transformative agency in Zambian schools. *Compare*, 39(4), 551-568.

Balfanz, R. (2009). *Putting middle grades students on the graduation path*. Retrieved from https://www.amle.org/portals/0/pdf/articles/policy_brief_balfanz.pdf

Banks, B.M. (2015). *The impact of microaggressions: an introductory training*.

[PowerPoint Slides] Retrieved from https://cehs.unl.edu/images/EdPsych/nicpp/NICPP_microaggression_presentation_2015-06-02.pdf

Bankston, C.L., III, & Zhou, M. (2002). Social capital and immigrant children's achievement. In B. Fuller & E. Hannum (Eds.), *Schooling and social capital in diverse cultures* (pp. 1-12). Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier Science Ltd.

Barajas, H. L., & Pierce, J. L. (2001). The significance of race and gender in school success among Latinos and Latinas in college. *Gender and Society*, 15(6), 859-878.

Basford, L. E. (2008). *From mainstream to East African charter: East African Muslim students' experiences in U.S. schools* (Doctoral dissertation) Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses @ CIC Institutions; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I. (304581839).

Berenson, T. (2016, November 6). Donald Trump: Minnesota has 'suffered enough' accepting refugees. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/4560078/donald-trump-minnesota-somali-refugees/>

Bigelow, M. (2008). Somali adolescents' negotiation of religious and racial bias in and out of school. *Theory into Practice*, 47(1), 27-34.

Bigelow, M. H. (2010). *Mogadishu on the Mississippi: Language, racialized identity, and education in a new land*. Maldon, MA: John Wiley & Sons.

- Biggeri, M., Libanora, R., Mariani, S., & Menchini, L. (2006) Children conceptualizing their capabilities: Results of a survey conducted during the first Children's World Congress on Child Labour, *Journal of Human Development*, 7(1), 59–83.
- Bok, J. (2010). The capacity to aspire to higher education: 'It's like making them do a play without a script'. *Critical Studies in Education*, 51(2), 163-178.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In J. Karabel & A. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and ideology in education* (pp. 487-510). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986): The forms of capital. In A. R. Sadovnik (Ed.), *Sociology of education: A critical reader* (2nd ed.) (pp. 83-95). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990a). *In other words: Essays towards a reflexive sociology*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990b). *The logic of practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990c). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society, and culture*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

- Bowman, D. (2010). *Sen and Bourdieu: Understanding inequality* (Social Policy Working paper No. 14). Melbourne, Australia: Brotherhood of St. Laurence and University of Melbourne Centre for Public Policy.
- Brubaker, R. (2005). The 'diaspora' diaspora. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(1), 1-19.
- Carpenter, M. (2009). The capabilities approach and critical social policy: Lessons from the majority world? *Critical Social Policy*, 29(3), 351–373.
doi:10.1177/0261018309105175
- Caskey, M. M., & Anfara, V. A., Jr. (2007). *Research summary: Young adolescents' developmental characteristics*. Retrieved from <https://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/WhatsNew/WNDet/TabId/270/ArtMID/888/ArticleID/455/Developmental-Characteristics-of-Young-Adolescents.aspx>
- Coleman, J. S. (1982). *The asymmetric society*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press
- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 94(Supplement), S95-S120.
- Coleman, J. S. (1994). *Foundations of social theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Coleman, J. S., & Hoffer, T. B. (1987). *Public and private schools: The impact of communities*. New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc.
- Collet, B. A. (2007). Islam, national identity and public secondary education: Perspectives from the Somali diaspora in Toronto, Canada. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 10(2), 131-153.
- Conradie, I., & Robeyns, I. (2013). Aspirations and human development interventions. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 14(4), 559-580.

- Connor, P., & Krogstad, J.M. (2016, June 1). 5 facts about the global Somali diaspora. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/01/5-facts-about-the-global-somali-diaspora/>
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. L. (2014). *Basics of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., Klassen, A. C., Plano Clark, V. L., & Smith, K. C. (2011). Best practices for mixed methods research in the health sciences. *National Institutes of Health, 2011*, 541-545.
- Czikszentmihalyi, M., & Larson, L. (1984). *Being adolescent: Conflict and growth in the teenage years*. New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc.
- Decoteau, C. L. (2016). The reflexive habitus: Critical realist and Bourdieusian social action. *European Journal of Social Theory, 19*(3), 303-321.
- DeJaeghere, J. (2018). Girls' educational aspirations and agency: imagining alternative futures through schooling in a low-resourced Tanzanian community. *Critical Studies in Education, 59*(2), 237-255.
- DeJaeghere, J., McCleary, K. S., & Josić, J. (2016). Conceptualizing youth agency. In J. DeJaeghere, J., J. Josić, & K.S. McCleary (Eds.), *Education and youth agency: Qualitative case studies in global contexts* (pp. 1-24). Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature.
- DeJaeghere, J., & Baxter, A. (2014). Entrepreneurship education for youth in sub-Saharan Africa: A capabilities approach as an alternative framework to

- neoliberalism's individualizing risks. *Progress in Development Studies*, 14(1), 61–76.
- DeJaeghere, J., & Lee, S. K. (2011). What matters for marginalized girls and boys in Bangladesh: A capabilities approach for understanding educational well-being and empowerment. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 6(1), 27. doi:10.2304/rcie.2011.6.1.27
- DeJaeghere, J., Wiger, N. P., & Willemsen, L. W. (2016). Broadening educational outcomes: Social relations, skills development, and employability for youth. *Comparative Education Review*, 60(3), 457-479.
- Demerath, P., Lynch, J., Milner, H. R., IV, Peters, A., & Davidson, M. (2010). Decoding success: A middle-class logic of individual advancement in a US suburb and high school. *Teachers College Record*, 112(12), 2935-2987.
- Dika, L. S., & Singh, K. (2002). Applications of social capital in educational literature: A critical synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(1), 31–60.
- Dreze, J., & Sen, A. (1995) *India: Economic development and social opportunity*. Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.
- English Oxford Living Dictionary. (2018). *Diaspora*. Retrieved from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/diaspora>
- Erikson, E. H. (1994). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York, NY:WW Norton & Company.
- Fernandez-Kelly, M. P. (1995). Social and cultural capital in the urban ghetto: Implications for the economic sociology of immigration. In A. Portes (Ed.), *The*

- economic sociology of immigration* (pp. 213–47). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Field, J. (2003). *Social capital*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J. U. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the “burden of ‘acting white’”. *The Urban Review*, 18(3), 176-206.
- Fukuda-Parr, S. (2003). The human development paradigm: Operationalizing Sen’s ideas on capabilities. *Feminist Economics*, 9(2-3), 301–317.
doi:10.1080/1354570022000077980
- Gale, T., & Parker, S. (2015). Calculating student aspiration: Bourdieu, spatiality and the politics of recognition. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 45(1), 81-96.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of cultures*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Giroux, H. (1982). Power and resistance in the new sociology of education: Beyond theories of social and cultural reproduction, *Curriculum Perspectives*, 2(3), 1-13.
- Grundmann, M., & Dravenau, D. (2010). Class, agency, and the capability approach. In H. Otto & H. Ziegler (Eds.), *Education, welfare and the capabilities approach* (pp. 85-100). Farmington Hills, MI: Barbara Budrich Publishers.
- Halpern, R., Heckman, P. E., & Larson, R. W. (2013). *Realizing the potential of learning in middle adolescence*. West Hills, CA: The Sally and Dick Roberts Coyote Foundation.
- Harker, R. K. (1984). On reproduction, habitus and education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 5(2), 117-127.
- Hart, C. S (2012). *Aspirations, education and social justice: Applying Sen and Bourdieu*. London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic.

- Hirsch, B. (2005). *A place to call home: After school programs for urban youth*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hixon, A., & Lorah, P. (2006). *The privilege walk*. Retrieved from: <https://edge.psu.edu/workshops/mc/power/privilegewalk.shtml>
- Ho, E. S. & Willms, J. D. (1996). Effects of parental involvement on eighth-grade achievement. *Sociology of Education*, 69(2), 126–141.
- Hussein, F. (2012). Charter schools: Choice of Somali-American parents? *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 11(1), 16.
- Israel, G. D., Beaulieu, L. J., & Hartless, G. (2001). The influence of family and community social capital on educational achievement. *Rural Sociology*, 66(1), 43–68.
- Jarrett, R. L., Sullivan, P. J., & Watkins, N. D. (2005). Developing social capital through participation in organized youth programs: Qualitative insights from three programs. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 33(1), 41–55.
- Kao, G., & Tienda, M. (1998). Educational aspirations of minority youth. *American Journal of Education*, 106(3), 349-384.
- Kaptejns, L., & Arman, A. (2008). Educating immigrant youth in the United States: An exploration of the Somali case. *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 4(1), 18-43.
- Kenway, J., & McLeod, J. (2004). Bourdieu's reflexive sociology and 'spaces of points of view': Whose reflexivity, which perspective?. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(4), 525-544.

- Konopka, G. (1973). Requirements for the healthy development of adolescent youth. *Adolescence*, 8(31), 1-26.
- Kruizenga, T. M. (2010). Teaching Somali children: What perceived challenges do Somali students face in the public school system? *International Journal of Education*, 2(1), 1-17.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2005). The evolving role of critical race theory in educational scholarship. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 115-119.
- Lamont, M., Lareau, A., Theory, S., & Autumn, N. (1988). Cultural capital: Allusions, gaps and glissandos in recent theoretical developments. *Sociological Theory*, 6(2), 153–168.
- Lareau, A. (1989). *Home advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary education*. Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.
- Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Lareau, A., & Horvat, E. M. (1999). Moments of social inclusion and exclusion race, class, and cultural capital in family-school relationships. *Sociology of Education*, 72(1), 37-53.
- Larson, R. (2006). Positive youth development, willful adolescents, and mentoring. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 34(6), 677–679. doi:10.1002/jcop
- Larson, R. W., & Tran, S. P. (2014). Invited commentary: Positive youth development and human complexity. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 43, 1012–1027.
- LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (2010). *Designing and conducting ethnographic research: An introduction*. Lanham, MD: Altamira Press.

- Leonard, M. (2005). Children, childhood and social capital: Exploring the links. *Sociology*, 39(4), 605-622.
- Levinson, B. A. U. (2011). Symbolic domination and the reproduction of inequality: Pierre Bourdieu and practice theory. In B. A. U. Levinson (Ed.), *Beyond critique: Exploring critical social theories and education* (pp. 113-137). Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Lin, N. (2001). *Social capital: A theory of social structure and action*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- López-Fogués, A. (2012). *Theorising further education through a capability lens: Vulnerability and freedoms*. Retrieved from https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/documents/research/jubileepress/workingpaper/_a-lopez-fogues-jp-final-20th-june-2012.pdf
- MacLeod, J. (1995). *Ain't no makin' it: Aspirations and attainment in a low-income neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- McLeod, J. (2003). Why we interview now--reflexivity and perspective in a longitudinal study. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6(3), 201-211.
- McLeod, J. (2012). Vulnerability and the neo-liberal youth citizen: A view from Australia. *Comparative Education*, 48(1), 11-26.
- McLeod, J., & Thomson, R. (2009). *Researching social change: Qualitative approaches*. Thousand aks, CA: Sage.
- McLeod, J., & Yates, L. (2006). *Making modern lives: Subjectivity, schooling, and social change*. Albany, NY: SUNY Pres

- McNay, L. (1999). Gender, habitus and the field: Pierre Bourdieu and the limits of reflexivity. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16(1), 95-117.
- Mikiewicz, P., Jonasson, J. T., Gudmundsson, G., Blondal, K. S., & Korczewska, D. M. (2011). *Social capital and education: Comparative research between Poland and Iceland*. Retrieved from [www.dsw.edu.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/Upload/Social Capital and education. Compraparative research between Poland and Iceland.pdf](http://www.dsw.edu.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/Upload/Social_Capital_and_education_Compraparative_research_between_Poland_and_Iceland.pdf)
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A method sourcebook*. Thousand Okas, CA: Sage.
- Minnesota Demographic Center. (2016). *The economic status of Minnesotans: A chartbook with data for 17 cultural groups*. Retrieved from https://mn.gov/admin/assets/the-economic-status-of-minnesotans-chartbook-msdc-jan2016-post_tcm36-219454.pdf
- Minnesota Department of Education. (2016). *Minnesota student survey reports 2013-2016*. Retrieved from: <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/DataTopic.jsp?TOPICID=242>
- Minnesota Historical Society. (n.d.) *Becoming Minnesotan: Stories of recent immigrants and refugees: Somali*. Retrieved from <http://education.mnhs.org/immigration/communities/somali>
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Morrow, V. (1999). Conceptualising social capital in relation to the well-being of children and young people: A critical review. *The Sociological Review*, 47(4), 744-765.
- Morrow, V., & Crivello, G. (2015). What is the value of qualitative longitudinal research with children and young people for international development? *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 18(3), 267-280.
- Nussbaum, M. (2000). *Women and human development*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Omar, Y. S. (2011). Integration experiences and youth perspectives: An exploratory study of school-going Somali youth in Melbourne, Australia and Minneapolis, Minnesota. *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 9(1), 115-136.
- Ortner, S. B. (2002). Subjects and capital: A fragment of a documentary ethnography. *Ethnos*, 67(1), 9-32.
- Otto, H., & Ziegler, H. (2006). Capabilities and education. *Social Work and Society: International Online Journal*, 4(2). Retrieved from: <http://www.socwork.net/sws/article/view/158/549>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pittman, K. (1991). *Promoting youth development: Strengthening the role of youth serving and community organizations*. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development.
- Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origin and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1-24.

- Portes, A., & Landolt, P. (1996). The downside of social capital. *The American Prospect*, 26, 18–21.
- Reay, D. (2004). Education and cultural capital: The implications of changing trends in education policies. *Cultural Trends*, 13(2), 73–86.
doi:10.1080/0954896042000267161
- Reed-Danahay, D. (2005). *Locating Bourdieu*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Robeyns, I. (2005). The capability approach: A theoretical survey. *Journal of Human Development*, 6(1), 93–117. doi:10.1080/146498805200034266
- Sadlowski, I. (2011). A capability approach fit for children. In O. Lebmman, H. Otto, & H. Ziegler (Eds.), *Closing the capabilities gap: Renegotiating social justice for the young* (pp. 215-232). Farmington Hills, MI: Barbara Budrich Publishers.
- Sadovnik, A. R. (2007). Theory and research in the sociology of education. In A.R. Sadovnik (Ed.), *Sociology of education: A critical reader* (2nd ed.) (pp. 3-21). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Saito, M. (2003). Amartya Sen's capability approach to education: A critical exploration. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 37(1), 17-33.
- Saldaña, J. (2003). *Longitudinal qualitative research: Analyzing change through time*. Lanham, MD: Altamira Press.
- Schwalbe, M. (2000). The elements of inequality. *Contemporary Sociology*, 29(6), 775-781.
- Sen, A. (1980). Equality of what? In M.S. Tanner (Ed.), *The Tanner Lectures on human values* (Vol. 1) (pp. 197-220). Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

- Sen, A. (1985). Wellbeing, agency and freedom: The Dewey lectures 1984. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 82(4), 169-221.
- Sen, A. (1993). Capability and wellbeing. In M. Nussbaum & A. Sen. (Eds.), *The quality of life* (pp. 30-53). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Sen, A. (2004). *Rationality and freedom*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sen, A. K. (2009). *The idea of justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sirin, S. R., & Fine, M. (2007). Hyphenated selves: Muslim American youth negotiating identities on the fault lines of global conflict. *Applied Development Science*, 11(3), 151-163.
- Spaaij, R., & Broerse, J. (2018). Diaspora as aesthetic formation: Community sports events and the making of a Somali diaspora. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 1-18.
- Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (1997). A social capital framework for understanding the socialization of racial minority children and youths. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67(1), 1-40.
- Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (2011). A social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students and youth. *Youth society*, 43(3), 1066-1109.
- Stanton-Salazar, R. D., & Dornbusch, S. M. (1995). Social capital and the reproduction of inequality: Information networks among Mexican-origin high school students. *American Sociological Association*, 68(2), 116-135.
- doi:10.1126/science.135.3503.554

- Stringer, E. T. (2007). *Action research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sukarieh, M., & Tannock, S. (2014). *Youth rising? The politics of youth in the global economy*. New York, NY: Routledge Publishers.
- TAYO Consulting Group. (2016). *Pathways to dignity: A human security approach to uplift Minnesota's Somali youth*. Retrieved from <http://tayocg.com/resources/>
- Terzi, L. (2007). The capability to be educated. In M. Walker & E. Unterhalter (Eds.), *Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education* (pp. 25-43). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tikly, L., & Barrett, A. M. (2011). Social justice, capabilities and the quality of education in low income countries. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31(1), 3-14.
- TPT Twin Cities PBS, Ka Joog, & Somali Museum of Minnesota (Producers). (2017). *Somalia: A nation of poets* [Documentary]. St. Paul, MN: TPT Twin Cities PBS.
- UNESCO. (2010). *Education for All global monitoring report: Reaching the marginalized*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Wacquant, L. (2011). Habitus as topic and tool: Reflections on becoming a prizefighter. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 8(1), 81-92.
- Walker, M. (2012). A capital or capabilities education narrative in a world of staggering inequalities? *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32(3), 384–393.
doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.09.00
- Walker, M. (2006). *Higher education pedagogies: A capabilities approach*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

- Walker, M., & Mkwanzani, F. (2015). Challenges in accessing higher education: A case study of marginalised young people in one South African informal settlement. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40, 40-49.
- Walker, M., & Unterhalter, E. (2007). The capability approach: Its potential for work in education. In M. Walker & E. Unterhalter (Eds.), *Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education* (pp. 1-18). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- White, R., & Wyn, J. (1998). Youth agency and social context. *Journal of Sociology*, 34(3), 314-327. doi:10.1177/144078339803400307
- Wilhide, A. (2018). *Somali and Somali American experiences in Minnesota*. Retrieved from <http://www.mnopedia.org/somali-and-somali-american-experiences-minnesota>
- Wilson-Strydom, M. (2015). *University access and success: Capabilities, diversity and social justice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Yates, L., & McLeod, J. (1996). 'And how would you describe yourself?' Researchers and researched in the first stages of a qualitative, longitudinal research project. *Australian Journal of Education*, 40(1), 88-103.
- Yosso, T. J., Parker, L., Solorzano, D. G., & Lynn, M. (2004). From Jim Crow to affirmative action and back again: A critical race discussion of racialized rationales and access to higher education. *Review of Research in Education*, 28(1), 1-25.
- Yusuf, A. I. (2012). *Somalis in Minnesota*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society.

Zipin, L., Sellar, S., Brennan, M., & Gale, T. (2015). Educating for futures in marginalized regions: A sociological framework for rethinking and researching aspirations. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 47(3), 227-246.

Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Somali American Youth: Agency and Aspirations for the Future

You and your child are invited to be in a research study of young people's aspirations for their future. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. This study is being conducted by: Joanna Tzenis of the University of Minnesota's Extension Center for Youth Development.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to understand youth aspirations and their educational pathways. Specifically, to understand how Somali youth are thinking about their future and to learn what they are doing to achieve their aspirations. I am interested in your child's points of views and in getting parents' viewpoints, even if you never discuss this topic with their son or daughter.

Procedures

If you agree to have your child be part of the study, your child will be invited to sit down and be interviewed by the researcher, Joanna Tzenis, at four different times during the year. In the interviews, your child will be asked questions about the aspirations she or he has, what they believe are their obstacles and supports, and what they are currently doing to achieve their aspirations. Each interview will take about one hour.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be invited to sit down and be interviewed by the researcher, Joanna Tzenis. In the interview, you will be asked questions about the aspirations you have for your child, the aspirations your child has for her or himself, and what you believe to be your child's biggest obstacles and supports. Each interview will take about 1 hour.

I will schedule an interview time at a time and place that is convenient for you and your child (e.g., your child's youth program or another location of your choosing).

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The risks involved in this study are the same as those people encounter in everyday life. The project's goal is to understand the aspirations and educational pathways of Somali American youth. Parents and youth will not be asked about illegal or sensitive behaviors. If you think any of the questions are too personal, you do not need to answer them.

This study is not intended to benefit individual participants. I have been a part of similar studies in the past, and many parents say they are fun and interesting. It may help you think about your child's future and how she or he might achieve your aspirations. Further,

this study may help improve youth programs and policies, which may benefit other Somali American youth in the long run.

Confidentiality

Your privacy is very important to us. You will not be asked to show any form of identification to be in the project. All information you provide will be kept private (confidential). We will not share individual parents' interview responses with anyone who is not on the research team. Your child and the program staff will not know what you told us.

Your name will not appear on the information you provide. We will use an ID number to identify your information. Only the researcher will be able to see the list linking your name and ID number. This list will be destroyed after the project is over. All information will be kept in a secure place. Only the researcher will be able to look at it. When the researcher writes reports about the study, answers from all participants will be combined and individuals will not be named.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this study is voluntary – you can decide whether to take part. If you do join but change your mind, you may stop at any time. If you refuse to join or stop the project early, your decision will not negatively affect your relationship with your child's program, the researchers, or the University of Minnesota.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is Joanna Tzenis. If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact her at:

Joanna Tzenis
O: 612-625-9771
C: 612-867-5588
tzeni004@umn.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Do you agree to be digitally recorded during the interview?

Yes

No

Do you agree to have your child's interviews digitally recorded?

Yes

No

Name (print) _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Return the signed form to the researcher at the time of data collection. You may also give it to your son or daughter to bring to the program, or return the form by mail to:

Joanna Tzenis
University of Minnesota
Extension Center for Youth Development
1420 Eckles Ave
90 Coffey Hall
Saint Paul, MN 55108

Appendix B: Youth Assent Form

YOUTH ASSENT (Prospective Sample) Somali American Youth: Agency and Aspirations for the Future

I have been informed that:

- (1) The goal of this study is to learn about youth aspirations--how young people are thinking about their future-- and to learn what they are doing to achieve their aspirations
- (2) I, Joanna, looked at a first set of short interviews to identify young people who voiced aspirations of going to college or attending a university one day and who communicated their ideas and experiences with ease and richness.
- (3) If you agree to do this part of the study, you will take part in four individual interviews about your aspirations for the future, your plans and actions to achieve your aspirations, how you overcome challenge and get help or support to achieve your aspirations and how these things might change as time goes on. Each interview will take about an hour. With your permission, the researcher would also like to interview your parent. Your decision will not affect your involvement in the interviews or the larger study.
- (4) The risks associated with this study are no greater than the young people encounter in their daily lives.
- (5) The researcher will keep all information private (confidential). Participation is voluntary and you may stop participating at any time without affecting your position in the program. You may also skip any questions you choose not to answer
- (6) Although this study is not designed to help you personally, it may help you think about your aspirations for the future and how you might achieve your aspirations. Further, this study may help improve youth programs and policies, which may benefit other young people in the long run.
- (7) The results of this study may be presented in conferences and/or published in academic papers, but your name will not be used.

Any questions about this study may be directed to Joanna Tzenis (612) 625-9771 (tzeni004@umn.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

I choose to:

Participate _____ Not participate _____

Do you agree to be audiotaped and video taped?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please print your full name:

First Name

Middle Initial

Last Name

Your signature:

Appendix C: Baseline Interview Protocol (Wave 1)

Somali American Youth: Agency and Aspirations for the Future

TI: Baseline Interviews (for full sample)

Before you turn on the video recorder, tell the youth the following:

Thank you for coming. I'm looking forward to talking to you.
[You can ask how their day is going or another warm-up question.]

Before we start, I want to tell you these things:

(1) There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. I am interested in your experiences and points of view! (2) Your participation is voluntary, (3) The responses you give will remain confidential.

Is it okay if I video record this interview?

[After you start the recorder, state the following:]

This is interview number [ID #], today's date is [XX], and the interviewer is [XX].

1. [If youth did identity wheel first] Tell me about your identity wheel. What makes up your identity?
Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
Probes: How do you see yourself? What are some important parts of your identity that make up who you are?
Note: If you noticed things they said or did during program, you can ask them to explain that in more detail.
2. Tell me about a typical day at home – what do you do?
 - a. What about school?
3. Can you tell me what being educated means to you?

Probe: Can you tell me it means to you to graduate high school or go on to college? Why is this important to you?

4. Can you describe your educational goals and aspirations to me?
 - a. How do you see yourself in the future?
 - b. Why are these things important to you?
5. What are some of the things you are doing in your life right now to achieve your aspirations?
 - a. What or who makes it hard to reach your goals?/Does someone not believe in you?
 - b. What or who makes it easier to reach your goals?/Who has believed in you up until this point?
 - c. Do you ever feel that your identities help you or make it hard to achieve your dreams and aspirations for the future?
6. In what ways have you been thinking about your future during this campus immersion program? [If at program]
 - a. Have any particular experiences this week influenced your thinking about the future?
7. That's all the questions I have for you now. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
8. Do you have any questions for me?
9. Would you be interested in possibly talking to me more during this upcoming school year and share more about your aspirations for your future and what you are doing to achieve your aspirations?

THANK YOU!

Appendix D: Second Wave Interview Protocol

Somali American Youth: Agency and Aspirations for the Future

Thank you for coming. I'm looking forward to hearing about what's been going on since our last interview.

[You can ask how their day is going or another warm-up question.]

Before we start, let me repeat the basics:

(1) There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. We are interested in your experiences! (2) Your participation is voluntary, (3) The responses you give will remain confidential.

Is it okay if I record this?

[After you start the recorder, state the following:]

This is interview number [XXXX], today's date is [XX], and the interviewer is [XX].

Things to follow up with based on observations, program documents and previous interview.

-
-
-

MEMO CHECK:

When we spoke briefly this summer, you told me these things-----does that sound right? Am I missing something, or did I not describe something accurately?

1. You recently did an identity wheel activity in your program. Is this still how you see yourself?

- a. Tell me more about XX part of who you are? Does it affect how people treat you?
 - b. Do you ever feel limited in what you can achieve because this part of your identity?
 - c. Do parts of your identity help you be successful in your education?
- 2. How do you see yourself in 10 years, when you are---- years old?
 - 3. What do you see other Somali Americans who are a little bit older than you, doing with their futures?
 - 4. Last time we talked you mentioned _____ as your aspirations. I would like to spend some more time discussing this. Tell me why this aspiration is important to you.
 - 5. Last time we spoke, you mentioned that you were doing these things [NAME THINGS FROM TIME 1] in order to achieve your aspirations. How has that been going? Have things changed?
 - 6. Could you tell me a barrier or challenging situation you have faced lately that makes it hard to try to achieve your aspirations? Can you describe this situation to me?
 - 7. Have you been able to overcome . . . ? How?

Probe: This challenge might come from school, home, friends, or your program.

- 8. Could I get you to think of a time when you felt that somebody or something really helped you be successful in trying to achieve your aspirations? Can you describe this situation to me?

Probe: This help might come from school, home, friends, or your program. Someone who believes in you.

- 9. Fill in the blank: When I think of my future in education I feel _____:
(sample words: hopeful, excited, nervous, sad)

10. Can you describe why you picked that word to describe how you feel?
- a. Probes: What are some of the things or who are some of the people that make you feel that way about your future?
 - b. How does this feeling influence the decisions you make about your education?
11. What do you imagine could be barriers [i.e. some barriers you might face in the future, but are not a barrier to you right now] to achieving your aspirations?
- AW: Could I get you to think of a time when you felt that somebody or something really got in the way of you being successful in trying to achieve your aspirations? Can you describe this situation to me?

Probe: This help might come from school, home, friends, T.V. or your program.

12. I want to ask you to think about a friend or someone you know from school. How are your aspirations different from theirs? How are their obstacles different or similar to yours? Support?

13. Observations/program document data to be followed up on:

14. Is there anything else you would like to add that I haven't asked you about?

Appendix E: Final (Wave 3) Interview Protocol

Somali American Youth: Agency and Aspirations for the Future

T6 Retrospective Youth Interview Protocol

[After you start the recorder, state the following:]

This is interview number [ID #], today's date is [XX], and the interviewer is [XX].

Memo check: This will be our last interview together. We've talked about a lot of things this year. I've learned these very important things about you: -----

-
-
-

Does that sound accurate? Is there anything that I could describe differently? Is there something I am missing?

1. How would you describe your identity now?
2. Can you tell me what being educated means to you?
Probe: Can you tell me it means to you to graduate high school or go on to college? Why is this important to you?
3. Can you describe your educational goals and aspirations to me?
 - a. Why are these things important to you?NOTE: Try to probe to see if they distinguish between educational and academic/career goals)
4. What are some of the things you are doing in your life right now to achieve your aspirations?
 - a. What makes it hard to reach your goals?
 - b. What makes it easier to reach your goals?

Follow up on key themes that emerged from previous interviews.

-
-
-

Appendix F: Parent Focus Group Protocol

Somali American Youth: Agency and Aspirations for the Future

T3. Parent Focus Groups

Thank you for coming. [You can ask how their day is going or another warm-up question.]

The reason why we are sitting down and having this interview is because I am interested in your point of view about your child's aspirations for his/her future in higher education.

Before we start, I want to let you know that:

(1) There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. We are interested in your experiences! (2) Your participation is voluntary, (3) The responses you give will remain confidential.

[After you start the recorder, state the following:]

This is interview number [ID #], today's date is [XX], and the interviewer is [XX].

1. This is a program that is meant to help your child prepare for the future. Tell me what you want for your child and his or her future. Why do you want these things?
2. Is this different or similar to what you wanted for yourself when you were growing up?
 - a. Probe: Say more about the differences or similarities.
 - b. (Learn parent stories. How/Why did they arrive here to MN?)
3. Do you think your aspirations for your child are the same as the aspirations she/he has for her/himself? Why or why not?
4. How do you support your kid?
5. What do you see as his or her biggest supports or opportunities?

6. What do you see as the obstacles in his or her way? What will make it hard for him or her to achieve aspirations?
7. What do you think your child's biggest strength is?
8. In what ways do you see your child taking action to achieve her/his aspirations for the future?
9. What is your role in helping your child?
 - a. What are some of the choices she or he is making that is making you feel happy and good about your child's future?
 - b. What are some of the choices she or he is making that is making you feel nervous or not good about your child's future?
10. Why do you bring your child to Somali Youth Strength? What do you hope they get from coming here?
11. What would you like to see change at Somali Youth Strength?

Appendix G: Identity Wheel Activity

Somali American Youth: Agency and Aspirations for the Future

Identity Wheel Activity

Purpose: To understand how youth think about their identity and about how their identity influences what they believe is achievable in their lives.

Time Needed: 90 minutes- depending on group size

Materials: Table Handout, Marker, Larger pieces of paper,

Directions: Begin by telling youth that we will be talking about our identities. Explain that an identity is a distinguishing characteristic, quality or personality of an individual that makes the person who she or he is. Ask youth to come up with examples of what might be elements of one's identity. Keep a running list. If they need prompting, suggest that this might have to do with their gender, religion, race, ethnicity, or even something they are good at, like singing, a subject in school, or sports. Explain they we will make a wheel of our own identities. You can bring an example of your own wheel of identity.

Then complete the following exercises in sequential order.

1. Ask the youth to pick five characteristics that best make up the person she or he is.
2. Fill out a pie chart with these five characteristics and assign them a percentage.

(For example: If being a female is a strong part of my identity I might say it represents 60% of who I am, and being a soccer player might only represent 5% of who I am, because while in play soccer, I don't think being a soccer player says much about who I am or describes my values in life.) (I will show an example of my own completed table and pie chart.)

3. Answer this question in small groups or the large group:

Are there pieces of your identity that help you feel like you can achieve your educational aspirations? Are there pieces of your identity that you think get in the way of you being able to achieve your educational aspirations? *(These can also be interview questions.)*

Data collection.

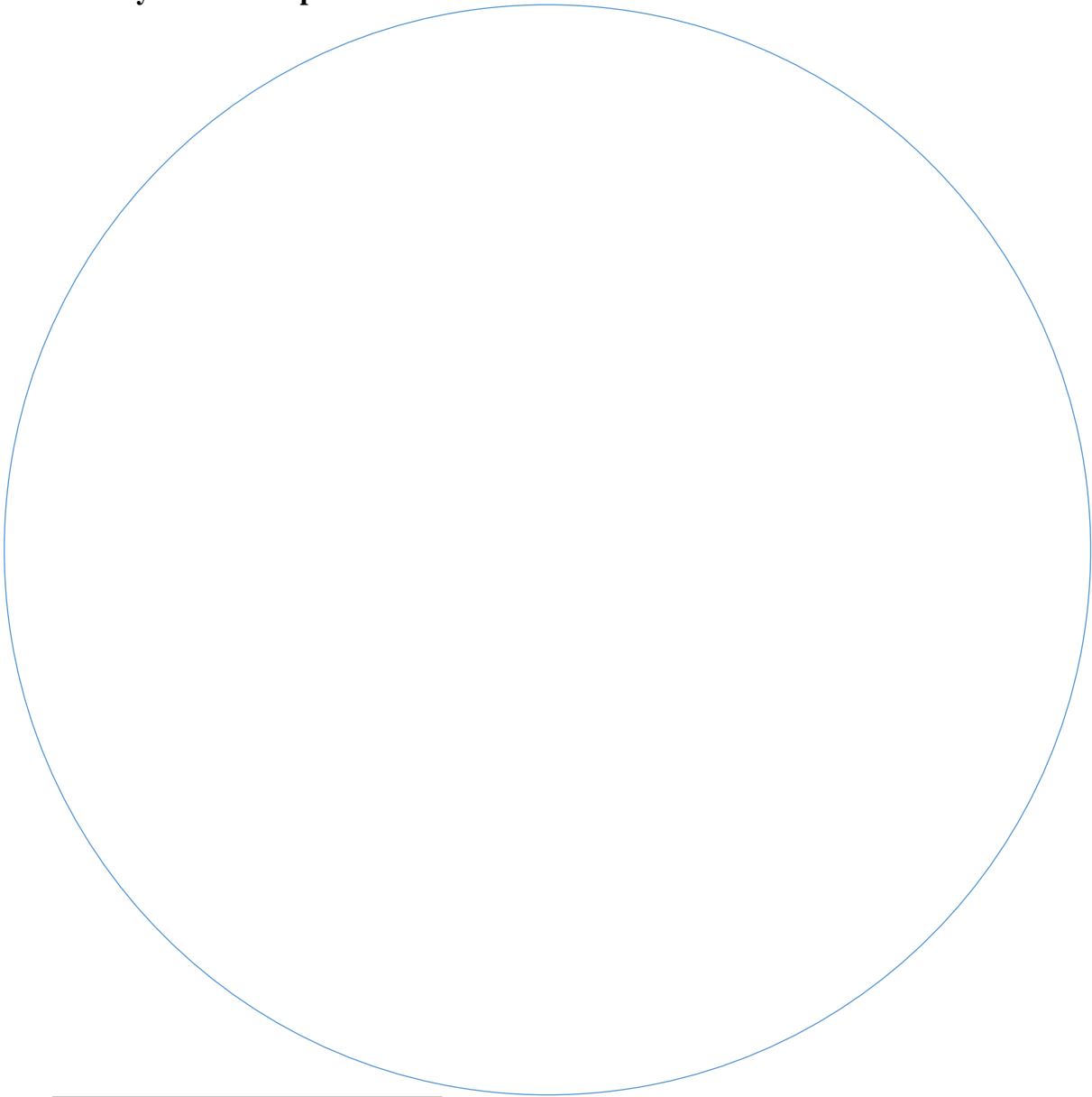
Makes copies/take photos of wheel.

Observe process of making the wheels- verbal and non-verbal actions and interactions of youth

Use as prompt in early interviews:

Are there pieces of your identity that help you feel like you can achieve your educational aspirations? Are there piece of your identity that you think get in the way of you being able to achieve your educational aspirations? How do you think others see you?

Identity Wheel Template



Parts of My Identity

Appendix H: Vision Board Activity

Materials: Poster board, magazines, album art, computer with internet and printer, scissors, markers, colored pencils, glue or tape, flip cams

Time: 60 minutes

Group Size: No limit

Directions

Ask youth to imagine that they are looking into the future and seeing their lives ten years from now. Tell them that in the future, they are happy and everything is as they want it to be. Ask them to find images and words from pieces of popular culture: (e.g. magazines, album art, book covers, screenshots from the internet) what they want in their future life and lay out the images on the board.

Some prompting questions to ask them throughout the process are: *What are you doing? Who is in your life? What are you feeling? What have you accomplished?* Challenge youth that to think beyond about what jobs they will have or what material items they possess.

At the conclusion of the activity, have youth present their vision boards in small groups or to the larger group. Record the presentation.

Reflection:

- How did you feel thinking about good possibilities in your life?
- What specifically about this future you depicted makes you happy?
- How confident are you that you will realize this future? Explain.

Appendix I: Privilege Walk Activity

Purpose: To provide participants with an opportunity to understand how privilege and power affects their lives.

Time: 45 mins

1. Participants should stand shoulder to shoulder in a line across the room.
2. At the site, participants, can release their hands, but should be instructed to stand shoulder to shoulder in a straight line without speaking.
3. Participants should be instructed to listen carefully to each sentence, and take the step required if the sentence applies to them. They should be told there is a prize at the front of the site that everyone is competing for.
4. Write the word DREAMS at the end of the line

Sentences:

1. If your ancestors were forced to come to the USA not by choice, take one step back.
2. If your primary ethnic identity is American, take one step forward.
3. If you were ever called names because of something you cannot change (like your race, class, ethnicity, gender, or religion) take one step back.
4. If you were ever ashamed or embarrassed of your clothes, house, car, etc. take one step back.
5. If your parents are professionals: doctors, lawyers, etc. take one step forward.
6. If you are raised in an area where there was drug, gang activity, etc., take one step back.
7. If you ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to avoid being judged or ridiculed, take one step back.
8. If you studied the culture of your ancestors in elementary school, take one step forward.
9. If you went to school speaking a language other than English, take one step back.
10. If there are more than 50 books in your house, take one step forward.

11. If you ever had to skip a meal or were hungry because there was not enough money to buy food when you were growing up, take one step back.
12. If one of your parents was unemployed or laid off, not by choice, take one step back.
13. If your family ever had to move because they could not afford the rent, take one step back.
14. If you were told that you were beautiful, smart and capable by your parents, take one step forward.
15. If you were ever discouraged from academics because of things you cannot change (race, class, ethnicity, gender or religion, take one step back.)
16. If you were/are encouraged to attend college by your parents, take one step forward.
17. If you were raised in a single parent household, take one step back.
18. If you were ever offered a good opportunity because of your association with a friend or family member, take one step forward.
19. If you were ever denied an important opportunity because of your race, ethnicity, gender or religion, take one step back.
20. If you were ever, treated unfairly because of race, ethnicity, gender or religion, take one step back.
21. If you were ever accused of cheating or lying because of your race, ethnicity, gender, or religion, take one step back.
22. If you were ever stopped or questioned by the police because of your race, ethnicity, gender or religion, take one step back.
23. If you were ever afraid of violence because of your race, ethnicity, gender or religion, take one step back.
24. If you were generally able to avoid places that were dangerous, take one step forward.
25. If you were ever uncomfortable about a joke related to your race, ethnicity, gender or religion but felt unsafe to confront the situation, take one step back.

26. If you were ever the victim of violence related to your race, ethnicity, gender or religion, take one step back.
27. If your parents did not grow up in the United States, take one step back.
28. If your parents told you you could be anything you wanted to be, take one step forward.
29. If your school holidays coincide with religious holidays that you celebrate take one step forward.
30. If you feel good about how your identified culture is portrayed by the media take one step forward.

Debrief:

Ask participants to remain in their positions and to look at their position at the site and the positions of the other participants.

Record conversation. (tell them you are recording it)

- 1) What happened?
- 2) What did moving forward or backward mean?
- 3) Is there a question that stood out as really important or relevant to you?
- 4) Were there statements that were hard for you?
- 5) How did this exercise make you feel? (when you went forward to backward)
- 6) What have you learned from this experience?

Modified from: Hixon, A., & Lorah, P. (2006). *The privilege walk*. Retrieved from:
<https://edge.psu.edu/workshops/mc/power/privilegewalk.shtml>

Appendix J: Mock College Essay

College Essay Practice

Pick one of these two essay topics.

- 1) The lessons we learn from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you and what did you learn from the experience?
- 2) Reflect on a time when you challenged an idea or a belief. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
