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SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL AT SCHOOL: THE CASE OF A SOMALI TEENAGE GIRL

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1 Introduction

High quality schooling experiences are essential for adolescents who come to the US as immigrants or refugees. This is particularly true if they arrive with little prior formal schooling and low print literacy.¹ The important role of quality schooling for future employment and academic goals is documented in a number of ethnographies of high schools (e.g., Lopez, 2003; e.g., Olsen, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). However, in the world of public education, immigrant and refugee adolescents are often characterized by what they lack at school. Students' gaps in English language proficiency or background knowledge are often the focus of discussion around their educational needs. While it is essential to acknowledge what these students' need to know and learn, it is also important to counterbalance a very powerful discourse of deficiency with a more well-rounded image of their strengths and assets. One way to do this is to examine immigrant students' and families' strengths by learning about the home- and community-based social and cultural capital students bring to their schooling experiences (Gibson, 1988; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). By uncovering immigrant students' home and community assets, educators will be better able to make home-school connections productive. This endeavor may also reveal clear ways schools may facilitate the development of capital, both social and cultural.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the growing body of scholarly literature on the role of social and cultural capital in schooling by telling the story of a Somali teenage girl, Fadumo (a pseudonym), whose first formal schooling experiences were in a US urban high school as a ninth grader. Findings show that Fadumo's family and ethnic community are rich sources of social capital. However, while much of her success can be attributed to the social capital she brings to school, findings also show that she lacks key cultural capital that would give her easier access to post-secondary educational opportunities. Finally, this research shows that it is important to recognize that there is a strong connection between having strong co-ethnic social capital and the development of the cultural capital of the dominant White middle class.

¹ Limited formal schooling implies the likelihood of little exposure to academic content, but it is not necessarily paired with illiteracy because it is possible to learn to read outside of a school setting. The focus of this paper is on the challenges of having both limited formal schooling *and* low alphabetic print literacy.

2 *The Social Capital of Immigrant Adolescents*

Social capital is defined as “intangible social resources based on social relationships that one can draw upon to facilitate action and to achieve goals” (Coleman, 1990, p. 302). Cultural capital, on the other hand, consists of investment in a set of symbols and meanings reproduced by the dominant class of a society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and passed down, or reproduced, through generations. The investment and reproduction of cultural capital serve to include or marginalize individuals in society, which in turn leads to unequal social and economic rewards. Discussions of what cultural capital consists of will be strategically restricted to what Fadumo does that seems to *reproduce behaviors of the dominant class* because these are behaviors that are likely to gain her access to higher status social and economic opportunities in a hierarchical society like the United States. Maintaining this definition of cultural capital will allow an analysis of what schools do “to help marginalized students gain access to cultural capital and ... to critique the inequitable system that distributes advantages on the basis of arbitrary cultural practices” (Lubienski, 2003, p. 34).

For immigrants, family and co-ethnic networks are key sources of most social capital (Portes, 1998) and social capital is often maximized when an immigrant group is welcomed by the host community as well as their own co-ethnic community. This argument speaks to the structural supports or obstacles present in the host society. Portes and Zhou’s (1993) Modes of Incorporation Typology (p. 84) is helpful in thinking about how Somalis may feel received in Minnesota, the setting for the present study. This typology considers factors, such as governmental policies, societal factors and qualities of the existing co-ethnic community, that affect newcomers. First, Somalis in the U.S. and in Minnesota experience a receptive *government policy* in that they receive resettlement assistance, albeit short term, and come as refugees or asylum seekers. This means that, in comparison to undocumented immigrants, Somalis may be seen by the larger population as having a legitimate right to be in Minnesota. Following Portes and Zhou’s typology, Somali immigrants’ *societal reception* is likely to be prejudiced in U.S. society because they are not phenotypically white. Their societal reception may also be compromised by the overwhelming climate of Islamophobia in the U.S. However, the challenges of living in an unwelcoming society may be mitigated by the fact that Somali newcomers have a strong and large *co-ethnic community* in Minnesota, the last criteria used in the typology. A strong Somali community offers the potential for newcomers to develop social capital which can translate into positive effects for them and their children (Portes & MacLeod, 1996). Additionally, a strong co-ethnic community consisting of large numbers of Somali families and religious

and societal organizations can offer newcomers logistical support while they resettle (Zhou & Bankston, 1994). Nevertheless, co-ethnic social capital is not always used by all immigrant or refugee families even if it is available. Stanton-Salazar (2001) offers the following set of fundamental characteristics of social capital that help to clarify what qualifies as social capital: (a) it is based on reciprocal investments in a relationship where two or more parties make reciprocal investments and commitments; (b) it depends on the presence of trust in the relationship; and (c) it has the potential to generate resources.

The literature in the area of social capital has found native language proficiency to be important. Bankston and Zhou (1995) argue that native language proficiency “can facilitate access to the social resources of ethnic communities” (p. 6). One large scale study done by Dinovitzer, Hagan and Parker (2003) that included immigrant youth found that relational ties to parents predict higher educational attainment. The authors link students’ close relational ties to their parents their maintenance of the native language. In other words, the ability to speak their parents’ and, therefore, the co-ethnic community’s language gives youth access to many sources of social capital. Studies done by White and Glick (2000) and White and Kaufman (1997) mirror these findings. It would be assumed that the relationships immigrant youth have with their parents would possess all three characteristics put forth by Stanton-Salazar (2001).

It is also possible that maintenance of the native language, in this case Somali, could not only be leveraged for social capital but may also lead to the growth of cultural capital. In a study of Cantonese-speaking high school students in Canada, Goldstein (2003) makes the point, using Bourdieu (1999), that one type of capital can be converted into another. For example, in her study, native language linguistic capital may be used to obtain cultural capital such as good grades, college admission and a good job through friendships with peers who can help them with their studies. Zhou and Kim (2006) found that community-based weekend schools for Chinese and Korean children facilitated a strong ethnic identity, peer networks, and ultimately academic achievement. The authors argue that the structural support of the weekend schools “sustain[s] community forces that value education and facilitate the formation of social capital conducive to education” (p. 25). The Chinese and Korean families in this study do not rely on public schools to meet all of the needs of their children but rather take educational success into their own hands, with the help of their communities.

While this review illustrates only a small number of the studies on the social and cultural capital of immigrant adolescents, the area is fairly well established. Nevertheless, there has been no research that specifically focuses on how newer immigrant groups or adolescents that have had limited formal schooling and low print literacy use social capital to

succeed at school. Refugee groups such as the Somalis may not have well-established weekend schools and a well-anchored community of many generations like the Chinese and Korean communities in North America. Furthermore, unlike the stereotypes of Asian youth and their families as “model minorities” and high achieving (Lee, 1996), it is often assumed that the families of refugee adolescents may even be barriers to education rather than an asset. For example, some people may assume that older adolescents are expected to help the family financially by working or take charge of domestic duties so that others may work. Perhaps the assumption is that because refugee adolescents have never been to school, their families do not value education. The fact is that while there are many structural obstacles for an adolescent newcomer with limited formal schooling to graduate from high school (e.g., they become too old to attend high school, they do not complete graduation requirements), many do graduate and move into the workforce or on to higher education. Therefore, it is essential to provide them with the best education possible in order for them to be productive members of society in the long term. One important way to achieve this goal is to understand more about their out-of-school lives and what their families and communities do to promote educational success.

3 *The Study*

In light of this overview of the literature on social capital and immigrant youth, there is a need for particularizing the experience of attending high school as a recently resettled adolescent immigrant with no prior schooling experiences and the low levels of literacy that often accompany this kind of background. Equally important is to situate those experiences in a way that underscores the fact that youth are members of a family and a community. To further an understanding about how home and school connect around issues of social and cultural capital for adolescent immigrant and refugee youth, the following question focusing on one individual will be explored:

- What is the role of social and cultural capital in the academic life of a Somali refugee teen as she strives to graduate from a US high school and pursue higher education goals?

This investigation tells the story of one teenage girl and her family and reveals to educators information that has the potential to inform curriculum and instruction as well as point to crucial ways schools must be charged with developing cultural capital.

3.1 The Participant

Fadumo, the single participant in this analysis, is a member of the largest Somali community in the US. Minnesota has an estimated 40,000 Somalis, with most living in Minneapolis or St. Paul. Fadumo is also a member of a very large family. She is the oldest of 10 children and these data were gathered when she was 18 years old and a senior in high school. At the time, Fadumo's mother worked second shift as a janitor and had very limited English language skills.

At age 6, Fadumo fled Somalia with her mother and siblings due to the civil war in the late 90s and lived in a refugee camp in Kenya for eight years. She is not alone in having her life interrupted by civil war. Somalis are among many refugees who have spent many years in refugee camps in Kenya or Ethiopia waiting to be processed to resettle in third countries. Refugee camps are characterized by violence, exploitation, lack of schooling opportunities, scarcity of food, inadequate housing, and unsanitary living conditions. Due to these stark facts, Fadumo's first formal schooling experience was in the US. She was enrolled as a freshman (9th grader) in a large urban high school, which had two main student populations at the time: Somalis and African Americans. She attended this school for two years. In her junior year, she transferred to an Afrocentric charter school² and then returned to the first school she attended to complete her senior year and graduate. Because Fadumo was part of a large wave of Somali refugees that settled in Minnesota, she was afforded high school content classes in Somali her first year. As she progressed through school and learned English, her grades steadily improved. She met all of her graduation requirements and graduated in 4 years with a 3.85 (out of 4.0) grade point average. This diploma was the typical diploma received by all graduating students in the state. The extraordinarily high grade point average and fact that Fadumo graduated in a mere 4 years will be problematized in the discussion.

3.2 Methodology

This research is interpretive and qualitative in nature. The data from this paper came from a larger qualitative and ethnographic case study carried

² An Afrocentric curriculum typically provides a learning environment that includes content, role models, images and discussions that reflect the African-American communities. The world-view presented and encouraged links students to their African and African-American history, arts, literature, philosophy, etc.

out with Somali teens.³ The data from one participant, Fadumo, is showcased because her stories illustrate numerous instances of how she uses her social capital at school. As a case, she challenges those who see Somali youth mainly through the deficit lens. The context of the data collection was a Saturday tutoring group with four Somali high school girls. For over two years, I met with the girls and we worked on homework, did reading and writing activities together, and talked about school and their lives.⁴ The specific data sources used to understand the experience of struggling to meet the expectations of classes in a US high school with limited literacy included copies of homework assignments, creative writing exemplars and written personal narratives. This paper draws from five semi-structured, hour long interviews. This methodology and range of data sources were used to understand and recognize the complexity of one girl's life and the power of her non-school associations. The focus for this paper is on "practice" – it is, modestly, what one girl and her family do and what she says they do (González, 2005).

Because of Fadumo's low to intermediate levels of English, Somali was used often in the group, although the researcher did not speak Somali. Interviews in English were carried out individually and in groups of two or four. Somali was used for discussion and clarification during the interviews.⁵

The data sources were all coded and categorized inductively and deductively (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The process was deductive because the coding was informed by the literature review and the research questions (e.g., social capital, cultural capital). It was inductive because emerging themes and patterns from the data dealt with the participants' schooling experiences (e.g., challenges at school, resources for school, homework, native language literacy). The analysis strategy was explanation building, which presumed set of causal links about the phenomenon (Yin, 2003) of being young, black, Somali, Muslim, female, refugee, and an English language learner, attending a large U.S. public

³ This study examined the U.S. schooling experiences of Somali youth with limited formal schooling, including, for example, their home and school uses of Somali and English oral and literacy skills, their perceptions of their classes, their school-related tasks, interpersonal relationships at school and out of school, and the cultural adaptation processes they experience and watch others experience.

⁴ Others have gathered data this way (e.g., Rymes, 2001). It is convenient because it does not interfere with the school day and allows for interaction with participants that is not hinged to evaluation.

⁵ Early in the research I considered involving an interpreter who was Somali and female; however, as the groups' rapport and trust developed, it seemed that bringing in an outsider would change the group dynamics and thus the quality of data gathered. Furthermore, the presence of an older Somali adult woman would likely influence how the girls chose to present themselves to me (and her) and limit conversations about such things as dating and marriage.

school. Triangulation of codes and themes was applied among the various data sources. Member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with the focal student were done by presenting, in English, simplified sections of the syntheses, orally and in writing, for verification, and with the option of removing anything she wished, as per her informed consent.

4 Results and Discussion

This section of the paper will answer the research question in two parts: (a) the role of Fadumo's social capital in her education; and (b) the role of Fadumo's cultural capital in her education.

4.1 Sources of Social Capital

4.1.1 Family

Fadumo's family is large and they work as a unit to support each other. Fadumo's family is clearly the most important source of social capital Fadumo has and this is the support that she often leverages to do well in school. The data in this section will show Fadumo's family, particularly her mother, is a valuable source of cultural capital.

Fadumo sees her mother as a strong role model and the expectation in the family is that Fadumo and all her siblings will study and one day obtain good jobs. Fadumo and her sister both talked about how difficult it was to be in the refugee camp but that the family stayed together despite the hardship. When they resettled in Minnesota, the family continued to work together. Examples of this are working together to understand the daily mail and to manage in their interactions with English-speaking Minnesotans. One key finding is that Fadumo stressed that her mother never allowed the children to make decisions or assume adult responsibilities due to her own lack of skill in English, something often reported in immigrant families (Gonzales, May 14, 2003). In the quote below Fadumo explains that her mother uses her friends as translators instead of the children.

MB (*researcher*): So your mother is not afraid to go to school? Does she speak English?

F (*Fadumo*): No.

MB: How does she talk to the teachers ... does she bring someone to translate?

F: Yeah. She don't bring us cause she think like...she don't rust us.

MB: Who does she bring?

- F: Like you know she calls the people she knows and “can you come tomorrow for help me, like that.” They say, “Ok.”
- MB: You know I’ve heard a lot of people say parents are afraid to go to school because they don’t speak English.
- F: My mom, she do whatever she do. She go to school by herself. She do everything.

This quote both reflects Fadumo’s admiration and respect for her mother and tells how her mother leverages her own social capital among her Somali friends.

The interviews revealed that Fadumo’s mother has strong opinions about schooling and has her own way of interacting with her children’s teachers and schools. For example, Fadumo said that her mother is likely to go to her children’s school at any time, not only when called for parent-teacher conferences. While this may not be a common or even a sanctioned way of interacting with teachers in the US, the message to the children is clear: their mother is going to find out how things are going in school.

In the following quote, Fadumo explains her mother’s opinion about the fact that her sons sit in the back of the class and her strategy for getting them to move forward:

- F: You know they [Fadumo’s brothers] sit in the class in the back. She don’t like when the people sit in the back.
- MB: So she finds out where they sit and everything.
- F: If they do something, she repeat it like joke. She make like a joke.
- MB: She teases them about sitting in the back or whatever?

Another strategy that Fadumo’s mother uses to guarantee her children’s educational success is to closely monitor who their friends are. If they are not associating with “good” kids, the child may be transferred to another school. Fadumo’s mother believes that it is better not to have friends in school if those friends are not “good.” This issue has applied only to the boys in Fadumo’s family thus far, but the assumption is that the same thing would occur if a girl in the family began associating with “bad” friends. The following conversation began because Fadumo told me about an incident at her school where a gun was found in a student’s locker.

- MB: Do your brothers get in fights?
- F: Never.
- MB: How do they stay out of fights?
- F: It’s the parents.

- MB: Because they are afraid of the parents. So what does your mother do to make them afraid?
- F: She knows, "Why you to fight, what are doing in the house, xxx, I cook for you for food, I clean everything. Just go to school and learn."
- MB: School is their only job.
- F: Yeah. Same for me. They get like that cause they scared for my mom because of that. For the boys, she go to school and talk to other teachers and she says to them now, "Why this happen and who was the side of the problem."

This excerpt illustrates the respect Fadumo's mother has from all of her children and the control she is able to exert in terms of their behavior outside of the home. These data contribute to the literature cited previously (e.g., Dinovitzer, Hagan, & Parker, 2003) indicating that parental involvement and close monitoring are important for academic success.

Knowing that Fadumo is the oldest of 10 children, one would expect her family responsibilities to have a powerful impact on her ability to get her homework done. These responsibilities, however, did not seem to hinder her ability to meet her teachers' expectations. Fadumo explained to me how she would go to a nearby library if she needed a quiet place to study and her sister would take over her tasks. On a separate occasion, Fadumo told me about how when she needed help with her homework, she would take a bus to a neighborhood where she could get help at a homework help program and that it was often possible to get bilingual help at this program. She also told about how some of the younger children who are somewhat more fluent in English often helped her with her homework. The description Fadumo depicts of her home with respect to education is that they all work together to help each other succeed. It is also evident that Fadumo is not the only one succeeding. Her younger sister Sufia (also a pseudonym) is also a successful student and self-proclaimed story teller. Fadumo told me that she has a younger brother who wrote a book.

So, while she is the oldest girl in a large family that moves frequently and struggles financially, it is clear that this is a highly-functioning family unit with a strong mother. They pool their skills and resources and show that they value success at school in tangible ways. It is also relevant to note that a child does not necessarily require a parent to sit with them to complete homework assignments, as is often assumed. This task can often be managed among peers or siblings. Fadumo's mother clearly shows interest in her children's education and communicates her expectation that they do well in school and challenges commonly held assumptions that immigrant parents are not involved in their children's

schooling (Lopez, 2001). Fadumo's family is clearly a main source of social capital that is being converted into educational achievement, a valuable piece of cultural capital.

4.1.2 *Community*

Fadumo identifies as Somali and Muslim and, for her, these descriptors are almost completely interchangeable. These identity markers are meaningful in this context because of the large Somali community present that identifies similarly. Fadumo, her mother, and her teenage sister all wear a full length, traditional hijab which further identifies them as Somali and Muslim. Unlike many girls her age, Fadumo has never felt confused about who she is. She has never modified⁶ or taken off her hijab and does not seem to struggle with this, as some girls do. The following is what Fadumo said when I asked her about taking off her hijab:

- F: If you don't like the hijab, you have to throw it away. Sometimes you wear it. If you don't like it destroy it. You are big enough. You're not a kid.
- MB: I f you decided that you didn't want to wear the hijab anymore would your mother be mad?
- F: She say ok. You're not like a little kid.

One possible reason for this absence of struggle is Fadumo's strong family unit. They regularly go to the mosque on weekends and observe Islamic prayer and eating requirements together. Fadumo studies the Qur'an and meets with a tutor (*duksi*) to do so. She is not experiencing a rapid assimilation process and has a great deal of cultural continuity in her life. Portes and Zhou (1993) argue that immigrant youths who remain firmly ensconced in their respective ethnic communities may, by virtue of this fact, have a better chance for educational and economic mobility through use of the material and social capital that their communities make available (p. 82).

Fadumo's community, given its size, is another source of social capital for her. The community grounds her as Muslim female in an overwhelmingly Judeo-Christian society and, in conjunction with her family, seems to give her strength to maintain her religious practices and rewards her with a respectable place in her society. Beyond using a bilingual homework help there are few examples of Fadumo using the Somali community as social capital. Nevertheless, her mother uses her

⁶ Some Somali girls modify their head covering by wearing hats, hooded sweatshirts, tight scarves that cover their hair and tie into a low bun, or loose scarves that drape without full hair coverage.

community network to recruit translators to accompany her to the children's schools. It is her powerful social network that gives her the opportunity to speak. The way in which Fadumo and her family operate as a unit and part of a larger social network of Somali families allows them to access a number of networks that call for Somali and English language skills. Their Somali language networks are tapped through Somali television, commerce, and a large network of family friends. Fadumo's family benefits greatly from the size of the Somali community in this metropolitan area. They are able to shop, worship, hear news, and socialize in Somali.

For Fadumo and her family, social capital among community and family members is accessed mainly through the Somali language and culture, two assets that are not typically seen as advantages in the mainstream US society and even among Somalis themselves. Nevertheless, the data presented above illustrate that Somali language and culture yield a high cultural capital return when they are converted to educational access and achievement.

4.1.3 Notable Gaps in Social Capital

Fadumo makes no mention of peers at school being helpful in her learning. In fact, she said that she often spent the entire day at school alone, talking with no one. She resisted making friends because she thought that they could distract her from her one purpose of being in school, which was to graduate, or that they could put her in physical danger if they offended another group of students and caused a fight. It is also notable that Fadumo had few acquaintances who were not Somali. She said that the only White people she knew were her teachers and me, the researcher. This finding is quite different from those in other studies that found that peer relationships were key to academic success (e.g., Zhou & Kim, 2006). Perhaps Fadumo's siblings occupied the place of peers in her life.

4.2 Sources of Cultural Capital

4.2.1 Language

The ability to master English and any other language should be seen as cultural capital (Trueba, 2002) in today's interdependent global economy. Fadumo's family is retaining Somali and at the same time learning English quickly. English skills are needed to navigate numerous institutions and systems and for this reason are termed cultural capital. Fadumo's family hears about social services and homework help programs through their social network (social capital) and often call upon their friends to help

them navigate those services. One clear example is their enrollment in a program which pays Fadumo a stipend for the care of her younger siblings. Enrolling in this extremely helpful program required knowing that it existed, knowing that they would qualify, and then getting on the waiting list. Managing bureaucracy such as this, as well as the workings of schooling and immigration institutions, is a skill that taps into social capital and displays cultural knowledge that can turn into concrete financial gains.

Perhaps more fundamental in terms of cultural capital is the family's unwavering belief that education is paramount and the one sure path to success in the United States. This belief informs the family's decisions about how to allocate their time and resources on a daily basis and override all obstacles. For instance, because Fadumo graduated so quickly from high school, given her limited formal schooling, she needed to take many English as a second languages (ESL) classes at the community college before being permitted to move into the nursing classes that interested her. However, rather than becoming discouraged, Fadumo persisted, working hard in all of her ESL classes, while noting that she had a lot to learn about writing. Again, her grades were high.

4.2.2 *Good Student Behaviors*

How does an adolescent refugee newcomer with no prior formal schooling enroll in a US high school and know what to do? Fadumo had to make for herself a student identity without many references. Nobody in her family had done what she was doing, and she did not have the years of experience with formal schooling that adolescents her age typically have. Nevertheless, Fadumo was strategic in high school and this, I argue, is an example of her demonstrating cultural capital. She knew how to show teachers that she cared about her studies. For example, she had a flawless attendance record, always did her homework, showed teachers drafts of projects and papers, and asked for help when she needed it. Obtaining this level of strategic competence in school was not a small accomplishment and it seems that Fadumo created/fashioned her own strategies, on her own terms. Fadumo has forged a self-created student identity along with behaviors that endeared her to her teachers. She remained immune to peer pressure and focused on her educational goals.⁷ Fadumo's flawless reputation and "good student" behaviors at school likely advantaged her in terms of grades.

⁷ It is possible that being Muslim will help girls like Fadumo survive high school. One study about adolescent alcohol abstainers in Oslo found that Muslim immigrant girls are the biggest group of abstainers (Pedersen & Kolstad, 2000). Could being Muslim be a form of cultural capital because following Islamic law keeps Muslim girls from being exposed to the risks involved with, for example, drinking alcohol or dating?

4.2.3 Notable Gaps in Cultural Capital

Fadumo said that her biggest challenge in her junior year was passing the state-mandated graduation tests. After taking them 3 times, she passed them the summer before her senior year. Fadumo said that the biggest challenges presented to her in her senior year were knowing how to apply for college, take the standardized tests required to apply to college, and fill out financial aid forms. Her academic literacy skills were not well developed. I observed that Fadumo's good grades may have made her overestimate her post-secondary options. Her "good student" behaviors may have earned her better grades than her skills warranted. In fact, her reading and writing skills upon graduation from high school were still quite low, which Fadumo seemed only vaguely aware of. Her hopes to become a nurse were severely undermined by her lack of skills upon graduating from high school.

5 Conclusion

It is important to theorize about Fadumo's experiences carefully. There is always a risk that we present her, and others like her, solely as victims – victims of poverty, war, displacement, etc. The reality is that Fadumo is a person with agency (Willis, 1977) and power. The data presented should challenge the deficit discourse so often associated with refugee adolescents with limited formal schooling. The information that was uncovered in this study shows that while Fadumo had many responsibilities at home, this did not mean that she was unsupported in her education. She brings motivation and much social and cultural capital to her schooling experiences.

Anyone would acknowledge that Fadumo accomplished a great deal in her four years of education. Nevertheless, she graduated with English language and literacy skills that were still markedly low. In turn, this has severely limited her post-secondary opportunities and delayed progress toward her goal of being admitted to a nursing program. Unfortunately, Fadumo had far to go after high school before she had the skills needed to do the level of academic work required by a nursing program. Luckily, her family facilitated her success, in numerous tangible ways. Nevertheless, one still needs to ask, Could Fadumo's high school have prepared her better? Should she have done all of her schooling in alternative or charter schools geared toward immigrants? Should her high school experience have been extended beyond four years, given the fact that this was her *first and only* formal schooling experience? These questions should cause educators to revise what should be defined as "success" in high school for Fadumo and other adolescents like her. It

seems that it is entirely reasonable to envision secondary programs for students like Fadumo that are better tailored to their needs and take longer to complete. This would give them time to develop better academic literacy skills needed to pursue the goals Fadumo, and students like Fadumo, envision for themselves. Fadumo has the desire and support to persevere, but it would have been much easier with a stronger high school background that developed strong literacy skills.

Fadumo needed different kinds of support as she moved through high school. Her most urgent need toward the end of her high school years was guidance in choosing and taking her next steps after high school. Schools need to take on the role of helping students like Fadumo do such things as find out about jobs students can do, apply for scholarships, fill out college applications and financial aid forms, meet deadlines for registering for the required standardized tests, get recommendation letters, write personal statements, and visit campuses. If this does not occur, students like Fadumo may discover that while they have much social capital, they cannot exchange it for educational aims because of lack of this crucial body of cultural capital. While it is important to recognize the powerful assets of Fadumo's life, particularly her family, it is essential to see where her family leaves off and where the school must continue. Educators and policy makers must problematize this issue. As Lubienski (2003) argues, "Because our current ideologies cannot help but define what we consider a "problem," the restrictions against discussing "problems" that diverse groups can have can bias research conducted on diverse students' experiences in classrooms" (p. 35). It is essential that we all engage in recognizing "problems" as well as strengths in order to raise expectations of all marginalized youth and equitably educate all students. One conclusion may be to invest more in Somali after-school and weekend schools, using the rationale offered by Zhou and Kim (2006) that these settings share in the responsibility of educating immigrant youth while fostering a sense of ethnic identity and peer networks, something Fadumo seemed to lack.

Any adolescent would be lucky to have a family like Fadumo's. They function cooperatively in ways that promote the educational success of every member. In doing so, they challenge media representations of, for example, Muslim girls as uneducated and poor families as not valuing education. At the center of this family is a mother that is clear about her need to maintain authority and her crucial role in her children's academic success. Fadumo and her family reveal no deficits, only strengths. The educational system, however, did fail to offer Fadumo enough opportunities to acquire the literacy necessary to proceed to a two- or four-year college as well as the logistical help to make these dreams a reality. A final challenge facing teachers is how to learn more about the

home and community lives of their students. The relationships students have outside of school could be the ones that make all the difference.

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