

ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND ACCULTURATION: A CASE STUDY OF TWO SOMALI WOMEN IN COLLEGE

Kari Smalkoski

This study explored two Somali women's perceptions of their academic progress and acculturation in college, specifically the nature and impact of: family support, socio-cultural and identity issues, and past and present experiences in and out of middle school, high school, and college classrooms. Both participants were generation 1.5 Somali college students in the final semester of their sophomore year at the time of the study. Qualitative research was conducted over a period of eight weeks using case study, and data was collected through interviews, questionnaires, and journal prompts that the participants responded to. The results of the study suggest: 1) the need for intensive mentoring and advising focused on time management, study skills, and emotional support; 2) a need for more Somali mentors, advisors and teachers in ESL and bi-lingual classrooms; and 3) increased opportunities for English language acquisition in content coursework across the curriculum. The results of the study also showed the complexity in the lives of the participants as they progress through college.

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STUDY OF TWO SOMALI WOMEN IN COLLEGE

by

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For two pioneering women:

My mother, Janna Smalkoski

And “the breadgiver,” Rachel Trockman, M.D.

I am reaching for the words to describe the difference between a common identity that has been imposed and the individual identity any one of us will choose, once she gains that chance.

June Jordan (1985). On call: Political essays. Boston: South End Press, p 47.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

During the academic year of 2003-2004, the number of traditional aged* Somali women college students in my classes increased substantially. As an instructor of English as a second language (ESL) and basic writing courses to mostly freshmen students, it was not as if I had never taught a Somali college student before, but the majority had been students who were, by definition, “non-traditional.” Many were married and/or had children, most worked outside of the home, and had either completed high school before arriving in the United States or had completed high school several years before attending college.

As I got to know several of the traditional aged Somali women students better that year, I was curious why this particular group was applying in larger numbers to the college where I worked, but even more so, I wanted to understand what had gotten them to this point in their lives. Throughout the semester, I began asking myself many questions about these women. What experiences had they had in and out of the classroom before they had gotten to college? How had they been academically prepared in middle and high school for college work? Were their families supportive of their academic decisions? Did they identify more with a “Somali” identity or an “American” identity? What were their perceptions and experiences as Somali women in college?

* Students who enter college immediately following graduation from high school.

These questions ultimately led me to this research. I soon learned that although Somali students are entering higher education settings in large numbers throughout the metropolitan area where I teach and where the participants in this study live, little research has been conducted on Somali students in higher education, in part because the group is relatively new to higher education. Still, Somali students currently make up the third largest group of limited English speakers in this metropolitan area's largest K-12 school district (Farah, McCullough-Zander, & McGuire, 2001). As the Somali population at local metropolitan area high schools continues to increase, it is likely that Somalis will continue to enter a variety of higher education settings. Knowing this, I felt it would be helpful to have a deeper understanding of Somali students' needs, experiences, and perceptions. As my list of questions continued to grow, I realized I wanted to focus my study on this population of college students.

Somali Students

As of 2003, it is estimated that roughly 25,000 Somalis live in the metropolitan area in the upper Midwest where my study took place. This is one of the largest concentrations of Somalis living anywhere in the United States (Anderson, 2003). The majority of Somalis came as refugees in the 1990s, with relatives continuing to arrive as secondary migrants; in fact, one Somali community assistance organization estimates that approximately 90% of the Somali community is here through secondary migration (Magnuson, 2002).

Approximately 85% percent of Somalis living in this metropolitan area are between the ages of twenty and forty, and studies indicate that approximately half of the families consist of mothers raising children on their own. Two of the reasons for the large proportion of single mothers are that many men were killed in the civil war (Farah, McCullough-Zander & McGuire, 2001) and according to Sahra Noor, R.N., men who are married to more than one wife were only able to claim one wife on their official documents in the United States.*

Reporting the exact numbers of Somali students in any K-12 school system in the state is impossible. By law, school districts cannot ask about immigration status when students enroll, though they can ask about the native language of students, and data on native languages of students are reported by district. When estimates are made regarding the numbers of Somali students in a K-12 school system, native language is most often used as a measure. It is also important to consider that data collected for different purposes, by different agencies, do not always agree; statistics change quickly over time and many immigrants and refugees are consistently undercounted or overcounted (Magnuson, 2002).

What *is* clear is that the number of K-12 ESL Somali students in the state school system has increased rapidly, particularly in the metropolitan area where I teach and where the participants in this study attended middle school and high school. Between the academic years of 1995-1996 to 2000-2001, there was a +2,889% increase in the number of Somali students in the public school system in the state; furthermore, growth rates

* Interview with Sahra Noor, R.N., Health Education Nurse, October 2nd, 2004.

began increasing rapidly the school year of 1997-1998, have continued since, and are not expected to slow in the near future (Magnuson, 2002). Clearly, a study on Somali college students is much needed.

Generation 1.5

As I researched the academic language learning of ESL students in college, I realized that the field of college ESL still focuses heavily on the international student population. Much of the pedagogical literature on academic language instruction for college ESL students remains focused on international students with limited exposure to American society and the English language; furthermore, many materials marketed towards college ESL classrooms are most suitable for ESL students who have learned English through formal, metalinguistically oriented classroom instruction, and are fully literate in their first language (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999).

As I continued researching, I began learning more about the population called “generation 1.5” also called “the 1.5 generation.” There is no one definition of generation 1.5, but generally speaking, this population of students has traits and experiences that lie somewhere in between those associated with first or second generation immigrants (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999). Furthermore, they have arrived in the United States at young ages so they often possess a high level of conversational fluency and identify with American culture and its educational system because they have received little or no formal education in another country or in their first language (Destandau & Wald, 2002). Realizing that the 1.5 generation has been increasing steadily

in higher education settings throughout the United States for some time, I wondered if the traditional aged Somali students who I was working with fit the definition of a generation 1.5 student and if they had “typical” generation 1.5 student needs.

Fatimo and Leyla: A Case Study

“Fatimo” and “Leyla” (both names are pseudonyms) were two of the traditional aged Somali women college students who I had in my courses the first semester of their freshman year. Apart from their academic progress in my courses, I knew little about them or what had gotten them to this point in their lives. In fact, they seemed a lot like many of the Somali women college students I had in my courses that semester. On paper, they looked as if they had led parallel lives all the way up to their high school graduations.

Both women were 20 years old at the time of the study, came from middle-class families that were originally from the capital city of Somalia, Mogadishu, have college educated fathers, left Somalia around the same age, lived in refugee camps in Kenya for approximately the same amount of time, and came to the United States as refugees at the age of 11. They both received ESL instruction in middle school, attended the same high school, graduated from high school the same year, had ACT composite scores of 13 (Fatimo) and 14 (Leyla), had chosen to attend the same college, and had the same career aspirations as future pediatricians. Neither of them was married at the time of the study nor had children, and both lived at home with their parent(s) and siblings.

As I worked with Fatimo and Leyla the first semester of their freshman year, I noticed one difference between them early on. Though both had taken an English language proficiency test after they had applied to college, it had been recommended that Fatimo take an ESL reading and writing course, but that Leyla take a college level basic writing course for native speakers of English. I was the instructor for both courses. Though Fatimo was resistant to ESL in college from the beginning of the course to the very end, I recognized that she had been placed in the appropriate course. Leyla did quite well in the basic writing course, and it was clear towards mid-semester that she could have gone directly into freshman composition and done well.

As I reflected on Fatimo's attitudes towards needing an ESL course in college, I considered the root of where her feelings originated from; after all, she clearly needed the course, and by mid-semester *she* even acknowledged that she needed the course and that it was helping with her written English grammar. I found her concerns for being placed into ESL legitimate. She had only been required to take ESL in grades six and seven in middle school and her experiences in those classes had been, overall, quite negative. She also did not like the label "ESL student" and told me that it carried many negative connotations for her.

I got to know Fatimo fairly well when she was a student of mine. She regularly and voluntarily met with me outside of class and was regularly talkative in class. In contrast, I felt that I barely knew Leyla even after the basic writing class had ended. She was reserved and quiet in class and never met with me outside of class, even though I

encouraged her and all of my students to do so. Leyla had clearly not needed ESL coursework in college and I wondered why. After all, Leyla and Fatimo looked as if they had led parallel lives on paper. Why did one student have such a strong need for ESL and the other did not? I also was curious about Leyla's perceptions of ESL coursework. Was her perception different as a student who had not been required to enroll in ESL coursework in college?

After the academic year ended, I wanted to understand Fatimo and Leyla's perceptions of their academic progress and acculturation in college. In order to do that, I needed to learn about their middle school and high school educational experiences, the influence and impact their families had on their educational choices, the socio-cultural and identity issues in their lives, and what was motivating them to make certain academic choices in their college educations. Shortly after Fatimo and Leyla completed the first semester of their sophomore year, I invited them to participate in the study. At this time, neither were students of mine. I also did not realize that they knew one another, and because I needed to protect their identities, they never knew of one another's participation in the study (at least not to my knowledge). The study was intensive and done over the course of approximately eight weeks with each participant.

Purpose of the Study and Guiding Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore two Somali women's perceptions of their academic progress and acculturation in college. To guide my research, I investigated the following questions:

- 1) What past experiences (in and out of the classroom) have had the greatest impact, both positively and negatively, on the participants in college?
- 2) How have the participants' families influenced and impacted their decisions and progress in college?
- 3) What socio-cultural and identity issues have had the greatest impact, both positively and negatively, on the participants in college?

The literature review, which follows in Chapter Two: 1) examines the unique backgrounds and key issues that pertain to generation 1.5 students; 2) discusses the Somali community and aspects of their culture; 3) reviews the development of academic English and its relevance to the participants in this study; and 4) discusses the concepts of identity, and the complex relationship between identity and academic language learning.

Chapter Three includes information on Fatimo and Leyla's participation in this study, the methods used, and a description of how the data was analyzed. Chapter Four describes the results of the data analysis and a discussion section is also included. Chapter Five concludes with a discussion of this study, implications of the study, and my recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, I explored two Somali women's perceptions of their academic progress and acculturation in college. To have a better understanding of the participants, I focused on the following in this literature review: 1) the unique backgrounds and key issues that pertain to generation 1.5 students; 2) the Somali community and aspects of their culture; 3) the development of academic English and its relevance to the participants in this study; and 4) concepts of identity, and the complex relationship between identity and academic language learning.

Generation 1.5 Students: Who are They?

Contrary to popular belief, the term "generation 1.5" is not a recent phenomenon, nor are the students. Rumbaut and Ima first brought "generation 1.5" into the educational research community; the term was initially created to describe young Southeast Asian refugee children adapting to life in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s (Rumbaut, 1994). "Generation 1.5" was eventually adopted by many scholars in a variety of disciplines to describe the "in-between" position of immigrants who did not fit the traditional definitions and categories in educational settings (Roberge, 2002). Over the past several years, the term "generation 1.5" has been widely used to describe many different students in a variety of ways. Some researchers use the term to describe

students who arrive pre-kindergarten, whereas others use it to describe any immigrant who comes to the United States as a child.

Danico (2004) argues that age at the time of arrival to the United States is not what is important when typifying the 1.5 generation; what should be considered are the process, experience, and the socio-cultural environment--specifically, the role of family, education, and the students' community in forming and constructing a 1.5 identity. The term "generation 1.5" is far from perfect and does not always effectively describe students. As Roberge (2002) argues, whenever researchers attempt to categorize a group of students, they run the risk of over-generalizing; in addition, the term implies that students are always "in-between" the first and second generations, when many actually have experiences, characteristics, and educational needs that are not found in either generation. To add further confusion, "generation 1.5" is used specifically in educational settings and not in the traditional sense to describe the generations of an immigrant's family.

There are two comprehensive definitions that I will use throughout this capstone when referring to the participants in the study. The first comes from Goen, Porter, Swanson, and VanDommelen (2002). They describe generation 1.5 students as:

Immigrants who arrived in the U.S. at a young age, learned English primarily through informal means, received most or all of their education in the United States, and entered college with language and literacy profiles somewhere between those of "basic writer" and "ESL student" (pp. 103).

The second, and more detailed, definition comes from Destandau and Wald (2002):

In general, these learners have been in the U.S. for more than six years. They are more often ear learners than eye learners, having acquired English through oral and aural means, not through formal or systematic learning in EFL, ESL, or English classrooms. These students possess a high level of conversational fluency and identify with U.S. culture and its educational system, many not having received any formal education in another country. These factors, however, can create learning situations in which Generation 1.5 students generally achieve a lower level of cognitive academic language proficiency than later-arriving immigrants or internationals, given their lack of formal, systematic study of English and exposure to academic language and discourse (pp. 208).

Issues in Higher Education: The ESL Label and ESL Coursework

For reasons discussed in more detail in this section, labeling a generation 1.5 student “ESL” can be problematic. Furthermore, the label often makes their needs appear one-dimensional and overlooks other social, cognitive, and affective factors associated with their immigration and biculturalism (Roberge, 2002). Generation 1.5 students are by no means a homogenous group of learners; in fact, they are bicultural as much as they are bilingual (Frodesen, 2002).

In a year-long study with freshmen generation 1.5 students conducted by Chiang and Schmida (1999), the researchers found that most of the students had many difficulties using their native languages.* Chiang and Schmida concluded that English was the primary language the students used to articulate their complex realities; they depended on it for their everyday communication in and out of the classroom.

This is closely related to another issue that generation 1.5 students face in higher education: ESL coursework. There are several factors to consider. First, the majority of generation 1.5 students have learned much of their English through informal oral/aural interactions with friends, classmates, co-workers, and English-dominant family members such as older siblings; therefore, while they are often highly proficient oral communicators, many face considerable difficulty with academic writing (Roberge, 2002).

Another factor to take into consideration is that within K-12 English programs, curricular procedures that track and place students into ESL, bilingual, remedial, and mainstream classes many times offer inconsistent placement options for immigrant and refugee students who are long-term residents of the United States; after several years in the United States, these students do not “fit” into newcomer-oriented ESL classes, and yet are not always ready for the language and literacy demands of mainstream English classes (Roberge, 2002). With time, particularly in college, English placement becomes even more problematic, especially when students have shifted to English dominance, but

* Also referred to in the literature as “heritage” “home” and “cultural” languages, however, I will use “native” language throughout this capstone.

still retain ESL-like features in their speech and especially their writing (Frodsen & Starna, 1999).

A final factor to take into consideration is that immigrant and refugee students do not always gain the proficiency in English literacy skills that they need in order to handle complex de-contextualized language as well as the ability to participate in the culture of mainstream classrooms (Hartman & Tarone, 1999). When students are moved to mainstream classes before developing the language, background knowledge, and cultural schema they need in order to be successful in these classes, they miss an enormous amount of information (Miramontes, 1993). Furthermore, they experience yet another interruption in their education, something many of them have already experienced before coming to the United States (Bosher & Rowekamp, 1998; Hartman & Tarone, 1999).

Given the fact that most generation 1.5 students have lived and attended school in the United States for many years, it is not always the best option for them to be placed into college ESL courses with newly arrived immigrants or international students. At the same time, it is not always the solution to place them into basic writing (or freshmen composition) courses for native speakers; after all, the writing of many generation 1.5 students often shows evidence that they do indeed have second language writing needs (Blanton, 1999).

Whether or not students are placed into ESL courses or basic writing courses will work in a particular institution depends on many factors that are local, political, and philosophical to that particular institution; furthermore, before placing students into any course, examining each student's writing and meeting with them to get a sense of their

backgrounds is essential (Smoke, 2001). Also essential about the courses students are placed into, according to Robin Murie, is making sure that the course is rich in academic literacy and reading taught by instructors who are well-trained in how to respond to a student's writing and reading.*

Thomas and Collier (1997) conducted a groundbreaking study of over 700,000 language minority students which included new immigrants and refugees from around the world as well as students born in the United States of mostly Spanish-speaking parents. The study was conducted over the course of 14 years in five participating school systems, and found three key predictors of long-term school success with language minority students. The first predictor was cognitively complex on-grade-level academic instruction through the students' first language for as long as possible (at least through grades 5 or 6) and cognitively complex on-grade-level academic instruction through the second language (English) for part of the day in each succeeding grade throughout the students' schooling. The second predictor was the use of current approaches in teaching the academic curriculum through two languages, and the third was a transformed socio-cultural context for the language minority students' education.

Mohamed Farid, an elder in the Somali community and high school ESL teacher who I interviewed as an expert for this study, supports these findings. Mr. Farid believes that ESL classes for Somali students in K-12 schools are serving Somali students' language and educational needs to some extent, but offering bi-lingual services is by far the best option. Somali students who arrive to school in the United States with no

* Interview with Robin Murie, expert from the University of Minnesota, March, 2004.

literacy or formal schooling in their first language, and who may also be losing Somali values, will thrive in a bi-lingual environment. Ideally, Mr. Farid believes, bi-lingual services should be offered in content areas throughout high school.*

Although bi-lingual services and instruction are ideal settings for many Somali students, most districts do not offer these opportunities. Mr. Farid believes that when bi-lingual education is not offered, ESL is always the second best option. Furthermore, Thomas and Collier (1997) recognized that language minority students in their study thrived when the English language component of the day was taught through cognitively complex academic work across the curriculum, while making the material meaningful for students at their proficiency level in English. They also found that students in programs that used more interactive, interdisciplinary, discovery learning approaches by ESL-certified teachers who understand second language acquisition, excelled past their peers who received ESL instruction focused only on the structure of the English language.

Thomas and Collier's (1997) study clearly showed that when teachers taught ESL courses using an interactive approach focused on interdisciplinary problem-solving, and making use of the students' knowledge and resources from their diverse life experiences in other linguistic and cultural contexts, students reached higher long-term levels of academic achievement in all areas.

Zamel also supports Thomas and Collier's findings. According to Zamel (1998), whether it is in ESL, basic writing, or freshman composition courses, generation 1.5 students' needs will be met if:

*Interview with Mohamed Farid, March 14th, 2005.

we involve students in authentic work by immersing them in reading, writing, and language, by engaging them in rich course material, and by providing them with multiple and extensive opportunities to inquire into, raise questions about, critically examine material, by inviting them to see connections between their own perspectives and course content, by helping them develop new frameworks of understanding, by allowing them to actively construct knowledge by locating meaning in their observations and interpretations (pp. 194).

In order to have a better understanding of the participants in this study, it is vital to have insight and knowledge about their community and culture. In the next section, I will discuss aspects of Somali community and culture as well as how the civil war and relocation has affected and continues to affect the Somali community.

The Somali Community and Culture

Somalia is located on the Horn of Africa, adjacent to the Indian Ocean; it is approximately the size of Texas with a population of 7,140,643 (Magnuson, 2002). Approximately 95% of the people are ethnic Somalis and society is organized around male lineage clan groups rooted in “nomadic pastoralism,” which is the act of traveling with herds of goats, sheep, and camels. Somalis in the United States represent a cross-section of the Somali population, which includes varied levels of formal education, traditional nomads to urban dwellers, and major clans to minority clans (Farah, McCullough-Zander & McGuire, 2001; Magnuson, 2002).

The majority of Somalis were nomads and farmers in Somalia, but prior to the civil war, an urban, professional class in Somalia emerged. Even amongst this group, traditional Somali culture was revered and followed (Anderson, 2003). Somalia enjoyed a democratic style of government made up of many political parties until 1969 when the last democratically elected Somali President was assassinated while campaigning for election. The Somali state collapsed in 1991 as civil war engulfed the capital city of Mogadishu (Gardner & Bushra, 2004).

War and Relocation

The civil war has commonly been reported as a conflict between competing clan-based groups. By 1991, the civil war was in full force and extremely brutal. It was often described as one of the worst humanitarian crisis' faced by people in the world. By the end of 1992 an estimated 500,000 people – 300,000 of them children – died in the war and subsequent famine. Some 1.5 million Somalis had fled to neighboring countries and beyond, leaving everything they owned behind including their homes which were looted and destroyed (Gardner & Bushra, 2004).

Between 1991 and 1993, women and children made up approximately 80% of the estimated 300,000 who sought refuge in Kenya by October 1993. Although they had fled Kenya to escape the civil war, many found themselves facing sexual violence, most often rape, which was used as a means of torture for women and girls as young as four years old in the refugee camps (Musse, 2004). In fact, it has been estimated that at least 35% of all Somali refugees have been victims of torture (Farah, McCullough-Zander & McGuire, 2001; Farid & McMahan, 2004). While the majority of Somali refugees

relocated to Kenya and Nigeria, where they most often lived in refugee camps, many who came to the United States settled in the metropolitan area in the upper Midwest where both participants in my study live. Currently in Somalia, conditions are improving, but there is still massive internal displacement, continuing violence, starvation, and political instability (Magnuson, 2002).

“Reflections on Exile,” by Edward Said (1991), describes what it must mean for many Somalis to have been forced to leave their country behind. I believe Said articulates this in ways that are far more powerful and meaningful than any statistic or fact that could ever be included in this chapter about the Somali refugee experience:

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile’s life, these are no more than efforts to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind for ever (pp. 357).

Religion

Nearly all Somalis are Muslim, which is important for educators of Somali students to understand as religion serves as the foundation of Somali culture and lifestyle. For those who value and believe in the separation of church and state, it may be difficult to comprehend the importance of religion in all areas of a Muslim’s life. One of the major holidays that Muslims observe annually is Ramadan, which occurs on the ninth

month on the lunar calendar. Ramadan lasts for approximately one month and all healthy and able Muslims beyond puberty are expected to abstain from food, drink, and intimate relations from dawn to sunset (Farid & McMahan, 2004). It is important that educators who work with fasting Somali students understand all that is involved with Ramadan.

According to Ms. Noor, an expert who I interviewed for this study, “for students who fast, there are a lot of bad days during Ramadan.” Ms. Noor recommends that though college instructors’ expectations and academic requirements of students should not change during Ramadan, instructors should be sensitive to students’ needs during this time. For example, if instructors notice that a student is missing classes, they should discuss the absences with the student and make accommodations for the student to turn in assignments at a later date or to take exams at a different time of day. According to Ms. Noor, courses that run anytime between 4pm – 8pm are often the most challenging for fasting Muslim students to attend.

Traditional Family Structure, Role of Women, and Change

In Somali society, many men and women lack formal education. In fact, even before the war, Somalia had some of the lowest literacy rates in the world for both men and women. Still, Somali men have a superior social status to women and are not responsible for domestic duties. They are assigned the dominant roles in religion, economics, politics and all decisions that affect their community and families (Gardner & Bushra, 2004). For women, marriage and childbearing are expected. Childbearing begins shortly after marriage and a woman’s status rises as she has more children (Farid & McMahan, 2004). During my interview with Mr. Farid, he explained that Islam

teaches that the man is responsible for “feeding the home” whereas women are responsible for taking care of all that happens inside of the home, including the children.

However, as Gardner and Bushra (2004) argue, women are responsible for taking care of all that happens inside of the home because they are not valued as highly in Somali culture as men. In a poem by an unknown Somali woman, the poet voices a mother’s frustration at the attitude of Somali society regarding the worth of female children, regretting the birth of her daughter (Gardner & Bushra, 2004):

Why were you born? Why did you arrive at dusk? In your place a boy would have been welcome. Sweet dates would have been my reward. The clan would be rejoicing. A lamb would have been slaughtered for the occasion, and I would have been glorified (pp. 1).

The civil war and re-settlement have added another component of major stress to Somali family life. Many women who have never lived in an urban environment, worked outside of the home, and have always had the support of a large extended family, now find themselves living with many challenges. According to Farid and McMahan (2004), many Somali students have not had the benefits of a traditional and stable family life as they would have had before the civil war. Many spent time in refugee camps where day-to-day survival set the rules of living; many Somali elders believe that the war and refugee experience weakened the family structure as well as traditional Islamic values. Due to resettlement and the inability to always keep families together in refugee situations, only about one in four Somali children in the metropolitan area live with both parents; in fact, the average number of children living at home is 2.7 (Farah,

McCullough-Zander & McGuire, 2001). According to Ms. Noor, there are restrictions on the number of children that can be brought into the United States, which also contributes to this 2.7 average.

Because so many women are now the head of their households, a major role-reversal has taken place. Elders in the Somali community are concerned that Somali women who are now the head of their households are under-prepared when teaching Islamic values to their children as they generally have received less training in this area than Somali men (Farid & McMahan, 2004). However, as Gardner & Bushra (2004) point out, Somali women are under-prepared because they were never allowed to make major decisions for their families or educate their children on the teachings of the Koran. Furthermore, as children get older and become more educated, yet another role reversal takes place; children are often put in roles where they have authority over their parent(s).

Many educators in the field of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) understand the importance of taking inventories of immigrant and refugee students' educational and language backgrounds to better understand and teach students. However, it is just as necessary that we take into account the traumatic and challenging experiences that Somali students have had, how these experiences have impacted and continue to impact them, and the many life-changing adjustments they are currently making in a different country, culture, educational system, and language. Generation 1.5 Somali students experience day-to-day stresses of living between cultures, being part of a generation in transition, and being a teenager or young adult in the United States.

Developing Academic English

The participants in this study are Somali refugees who arrived in the United States at the age of 11 with interrupted educations and little to no formal education in their native Somali language. This brings up several implications regarding their language learning in academic settings. What follows are summaries of pertinent language learning theories developed by experts in the field of second language acquisition and education. Not every major theory or research study regarding language learning is included, but what is included is most relevant to the participants who I studied and gives context to their academic language backgrounds.

BICS/CALP

Cummins (1979) developed one of the first theoretical models for the field of second language acquisition that makes a distinction between two basic types of language proficiency: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS includes accent, oral fluency, and sociolinguistic competence. CALP includes context-reduced, cognitively demanding aspects of language proficiency including literary skills involving cognitive processes at higher levels used to function successfully in the academic classroom (Krashen, 1982; Collier, 1987). Cummins found that the rate it takes young children with little or no formal schooling in their first language to attain CALP in their second language is approximately five to seven years, whereas it takes the same students approximately two years to master BICS in their second language (Cummins, 1979).

Rate of Language Acquisition

Numerous studies done on the age and rate of attainment in a second language have confirmed that older children and adults *initially* acquire many aspects of the second language faster than younger children. However, with acquisition of pronunciation and influence of the socio-affective filter, adults sometimes experience problems with second language acquisition, and with time, younger learners often attain higher levels of proficiency in the second language than those who begin learning the second language as an adult (Collier, 1987).

Cummins found that older learners acquire CALP in their second language faster than younger learners, and that length of residence *instead* of age on arrival accounts for the major variance in performance (Cummins, 1979). Cummins' interdependence hypothesis predicted that older learners who are "more cognitively mature" and whose first language proficiency is better developed will acquire cognitively demanding aspects of the second language more quickly than younger learners do (Collier, 1987). Because of older children's greater cognitive maturity, it is only expected that they will have an advantage over younger children in acquiring aspects of a second language that is strongly related to CALP (Cummins, 1980).

Collier's (1987) seminal study of 1,548 limited English proficient students supported a new hypothesis that older students who arrive between the ages of 12 and 15 experience the greatest difficulty with acquisition in English for academic purposes combined with continuing content-area development when these students are educated only in English. Collier found that students in grades 7-12 could not afford to lose even

one year of cognitive and academic development in all subject areas while they were mastering English.

Though this study in its scope and findings was groundbreaking, it is important to consider that the students in the study were proficient in their first language, came from socioeconomic and educationally advantaged families, and went to schools in a district with a highly regarded ESL program. Standardized, multiple-choice tests were primarily used to measure students' CALP skills in the areas of reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Thomas and Collier's later study (1997) found that the deeper a student's level of cognitive and academic development in their first language, the faster the student progressed in English. Thomas and Collier as well as Boshier and Rowekamp (1998) also found that formal schooling in a learner's first language is a significant predictor of academic success. In fact, students who complete high school in their native countries have been found to be the most successful academically in higher education settings which suggests the importance of an uninterrupted education in a learner's native language as well as acquiring language through more formal means (Boshier & Rowekamp, 1998).

Cummins (1980) found that older learners consistently failed to demonstrate an advantage over younger learners in studies measuring BICS (though much of his research was conducted on adolescents and adults who had lived in the United States for shorter periods than the participants in this study who arrived in the United States at the age of

11). However, it was also revealed that it takes at least five years for these same learners who arrive after the age of six to approach grade norms in CALP.

An Alternative Framework to BICS and CALP

The distinction between BICS and CALP is useful in understanding that the type of language learning needed to be successful in academic settings occurs over a long period of time and is a highly involved, complicated process. For refugee students like the participants in this study who had periods of interruption in their educations and were not academically literate in their first language when they arrived to the United States, Cummins' BICS/CALP theory gives context to why they still need further instruction in English at the college level even after graduating from high school in the United States. However, is the BICS/CALP model too simplistic?

Those who accept the BICS/CALP distinction believe that basic conversational skills are usually acquired in an ESL student's first few years in the United States, but that academic English is usually acquired later or takes longer to acquire, approximately five to seven years (Collier & Thomas, 1989). However, what researchers have not discussed is the fact that learners who live in communities that are linguistically isolated and those who are not exposed to academic English in their communities, either in their homes or in their schools, often never acquire this kind of English or do so in limited ways (Scarcella, 2003). Furthermore, the BICS/CALP model neglects to address issues of power and socio-cultural issues that the immigrant and refugee learner experiences while learning academic English (Norton, 2000).

For many immigrants and refugees in the United States, the language learning required for BICS does not regularly occur in stimulating environments surrounded by fluent speakers of English who make certain that the learner understands the communication directed at him or her and are prepared to negotiate meaning in a supportive atmosphere (Norton, 2000). In fact, Norton (2000) found that immigrant women in her study experienced native English speakers who were often impatient, uninviting, and sometimes hostile towards them.

From the BICS/CALP perspective, the development of academic English is largely presented as a fixed choice: either it is acquired or it is not. However, in reality, this view of language and its development rarely happens as some aspects of BICS are acquired later, and some aspects of CALP are acquired earlier; in fact, BICS is not as monolithic as the distinction implies (Scarcella, 2003). Furthermore, an assumption is often made that BICS refers only to spoken English and CALP refers solely to written English. Perhaps most importantly, the BICS/CALP perspective does not provide instructors with enough information about academic English to help students acquire it (Scarcella, 2003).

Scarcella (2003) argues that academic English entails, “multiple, complex features of English required for long-term success in public schools, completion of higher education, and employment with opportunities for professional advancement and financial rewards. It involves mastery of a writing system and its particular academic conventions as well as proficiency in reading, speaking, and listening” (pp. 3-4). Furthermore, academic English is not acquired once and for all as it is continually

evolving and shifting to meet changing tasks and purposes; after all, each discipline involves its own literacy in English, and within that discipline, ESL students must continually acquire new English literacy skills.

Traditionally, literacy has been defined as the ability to read and write involving decoding and encoding. Many researchers now believe that it also involves higher-order thinking such as conceptualizing, inferring, inventing, and testing, and they argue that literacy encompasses oral communication skills and reading and writing skills (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Also important to note is that listening, speaking, reading, and writing do not develop sequentially, nor is proficiency in one necessarily an indicator of proficiency in another (McKay & Wong, 1996).

Connections Between Academic English Learning and Identity

Motivation

The work of Gardner and Lambert (1972) has been influential in introducing the concepts of “instrumental” and “integrative” motivation into the field of second language acquisition. “Instrumental” refers to the motivation that language learners have to learn a second language for purposes such as education and employment, while “integrative” refers to the motivation to learn a language to integrate successfully within the target language community.

Theories of a “good language learner” have been developed with the belief that all language learners are fortunate enough to *choose* under what conditions they will interact with members of the target language community and that the language learner’s access to

the target language community is a function of the learner's motivation; furthermore, many researchers have assumed that learners can simply be defined as motivated or unmotivated without considering that such affective factors are frequently socially constructed in inequitable relations of power (Norton, 2000).

Focus on motivation not only simplifies the language learning process of a student, but it diverts attention from the multiplicity of social factors that the student must regularly address, and it may also contribute to blaming an unsuccessful student for simply not being more motivated (McKay & Wong, 1996). Moreover, the concept of learner motivation does not take into account the complex factors that refugee students, like the participants in my study, have in their language learning profiles. These students face difficulties that come from the challenges of having to negotiate new literacy practices and social identities in a language they are still in the process of acquiring; inevitably, students who have had limited academic experiences in their first language will have difficulty when they do this work in English (Zamel & Spack, 2004).

Investment

Norton argues that second language acquisition theorists have struggled to conceptualize the relationship between the language learner and the social world because they have not developed a comprehensive theory of social identity which integrates the language learner and the language learning context (Sharkey, Ling, Thompson & Norton, 2003). Norton's "investment" framework (having nothing to do with "instrumental motivation") replaces "motivation" by treating the language learner as an individual with a complex social history and multiple desires; an investment in the target language is also

an investment in a learner's own identity, one that is always changing (Norton, 1995, 2000). Investment does not decrease because of multiple identities, it actually increases (McKay & Wong, 1996).

Connections Between Identity and Academic English Language Learning

For many years, error analysis and inter-language analysis dominated research in second language acquisition which gave little recognition to learning processes, individual variables, or the social context in which the second language was learned and used (McKay & Wong, 1996). Currently, interest in the intersection of language and identity has been a growing trend amongst researchers in the fields of second language acquisition and social psychology (Norton, 2000). Research has shown that learning is socio-culturally bound and further compounded by components of a learner's identity (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991).

When discussing "Identity" in this study, the following will be included: ethnicity, race, gender, age, religion, social-class, educational background, and language. It should be noted that none of these are experienced as separate entities, rather, they are all inter-connected in complex ways that shape a person's identity. *How* identity is formed is just as important, if not more important, than *defining* what identity is.

The shaping of identity and impact of identity on language learning and learners is a key point of this study and has been gaining interest amongst researchers for some time. For example, Boshier's (1995) study that examined the acculturation of Hmong college students' showed that acculturation contributed significantly to students' native

language maintenance and self-esteem. In fact, students who were actively maintaining their Hmong culture identity were most successful in college.

Definitions of Key Terms

In the following section and throughout this capstone, a variety of terms will be used when discussing Fatimo and Leyla's academic progress and acculturation in college. These key terms: Acculturation, Assimilation, and Integration (Berry, 1980, 1986) were adapted and successfully used in Boshier's (1995) study. The definitions are as follows:

Acculturation - The overall process of cultural adaptation or change, which is both multidimensional and non-linear.

Assimilation - The process of cultural adaptation whereby the majority culture eventually replaces the native culture.

Integration - A bicultural approach to cultural adaptation in which there is both movement towards the majority culture, as well as maintenance of native culture.

Identity Formation

Research in the field of lifespan and development shows that all 18 and 19 year olds experience major identity shifts during this period of their lives, constantly questioning how their identity fits with their expectations for the future with the beliefs and experiences they have experienced in their past all the while experiencing a heightened self-consciousness (Berger, 2005). For the participants in this study, this normal shift in identity is further complicated by experiences of intense acculturation and intergenerational conflicts as they adapt to a variety of identity contexts, some of which are quite different than what they have known in their families and Somali community.

Immigrants and refugees who arrive during childhood or adolescence face a daunting task: they must continue to develop a home cultural identity, while simultaneously developing an American cultural identity; when this process is successful, they develop healthy bicultural identities with strong attachments to two or more cultures, but when the process is unsuccessful, they sometimes become doubly alienated (Roberge, 2002). A unique issue affecting Somalis is not only when or if the Somali community will acculturate or assimilate into “American” culture, but how they will do it.

Waters’ (1990) study of second-generation adolescents of West Indian and Haitian origin in New York City found that when the adolescents worked to distinguish themselves apart from their “immigrant” identity, they embraced the African-American identity, which was perceived by their parents as downward assimilation. However, none of the adolescents in the study were Muslim, which could potentially be a major factor that would prevent Somalis from “assimilating” into any non-Muslim American community or culture.

Currently there are social institutions in place that assist Somalis in maintaining and continuing their culture and first language. Weekly attendance at educational and religious ceremonies encourage Somalis to remain connected to their family, community, culture, and language, which many educators of Somali K-12 students believe is a key contributor to the relatively fast academic gains that Somali students make regardless of their educational background (Magnuson, 2002). Mr. Farid, who I interviewed as an expert for this study, explained that Somali elders in the metropolitan area where my participants live have taken on a proactive role in guiding, encouraging, teaching, and

mentoring Somali students in and out of K-12 schools; their hope is to move into higher education settings as well to work with and support Somali college students.

Furthermore, Mr. Farid acknowledged that Somali teenagers experience many challenges and explained that Somalis refer to puberty as “the age of responsibility.” In fact, before the age of fifteen, parents are responsible for the spiritual guidance and religious education of their children, but afterwards, the children themselves are responsible. Wearing a hejab* or scarf for the first time is a rite of passage for a young Somali woman and if she chooses not to wear it, she is often thought of as less than a decent, proper woman. Education is a high priority to Somalis as very few, particularly women, had opportunities to become college educated in Somalia. Mr. Farid supports and encourages both Somali boys and girls to become educated, but at the same time believes that it is important to “train” Somali girls to take care of the home so that they will be good “managers” of their own homes when they are married.

Another issue to add to the complexity that generation 1.5 Somali women experience is the fact that they will always be perceived as “foreigners” no matter how long they live in the United States. Many generation 1.5 students who are discussed in the literature are often not perceived as “immigrants” or “foreigners” in the United States by anything more than their ethnicity and their accents (Yu, 2004). However, this is not the reality for Somali women who wear the hejab. Discrimination and racism have been experienced in the United States by many Somalis, and the participants in my study are no exception. In a time when acceptance amongst peers is valued, this marginalization

* A hejab is a scarf that covers the head and hair.

adds yet another layer of complexity to an already multilayered generation 1.5 Somali identity.

It is predicted that 10% of immigrants who arrive between the ages of 0 to 14 (like the participants in my study who arrived in the United States at the age of 11) will eventually lose their native language completely and that those who arrive after age 15 will most likely not lose their native language over the course of their life (McKay & Wong, 2000). Pressure on immigrant and refugee children to lose their native language and culture carries a high price; some children never recover from the trauma of losing their native language before they can acquire a new language (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991). Many Somali students are faced with having a native language in which they have the culture, but not the full linguistic ability; at the same time, they have English in which they have the linguistic ability (varied as it is), but not the culture (Chiang & Schmida, 1999).

Many generation 1.5 students have been successful at maintaining aspects of their home culture identities instead of rapidly assimilating into American culture (Rumbaut, 1994). This challenges the belief that assimilation is a prerequisite for success in the United States; in fact, over the past twenty years, many scholars such as Boshier (1995) have shown that strong home culture identity is positively correlated with successful academic performance; rapid cultural and linguistic assimilation has been linked to educational failure, rather than success, particularly amongst certain segments of immigrant and refugee populations.

In closing, learners are extremely complex with a multitude of fluctuating, at times conflicting, needs and desires (McKay & Wong, 1996). In addition, generation 1.5 learners in higher education are learning in extremely complex social environments amongst multiple, varied discourses. The complex relationship between the participants' identities and the new "academic" identities they are gaining in college are explored in detail in this study. A closer examination of the participants in this study and an overview of the study itself are included in the next chapter. Also included are the methods used to collect data and the techniques used to analyze the data in this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

The purpose of this study is to explore two Somali women's perceptions of their academic progress and acculturation in college, specifically the nature and impact of: family support, socio-cultural and identity issues, and past and present experiences in and out of the classroom. In this chapter, the research methods as well as the procedure used for data collection and analysis used in this study are explained. Fatimo and Leyla's participation in this study is also discussed.

Case Study

From the beginning of this study, I intentionally avoided what is called blitzkrieg ethnography: taking a quick look at a handful of learners, coming up with anecdotes on them, and writing up their de-contextualized stories (Rist, 1980). Instead, research conducted was qualitative using case study as the primary means of collecting data. This allowed me to focus on the process of carrying out the study, and reveal unique knowledge that I would not have had access to otherwise (Merriam, 1998). Case study ultimately provided a rich, detailed, complex, and holistic description of both Fatimo and Leyla.

During the study, I made a conscious effort to be aware of my role with Fatimo and Leyla as a researcher. Researchers must implicitly understand that their research can

never be completely objective or unbiased. For example, most feminist research begins with the belief that a researcher plays a constitutive role in determining the progress of a research project and that a researcher must understand her own subjective experience and knowledge as well as that of the women she is studying (Weiler, 1988). Furthermore, race is always salient and part of the dynamic in any interviews a researcher does because of, and in spite of, the subject matter of the study (Tamale, 1996).

Although I am an Asian-American woman who was not born in the United States, my experiences and perceptions as a woman of color are vastly different than those of Fatimo and Leyla. Although my being a “minority” in the United States may have helped make them feel more comfortable with me in our interviews, I am not a member of the Somali community, nor did I ever want to pass myself off as an “expert” about their culture or appropriate their culture at any time. When a researcher is not of the culture of their participants, regardless of his or her culture or race, the researcher must always be aware of these differences.

Because I had taught courses that Fatimo and Leyla completed, I already had established relationships with them, which led to their willingness to participate in the study and their openness to share confidential information about their lives. On the other hand, as their former instructor, they may have viewed me in a position of authority, and not as an equal. I made a conscious effort to make them feel comfortable. One of the ways I did this was by offering to conduct all interviews off campus at a location chosen by each participant. I feel immensely privileged that Fatimo and Leyla shared so much with me about their personal lives and feelings. As a researcher who is not from their

culture, I made a conscious effort not to take advantage of their vulnerability or represent their perceptions in ways that were not their own.

It should be noted here that a former student who I had asked to be in the study and who agreed to participate, dropped out of the study early on. When she spoke with her family about the study, her father did not support her decision to participate. Though she would not go into detail about her father's feelings, it was clear that he did not trust or understand the study and felt uncomfortable having his daughter "researched." She wanted to stay in the study regardless of her father's feelings, but was told by her mother that her father could possibly disown her if she went ahead and participated.

After learning this, I urged her to drop out of the study. I told her that it was not in her best interest to participate and that I was sorry it had created so much conflict for her. Had she continued with the study, she could have suffered major, life-changing consequences with her father and her entire family. Although I felt badly that she would not be a part of the study, I also understood that her participation in the study was not worth the stress it was causing her. This experience showed me yet another layer of complexity that many Somali college students experience; although they are "technically" adults in the United States, the decisions they make do not just affect them, but their entire family. In addition, not all cultures or communities perceive "research" in the same ways that many of us in academic settings do.

Empowering Research

After having this experience with the former student who dropped out of the study early on, I was even more committed in doing thoughtful, contextual, and holistic case study research. “Empowering research” most appealed to me. As described by Cameron et al. (1992), the researcher’s goals, assumptions and procedures should be made explicit to the participants, and research methods should be open, interactive, and a constant dialogue. Furthermore, when the researcher is not of the same cultural group as his/her participants, and the participants’ culture is being studied in some way, Cameron et al. (1992) suggests the following to guide the researcher:

1. Ask questions that interest the researched group or are generated by them.
2. Be open about your agenda and negotiate at all stages.
3. Make the knowledge and perceptions of the researched group count; do not impose an ‘expert’ framework unthinkingly.
4. On the other hand, share information and analytic tools; the group may reject them but it is wrong to assume from the outset they do not want to know.
5. Present what you learn from research in such a way that the researched group will find it accessible (1992, pp. 128).

I used this list to help guide me when developing the details of my study, and I also added my own 6th component:

6. Consult with experts from the community you are studying. Do not rely solely on research or theory written by those who are not members of the community, even if they are “experts” in their fields.

Community Experts

Committed to the above guidelines, I interviewed two experts in the Somali community during the course of this study. I did not want to rely solely on information written about the Somali community or by non-Somali educators in my discipline. I also wanted to make sure that I conducted my study with Fatimo and Leyla in respectful and effective ways. To gain further insight and knowledge, I had the opportunity to interview Sahra Noor, a community health education nurse, and a graduate of the same college that Fatimo and Leyla attend. Ms. Noor was the first Somali student I worked with at the college almost eight years ago, and is now a respected nurse professional.

I also had the opportunity to interview Mohamed Farid, an elder in the Somali community who is both an ESL teacher and an author. His book, co-written with Don McMahan, “Accommodating and Educating Somali Students in Minnesota Schools: A Handbook for Teachers and Administrators” (2004) should be required reading for any educator who works with Somali students.

Data Collection

I modeled the study after Bonny Norton’s (2000) longitudinal study that she conducted over the course of two years with five adult immigrant women. Like Norton, I collected data in several steps; however, unlike Norton, my data collection was done deliberately over a much shorter period of time: approximately eight weeks. Fatimo and Leyla both expressed interest in participating in a study intensively over a shorter period of time rather than participating in a study that moved at a slower pace over a longer

period of time. I understood this need; after all, they were busy college students at the time. I told them throughout the study that their college courses and family obligations should be the priority at all times, not their participation in the study.

In order to protect the participants' identities, Fatimo and Leyla never knew of each other; in fact, Leyla asked at one point if I knew Fatimo because she thought that Fatimo would be an excellent candidate for the study. I told Leyla that not only could I not tell her if I knew Fatimo, but I could not tell her who the other participant in the study was, nor could I tell the other participant who she was.

I conducted the study for my own personal research. Furthermore, I did not receive monetary compensation for my work, though I did receive a grant from a local TESOL organization to pay Fatimo and Leyla stipends of \$100 each after they had completed the study. I wanted them to know that I valued their time and how much those, particularly in the field of TESOL, will ultimately value their perceptions. They were happy to be compensated for their participation, but it was clearly not their motivation as to why they chose to participate in and complete the study. Both Fatimo and Leyla shared with me that they were honored and flattered that I had asked *them* to participate and that they both felt strongly that those who work with Somali students (of any age) need to understand their perspectives and point of view.

First, background information on Fatimo and Leyla in the form of high school transcripts, college pre-admission ESL test scores, ACT test scores, and college academic records was collected. This information provided insight into their academic history.

Second, Fatimo and Leyla completed two questionnaires: a Language Use Survey and a General Background Information Survey (See Appendix A) so that I could learn more about their language background as well as general background information about them before I conducted the interviews. The Language Use Survey was developed by Goen, Porter, Swanson and Vandommelen (2002), and I developed the General Background Information Survey. After reviewing the completed questionnaires from the participants, the interview questions were reviewed and in some cases revised.

Third, I made arrangements to interview Fatimo and Leyla. Though they were interviewed separately, the same set of interview questions was used as a template to guide our discussions (See Appendix B). I conducted two interviews with Fatimo that lasted approximately six hours total. I also conducted two interviews with Leyla that lasted approximately five hours total. Before the first interview started with each participant, I took the opportunity to clarify the study with them again and answer any questions that they had about their involvement in the study or the study itself.

Fourth, Fatimo and Leyla took part in journal writing (See Appendix C). This method will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. After the last journal entry was written, I analyzed data from the interviews and journal entries, making notes regarding anything that I needed clarification on, or that I had forgotten to ask from the interview questions.

Fifth, I asked Fatimo and Leyla to give me copies of papers they had written in college that they believed represented their best and worst formal, academic writing. Each participant gave me two papers to review.

The final step was to conduct a final interview individually with Fatimo and Leyla. This final interview added closure to the study and gave me the opportunity to ask any final questions for further clarification, answer any questions they had, thank them for their participation, and compensate them for participating in and completing the study. The final interviews took approximately one hour with each participant.

Journal Writing

For the purpose of this study, journal writing was intended to provide genuine opportunities for Fatimo and Leyla to express themselves beyond the interviews and questionnaires in reflective, critical, and sometimes more open ways.

Because Fatimo and Leyla had gone to middle school and high school in the United States, they were familiar with informal journal writing and already had many experiences with it before coming to college. I wanted to present writing in an informal, non-threatening way that would give them opportunities to reflect on what they wanted to say that they may have not felt as comfortable expressing during the oral interviews. I told Fatimo and Leyla that their journals would never be assessed by me in any way and that they should not spend any time thinking about the mechanics of writing or editing their writing. The main objective of the writing was self-expression.

Fatimo and Leyla were asked to respond a minimum of once a week to journal prompts that I gave them. The prompts were intentionally similar to the questions I had asked during the interviews and organized under similar

categories as the interview questions. I gave both of them the option of writing their responses over a secure Blackboard site on-line, word processing, or handwriting their entries. Fatimo and Leyla both preferred to handwrite, saying that it was the easiest way for them to write journals. They understood that the journals were read only by me and that everything they wrote was part of the study which had the potential to be shared in this capstone. They understood that though pieces of their writing might be shared publicly, their real names would never be revealed.

Writing journal entries over the course of an eight-week study did not appeal to Fatimo or Leyla. Both participants asked if they could respond to all of the journal entries after the interviews had been completed. I realized this method would be even more effective as the participants could reflect on something they said during an interview and reflect on it in even more detail in writing if they chose to. It also turned out to be a preferred method because I could pick and choose which journal prompts to give the participants after the interviews had been completed. Fatimo and Leyla did not respond to the same journal prompts nor did they respond to all 11 of them. Neither participant responded to more than a total of six journal prompts during the study. The prompts were selected specifically for Fatimo and Leyla based on what additional information I still hoped to receive after the interview portion of the study had been completed.

Method of Analysis

Interviews were recorded and later analyzed in detail. Though I did not transcribe each interview, I did record in writing significant information that each participant shared. This written analysis, both questionnaires, journal entries, and my own notes were categorized within the following general themes: Somali Identity, Identity (General), Investment, Attitudes Toward Academic Literacy, and College Environment. These themes emerged from the guiding questions I developed:

- 1) What past experiences (in and out of the classroom) have had the greatest impact, both positively and negatively, on the participants in college?
- 2) How have the participants' families influenced and impacted their decisions and progress in college?
- 3) What socio-cultural and identity issues have had the greatest impact, both positively and negatively, on the participants in college?

These guiding questions were developed as I considered what I wanted to learn about the participants in relation to their academic progress and acculturation in college. All of the themes that emerged from the guiding questions proved to be useful, although some changed slightly as the study progressed. For example, there was no need to separate "Somali Identity" from "Identity" as it was revealed that the participants do not separate these identities in their own lives. In the following chapter, the specific themes, the results and analysis of the questionnaires, interviews, and journal entries are discussed in detail.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore two Somali women's perceptions of their academic progress and acculturation in college. In this chapter, I have analyzed and summarized the findings of the data from the participants' completed questionnaires, interviews, and journal entries. These findings are organized and reported by themes that evolved from the guiding questions I developed:

- 1) What past experiences (in and out of the classroom) have had the greatest impact, both positively and negatively, on the participants in college?
- 2) How have the participants' families influenced and impacted their decisions and progress in college?
- 3) What socio-cultural and identity issues have had the greatest impact, both positively and negatively, on the participants in college?

Fatimo and Leyla: Educational Backgrounds

Though both Fatimo and Leyla had been students of mine for one semester, I knew little about them beyond the classroom. When I decided to do this study, I reflected on the traditional aged Somali women college students whom I had taught and gotten to know the previous academic year and who were currently sophomores in college. After careful consideration, I chose Fatimo because we had connected outside of class, she was

talkative in-class and regularly expressed her point of view. I also chose her because although she needed ESL coursework, her attitude towards ESL coursework was negative and she resented being labeled an ESL student; I wanted to understand why she felt this way.

I chose Leyla because she was only one of two traditional aged Somali women who had been a student of mine in the basic writing course for native speakers of English I had taught the previous year. Not only did she clearly not have a need for ESL coursework, but she excelled in the basic writing course for native speakers of English and could have bypassed the course altogether and gone directly into freshman composition for native speakers of English. She was reserved and quiet in class and never attempted to connect with me outside of class. I wanted to understand why she, unlike Fatimo, did not have a need for ESL coursework in college and why she was prepared in written academic English.

On paper, Fatimo and Leyla looked almost identical. Both women were 20 years of age at the time of the study, had little to no formal education in Somalia or the refugee camps in Kenya where they both lived for two and three years, came to the United States as refugees and began middle school at the age of 11. They both received ESL instruction while they were in middle school only, attended the same high school, graduated from high school the same year, chose the same college to attend, and came to college with the same career aspirations as future pediatricians. Fatimo had an ACT composite score of “13” whereas Leyla’s ACT score was not much higher at a “14.” The only major difference I could find was that based on the results of the college English

language proficiency test both students had taken, Fatimo had been placed into college ESL coursework whereas Leyla had been placed into basic writing for native English speakers. It was a coincidence that on paper these two women presented such similar profiles. Still, I wanted to go beyond their profiles and understand their perceptions about all that had gotten them to this point in their lives.

Language Use

Fatimo

On the Language Use Survey (See Appendix A) that Fatimo completed, she wrote that Somali was the first language she learned to speak, write, and read. Like many generation 1.5 Somali students, she said that although she understands and speaks Somali “well” and writes and reads English “well,” she only writes and reads “some” Somali. When taking into consideration all of the situations where she uses language, she wrote that “English” is her best language and that she is most comfortable speaking “both English and Somali,” but like many generation 1.5 students, she is most comfortable and best able to write and read in “English.” In a “perfect world” she said she would be able to best express herself orally using a combination of English and Somali in college classes.

She wrote that though she is a non-native speaker of English and speaks English as a second language, she is *not* an ESL student, nor is she bi-lingual. Responding to the question on the survey, “I am neither an ESL student, nor bilingual. I am: _____” she filled in the blank by simply writing, “Me.”

When I interviewed Fatimo, she explained that she had already been living in Kenya for two years before the civil war in Somalia began. Her parents had recently separated and her mother had moved to Kenya to work. While living in Kenya with her mother, Fatimo attended grades four and five. While in school, she learned what she called “Kenyan” (Swahili) as well as English, but when the war broke out in Somalia, she and her family were forced to live in a refugee camp. Like many school-age Somali refugees, Fatimo did not attend school while she lived in the refugee camp for two years. At this time, she only spoke Somali and did not continue her studies in English or Swahili, nor did she have opportunities to write or read Somali.

After moving to the metropolitan area where she lives now with her family and where she currently still resides, Fatimo began school in grade six. In grades six and seven she was placed into ESL classes, which she felt she was forced to take only because she was Somali. She said she never took an ESL test nor was told why she needed ESL classes, so she could not figure out any other reason why she was put in ESL classes. Fortunately, she liked ESL in the sixth grade because of the teacher who knew that Fatimo and her classmates were being teased at school for being ESL students. The teacher told the students regularly not to think “low” of themselves and made the class “fun” and “normal.” Fatimo acknowledged that her reading did improve in the sixth grade because of the ESL class as well as the fact that she was enrolled in non-ESL classes at the same time.

Unfortunately, Fatimo “hated” her seventh grade ESL teacher, who she called “evil,” and who she said regularly yelled at her and her classmates for simply asking

questions in class. She felt that the assignments were below her level of English ability as well as demeaning to her as a person; what stood out for her the most was that the teacher was disrespectful to all of the students. When I asked specific questions about what she learned in seventh grade ESL, she did not go into detail, but kept coming back to the fact that the teacher made her feel ashamed about herself for being an ESL student.

Though she did have a positive experience with one ESL teacher, her lasting impression about ESL was with the teacher in the seventh grade that she “hated” and who made her life and the life of her classmates “a living hell-on-earth.” I asked Fatimo if she thought having a Somali ESL teacher would have made ESL a more positive experience. She was not sure how beneficial it would have been to have a Somali teacher teaching English in Somali, but that “attitude” and “treating students fairly and with respect” was what mattered. She felt the ethnicity and cultural background of the ESL teacher was irrelevant.

At the same time Fatimo was in middle school, her parents, who had gotten back together when they had arrived in the United States, were separating again. Not only were her parents trying to adapt to life as recent refugees in a new country, but they were having many problems in their marriage. Though her father helped her “a little” with homework in middle school, he was not around much, and her mother could not help her at all due to the fact that she “knew no English.” Neither of her parents understood the school system in the United States and were unable to offer her support academically. As a result, Fatimo shared nothing with her parents about what she was experiencing in school. Furthermore, Somali refugees were just beginning to enter the school system and

educators knew little about Somali students or their educational needs. Neither of Fatimo's ESL teachers were Somali, nor did they have much experience with Somali students.

Fatimo went on to attend a high school with one of the largest populations of Somali students in the state. Before she began ninth grade, she was given an ESL test to complete and then told that based on the results of the test, she would not need ESL classes in high school. Though her parents were back together again by the time she began high school, she still received little help from them with her studies. Her grades were inconsistent in high school, especially in grades nine and ten where she failed civics, history, and English classes one quarter, but then in another quarter, the same year, received "A" grades in the same classes.

She received the most help outside of school from the "homework helpers" at the local public library. She said they worked with her so much that they put a photograph of her up in the library. She also received a lot of help from a particular English teacher who pulled her aside and told Fatimo that she needed to get her "act together." Fatimo began working with this teacher regularly outside of class on papers and eventually got her grades up in all of her English classes and took only advanced placement English classes her senior year of high school. She also received help from a math teacher who offered to meet regularly with Fatimo outside of class. She said she was the only Somali student in calculus in grade 12 and that she received "A" grades in calculus because of the help she received from this particular teacher.

In fact, by grade 11, her grades drastically improved, and with the exception of a physics course that she took the last quarter of her senior year, she received all “A” and “B” grades. She also became more active in school by attending an after-school mentorship program that helped her study for the ACT test, educated her on college scholarships, applications, and financial aid. She also joined the Somali Student Association and the school newspaper. Still, she admitted that the classes she did best in were the ones that she was most interested in. If she did not like the teacher or was not interested in the material, she did not put effort into the class and received a poor grade. Fatimo described high school as a “rollercoaster,” but acknowledges that it was her fault when she did poorly in classes and admits that she often spent more time watching TV than studying in high school. She graduated from high school with a 2.8 grade point average.

Although Fatimo never acknowledged it, it was apparent that her parents’ separations impacted her a great deal. When she talked about the “rollercoaster” that high school was, she immediately began talking about her father whom she said was rarely at home. When I asked her, “overall, how would you describe your school experiences?” She only talked about how she did not blame her father, but that she blamed herself for her inconsistent grades. She said that none of the classes she took were too difficult, even math, her least favorite subject.

Unfortunately, Fatimo took the ACT test twice and received a low composite score of “13” both times. On both occasions her highest scores were in the areas of “mathematics” and “science reasoning,” which is ironic given that she often performed

poorly in these classes in high school. Her lowest scores were in “English” and “reading.” Even so, the scores never represented the grades she earned throughout high school.

Leyla

On the Language Use Survey (See Appendix A) that Leyla completed, she wrote that Somali was the first language she learned to speak; however, unlike Fatimo, English was the language she first learned to write and read, which is not uncommon for many generation 1.5 students. Leyla had never formally studied English before arriving in the United States and wrote that she *is* an ESL student and bi-lingual on the survey. When taking into consideration all of the situations where she uses language, she wrote that “both English and Somali” are her best languages and that though she is most comfortable speaking “both English and Somali,” she is most comfortable writing and reading in “English.”

When I interviewed Leyla, she explained that her parents want her to speak Somali only when she is at home and it is the only language that she communicates in with her parents; however, she speaks a lot of English with her siblings or a combination of Somali and English. She said when she and her siblings communicate in English it is to argue, explain, or “hide stuff” from their parents. She said it drives her parents “crazy” when she and her siblings speak English at home. However, unlike Fatimo, when Leyla first arrived in the United States at the age of 11, she could not speak, write, or read English.

Like Fatimo, Leyla began school in the United States in sixth grade, and although her family moved to the same city as Fatimo's family, the two women attended different middle schools. When she arrived to middle school in grade six, she was placed in ESL classes in grades six through eight. In grade six, she was enrolled exclusively in ESL classes and in grades seven and eight she took non-ESL classes as well. Leyla had the same two ESL teachers in all three grades, elder men in the Somali community who "explained everything in Somali" especially in grade six when she knew no English whatsoever. During this time, she also received instruction from the same teachers in Somali. She said that learning how to write and read in Somali also helped her learn English and that she took immense pride in being able to write and read her "own" language.

Leyla said that having Somali ESL teachers was a positive experience and that she was not sure how she could have learned so much in such a short period of time without them. In the seventh grade, when she began taking non-ESL classes, she went back to one of her ESL teachers and begged him to let her stay in his ESL classes all day, but he told her it was in her best interest that she take non-ESL classes as well.

Having Somali ESL teachers was not only a positive experience for Leyla academically, but socially as well. In grades six through seven she got into physical fights regularly with students in the same school, all of whom were African-American girls. She said that she did not understand why African-American girls treated her the way they did the first day she began school, and that because she had no idea what they were saying to her, she hit and pushed them to retaliate. She said this "fighting

mechanism” came from the refugee camps where seeing violence was a regular occurrence. According to Farid and McMahan (2004), Leyla, like many other Somali youngsters, was a product of “refugee culture.” The authors also explain that it is not uncommon for Somali children and adolescents to have some form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) when they arrive in the United States; the impulsive and aggressive behavior that they exhibit can lead to physical fighting.

Leyla’s memories of the refugee camps are not pleasant. She said kids solved their problems by physically fighting with one another and that she did her fair share of physical fighting as well. She said this would have never been permitted at home, but in the refugee camps, parents were doing all they could to survive and children were often left unsupervised and unattended to. She also remembers seeing kids and elderly people die. Often when her friends would die she would ask her parents what happened to them, and they would tell her that they had to go away for awhile and could not play with her any longer. She discussed three horrible years of witnessing people starve to death and die of hunger and disease and then recalled feeling shell shocked that in a matter of a short few months she was in an American school learning English.

She also had no concept of American “race relations” or the “African-American experience” and was confused why “other black girls” were so mean to her. In grades six and seven she was suspended a total of eight times for fighting. She said that one of her Somali ESL teachers talked with her regularly about her behavior and why she needed to change. This particular teacher also talked with her parents about her fighting so that they could understand why she was behaving the way she was and what the consequences

were for her behavior. By the eighth grade, Leyla was confident in her English and felt she could express herself verbally rather than physically when girls at school harassed her. She no longer was fighting or getting suspended from school.

Leyla attended the same high school as Fatimo, was also given an ESL exam to complete before she entered school, and told that based on the results of the exam, she would not need to enroll in ESL classes. Overall, she did quite well in high school classes and loved English and history classes the most. She never received anything less than a “B” in any of the English or history classes she completed; in fact, she received nothing less than a “B” in most of her classes. However, she often did poorly in math and science classes, particularly in chemistry where she never received grades above a “D.” She said she was not good at math and science classes and because of her insecurities in these areas, often skipped these particular classes or slept at her desk when she did attend.

During this time, she received no help with homework from her parents, both of whom knew little English at the time. Most of the help she received outside of high school came from the “homework helpers” at the same public library where Fatimo went for help with her homework as well. She continued to thrive in English and social science coursework in high school so much so that her school counselor recommended that she enroll in a post secondary English program her senior year. Unlike a general post secondary education option, Leyla was enrolled in an English program at the local university and completed college coursework in writing, reading and immigration literature. She received “A” and “B” grades in these classes and said it was good for her

to experience a college environment and college coursework. More importantly, the English program prepared her academically for her college coursework the following year.

It was also during this time when she knew her true passion was to become a journalist. She said she loved to write and wanted a job where she could write for a living. She graduated from high school with a 3.3 grade point average. Unfortunately, she received a low composite score of “14” when she took the ACT test. Even stranger was that her highest scores were in “mathematics” and “science reasoning” and her lowest scores were in “English” and “reading.” Like Fatimo, her ACT scores did not represent the grades she earned in high school, nor did her parents understand what the ACT test was or why she took it.

The Impact of Family on Fatimo and Leyla

Fatimo

At the time the interviews took place, Fatimo’s parents were going through yet another separation which she felt would ultimately lead to a divorce. Her father had recently moved out and was working as a driver at a trucking company and her mother was not working outside of the home.* When I interviewed Mr. Farid, he informed me that divorce was uncommon in Somalia before the war broke out. If marriages were in trouble, interventions took place and the community would step in to help; now that Somalis are living in America, there has been an increased rate of divorce. However,

* In our final interview, Fatimo informed me that her mother recently started working part-time at a factory.

from Fatimo's perspective, divorce was fairly common in Somalia even before the war broke out. She believes that the divorce rate has not increased amongst the Somali community that lives in the United States.

Her sisters, one born in the refugee camp and the other born in the United States, communicate with Fatimo using a mix of English and Somali, but all three communicate only in Somali with their mother who has not learned English since arriving in the United States. Fatimo says her father must communicate in English at work and because of this, his spoken English has improved since he arrived in the United States, though she says she and her father almost always communicate in Somali.

Fatimo's college education is a priority to both of her parents who tell her that "nothing else matters." She does not feel pressured to work or get married. Her mother often uses herself as an example, telling Fatimo that she feels badly that she does not understand what her children are writing and reading. According to Fatimo, her mother has spent her entire life taking care of others and putting others first. Her mother was not able to go to high school and when she did go to school, never went regularly because she had so many responsibilities at home. Still, her mother worked outside of the home as a business woman and traveled for work throughout Africa, which was not common for women in Somalia before the war. Her mother tells her that "men come and go, so you need something to fall back on." She feels strongly that Fatimo should not have a boyfriend while she is in college.

Though Fatimo and her family do live in a predominately Somali neighborhood, they have no family close by. Her mother's side of the family lives in Somalia, Kenya,

and Australia. Most of her father's immediate family members live on the West Coast and interestingly enough, came to the United States many years before the civil war began in Somalia. Her grandmother is a pharmacist, one of her uncles is an engineer, and her other uncles work with computers at "fancy companies." Fatimo says that although her father's side of the family is well established financially, they have never approved of her mother because she is from a different clan, and therefore, Fatimo has little contact with them.

When I asked Fatimo how important her friends are to her, she replied, "I don't think I even have any friends. I have sisters, but I don't know what friends are. My sisters are my friends." Whenever I see Fatimo around campus with others, she is almost always with Somali women her age, but she says that she rarely sees them outside of school because she is too busy. Though she is responsible for her sisters, especially helping them with their homework and picking them up from school, she says that these responsibilities have never interfered with her own schoolwork.

Recently, the family learned that Fatimo's maternal grandmother is very sick. Because Fatimo's mother cannot bring her mother here, she is in the process of trying to move to Kenya to care for her mother. It surprised me when Fatimo told me that she has her own one-bedroom apartment, which is located across the street from the apartment she lives in with her family. In fact, she invited me to her own apartment to have our second interview and it was exactly like she had described it, "nice, clean, and shiny with a couch, a TV, and a bed... that's it." Fatimo said she does not like to go there and that

the apartment was her mother's idea so that Fatimo and her sisters have their own place to live in case her mother does move to Kenya.

When Fatimo first came to college, she said she wanted to become a pediatrician. I wondered why she, like so many other Somali college women her age, want to become pediatricians. She said that doctors are highly regarded in Somalia and in her family, especially her father's side of the family. The college that she attends has a large, well-established nursing program that offers registered nursing degrees at the two-year associate level and four-year baccalaureate level. Even so, she said she has never been and never will be interested in a career in nursing, even though most of non-traditional aged Somali college women students are nursing majors, especially at the two-year associate level.

Sahra Noor, whom I interviewed as an expert for this study, and who is a graduate of the same college that Fatimo and Leyla attend, says that most Somali women who were educated before the civil war do not have college degrees in medical fields. According to Ms. Noor, Somali women majored in economics, agriculture, or business. The pressure Somali women receive from their parents to become doctors, in particular, has happened only since they arrived in the United States. Ms. Noor, who came to the United States at the age of 18, comes from an educated family; in fact, both of her parents were college educated before the civil war began. Her desire to become a nurse was questioned by her family who could not understand why she wanted to work in the medical field.

Leyla

Leyla lives in an apartment with her mother, father, two younger teenaged brothers, and a younger teenaged sister. She also has two older brothers in their early twenties, one of whom is an unmarried college student and the other who is married and works full-time. Neither of her older brothers live with their family. According to Leyla, it is acceptable for boys to move out of their home before they are married. In Somalia, her parents led traditional lives. Her father worked outside of the home as a military nurse and her mother, who finished high school but never went to college, took care of the home and children. According to Mr. Farid, whom I interviewed as an expert for this study, the Koran says that a man is responsible for his children and his wife and that it is his responsibility to “feed” his home; if a family lives in a peaceful home, they will ultimately have prosperity.

Though Leyla’s family would have preferred to continue their household traditions, her father became severely ill in the refugee camp and has been unable to work outside of the home since arriving in the United States. Leyla’s mother works two jobs: a factory job during the day and an evening job at a local Target store. Recently, Leyla’s father had a kidney transplant and is still too weak to work outside of the home.

Leyla says that she and her younger sister do the “mom job” at home by taking care of their father and the house while their mother is at work. Her younger brothers are not expected to do this work, though they are expected to do well in school and focus on their studies. Although her parents do expect Leyla to clean, cook, and take care of the home, they also want college to be her first priority. Her friends tell her that she has the

“best parents ever” because they are not strict, they trust her, and she has a good relationship with them, especially her mother.

In my interview with Mr. Farid, he said that although Somali parents “train” their daughters to be future “managers of the home,” they also encourage their daughters to do well in school; ultimately, parents believe that they will benefit from what their kids learn as well as earn. Furthermore, they know that most Somalis never had opportunities to attend college in Somalia and understand that their children will have more opportunities for education in college and professional work in the United States.

Leyla said that if she had the choice to spend time with her friends or with her family, she would spend time with her family. Though she said the relationships she has with her friends are very important to her, the relationships that she has with her family, especially her parents, are the most important. It is obvious that they drive all of her major decisions in life. For example, even though Leyla always wanted to become a journalist, she changed her mind about her future career after her father’s kidney transplant. She realized two things: She wants to take care of people – especially children, and she wants to work right away so that she can help her family out financially.

After learning how long it would take to become a pediatrician, Leyla decided to become a nurse. Because she wants to help her family right away, not only did Leyla decide to become a nurse, but she decided to do a two-year associate degree in nursing so she could begin working sooner. In fact, Leyla wanted to work right out of high school so that she could help support her family, but her mother felt strongly that she needed to go to college. After she finds work as a registered nurse, she does not want to stop at a

two-year associate degree in nursing. She plans to continue on to complete a four-year degree in nursing and eventually go to medical school to become a pediatrician.

Leyla's ultimate goal is to become a pediatrician and return to Somalia after the civil war ends to open her own clinic to help sick children. She said she got this idea after her youngest brother nearly died in the refugee camp where he was born. She said that seeing her brother and father so sick and witnessing all of the suffering and death in the refugee camps made an ever-lasting impact on her and she wants to help the children in Somalia. Her parents also wish to return to Somalia after the civil war ends. According to Leyla, they have not adjusted to life in the United States.

When I asked how her parents felt about her true desire to become a journalist, she said they never supported her decision. They always wanted her to go into healthcare. According to Leyla, all Somali parents want their children to go into healthcare or business because this is what they know from Somalia. She said that her parents want her to eventually become a medical doctor so she can support them and herself for financial and medical purposes. Though I sensed that Leyla's true aspirations really do lie in journalism, I believe her desire to become a pediatrician is genuine because of her desire to help children; however, it is also clear that she feels a tremendous responsibility to help support her family financially.

In my interview with Mr. Farid, he discussed how a husband and wife shared everything equally and contributed equally to the prosperity of their family before the civil war broke out. Because of the war, the family structure of many Somali families was forced to change. Had it not been for the civil war, Leyla's mother would have never

worked outside of the home. Even if her husband had become sick, she would have had family to help them financially. Because Leyla has seen her parents' roles reverse and because she is living in the United States, she sees no reason why she cannot and should not support her family financially.

Impact of Socio-Cultural and Identity Issues on Fatimo and Leyla

Fatimo

When I asked Fatimo questions about how she chooses to identify herself she was adamant that her identity does not change depending on who she is with, "I am always me. I don't need to be different," she said. In high school, Fatimo's peer group consisted mainly of Somali classmates her age, but she said this was only because there were a lot of Somalis in her particular high school. She said that having friends who are exclusively Somali does not matter, that it is good to have friends of other races, and that two of her closest friends in high school were "Hmong" and "Mexican." I told her I had observed that most of the women she is friends with in college are Somali. She said this is only because many of them had been her friends in high school, but insisted that she currently does not have a "group" of friends. She said that she defines "friends" as people she is close with and that she is not really close to anybody except for her mother. "My mom... she's pretty much my best friend," she said.

Fatimo said she learned recently that inter-racial relationships are not "cool" with her mother. Her first serious relationship was with a non-Somali Muslim man her age whom she met when she was in high school. She hid the relationship from her parents

and dated him secretly throughout high school and part of her freshman year in college. When the relationship became serious and she decided she would become engaged to him, she told her mother about the relationship. Her parents had always told her that as long as a man treats her well they would approve of him, but when she told her mother about her relationship with an Indian man who was Muslim, her mother told her to end the relationship. There was no further discussion about it and she said that she ended the relationship immediately. She said that he still calls the apartment, but she will no longer talk to him.

It was difficult to tell how Fatimo actually felt about such a serious relationship of three years coming to such an abrupt end. She focused only on her mother's feelings and said:

I can't make my mom unhappy. She's been through a lot and a lot of people have made her unhappy and I don't want to be one of those people who made her unhappy... so if she says it wasn't a good idea, even though like, the excuses, the like stuff she gave me was... it wasn't really logical, I always go with logical things, you know, but she said that wasn't a good idea and I was like okay and I called him up and I was like, "no."

According to Fatimo, it is okay for women her age to date as long as they are serious with one person and their parent(s) know about it and give their permission. She says it was the same way in Somalia before the civil war broke out. She also said that it is not acceptable for a woman to move out of her parents' home until she is married, nor is it okay for a Somali woman college student to live in a college dormitory. Still, she

said it would be acceptable if she and her sisters lived in their own apartment if her mother does move to Kenya. She would not elaborate on whether or not her father would live with them, or if it would be okay if they lived on their own. Fatimo did say that though some things have not changed, she does believe that many Somali women her age have no desire to get married until they are in their thirties because they want to focus on college and their future careers, whereas Somali men her age want to work, get married right after high school, have children, and purchase their own homes.

Still, even if she were still living in Somalia and there had never been a civil war, Fatimo believes that she would be attending college in Kenya studying, “international something... probably nursing school or medical school. Kenya has really nice universities.” Apparently, when Fatimo was a little girl in Somalia, her maternal grandmother arranged Fatimo’s marriage; however, even if Fatimo had not left Somalia, her mother would not have allowed Fatimo to get married. “There’s a lot of things my grandmother did that my mom doesn’t approve,” she said.

One of those things was female genital mutilation (FGM). Knowing this is a sensitive topic, I never asked about it in any of the interviews with Fatimo or Leyla, but Fatimo brought it up on her own after she mentioned the arranged marriage her grandmother had set up for her back in Somalia. She explained that when she was about five years old, her mother had left for a trip to Kenya and she had gone to stay with her grandmother. During this time, her grandmother arranged for FGM to be performed on Fatimo; when her mother came home from her trip she was irate with Fatimo’s grandmother.

Though Fatimo says she does not think about FGM often, when she does it is so debilitating that it takes her almost a week to function emotionally and physically. She said this most often occurs when she gets her period; menstruation is a constant reminder of FGM for her. She says that “99%” of Somali women college students she knows are against FGM and are beginning to speak out against it as well. This led to Fatimo proudly exclaiming that she is a “feminist.” Her definition of a feminist is:

A strong woman that values her own roles... men and women being equal in certain, like... being equal and having equal education and equal household roles... that kind of stuff... being a strong woman who doesn't take crap from other people.

Fatimo believes that men and women are not equal in Somali culture and that men always get their way. “If there were no men, FGM wouldn't exist,” she said. I told Fatimo about a college classmate of mine many years ago who believed that Muslim women who covered themselves were oppressing themselves without even realizing it. I wondered what Fatimo thought of this. It made Fatimo angry and she said that my classmate's beliefs were completely untrue. “When I cover myself it's not because I'm doing it for the sake of men. When I wear this... this shows I'm a Muslim woman,” she said while grabbing the scarf she was wearing that covered her hair when I interviewed her.

Fatimo went on to say that if people read the bible they will realize that Christian women also wore scarves at one point in history to make a statement that they were Christians. She said that Muslim women cover themselves for the sake of “safety” and to

follow “the practice” of their religion. She values the “dress code” for Muslim women as a “cultural practice.” She thinks that covering herself is “pretty” and she believes that women should value their bodies. “It seems like the motto in America is if you’ve got the stuff, show it, but with us it’s if you’ve got the stuff, please cover it.”

When I asked Fatimo what “generation” she considers herself a part of she said, “half generation. Part of me like grew up here, but half of me didn’t. I don’t really belong anywhere because if I was born here I’d be first generation like my sister.” This comment fits the definition of generation 1.5. Still, Fatimo immerses herself in Somali cultural gatherings, religious celebrations and Somali food. Recently, she joined the Muslim Student Association at the college and says that the group has very diverse members and that she is one of the only Somalis in the group. She said that the group’s primary focus is to educate the college community about Muslim culture.

Though she felt prejudice towards Muslims always existed, she felt it even more so after September 11th. She had a couple of encounters while riding the city bus to school where strangers on the bus, all of whom were white, were outwardly racist towards her, and in some cases, harassed her. In one incident, the bus driver had to tell Fatimo to “sit down” and “calm down” because she was standing up and yelling at the people who had assaulted her verbally. She said they were calling her a “terrorist” and accusing her of not being able to read the book she had been reading on the bus (which happened to be for the college ESL class she was taking at the time).

What has been consistent since she arrived in the United States, is the negative looks and comments she has gotten and continues to get from some African-Americans.

In our interview, Fatimo explained:

I'm never going to be African-American, but I'm Somalian American which is kind of interesting because the whole slavery issue is about African-American.

People assume that if you are from Somalia that you don't know anything about the African-American history, and to be honest, I know a lot because I really like African-American studies.

Fatimo explained that in high school, a speaker was invited to talk to students and staff about helping African-American and Somali students' relationships. She said the school needed even more education around the "Somali/African-American conflict" to help students get along better. According to Fatimo, one of the many problems was that some Somali students were identifying themselves as "African-American" and calling African-American classmates their "brothers and sisters." Some African-Americans were offended by this and said that Somalis would never be like them and certainly never their "brothers and sisters." Fatimo described an African-American event that she was invited to go to by an African-American classmate in high school. She said that people around her age at the event were very friendly to her, but that older people were questioning why she was there and some even asked her how "dare" she show up to *their* event. She said she was surprised this type of "racism" existed and was quite hurt by it.

Unfortunately, as a college student, she also has had negative and equally as hurtful experiences at events she has been invited to attend by non-Somali classmates.

Two events in particular, both of which took place outside of the college, occurred at major cultural events. One of the events was a Chinese New Year celebration and the other was a Muslim celebration. She said that at both events the people who were around her age were accepting of her being there and many tried to make her feel welcome, but almost all of the older people did not make her feel welcome and were even hostile towards her when all she wanted to do was learn more about their culture and cultural practices.

An experience she could specifically recall in high school that upset her was with a particular teacher. She said that the teacher only referred to Somali students as “refugees” but did not refer to any of the other immigrant and refugee students as “refugees.” After awhile, Fatimo became so angry that she told the instructor in class that she would appreciate it if she would stop referring to the Somali students as “refugees” and that she was not only speaking for herself, but for all of the Somali students in class. She said the instructor retaliated by picking on Fatimo every day by asking her, “so, what do you think now? Is there something you disagree with today?” Fatimo said that in some ways she regretted saying anything because the teacher targeted her daily.

Fatimo said that in college she had one negative experience with a teacher who she felt “just didn’t like her” and because she was the only Somali student in the class, she wondered if that was why; however, Fatimo never said anything to the teacher and never really understood where the tension was coming from. Overall, Fatimo said that she has not had any negative experiences like the ones she had in high school in her

college classes or anywhere on either campus at the college. I sensed she was being forthcoming and was not withholding information because I work at the college.

Leyla

When I asked Leyla a broad question about how she chooses to identify herself, she replied, “Somalian.” In high school and college, her friends have exclusively been Somali women with whom she speaks a combination of Somali and English with. She said that though she has nothing against becoming friends with people from other cultures, she does not seek out friendships with anybody outside of her culture because she prefers to have Somali women friends who she can relate to and who understand her.

Like many generation 1.5 students, Leyla does not have knowledge or understanding of her country’s history. Still, she feels strongly that Somalis should never convert to another religion no matter how long they live in the United States. According to Leyla, “if you are not Muslim, you are not considered Somali.” In our final interview, she told me about a Somali high school classmate who was openly gay and who had converted to Christianity. She said that he was regularly “beat up by Somali boys *and* girls” because they believed he had “disgraced” them. She said it got so bad that this classmate had to be escorted by a security officer whether he was inside or outside of school. Although she never verbally or physically abused him, she said she could understand why others did.

She acknowledges that not all aspects of “Somali culture” are positive, particularly the rampant inequalities in gender in the community. She feels fortunate that her parents would never force her to get married or arrange her marriage, though she

knows some of her Somali women college friends have parents who have already done this or who will. Her parents have told her that after she gets an education she can date whomever she chooses “as long as he is Muslim and especially Somali.” Currently she does not feel any pressure to get married or have children by a certain age, but if she were living in Somalia, she knows she would be married with children right after high school which is what most young Somali women her age do. “Education is not the priority for women like it is for men in Somalia,” she said. In a journal entry (See Appendix C, #2), Leyla wrote the following:

Somali women are eager to learn and continue their education because they never had this kind of opportunity back home. Honestly, Somali women come from a culture that does not value women’s education and when they came to America they wanted to be able to educate themselves to make a change in their culture as well as themselves. They want to prove to men that a woman can get educated and become something.

Unlike Fatimo, Leyla’s friends are very important to her – two of them in particular whom she attended middle school and high school with. They are currently college students at the local university that Leyla attended her senior year of high school. Still, she chose to go to a different college because she was told that it would take “forever” to complete a nursing degree at the local university. Clearly, her family drives her major choices in life, not her friends.

In high school, Leyla was active in clubs and organizations such as the Somali Student Association, the school newspaper, and the student council, but she has no desire

to join any organizations in college because she is just too busy. She tries to accomplish all of her homework and studying on campus because once she is home, she has to do the “mom job.” She says that it is impossible to study at home because someone always needs something from her.

Being Somali is Leyla’s priority and she has no desire to become “American.” In a journal entry (See Appendix C, #9), she wrote:

To be an American means to have the blood of an American... English have to be your first language. You have to show your American love and you have to eat while you watch TV. You have to make appointments to visit your family members or friends. You have to use a calendar. You have to be on time you know you have to value time. You have to celebrate the American holidays...

In our final interview together, I asked Leyla to elaborate on what it means to her to have “the blood of an American.” She said that a person’s grandparents or parents must be born in the United States regardless of their ethnicity or religion. However, if the person is born outside of the United States, they can never have “American blood.”

Somali culture, Leyla feels, is her life. She is deeply rooted in Somali music, food, celebrations, family and friends, and says she has no desire to change any part of her life or give anything up that is part of her Somali culture. She said that what she values most about being Somali is “covering” herself, maintaining Somali language, following the rules of Islam, and maintaining her cultural traditions. She believes the college she attends respects her cultural traditions by providing a prayer room for her to pray and meditate in. Her interaction with non-Somalis only occurs when she is at

school, and though she has no desire to become “American,” she says that she admires the role of American women because “there is equality in education of American women.” In a journal entry (See Appendix C, #11), Leyla wrote the following:

I wish the Somali community would appreciate Somali women college students... Somali men had the perception that a woman can never be as smart and educated as men... They believe that a woman suppose to stay home and be a housewife. Girls used to get married at the age of 14-18. They never had the opportunity to dream about becoming a doctor or a lawyer or even working. Because when they get married the man takes care of all the expenses and the girl just stay home and takes care of the housework. Therefore, I want the Somali community to look at their women differently and treat them just like their men.

In fact, Leyla told me in our final interview together that Somali men her age and older regularly harass her in public places telling her she is wasting her life by going to college and that she should quit school, get married and start having children. Although her father currently supports her decision to go to college, she said that he would not if they were still living in Somalia.

During my interview with Ms. Noor, she also said that men her age and older regularly harassed her when she was in college. For example, on occasion she would study at a coffee shop near campus with non-Somali friends. Each time she did this, at least one Somali man at the coffee shop would tell her in Somali that she needed to leave because “proper” Somali women do not “hang out” in coffee shops; proper Somali women stay at home and take care of their families. In another instance, Ms. Noor said

she went to a Somali restaurant to eat and because she did not sit in back where the women are supposed to sit, the owner of the restaurant asked her to leave.

According to Leyla, having to deal with gender inequalities in the Somali community is difficult on a daily basis; in addition, after September 11th occurred, she commented that her life as a “Somali” was impacted negatively. People outside of the Somali community began looking at her “funny” and “suspiciously.” At the time, Leyla was in high school and had a history teacher who began treating her and her Somali classmates differently in class. He began ignoring them, would not answer their questions, and criticized them publicly even when they had the right answers. A group of Somali students, including Leyla, discussed the teacher’s behavior with the school principal and shortly afterwards, the history teacher publicly apologized to the Somali students in his class and admitted that he was at fault.

She also said that non-Somali students would call her and her Somali classmates “terrorists” in the hallways and yell at others to “stay away from them.” Although these experiences bothered her, she said that she was grateful that her family was not affected; if they were, they did not talk about it at home. Still, a serious incident happened to one of Leyla’s Somali friends; her father was beaten to death at a city bus stop. After all of the evidence was gathered, it was deemed a “hate crime.”

African-American and Somalis fought a lot, but she said that it had begun before September 11th and so she thinks it just added another element to a problem that already existed. Like Fatimo, she said this tension between African-American and Somali students, including herself, was always a major issue in her high school; however, unlike

middle school, she was able to “control” her anger in high school and keep her words to herself. She said that she has not experienced any conflict with African-Americans in college, nor has she experienced anything negative in college with non-Somali students bothering, offending, or harassing her because she is Somali or Muslim. Fortunately, with the exception of one college instructor, her experiences with her college instructors thus far has been overwhelmingly positive.

Perceptions of and Acculturation to College

Fatimo

I wondered why Fatimo had decided to apply to the college that she is currently attending. She said that when she went on the college tour she liked the fact that the college was close to home, it was private and therefore the class size was smaller, and the environment seemed peaceful and quiet; she liked that “people always smile and open doors for you.” She said she immediately got a “good feeling” on the tour and her parents wanted her to go there because they liked that the school was “all-women.” She said it did not bother her parents that the college is Catholic.

Fatimo applied directly to the campus that offers primarily baccalaureate degrees with the intention to do a pre-medicine major. Because she self-identified on her college admission application that English was *not* her native language, her ACT score was less than 18, and she had been in the United States school system less than ten years, she was required to take an English language proficiency exam. The exam has three components: A reading comprehension section, a listening section, and a written essay. With the

exception of the written essay, the exam is multiple-choice. Based on the results of the exam, it was recommended that Fatimo enroll in an ESL reading and writing course.

Fatimo's admission application was evaluated and based on several factors in her file, the Admissions committee determined that she should begin her studies on the campus that offers primarily associate level degrees and then transition to the other campus if she did well academically her first year of college. Fatimo spent her first semester of college in an associate of arts cohort with students like her who planned to transition to a baccalaureate major on the other campus. She found herself in an environment with supportive faculty and small class sizes; she was enrolled in liberal arts coursework that was challenging, contextual, and with faculty who were open to giving her regular critical, but supportive feedback.

She immensely enjoyed the interdisciplinary, art and theology courses she completed saying that the instructors and course content helped her look at things differently and changed her perspective on many things. She also enjoyed being in an environment where her women classmates expressed their opinions in a supportive, intellectually stimulating environment. She said she ended up with all "A" grades that semester because she had nothing to worry about in her personal life and she had time to study.

It was during this semester that she also took the ESL reading and writing course. I was the instructor for the course and hoped she would not withhold how she really felt about the course; however, one thing I have learned about Fatimo through this study is that she does not hold back on her opinions. I felt she was forthcoming and honest when

she talked about her placement into the course and the course itself. First, she said, she did not “really try” when she took the English language proficiency exam as part of her admission application. She said she had no idea that it would matter in any way in terms of placing her into future coursework.

Though she admits that her written grammar “drastically improved” in the ESL reading and writing course, she also admitted that she did not always pay attention in class and that she was bored most of the time with the material. Though she does not think there is anything wrong with ESL coursework per se, she said she worried instructors would not challenge her as much if they knew she was an ESL student. She also felt that instructors would think she is “slow” and that “other things in college” would be limited to her.

Still, she said that she liked her instructor for the ESL reading and writing course which motivated her to make an effort to do well in the course. In a journal entry (See Appendix C, #8), Fatimo wrote the following about the ESL coursework she completed in her first year of college:

I think both classes had somewhat prepared for my future college courses because I knew I needed help with my grammar and citing papers... As for my grammar goes, I am more aware of my mistakes and I can correct, so is not as bad as before Yay! Even though I didn't feel comfortable taking these courses, it turned out I needed to take those classes and they were beneficial to me as far as writing papers weather is personal or school related materials. I didn't feel comfortable taking these courses because I had perception that I didn't need them and why

should I take ESL after all am not new comers. I guess I was biased and misjudging. But I still feel that I don't need to take anymore ESL classes.

The other ESL class Fatimo is referring to is a course she took the second semester of her freshman year at the campus to which she had initially applied. The course, “English for Cross-Cultural Nursing” was recommended because she was planning to go into healthcare at the time and her academic advisor felt that she would benefit from another ESL course that would focus on her writing, be taught by an ESL instructor, and give her a feel for being on the other campus.

Fatimo completed the ESL course successfully with a “B-” and told me she thought the material was very interesting, but that she did not need “another ESL class.” She gave me two academic papers she had completed from the course to review for this study. Interestingly enough, the paper that she said was the “best” paper she has written in college so far, and the paper that she said was the “worst” paper she has written were from this class, and in my opinion, are very similar in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. Both papers had long, sometimes unorganized paragraphs, problems with citations, and minor problems with grammar and mechanics throughout. Though she was able to articulate an argument and express her ideas, she did not always have well developed main points.

It was during this second semester of her freshmen year, on the same campus, that her grades took a drastic turn. Before I could even ask a question about her grades, she told me how disappointed she is in herself for receiving such “bad” grades in college the last two semesters, “it’s like I’m lacking... I mean, I love school and everything... it’s

kind of like emotional stuff that I have to deal with myself, so I don't know..." That semester she received a "D" in anatomy and general psychology courses.

She was adamant that the poor grades she received had nothing to do with the material or the instructor in either course. She said the material was interesting in both courses and not particularly difficult, but that she was having many family problems at the time and rarely studied that semester; she eventually just stopped attending the anatomy course altogether. The following summer, she re-took general psychology and failed it. She transitioned to the other campus the first semester of her sophomore year and completed a women's studies course and a general biology course with a "D." She withdrew early in the semester from a general chemistry course.

Even so, Fatimo was still adamant that she did not do poorly because of the material in the courses, but that she was having family problems that began around the same time she began her second semester of her freshman year. It was during this time when her parents separated. Knowing that Fatimo's success in college is the first priority to her parents, I wondered how she perceived her failure in these courses. She said that though college may be her parents' first priority for her, family is *her* first priority and college always comes second. She tried to make college a priority during this difficult family time by going regularly to school and studying, but she said she could not stop thinking about her family problems which interfered with her ability to concentrate, study, and turn in assignments on time. She admitted that she would write papers at the last minute without revising, editing, or even reading them.

I asked her if she had sought out support during this time, but she said she does not like talking to anybody about her personal problems, nor does she want to make excuses for herself as to why she did poorly in certain courses. She also said that she would often do well in the course, but never complete a major final assignment, or never study for a final exam. She said that she knew she was not studying enough, particularly in the first semester of her sophomore year. She would go to the computer lab on both campuses and stare at the computer monitor purposefully trying to waste time telling herself, “but at least I’m here at school.” She said that assignments were not even that challenging, she just could not get her “brain or heart” to focus on them. In a journal entry (See Appendix C, #1), she wrote that she sought out comfort in the prayer room on the campus where she had first begun studies her freshman year:

I get the privacy to cry and calm myself down, without others noticing that there is something. I personally don't like telling or sharing my personal problem with people, so that room give me that privacy I need for certain emotional circumstances. After sitting in that room for about two to three hours just reflecting about my situations, the result of my reflection always ended up being that there are people who have worst situation then what I am going through and that give me certain relief.

According to Fatimo, the only reason why she did poorly in courses the second semester of her freshman year and the first semester of her sophomore year was because of personal problems she was having. Still, I wanted to find out more about her perception of the courses she took the first semester of her freshman year when she

received all “A” grades. I asked Fatimo if she felt more comfortable in these particular courses. Did she feel that she could express herself more openly? Did her ability to perform better have anything to do with the fact that she had Somali friends in nearly all of her classes? To all of these questions Fatimo responded with a resounding, “no.”

It is true that she enjoyed her instructors immensely her first semester of college and that the courses she took were her favorite courses so far in college; she discovered new ways of looking at things, expressing herself both orally and in writing and had straight-forward instructors who were direct with her about what they expected, which helped her stay on track. She said that having Somali classmates had nothing to do with her comfort or confidence level in class, nor did the size of the class matter and that none of her classmates intimidated her in any way or affected whether or not she chose to express herself in class or not.

When reflecting on all of the college classes Fatimo has completed so far, she believes that the majority of her content instructors have been “fair” when assessing her work, particularly her written work where they have focused on the content of her papers rather than the grammatical problems. With the exception of one instructor on the campus where she transitioned to, she never has felt that her instructors have labeled her as an ESL student or treated her differently because she is Somali; she has genuinely felt respected and listened to knowing that her opinions in class are highly valued. She says what makes college classes comfortable are the “topics” in the course; if the instructor is critical and open, and the topic of the class interests her, she is more likely to share more

in class. She said she enjoys “thinking” and being a part of “challenging conversations” when the topic interests her.

She spent a lot of time discussing a women’s studies course she had recently completed that focused on “issues of violence.” She said it was the first course that she felt comfortable enough to volunteer information about FGM. A requirement of the course was to present an oral presentation to the class and the instructor would assign students their topics. Fatimo was assigned the topic “domestic violence,” but wanted to do a presentation on FGM. She discussed this at length with her instructor who was open to the idea as long as she could connect FGM with domestic violence during her presentation. Knowing that doing a presentation on FGM would most likely be more work, Fatimo went ahead with it and eventually did a successful oral presentation on the topic. Her instructor was impressed and said he wished they had an entire class period to devote just to FGM because he felt that she had educated him and her classmates so well on the issue.

Still, she ended up with a “D” in the course; from her perspective it was only because she never turned in a final paper. When I asked if she ever attempted to contact the instructor or any of the other instructors to discuss her need for an extension or to ask for help outside of class, she said she did not think any of her instructors would understand what was happening in her personal life, but she also admitted that she finds it a weakness to ask for help.

I wondered if Fatimo had ever sought out help at the learning centers on either campus. She said that she had gone to both and that though it was helpful both times, she

never went regularly. She admitted that part of the problem is she does not like being perceived as needing help, but that she knows that she needs to start asking more for help or else she will continue to have “bad” semesters. I reminded her that in high school when she sought out help from an English and math teacher outside of class, she ended up improving her grades in those courses drastically. She said she was not sure why this had become a reoccurring “issue” in college, but said she was beginning to see a pattern.

I also wondered how much the environment at the college was affecting her. She said overall that she feels comfortable on both campuses, though she feels more comfortable on the campus she began her freshman year at because it is racially more diverse than the other campus and it is smaller. She said she feels comfortable in the “multicultural rooms” on both campuses where she can “hang out and relax.” Though she said that sometimes white students look at her strangely, she feels that their stares are innocent because not only do they stare, but they often compliment her on her scarf and then ask her questions about her culture. She could only remember one incident where she confronted a student in class; a white classmate said something to Fatimo’s Somali classmate that was offensive to Fatimo so she told the white student to stop harassing her friend and to “quit being so ignorant.”

She does admit that she is disappointed when the Muslim Student Association organizes events on campus where there is consistently low student turn-out. She also wishes more people in general at the college were educated on Somali culture. In a journal entry (See Appendix C, #2) she wrote:

I know a lot of student who don't even know where or what Somali is, but come up to me and asked about my culture... The Somali culture is really beautiful and interesting... one suggestion I would give to the school is to have a week of cultural celebration... I think would be help to solve the miss conception and confusion people have about Somali woman that goes at _____.

Still, Fatimo stressed that she feels the college accommodates her cultural practices and is impressed that both campuses have a prayer room available for Muslim students to pray in anytime they want to. She could not think of any other resources the college needs that it does not already have for Somali students. She admitted that she is surprised that a Catholic college is so liberal and open to others' cultural practices and beliefs.

It seemed her overwhelming feeling of frustration was not about the college's perceptions of Somali students, but what is happening in the Somali community itself. She worries that the "community aspect is dying" in the Somali community and that people only want to take care of their own families, not their community like they used to. It concerns her that the Somali community is becoming more "Americanized" by only looking after themselves and their immediate family. In a journal entry (See Appendix C, #11) she wrote:

The Somali community should become one and show the rest of world that Somali people are not ignorant and savages, but respectful, civilized, peaceful, intelligent, strong, and united community. Like the way we use to be before the disgusting war took place and took a way everything Somali ever stood for. As a

young Somali woman, I am really disappointed at my community right now, I hope we get our ways back soon.

Fatimo said that she has no problem speaking her mind to anybody and she will stick up for anybody if she needs to. She said she tries to always be respectful to elders in the Somali community or elderly people in general, but that everyone else is “pretty much fair game.” Though she admitted that if she was in a college class with all Somali classmates, she probably would not talk at all because she would “piss everyone off.”

Recently Fatimo changed her major from “pre-medicine” to “social work” claiming that she had no idea how long it would take to become a medical doctor until she began learning more about it in college. She said that “quite honestly” she never really had a “passion in life” to become a pediatrician. She had felt pressure from her parents to become a doctor and had not really known all of the other majors that were available in college where she could still work with children internationally. After her first semester of college, she was interested in changing her major to women’s studies, theology, or political science.

After her first semester in college, Fatimo regularly paged through the college catalog and began putting stars next to the courses and majors she was most interested in. After her first year of college, she went back to the catalog and noticed where she had put the most stars and realized she was most interested in majoring in social work. She decided that her true passion was to become an international social worker who works with children. She would like to continue her education in social work in graduate school.

She had never heard of social work before arriving to college, though she now knows that the Somali community does not view the profession as a “prestigious position.” Her parents are not nearly as supportive of her career decision now as they were when she was pre-medicine, but her mother supports Fatimo no matter what she chooses to major in. Fatimo said her family believes that social workers only deal with welfare cases all day, particularly her father’s side of the family who live on the West Coast and who rarely ask how Fatimo is doing in college now that she has changed her major. Fatimo says she could care less what anybody thinks as long as her mother supports her decision.

Leyla

Leyla chose to apply to the college she currently attends because a counselor in high school told her how good the nursing program was and that it offered a two-year registered nursing degree option. When she applied to and was accepted at the same college that Fatimo currently attends, she mistakenly applied directly to the campus that offers primarily baccalaureate degrees. Like Fatimo, she also self-identified on her college admission application that English was *not* her native language, her ACT score was less than 18, and she had been in the United States school system less than ten years. Because of these factors, she was required to take an English language proficiency exam.

She performed only slightly better than Fatimo on all three sections of the exam and it was recommended that she enroll in a basic writing course for native speakers of English. Based on many factors in Leyla’s admission application, it was decided by the Admissions committee that she should begin her studies on the campus that offers

primarily associate degrees and then transition to the other campus if she did well academically her first year of college. However, Leyla thought she *had* applied to the campus that offers primarily associate degrees, but was confused about the Admission process; therefore, she never planned to transition after she was accepted.

Unlike Fatimo, Leyla was never offended or upset when she was told she needed to take an English language proficiency exam. In fact, she never knew that ESL coursework was even offered at the college until recently. She said that sometimes her college classmates, particularly other immigrant and refugee students, assume she is an ESL student with ESL needs. She also has noticed that certain teachers in her nursing courses have looked right at her and explained concepts unusually slow and look specifically at her when they ask if anybody has any questions in class.

She said it does not bother her if people think she is an ESL student. She has always associated ESL with a positive time in her life when she was learning English as well as how to read and write in Somali. She feels strongly that Somali ESL students need more Somali ESL teachers, even at the college level. At the same time, she has some concern about how Somali students in college may be perceived. She hopes that faculty at any college in the United States will not assume that all Somali women need tutoring or ESL coursework just because they are Somali.

The liberal arts courses Leyla took her first semester of college were identical to Fatimo's courses only that she did not need ESL coursework and enrolled in a basic writing course for native speakers of English that she completed successfully. In fact, Leyla received nothing but grades of "A" and "B" in all of her courses her freshman year

including the same anatomy course that Fatimo received a “D” in. She even received an “A” in chemistry which in high school she never passed. She said she had never liked math or science in high school, but she realizes now that she was “immature and careless” and did not put any effort into her high school chemistry courses in particular. She claimed that she “grew up” in college chemistry and also found the instructor and tutor extremely helpful. Unlike high school, she has no problem asking for help outside of classes that are difficult for her.

Although she still finds math and science courses the most challenging and by far the most academically rigorous in college, she says she is “more mature now” so she is paying attention in class and is surprised that she is finding the content interesting for the first time. Though she still does not feel as confident academically in math and science courses, her interest level has increased. Still, her favorite courses in college by far have been all of her writing courses and a diversity course she took the first semester of her freshman year. She believes that her 11th grade English teacher planted the seed for her love of writing. She loves to express her ideas on paper and think critically. She is not sure where her love of “critical thinking” comes from, but that she loves sharing her ideas and “thinking out loud” whether it is in a large class or in a smaller group.

Interestingly enough, she feels the most confident academically in classes where she can write essays and where there are frequent in-class discussions. She also feels more comfortable expressing herself orally in classes where there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. For example, in a theology course, she felt perfectly comfortable

discussing the similarities between Muslim and Christian faith. She said this also has a lot to do with instructors creating a comfortable and safe environment.

I was Leyla's instructor for basic writing, which she completed with an "A-". I recall that as the course progressed, it had not hurt her to take the course, but that she did not need it; in fact, her writing and grammar skills were more advanced than 95% of her native-English speaking classmates. When I asked her to rate her English grammar ability on a scale of one to ten she gave herself an "eight." She attributes her strong English grammar skills to her Somali ESL teachers in middle school.

Leyla showed me two academic papers that she has written in college, one of which she wrote in the literature course she had taken at the local university when she was a senior in high school. Even then, her writing had very few grammatical, structural, or organizational problems; though she had minor problems with paragraph development, citations, and paraphrasing, her ability to express herself and articulate her ideas in writing were clear and well developed.

She said that she always enjoyed English and ESL in middle school and high school and took the courses far more seriously than any of her other courses. She felt all of her ESL and English teachers were good and supportive. She said she was fortunate that in almost every liberal arts class she took in middle school the instructors integrated grammar and writing assignments into their curriculum. For example, one of her history teachers in middle school would make the class do many writing and grammar exercises in-class using history content.

In the first semester of Leyla's sophomore year, she took her first nursing course in the associate degree registered nursing program. She received a "C+" in the first part of the course, but failed the second half. When I asked about the first "C" grade she had ever received in college, she said that though she enjoyed the content of the course, she did not like how fast paced the course was and found it too "intense." She said that during the second part of the course she became ill and her doctor told her to take the rest of the semester off; she said he even wrote a letter to her instructors explaining her condition. Not only did Leyla not take her doctor's advice, but she never discussed her medical problem with her nursing instructors or academic advisor. She now realizes that this was a mistake and that she should have taken the rest of the semester off.

Though she said she failed the second half of her first nursing course because she was ill, she also acknowledges that even if she had not been ill, she may not have gotten more than a "C" in the course. It was during this time in our interview that she brought up the fact that she has never been good at managing her time and that after taking a nursing course, she realizes how important time management is in order for her to succeed academically in the nursing program. Unfortunately, she is not quite sure how to go about this. In the past, it has always worked for her to "work under pressure" by studying at the last minute, but she does not think this strategy will work for her anymore. She said that even when she wants to study and has the time, she is not sure how, "my brain won't take up anything," she said. She also prefers to study alone and does not study with classmates or friends. She believes studying with others is often distracting, especially with friends. She feels she is often most productive when she studies alone.

Leyla feels she makes college a priority by not spending as much time with her friends, and that her family continues to help her make college a priority by not having her work; however, it has never occurred to her to talk to anybody at the college about “time management” or putting together a schedule. “I wanna learn how to study after class, like after the lecture,” she says, however, it is clear that the thought of doing this overwhelms her so much that she does not even know where to begin.

Interestingly enough, Leyla works at the campus’ learning center as a peer-tutor. She helps students with their writing in any of the liberal arts classes that the campus offers. Leyla said she does not really consider it “work” because she is only there four to six hours a week as a work-study student and never actually sees the money she makes; most of all, she does not feel that “helping students” is work. I found it fascinating that even though she works as a peer tutor, it never occurred to her to ask any of the staff who work in the center how to help her with time management. I also wondered how students who come into the learning center perceive a Somali peer tutor; from what I understand, she is the only Somali student who currently works as a peer tutor in the center.

She said that students of color from different ethnic backgrounds, including Somali, often walk into the center, see her and assume she is not a tutor. If they talk to her and eventually find out that she is a tutor, they immediately want to work with her and feel very comfortable with her. Many students of color, including African-Americans, often return when they know she is working to seek help from her again. Still, she said there are a small number of students, the majority of whom are Somali or from other African nations, who do not “trust” working with her because they do not

think she is as good a tutor as the white tutors working at the same time in the center. She also feels this from many white students who come to the center for help. She could not recall the last time she helped a white student with a paper, but that it “honestly” does not hurt her feelings that white students do not want to work with her.

I wondered what Leyla does to relax and socialize when she is not in classes or working in the learning center. She talked a great deal about the multicultural room; the room is relaxing with a television, free beverages, magazines to read, and comfortable sofas and chairs. She also likes the diversity of the students who hang out there and though a lot of Somali students go there, students of other ethnic backgrounds also go there which she likes. At four o’clock in the afternoon the room fills with students of different ethnic backgrounds who watch “Oprah” together on television. She never eats in the deli, which is down the hall from the multicultural room and where the majority of students on campus eat. She eats her lunch in the multicultural room alone or with her friends every day that she is on campus. Leyla feels the college she attends does many positive things for Somali students such as providing services like the learning center, a room to pray in, and the multicultural room.

Though she is not a student at the same campus as Fatimo, I wondered if she ever goes there to socialize. She said she only goes there to use the school gym to exercise with the same Somali friend. She is the first Somali student whom I have ever known to exercise in the school gym, which is free of charge to all students, staff, and faculty; however, she said that she is seeing more Somali women there each time she goes. When Leyla and her friend exercise they still cover themselves “properly” by wearing scarves,

pants, and loose t-shirts. She said they do not feel uncomfortable changing in the locker room because only women are there. However, on occasion, men will exercise in the gym and though it does not bother Leyla, it bothers her friend quite a bit.

I asked her why she exercises regularly and she discussed how in Somalia being overweight was never an issue because if a woman was “fat” it meant she was wealthy and everyone thought that “fat” people were “cute.” According to Leyla, the Somali community living in America believes more and more that it is “ugly” to be overweight and Somali women talk regularly about losing weight and exercising. She said she does not think it is good to be overweight and agrees that “it’s ugly to be fat.” Her mother and aunts are overweight and according to Leyla, “they complain about being fat all of the time, but never do anything to change it.” Interestingly enough, this was the only instance where I found Leyla intentionally integrating into “American” culture.

Discussion

After the study was completed, I took a big step back to reflect on all I had learned. Fatimo and Leyla had shared a wealth of information with me, all of which I believe is significant to share. Though I cannot possibly discuss all of what I learned in this study, I will discuss the following significant findings. Furthermore, I will not review these findings in the order they were introduced in this chapter; rather, I will discuss findings that I believe are of particular interest to those who work with Somali students.

Perceptions of ESL Coursework and the ESL Label

Just as I believe Fatimo's negative experiences in ESL made an enormous impact on her, I believe that Leyla's positive ESL experiences made just as an enormous impact on her. Both women were introduced to ESL for the first time in their lives in middle school where Fatimo's negative experiences with an ESL teacher made the longest lasting impression on her and Leyla's positive experiences with ESL teachers still resonate with her and probably always will. This was clearly a crucial point in both Fatimo and Leyla's educational experiences. Though neither Fatimo or Leyla could remember many specifics about what they were actually taught in ESL classes, both women discussed how they *felt* about their ESL teachers as if they had just graduated from middle school.

If you are an ESL educator, you may be asking yourself several questions at this point. For starters, what happened in those ESL classrooms? What is the perspective of their former ESL teachers? What kind of students were Fatimo and Leyla? What material was actually taught in these classes? These are important questions, but they are irrelevant to this particular study; after all, I set out to understand Fatimo and Leyla's perceptions, not those of anybody else. Furthermore, as ESL teachers and educators, we have had, and will continue to have, many opportunities throughout our careers to discuss and write about *our* perceptions of ESL students; if we are invested in learning what our students need and how best to work with them, we need to understand their perspective first.

Leyla believes that having Somali ESL teachers is one of the main reasons why her English and grammar are as good as they are today. She cannot imagine having a non-Somali ESL teacher, especially when she was in grade six and could not read, write, speak or understand an English word. Though Fatimo did have some formal English instruction in Kenya, she has never had a Somali ESL teacher. Still, she is not sure if it would have made much difference; she believes the attitude of the teacher and how the teacher treats his/her students in the classroom is what is most important. I do not believe the right question to ask is who had better ESL teachers. I think it is most important to reflect on Fatimo and Leyla's lives during the time they entered middle school.

Both Fatimo and Leyla's first experiences with an American school were in sixth grade. Not only was the school system completely new to them, but they had been living in refugee camps for the previous two and three years and had not been going to school during this time. Both women and their families had experienced and/or witnessed traumatic events in the refugee camps and were dealing with high amounts of stress in their new homes where they had relocated as refugees. Fatimo's parents were separating yet again and Leyla's father was extremely ill, in need of a kidney transplant while her mother worked two jobs to support their family (a major role reversal). Neither women's parents understood anything about the American school system, nor knew much English themselves. On top of it all, they were adjusting to a new life in a new country.

I would argue that having Somali ESL teachers was a significant and positive experience for Leyla because she had elders from her community with whom she was able to communicate, who explained things to her in ways that she would understand,

who taught her how to write and read in Somali, and taught her how to take herself seriously as a student. They were supportive mentors to her in and out of the classroom, and could help her navigate through a complex new system. Leyla's Somali ESL teachers filled a certain role that her parents could not at the time. Though I believe Fatimo's ESL teachers had good intentions, they were not able to support or educate her in the same ways that Leyla's Somali ESL teachers could and ultimately did.

The Generation 1.5 Question

In Chapter One of this capstone, I asked whether or not Fatimo and Leyla are generation 1.5 students with "typical" generation 1.5 student needs. Unlike many generation 1.5 students who have acquired English through informal means, both Fatimo and Leyla have received almost all of their formal education in the United States and have had opportunities to learn English formally in ESL and content classrooms. Though it is true that Fatimo and Leyla entered college with language and literacy profiles somewhere between those of "basic writer" and "ESL student," Leyla's written English was far more advanced than Fatimo's written English with fewer ESL features. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Leyla's written English was stronger than 95% of the native English speaking students enrolled in the same course.

Fatimo and Leyla do possess a high level of conversational fluency and can easily code switch, but unlike many generation 1.5 students in the literature, they do not choose to identify with American culture. Even though they both have college-educated fathers, they are like many first generation college students, regardless of their ethnicity, in the United States. Although Farid & McMahan (2004) claim that many Somali students are

“concrete thinkers” and that abstract concepts, critical thinking skills, and independent work are challenging for many Somali students, Fatimo and Leyla enjoy courses where they can critically think and express their ideas about abstract concepts. Furthermore, both prefer working and studying independently rather than in groups.

Those who have studied generation 1.5 students have described students as being “caught” in the middle of two generations, that they have as Harklau, Losey, & Siegal (1999) describe, traits and experiences that lie somewhere between those associated with the first or second generation. Many experts have noted that generation 1.5 students can often “blend in” with other “Americans” their own age, and are torn between two cultures wanting to be like their mainstream American peers. However, Neither Fatimo or Leyla identify themselves as “American.” Though both said they admire the cultural diversity within American society and the opportunities that women have in America, neither are particularly interested in blending in with other Americans, nor do they feel torn between two cultures wanting to be like their mainstream American peers.

Both women choose to immerse themselves in Somali culture and have little interaction with non-Somali culture or people except when they are in school. They both follow the expectations of their parents and try to follow the teachings of the Koran. Both women cover themselves when they leave their homes and believe that the way they dress is “pretty.” They both not only hope, but plan to return to Somalia after the war ends. Though they consider the United States one of their homes, they do not consider it their first home or the home they prefer to live or stay in.

Because the Muslim religion serves as the foundation of Somali culture and lifestyle, it is impossible for Fatimo and Leyla to discuss their culture without discussing being Muslim women; after all, being Muslim is often how they identify themselves. Furthermore, because they cover themselves, they are identified as Muslim by others; there really is no way for them to “blend” into American culture like many other generation 1.5 students can. Ms. Noor, whom I interviewed as an expert for this study, recommends the word “integration” rather than “assimilation.” She believes that if Somali women like Fatimo and Leyla were to assimilate, they would have to give up their entire Somali culture; however, integrating would allow them to be a part of American society without giving up any of their cultural beliefs or practices.

However, can and will Fatimo and Leyla integrate into mainstream American society? If they stay in the United States and wish to marry, will their education be a liability when seeking a marriage partner? If they have children, will their children successfully integrate into American society or will they choose to assimilate? And if their children integrate or assimilate, will it be into mainstream American society or “African-American” society or perhaps “Muslim-American” society? As long as they are Muslim, can they ever fully integrate into any American society? Furthermore, if Fatimo and Leyla return to Somalia, will they feel entirely Somali? Will traditional Somalis consider them too Americanized?

As I discussed in Chapter Two of this capstone, Roberge (2002) argues that whenever researchers attempt to categorize a group of students, they run the risk of over-generalizing; in addition, the term “generation 1.5” implies that students are always “in-

between” the first and second generations, when many actually have experiences, characteristics, and educational needs that are not found in either generation. What I learned through this study was far more complex than what I had initially set out to find.

Defining New Roles as Somali Women in the Somali Community

Fatimo and Leyla are pioneers. In Somalia, few women had opportunities for education beyond high school. Many women in rural areas of Somalia did not have much opportunity to go to school at all. Fatimo and Leyla both acknowledge that they want to make the most out of their education while they are living in America. In fact, this appears to be how they are both acculturating the most: through education and career aspirations. Not only do they want to have college degrees, but they want to continue their education in graduate or professional school. From Leyla’s perspective she can be a medical doctor *and* a wife and a mother. At the same time, Fatimo and Leyla both feel immense responsibility to take care of their families, particularly their mothers.

In addition to having many responsibilities at home, Fatimo and Leyla must endure regular hostility from some of the men in the Somali community who do not support their decision to educate themselves. In Leyla’s case, men whom she does not even know feel they have the right to tell her what she should do with her life. The fact that men her age tell her regularly that she should quit school, get married, and have children shows that it is not just one generation of Somali men who hold these beliefs about Somali women. Though Leyla says she does not receive negative remarks from educated Somali elders in the community, she said that the educated men are not in the

majority and most men her age that she knows have chosen to work instead of go to college.

Still, Fatimo and Leyla are strong willed and strong minded. They both have said that if elderly men say negative things to them they will ignore the comments out of respect, but if men their age or slightly older make negative comments, they stand up for themselves and “fight back.” I do not believe that either Fatimo or Leyla will quit school because of Somali men’s attitudes and perceptions towards them. The inner strength and ability they have to advocate for themselves will only benefit them as they progress through college and ultimately to their future professions. Furthermore, they are fortunate to have the support of their families, particularly their mothers, who encourage them to become educated and make college a priority in their lives.

Fatimo and Leyla: Looking Towards the Future

Currently, Fatimo is on academic probation with a 1.98 grade point average and says she is not using any resources or supportive services that the college offers, nor is she studying with classmates or friends. Though she is aware that she has difficulty following through with final projects and papers in college courses, she says she does not know why. Or maybe she really has not explored the reasons behind what *appears* to be “typical” college student behavior. Though Fatimo has never actually articulated it, one could speculate the causes. Perhaps she is an over-achiever and is scared to follow through on assignments because of her overwhelming fear of failure. It is a strong possibility that she is not academically prepared in certain areas and she knows this, but does not want to appear under-prepared, nor does she want to ask for help.

There were times during the interviews with Fatimo when I wondered if she is depressed, but as Mr. Farid says, there is no word for “depression” in Somali and many Somalis do not wish to discuss it. Often times during our interviews I felt she was holding back from telling me deeply personal things that were affecting her ability to concentrate and follow through with assignments. Although she comes across as an energetic, talkative, open, and friendly woman, I have always had the sense that there is more going on than what she chooses to share with me. Her experience with FGM clearly continues to affect her. She may have post-traumatic stress disorder to some degree that has never been documented or explored. It was obvious to me that there was more to her stories than she felt comfortable sharing, but it was not appropriate or ethical as a researcher to push the discussion beyond her comfort zone.

With the exception of failing one course, Leyla has been successful academically in college and it appears that she is more academically prepared than Fatimo. Having three years of ESL instruction in middle school combined with Somali language instruction by Somali ESL teachers was clearly beneficial. She gained confidence in herself academically as she progressed through middle school and high school and had a positive attitude about ESL coursework; in addition, the experiences she had in a college level English program while she was in high school prepared her academically for college level work.

Currently when she experiences difficulty in her college courses or has questions she cannot answer, she is willing to seek assistance in the learning center or to ask for help from her instructors outside of class. However, she continues to struggle with time

management and studying, and nursing coursework is much more difficult for her than other courses she has taken in the past.

A major finding of this study is that defining “academic success” is far more complex than what was revealed in Fatimo and Leyla’s academic records, English language proficiency exam results, and ACT test scores. There are many factors that contribute to academic progress and acculturation in college, such as post-traumatic stress, family responsibility, possible depression, racism, sexism, poverty, lack of time management, mentors and role models, and weaker academic preparation for certain coursework. At the same time, Fatimo and Leyla are resilient, strong willed, and have parents who support their college educations and future careers. They also have had positive experiences in middle school and high school. In fact, had they not had some of these experiences, they may have never gone to college.

In middle school and high school, Leyla received superior English language instruction as well as opportunities to learn how to read and write in Somali at the same time as she was learning how to read and write in English. Both Fatimo and Leyla experienced middle school and high school teachers who cared about them and in some cases went beyond what was required of them as teachers. They also had access to a public library with staff who helped them regularly with their homework. Neither of them graduated with low grade point averages, and in some subjects they were clearly prepared for college level work. Currently, Fatimo and Leyla feel that the college they attend respects and accommodates their cultural practices and has faculty and staff that are supportive of their learning, which was a positive finding of this study.

As Fatimo and Leyla continue on in their major courses of study, I predict that they can be successful if they make some changes early on. Fatimo must begin using the resources on campus to assist her with time management, studying, and completing assignments. Leyla needs to learn time management and study skills in order to keep up with the rigor of the nursing program. Both women need to make an effort to connect with their instructors outside of the classroom to assure that they understand assignments, expectations, and logistics of courses. Making connections with academic advisors in their program will be extremely helpful, especially if they are able to establish a relationship with their advisor and meet regularly with that person to discuss future coursework, scheduling, time management, and studying methods.

These recommendations and other future recommendations will be discussed in greater detail in the next, and final chapter. Also included in the final chapter is a discussion about the limitations of this study as well as final reflections about Fatimo and Leyla and what I hope can be learned from their stories.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

I begin this chapter with a story that is very much connected to this study. Sahra Noor, who I interviewed as an expert for this study, was the first Somali college student I had as an ESL instructor almost eight years ago. She told me in our interview that she still remembers the day when I helped her organize a schedule the first semester she was in college. She remembered feeling terribly “out of control” and was falling behind in her school work mid-way through her first semester. I helped her plan what she would do each day of the week to maximize her study time when she was not in classes or working. She had little concept of time management, study skills, or the importance of keeping some type of daily planner. She also was not sure how to even begin studying because she was often so overwhelmed with everything else she had to do as a single, Somali mother taking a full credit load of college coursework.

Ms. Noor told me during our interview that she recently bought her own condominium that she and her daughter live in together, and when she was unpacking, she found the schedule that I had helped her write. She said she had laminated the schedule and each semester she would write and laminate a new schedule and put it in the front of one of the three-ring binders she used for classes. At this point during our conversation she started to cry and said, “you probably had no idea how much that meant

to me.” I told her not only did I have no idea how much it had meant to her, but I had no idea how much she needed it at the time or how seriously she would take it by incorporating it into her life as a college student.

Ms. Noor, whose alma mater is the college that Fatimo and Leyla currently attend, is considered a “success story” by many. She came from an educated family in Somalia, completed high school in Somalia never experiencing an interruption in her education, and learned how to read and write in both Somali and English before she arrived in the United States. When she first came to college, she was 20 years old and a single mother who had recently divorced. Her mother had died when she was younger and her father, whom she lived with at the time, worked full-time, did not understand the college system in the United States and in the beginning, did not support Ms. Noor’s decision to go to college. He, along with her equally college educated uncles, felt that she should get a full-time job.

Though Ms. Noor was *not* a generation 1.5 student, she said she regularly felt “lost, confused, and alone” when she first started college. When she reflects on what helped her navigate through college successfully, she credits key people whom she calls her “surrogate parents” that took the time to advise and mentor her; these staff members came from a variety of different departments at the college including a support program for student parents, the learning center, the nursing program and specific faculty members who taught anatomy, nursing, and ESL. Even though she came to college highly motivated, academically prepared, and from a college educated family, she is certain that she would have never returned after her first year without the help of these particular staff

and faculty. This need for support that she speaks to is also evident in the stories of Fatimo and Leyla.

Future Recommendations

The Need for Intensive Mentoring and Advising

Both Ms. Noor and Mr. Farid, who I interviewed as experts for this study, said that though many Somali students are motivated and hardworking, they need intensive mentoring and advising early on in their education. Mr. Farid believes that students who come to the United States while they are in middle school are at the most risk and intensive mentoring and advising should begin immediately with this group of students. Ms. Noor feels that Somali students who want to become nurses or medical doctors need to become educated about these professions before they arrive to college as they know little about these professions or the education they need in order to prepare for work in these fields. Furthermore, she feels they need to learn about other healthcare professions and non-healthcare professions as well.

When Fatimo and Leyla entered college, both women wanted to become pediatricians, but knew little about the profession or the process they needed to go through in college and medical school. The only other profession they felt they knew enough about when they first entered college was nursing, which Leyla decided to major in. Even now as second semester sophomores in college, they have questions that they are not sure whom to ask, or they have not connected with the staff and faculty who could help.

Fatimo and Leyla's lack of time management awareness and skill was a surprising finding of this study. Leyla discussed how differently Somalis perceive time and how difficult it has always been for her to manage her time since she first started school in the United States up until now. She says that she picks up a free daily planner from the college at the start of each academic year, but never actually uses it because she does not know how. When I offered to teach her, she jumped at the opportunity and we met after the study was completed. I was shocked that in her second semester of her sophomore year in college, she had no concept of how much she needed to study outside of classes, or that she needed to plan ahead for studying and homework. When I asked her if she had ever learned about studying and time management in high school she said, "yeah, but it didn't mean anything then." This supports the need for continued education on time management throughout college.

I also learned that she was not doing much studying over the weekends even though it was her intention to do so. We agreed that the only way she could study on weekends is if she physically left her apartment and went to the public or college library for long periods of time. After experiencing two nursing courses, she knows that she cannot rely on studying at the last minute for exams. Somali students need help understanding time from a Western cultural perspective. This awareness will help them realize the importance of time management as they progress through middle school and high school. Perhaps if they are exposed to time management skills early on, they will not feel so overwhelmed in college when they must rely on them to be successful.

As discussed in Chapter Four of this capstone, Fatimo joined a mentorship program in her senior year of high school that assisted her with college preparation. Though Leyla chose not join this program, she chose a post-secondary English option where she received English instruction in a supportive and academically challenging college level English program that prepared her for college work. Even before high school, Leyla received regular mentoring and advising from ESL teachers in middle school. These opportunities proved to be helpful for both Fatimo and Leyla's success in college.

Neither Fatimo or Leyla have ever been able to turn to their families for academic help or advice before or after they entered college. The homework helpers at the public library were who they received the most help from with their homework in high school. This is a valuable resource for many students like Fatimo and Leyla. In fact, this was another surprising finding of this study. I had no idea how much Fatimo and Leyla relied on the public library staff for academic support outside of high school. These library programs must be recognized as a valuable asset to students like Fatimo and Leyla who are unable to receive help from their family members with their homework.

In my final interview with Leyla, she said that one of the reasons why she loves the college she attends is because of the one-on-one attention that is available. Still, she would like to see a course required for Somali women where writing for academic purposes, time management, and study skills are taught. I would argue that students should continue receiving this type of instruction throughout their first and second year of college whether it is in certain college coursework, a mentoring and/or advising program,

or by a female faculty or staff member designated to work with the student(s). If this faculty or staff person is not Somali, it would be helpful if she has background knowledge about the Somali community and culture, an understanding of the unique challenges that Somali women college students face, as well as experience working with Somali women college students.

Had Fatimo been intensely mentored and advised early on, she would have had someone keeping track of her progress who would not let her stare at a computer screen for hours at a time never asking her instructors for help or for extensions on assignments. She would have had someone to talk to about her personal problems with an understanding of Somali culture and practices. She would have also understood early on why she took the English language proficiency exam and the benefits of ESL in college; perhaps her attitudes towards ESL could have changed earlier.

With intensive mentoring and advising from the very beginning, Leyla could have avoided failing a nursing course. One of the reasons she did not take the rest of the semester off when she was ill was because she believed that she would not have been given permission to finish the nursing course later on and that she would have been dismissed from the nursing program. She did not feel connected enough to anybody to ask for information nor did she understand who to talk to. She also would have had someone to advise her regarding the coursework she should take each semester and over a longer period of time.

When I reviewed the courses she registered for the first semester of her sophomore year, I could have predicted that she would have done poorly. There were

two classes she enrolled in that she should have never taken at the same time; in addition, she was taking far too many credits that semester. Unfortunately, offering free daily planners and time management workshops is not enough for some Somali college students. Many of them do not realize the importance of time management until they are in trouble academically.

In addition to intensive mentoring and advising, Fatimo and Leyla could benefit from a structured Somali women's support group either in high school, college or both. Ideally, the facilitator of the group would be an educated Somali woman in the community whom students admire and respect. She could assign peer mentors amongst the women in the group so that they would always have someone looking out for them. An educated Somali woman would have first hand knowledge of the struggles that Somali women college students face in and out of the college. She would understand the unique challenges and attitudes that Somali women in college have to deal with on a regular basis within their Somali community as well as the family responsibilities that many of them have when they are not in school.

The Need for More English Language Acquisition Opportunities Across the Curriculum

Leyla was fortunate that she had the opportunity to enroll in a rigorous English program her senior year of high school that prepared her academically for college level work. This is ideal for any ESL student in high school. However, I do not believe that more ESL coursework is what Fatimo or Leyla *currently* need as sophomores in college. Both women were fortunate to experience content faculty throughout their freshman year whose classes gave them meaningful, functional, and contextual academic learning

opportunities throughout the semester. They were exposed early on to instructors who valued their opinions and point of view in their classrooms and they had multiple opportunities to express and show what they were learning in different content area courses. Furthermore, though Fatimo and Leyla have both experienced academic difficulty in their sophomore year, it is their perception that it has little to do with their academic proficiency in English.

In Chapter Two of this capstone, I discussed how the development of academic English occurs over an extended period of time and it does not always occur in the order that second language acquisition experts believe that it does. I also discussed Scarcella's (2003) findings that academic English is not acquired once and for all; it continually evolves and shifts to meet changing tasks and purposes. To complicate matters, each discipline in college involves its own literacy in English, and within that discipline, ESL students like Fatimo and Leyla must continually acquire new English literacy resources (Scarcella, 2003).

The good news is that academic English *can* be acquired throughout college. Fatimo and Leyla benefited immensely from being in a small associate of arts program their first semester of college where they experienced courses rich in academic literacy and reading; Leyla's high school experience in a college English program at the local university was also beneficial and one of the reasons why her English language abilities were stronger when she entered the college she currently attends. Both Fatimo and Leyla were in ideal environments where they had many opportunities to develop their academic English without instructors ever telling them that they were "learning academic English."

Both women said they learned to love critical thinking and expressing their points of view in many of the classes they took their first year of college; their confidence in their academic English only continued to grow. Enrolling in content-based coursework in their very first semester of their freshman year was a positive factor in their acquisition of academic English.

The Need for More Somali Teachers, Mentors and Advisors

In Chapter Four of this capstone, I discussed how having Somali ESL teachers in middle school was enormously effective for Leyla's academic progress and acculturation. Leyla's ESL teachers were clearly not only ESL teachers, but mentors and advisors. There is a need for more ESL teachers, mentors, and advisors who come from the Somali community. Mr. Farid, and many Somali elders like him, knew that something had to be done to help Somali children in schools which is why so many of them are now K-12 teachers. Currently, there are programs at local colleges and universities in the metropolitan area specifically designed for bilingual paraprofessionals in K-12 settings to become licensed bi-lingual education teachers. These are exactly the teachers that students like Fatimo and Leyla need early on in their education.

Just like Leyla's middle school ESL teachers, mentors and advisors from the Somali community can best communicate with Somali students' parents so that they have a better understanding of the school system as well as what their children are learning and experiencing in school. Somali teachers can also educate students on Somali language, history, and the richness of their culture; after all, many Somali students who arrive in the United States after having lived in refugee camps for so long have little to no

understanding of Somali history, culture or the ability to write or read in Somali.

Language learning experts agree that students who have received formal instruction in their first language have an increased ability to function in their second language (Thomas & Collier, 1997; Boshier & Rowekamp, 1998). In addition, a member of the Somali community can educate students *and* their families about professional careers and potential college majors.

I was happy to learn in my final interview with Fatimo that she had just started a job as an ESL tutor in an after-school America Reads Program for immigrant and refugee children. I also was quite pleased when I learned that Leyla is a tutor in the learning center at the college she attends. As ESL educators, we need to constantly question what an “ESL expert” looks like. As uncomfortable as it may be at times, we need to challenge our thinking about who is most qualified to teach, mentor, and advise ESL students like Fatimo and Leyla.

Limitations of the Study

Though this study was successful, Fatimo and Leyla are only two traditional aged Somali women college students out of many whose numbers continue to increase in higher education. Ideally, longitudinal case study would have been done on more than just two students. If I were to do a longer study with more participants, I would follow three or four additional Somali women college students who look similar on paper. I would follow them from the day they enter college to the day they graduate. Much could be learned from such a longitudinal study; educators would have even more information

on how to best serve this population of students' needs more effectively. I would encourage others to consider continuing this important research.

It would have also been ideal to do "interactive" journaling with the participants in this study. I would be able to respond in writing to the participants' responses to the journal prompts creating more of a dialogue between us throughout the study. Furthermore, using technology as a tool for journal writing would have been most efficient and convenient for me in this study, but Fatimo and Leyla felt differently, which surprised me. I had assumed they would be eager to use Blackboard or another on-line method to complete journal entries, but both women felt more comfortable handwriting their journal entries on paper.

I also had assumed they would be more comfortable using technology because they were traditional aged college students who had used the internet, word processing programs, and e-mail throughout high school, but I did not consider the fact that neither of them had access to personal computers at home. Because they did not consider the journal entries a part of their college work, they did not want to work on them while they were on campus. Overall, they preferred the old fashioned method of pen to paper, which should be taken into consideration for similar studies in the future.

Finally, this study could have been even more effective if conducted by a Somali woman researcher. Imagine all that she could have learned if she conducted the interviews in a combination of English and Somali; after all, both Fatimo and Leyla said that is how they are able to fully express themselves orally. A Somali woman researcher would have insight into the Somali community as well as experiences as a Somali refugee

or immigrant woman that I do not have. Fatimo and Leyla likely may have held back at some points during the interviews because I am not from the same cultural background. On the other hand, they may have been even more open with me at times because I am an outsider for whom they did not need to project a certain image or worry that they were saying the “right” or “wrong” things to.

Final Reflections

I realize that some of the recommendations I have made in this capstone may be easier to write about than to actually do. It is not an easy process to develop new programs for students or to offer bi-lingual services when dealing with budget cuts, state mandates, over crowded classrooms, and a host of other realities that sometimes get in the way of best serving the needs of students like Fatimo and Leyla. One of the things that we can begin immediately (or continue doing) is to give direct feedback to our students early on when we first suspect they are having academic difficulties. The direct feedback that Fatimo and Leyla received from certain teachers in middle school and high school was invaluable for them and pushed them to succeed academically.

Fatimo said she liked the fact that her instructors in her first semester of college were straight forward with her. She never felt that any of them were simply “passing her through” or making assignments easier for her just because she was “Somali” or an “ESL student.” By challenging our students academically and giving them helpful and direct feedback early on about their strengths *and* weaknesses, we will lay a foundation for

them that they can build on as they progress through their coursework whether it is in middle school, high school, or college.

As the numbers of Somali students continue to increase in K-12 and higher education settings, we must continue to ask difficult questions that challenge and transform our work. Though this capstone may not offer any quick fixes or easy solutions, I do hope that it will provide insights and an understanding of the complex academic and social backgrounds of Somali students such as Fatimo and Leyla. Being aware of the complexities that our students bring with them to our classrooms are important first steps in working with them most effectively.

APPENDIX A

LANGUAGE USE SURVEY AND GENERAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION
SURVEY

LANGUAGE USE SURVEY*

I. MY BACKGROUND

1. English was the first language I learned to speak. Yes ___ No ___

If not English, I first learned to speak: _____
(what language)

2. English was the first language I learned to write. Yes ___ No ___

If not English, I first learned to write: _____
(what language)

3. English was the first language I learned to read. Yes ___ No ___

If not English, I first learned to read: _____
(what language)

4. I am a native speaker of English. Yes ___ No ___

5. I am a non-native speaker of English. Yes ___ No ___

6. I speak English as a second language Yes ___ No ___

7. I am an ESL student. Yes ___ No ___

8. I am bilingual. Yes ___ No ___

9. I am neither an ESL student, nor bilingual. I am: _____
(what best describes your language background)

II. MY EDUCATION

10. Please complete the chart below regarding the location of your schools, the languages you used, and whether or not you had ESL instruction.

* If you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions in this survey, please do not respond. Leave the response blank.

School grade	Location (country)	Languages used in school	Did you have any ESL instruction? (yes/no)
Kindergarten			
First			
Second			
Third			
Fourth			
Fifth			
Sixth			
Seventh			
Eighth			
Ninth			
Tenth			
Eleventh			
Twelfth			
College			

III. HOW I USE LANGUAGE

11. Please list in the chart what languages you know. (Don't include languages you studied only as a school subject.) Tell how well you understand, speak, read, and write these languages by circling the appropriate number that corresponds to the following:

1 = well

2 = some

3 = not much

LANGUAGE	UNDERSTAND	SPEAK	READ	WRITE
1. English	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
2.	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
3.	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
4.	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3

12. Please indicate how much you use any language **other than English** in the following situations by circling the appropriate number that corresponds to the following:

1 = not at all, 2 = less than half the time, 3 = half the time, 4 = more than half the time, 5 = all the time

	not at all	sometimes	all the time		
a) Talking to my parents	1	2	3	4	5
b) Parents talking to me	1	2	3	4	5
c) Talking with my brothers and sisters	1	2	3	4	5
d) Talking at work	1	2	3	4	5
e) Talking with my friends	1	2	3	4	5
f) Reading/writing at home	1	2	3	4	5
g) Reading/writing at school	1	2	3	4	5
g) Reading/writing at work	1	2	3	4	5
i) Writing to my friends (e.g. e-mail, letters)	1	2	3	4	5
j) Reading for pleasure	1	2	3	4	5
k) Dreaming	1	2	3	4	5

13. When I take into consideration all the situations where I use language (my home life, work life, social life, school life, etc.), I would say that, overall, my **best** language is:

14. When I take into consideration all the situations where I use language (my home life, work life, social life, school life, etc.), I would say that, overall, I am **most** comfortable:

Speaking _____ (what language)
 Reading _____ (what language)
 Writing _____ (what language)

From: S. Goen, P. Porter, D. Swanson & D. Vandommelen (2002). Working with generation 1.5 students and their teachers: ESL meets composition. In The CATESOL Journal, 14 (1), 159-161.

GENERAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION SURVEY*

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. How old are you now? _____
2. How old were you when you came to the United States? _____
3. Did you live in a refugee camp? Yes / No (circle one).
If your answer is "yes" how long did you live there? _____
Did you attend school there? Yes / No (circle one).
4. Was there a period in your life when you did not attend school? Yes / No (circle one). If your answer is "yes" what did you do during this time? _____

5. Was Minnesota the first state you lived in? Yes / No (circle one).

If your answer is "no" what state did you first live in? _____
How long did you live there? _____
6. Who are the family members that you live with? (list them all). _____

7. When you lived in Somalia, did you and your family live in the city?
Yes / No (circle one).
8. Are you currently working? Yes / No (circle one).
If your answer is "yes" where do you work? _____
How many hours per week do you work? _____
9. Do you plan to continue education after college in graduate or professional school?
Yes / No (circle one)

* If you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions in this survey, please do not respond. Leave the response blank.

II. FAMILY BACKGROUND

10. What social class did your family belong to in Somalia? _____

11. What did your father do for a living in Somalia? _____

12. Did your mother work outside of the home in Somalia? Yes / No (circle one).
If your answer is “yes” what did your mother do for work? _____

13. How many years of schooling did your father complete in his native country? Circle one:

- a. None.
- b. 1-2 years.
- c. 3-6 years.
- d. 7-8 years.
- e. 9-10 years.
- f. 11-12 years.
- g. Some college.
- h. Completed college.
- i. Some graduate and/or professional school.
- j. Completed graduate and/or professional school.

14. How many years of schooling did your mother complete in her native country?

- a. None.
- b. 1-2 years.
- c. 3-6 years.
- d. 7-8 years.
- e. 9-10 years.
- f. 11-12 years.
- g. Some college.
- h. Completed college.
- i. Some graduate and/or professional school.
- j. Completed graduate and/or professional school.

III. Identity

15. Is the neighborhood you live in mostly Somali? Yes / No (circle one).

16. How important are the relationships you have with your peers? Circle one:

- a. Not at all important.
- b. A little important.
- c. Somewhat important.
- d. Very important.
- e. Extremely important.

17. How important was it to you to be accepted by your “American” classmates and peers in high school?

- a. Not at all important.
- b. A little important.
- c. Somewhat important.
- d. Very important.
- e. Extremely important.

18. How important is it to you to be accepted by your “American” classmates and peers now in college?

- a. Not at all important.
- b. A little important.
- c. Somewhat important.
- d. Very important.
- e. Extremely important.

19. Were you a member of any organized activities (clubs, organizations, etc.) associated with your high school? Yes / No (circle one).

If your answer is “yes” list those activities here: _____

20. Are you currently a member of any organized activities (clubs, organizations, etc.) that are associated with the college? Yes / No (circle one).

If your answer is “yes” list those activities here: _____

21. Are you currently a member of any organized activities (clubs, organizations, etc.) that are outside of the college? Yes / No (circle one).

If your answer is “yes” list those activities here: _____

22. Do you consider yourself a member of a minority group in the United States? Yes / No (circle one).

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Educational Background

1. Before college, which classes did you:
 - a. Enjoy the most and why?
 - b. Enjoy the least and why?
2. If you took ESL classes in middle school, junior high, and/or high school:
 - a. What did you study in these classes?
 - b. How were these classes beneficial to you?
 - c. How well did these classes prepare you for your college work now?
3. Who helped you with your homework and studying in school?
 - a. At home?
 - b. At school?
4. In high school and/or middle school, did you receive help with school outside of school in an after-school program, library, or community organization?
5. Overall, how would you describe your school experiences?

Family Background

6. Do your parent(s) work outside of the home in the U.S?
 - a. Where do your parent(s) work and what do they do?
 - b. What language do they primarily use at work?
7. Do you speak English with any members of your family?
 - a. With whom?
 - b. In what situations?
8. Do you speak Somali with any members of your family?
 - a. With whom?
 - b. In what situations?
9. From the perspective of your family, is your college education a priority?
 - a. Are there things that you must do outside of college that are more of a priority to your family?
 - b. Are you feeling pressured to do something else?
 - c. Do your family's attitudes or doubts play a role?
 - d. Overall, do you feel your family supports you?
10. Does your family give you "time" and "space" to study at home?
11. Does anybody at home help you with your college homework or studying?
 - a. If so, who?

- b. What do they help you with?
12. If you are currently living at home, would you prefer to live someplace else?
- a. Where would you prefer to live and why?
 - b. Would your parents support your decision to live away from home?
13. Does your family want you to go into a certain profession or career?
- a. Which profession?
 - b. Why this profession?

Somali Identity

14. How do you identify yourself?
- a. How does the way you identify yourself vary depending on who you're with and where you are?
15. In high school, who was a part of your peer group?
- a. Were they predominately Somali?
 - b. Were most or all of them women?
 - c. Did you speak Somali, English or a combination of both with them?
16. Currently, who is a part of your peer group?
- a. Are they predominately Somali?
 - b. Are most or all of them women?
 - c. Do you speak Somali, English or a combination of both with them?
17. Traditionally, how does the Somali community view "dating" for un-married Somali women?
- a. Have these views changed since living in America?
 - b. Describe your own viewpoint.
 - c. Describe your parent(s) viewpoint.
18. Traditionally, how does the Somali community define when is it appropriate to move outside of your parents' house?
- a. Has this view changed since living in America?
 - b. Describe your own viewpoint.
19. In the Somali community, when is it preferable for a Somali woman to get married and have children?
- a. Has this view changed since living in America?
 - b. Do you feel pressured to marry and/or have children by a certain age? If so, where does the pressure come from?
 - c. If you were still living in Somalia, do you think that you would currently be married and/or have children?

20. From your perspective, how are the roles and expectations of Somali women different than the roles of American women?
21. From your perspective, how have the roles and expectations of Somali women changed since living in the United States?
 - a. How would your roles and expectations of Somali women differ if you still lived in Somalia?
22. What aspects of Somali culture do you value most?
 - a. How do you maintain these values while living in the United States?
23. How do you feel the college you attend should accommodate your cultural practices and beliefs?
 - a. Has this happened, and if so how and where?

Identity (General)

24. When you are not in classes, what social activities do you participate in?
25. What elements of American culture do you value most?
 - a. How do you integrate these values into your life in the U. S.?
26. In what ways was your life impacted by September 11th?
 - a. What was your reaction to these changes?
27. If you have experienced prejudice, how have these experiences impacted your life living in the United States?
 - a. Where have you experienced prejudice?
 - b. Have they impacted your relationships with people who you interact with on a regular basis?

Investment

28. In high school, which courses were your:
 - a. Favorite and why?
 - b. Least favorite and why?
29. In high school, which courses did you:
 - a. Perform best in and why?
 - b. Perform poorly in and why?
30. In college, which courses (including the courses you are in now) have been your:
 - a. Favorite and why?
 - b. Least favorite and why?

31. In college, which courses (including the courses you are in now) have you:
 - a. Performed best in and why?
 - b. Performed poorly in and why?
32. Describe your attitude towards “ESL”
 - a. ESL coursework pre-college.
 - b. ESL coursework in college.
 - c. Being “labeled” ESL.
33. Is college a priority in your life?
 - a. Why?
 - b. In what ways do you make it a priority?
 - c. What changes have you made to make this a priority?
 - d. What have you given up to study in college?
 - e. How many hours per day do you study?
34. What led you to choose this particular college?
35. What is your major?
 - a. Who/what has influenced your choice?
36. Ultimately, what do you hope to achieve through education?
37. After you are finished with your education, what do you want to do and where do you plan to live?
 - a. If you plan to stay in the United States, what do you hope to do?
 - b. If you plan to return to Somalia, what do you hope to do?
38. How do you define “academic English?”
 - a. How do you feel about learning academic English?
 - b. Is learning academic English a priority to you?
 - c. In what ways has your life been transformed by learning and using academic English?
 - d. Do you view academic English as a tool of power?
 - e. How has academic English empowered or transformed you?
39. Who supports and encourages you in your education?
 - a. What conversations have you had around your education?

Attitudes Towards Academic Literacy

40. Which courses in high school were the most academically rigorous?
 - a. How were they academically rigorous?
 - b. How did English play a role?
 - c. What strategies did you use to be more successful in these courses?

- d. What outside assistance did you use to help you in these courses? Was this voluntary or involuntary?
41. Which courses in college (including the courses you are in now) have been and/or are the most academically rigorous?
- a. How are they academically rigorous?
 - b. How has English played a role?
 - c. What strategies have you used to be more successful in these courses?
42. In college, in which courses (including the ones you are in now) have you felt:
- a. The most confident?
 - b. The least confident?
43. In college, in which courses (including the ones you are in now) have you felt that you *can* communicate using academic English successfully (orally and in writing)?
- a. With the instructor.
 - b. With your classmates.
 - c. In the larger class.
 - d. In smaller groups.
44. In college, in which courses (including the ones you are in now) have you felt frustrated by your ability to communicate in academic English (orally and in writing)?
- a. With the instructor.
 - b. With your classmates.
 - c. In the larger class.
 - d. In smaller groups.
45. In college, in which courses (including the ones you are in now) have you felt that you *can* communicate successfully overall (orally and in writing)?
- a. With the instructor.
 - b. With your classmates.
 - c. In the larger class.
 - d. In smaller groups.
46. In college, in which courses (including the ones you are in now) have you felt that you *cannot* communicate successfully overall (orally and in writing)?
- a. With the instructor.
 - b. With your classmates.
 - c. In the larger class.
 - d. In smaller groups.
47. In college, do you seek assistance with certain courses?
- a. Which courses?
 - b. Where do you go for assistance outside of class?

- c. Do you meet with the instructor(s) outside of class? Why or why not?
 - d. Which services outside of class have been the most beneficial?
48. What do you believe you still need in order to be more successful in college?
- a. Certain strategies?
 - b. Certain skills?
 - c. Improvement in particular courses?
 - d. More ESL courses or outside support?
 - e. More writing (non-ESL) courses or outside assistance in writing?
 - f. Resources that are currently not available?
49. In college, have you felt that instructors react to the content of your papers, and not solely on the problems in your writing?
- a. ESL courses?
 - b. Writing courses (non-ESL)?
 - c. Other courses?
50. In college, have you felt that instructors assess you not on the content of your papers, but solely on the problems in your writing?
- a. ESL courses?
 - b. Writing courses (non-ESL)?
 - c. Other courses?
51. If you have taken ESL courses in college, how have they contributed:
- a. Positively to your success as a college student?
 - b. Negatively to your success as a college student?

College Environment

52. What makes college classrooms comfortable and non-threatening learning environments?
53. When you are not in classes on campus, where do you go on campus to relax and feel comfortable? What makes these places comfortable and non-threatening?
54. What do you wish the college understood about Somali women college students? What advice would you give the college?
55. What do you wish other college students understood about Somali women college students?

APPENDIX C
JOURNAL PROMPTS

Perceptions of Inclusion in College

1. Describe some places on campus where you do and do not feel like you belong. In these places, why do you feel this way?
2. What do you wish the college understood about Somali women students? What advice would you give to the college?
3. What do you wish other students understood about Somali women in college?

Perceptions of Academic Success and Failure

4. Where do you feel you *do* have a voice and are confident academically? Where do you feel you do *not* have a voice and are less confident academically?
5. When you hear the term “academic English” what do you think of? When, where, and why do you use academic English?
6. Think of an assignment you are currently working on that is problematic and/or difficult for you in some way. Briefly discuss the assignment and discuss all of the ways you find it challenging. Next, discuss what strategies and resources you are currently using or could use to help you do well on this assignment.

Perceptions of ESL Coursework

7. If you took ESL courses before coming to college, describe what kinds of things you studied in these courses. Finally, how were these courses beneficial or not beneficial for you?
8. If you have taken ESL courses in college, describe what you studied in these courses and how they have been and/or have not been beneficial to you as a college student. Have these courses prepare you for the academic work you are doing this year? How did you feel about being in ESL classes?

Perceptions of Identity

9. First, how would you say you identify yourself and why? Second, explain in detail your definition of what it means to be an “American.” Third, explain in detail what it means to you to be “Somali.”
10. The following is written by a former English as a second language (ESL) college student by the name of Yuko (Spack, 2004). Read what she has to say and then respond to the question below:

I think it is true that the language you speak affects the way you think and to some extent your personality. I think my personality changes when I speak in English and when I speak in Japanese. I have two identities, specified by the language used. So the process of acquiring a second language is not simply learning a way of communication, but forming who you are which might be different from your self in the native language. I think this contributes to some degree to the difficulty in learning a second language (pp. 45).

Can you relate to what Yuko is saying? Explain how you change when you communicate (speaking and writing) in English than when you communicate in Somali. Think about where and when you use these languages, for example: at home, school, with friends, etc.

Somali Community

11. What do you wish the Somali community understood about Somali women college students? What advice would you give the Somali community?

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