

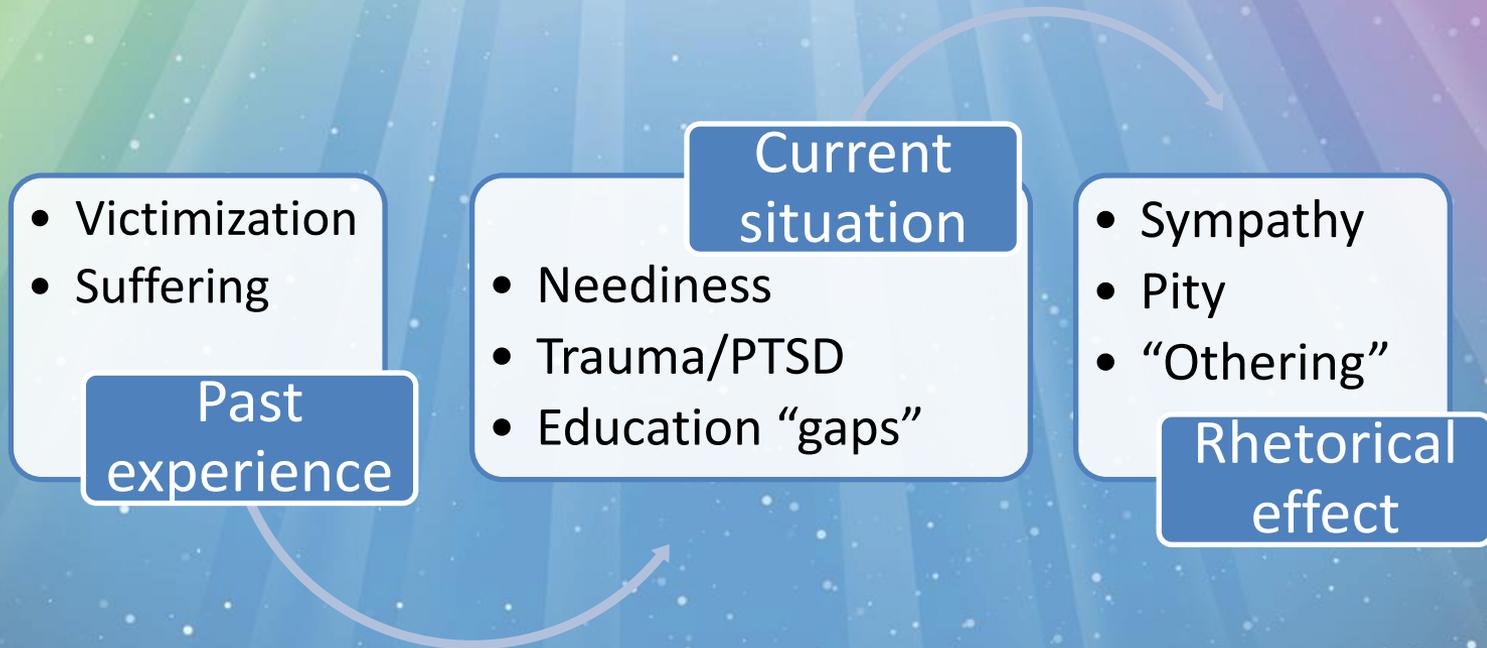
**“I Will Impress You!”:
Status-Oriented Aspiration,
Discourse, and Decision-Making
Among Refugee Youth**

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AAAL 2014**

My goals

- ❖ Understand the aspirations and decisions of refugee-background students
- ❖ Understand why school policies and practices might conflict with student/family expectations
- ❖ Promote dialogue and negotiation around representation and educational opportunity

“Refugee” Discourse



e.g., Bigelow, 2010; Butler, 2005; Keddie, 2012;
Kumsa, 2006; McPhereson, 2010; Roy & Roxas, 2011

What stories do RB* students want to tell?

WE ARE...

- ❖ Humanitarians
- ❖ Community leaders
- ❖ Intellectuals
- ❖ Multilinguals
- ❖ Global citizens
- ❖ Opportunity-seekers
- ❖ Change-makers



DISCOURSE OF NEED	DISCOURSE OF STATUS
What do you lack? (deficit)	What do you bring? (potential)
Where have you been?	Where are you going?
Victimization/Trauma	Agency/Resilience
Survival	Success/Thriving
Pity/Sympathy	Pride/Dignity
Being helped	Helping others

e.g., Bigelow, 2010, Kumsa, 2006; Keddie, 2012, MacDonald, 2013

Data Sources

- ❖ Scholarly literature
- ❖ Local media (community of “Laketown”)
- ❖ Student interviews
- ❖ Faculty/staff interviews at “New England State College”
- ❖ Participant observation and community engagement

Status orientation in the resettlement process

Selectivity

Being in “the 1%” that are chosen for resettlement (USCRI)

Persistence/Ingenuity

Survival by navigating the system and using social networks

Pursuing the best opportunity (often through secondary migration)

Investment

Parents giving up careers, social connections, etc. for children

Social mobility

Seeking political, social, economic capital

Pursuing citizenship status (green card, U.S. citizen, etc.)

(e.g., Butler, 2005; Mortland, 1987; Zeus, 2005)

What happens in schools?

Student/Family Expectations	School Practices
ESL/ELL label as stigma	ESL/ELL label as support
Focus on the future ("moving ahead")	Focus on the past and present ("getting through")
Push (intensive/immersive classes)	Protectionism ("sheltered" classes)
Grades = achievement	Grades = effort and growth
Success= college/career prep	Success= graduation

Bigelow, 2010; Callahan, 2012; Fritzen, 2010; Keddie, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Pinson & Arnot, 2010; Roy & Roxas, Shapiro, forthcoming; Shapiro, in progress; Sharkey & Layzer, 2012

How does this play out in “Laketown”?

Problems with lack of rigor, grade inflation, and social promotion

- “I can’t even read [my earlier essays]. How did I get an A?” (Najib)
- We were encouraged to take “easy” classes (student interviewees)
- “I got frustrated sometimes... maybe I should get pushed a little harder” (student interviewee)
- They don’t want to push them....but you have to push them” (parent)

ESL/ELL classes seen as barrier to educational opportunity

- “If you put kids from the same country in the same class, what are you hoping for them to gain?” (student protester)
- “You don’t need to separate us. We are all equal” (student protester)

Students not prepared for college/career paths

- Our graduates can’t even fill out a job application! (participants and community)
- “The SAT test-- I was like ‘What is that?’ I never learned it from them. Nobody taught me.” (Najib)

Case study: Najib as status-seeker in HS

Family placed high value on education

-Mom said: “We don’t need anything from you. You just educate yourself as much as you want to.”

Placed in low-level classes

-In Math, “I was, like acing it all the time”

-“I talked about a lot of teachers that I don’t want to be in ESL class, but they always tell me that ‘Your English is not ready to go to a high level.’”

Supported but under-challenged

- “Teachers don’t want to discourage their students. Pretty much they’ll give you good feedback. They’ll say ‘You did a great job’ even though you know you didn’t do a great job. You don’t know, but they know.”

Aware of social stigma

-“Give [students] awards at the end of the yearThey want to be something, be at a good level. But nobody cares.”

- “They’re not talking to you about academics—they’re talking about cleanness.”

Najib's experience in college

- Recruited to “NESC” through soccer team
 - “Star” athlete
- Found academics challenging, but developed close relationships with faculty/staff and peers
 - Social capital
- Perceived by faculty/staff as “lost potential”
 - **Why did he “drop out” after 2 years?**
 - **Why is he back at the same job he had in high school?**

Najib as life-long status-seeker

- Entrepreneur (soccer ball business in refugee camp)
- Family of musicians and community leaders
- Star athlete (in HS/college as well as in community; player and coach)
- Cook at pricey French restaurant where “everybody knows me”
- Author of a personal memoir (interviewed on public radio)
- College graduate– “I wanted to be the first in my family”
 - Hoping to transfer to R1 university with better soccer and academics
- Now a husband and father (and community leader?)

Lingering questions

What are the dangers of a status orientation?

- Students aspiring to unrealistic goals
 - Transferring to R1 school (e.g., Najib)
 - Majoring in pre-med (vs. other health sciences program)
- Expecting high grades; resisting critical feedback

How can an awareness of status-oriented discourse inform educational policy and pedagogy?

- Honest but encouraging conversations about students' hopes and dreams (“critical caring” - Valenzuela, 1999)
 - “I’m gonna just say, **this is about making family....** [B]ring all kids together and [tell] them ‘**...We’ll be working hard on you...**’ (Najib)
- Opportunities for students to serve and to lead
 - “Give me one minute, and I’ll impress you. Just one minute!” (student protester)

Possibilities for future research

Longitudinal:

- How do RB students interpret the value of their education in the short term? In the long-term?
 - (e.g. What will Najib say in another 5 years?)

Pedagogical:

- How can we draw on RB students' "funds of knowledge" to promote cultural competency and global citizenship for all students?

Theoretical:

- What are the affordances (and pitfalls?) of an increased focus on "status-orientation" among RB students and other groups?

Thank you!!

These slides will be available on my website:

<http://shawnashapiro.com/>

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