ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: CROSSING THE BORDERS THAT DEFINE
DIFFERENCE: THE CULTURE, POLITICS,
AND PRACTICE OF SOLIDARITY IN TWO
HIGH SCHOOLS

Beth A. Douthirt Cohen, Doctor of Philosophy
2013

Dissertation directed by: Professor Barbara Finkelstein
Department of Teaching, Learning, Policy &
Leadership

This multi-sited ethnography explores the experiences of high school students
in the United States as they enact solidarity across various identity borders including
race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and mental/physical ability.
Specifically, the study focuses on relatively privileged young people in two distinctly
different schools—an urban coeducational public school and a suburban all-boys
private school. The students entered into solidarity across difference in order to
protest the marginalization of minority groups. Using observations and in-depth
interviews, this study documents the process of how, when, and why these students
came to enact solidarity as a tool to alter systems of power and privilege.

For these students, their journeys towards enacting solidarity began with a
discovery of the borders that maintain inequality. These discoveries included a
process of 1) experiencing or witnessing marginalization, 2) questioning the borders
that maintain systems of power and privilege, 3) re-imagining identity categories,

4) integrating new ways of interacting across difference into their sense of self and sense of the world, and 5) seeking out opportunities to learn new ways of thinking about "others."

In an attempt to alter the borders that maintain inequality, the students took on the roles of helpers, messengers, advocates, and activists. They enacted solidarity in different ways at different moments based on their skills, capacities, perceived risks, and on their own understandings of justice, inequality, power, and social change. Over time, the student's enactments of solidarity became dynamic and fluid, while navigating various pitfalls such as paternalism. They employed various forms of solidarity, including human, social, and civic solidarities, and sought to build what this study calls "cultural solidarity" in their schools and communities in order to achieve social, political, and, perhaps most prominently, cultural change.

The findings suggest that the agency of relatively privileged students is an effective tool that educators and scholars can harness in interrupting inequality in schools. Dynamic and less rigid conceptions of solidarity better reflect how young people enact solidarity in their daily lives. Through curricular, philosophical, and pedagogical choices, high schools can enable or limit the manner in which students approach difference across groups.

Keywords: solidarity, privilege, inequality, border theory, high school

CROSSING THE BORDERS THAT DEFINE DIFFERENCE: THE CULTURE, POLITICS, AND PRACTICE OF SOLIDARITY IN TWO HIGH SCHOOLS

By

Beth A. Douthirt Cohen

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2013

Advisory Committee:

Professor Barbara Finkelstein, Chair
Professor Noah Drezner
Professor Sherick Hughes
Professor Francine Hultgren
Professor Michael Paolisso

Preface

I began my fieldwork for this study in 2010 and finished in late 2011. It was an interesting time to think about youth, justice, solidarity, and change with the "Arab Spring" uprisings throughout the Middle East, and, with the Occupy Movements here at home. In December of 2011, Time Magazine named "The Protestor," the activist, as the "Person of the Year." In the midst of the roar of these very public movements, this study explored the less visible moments of sociopolitical action that change societies, moments that young people carved out in their everyday school lives to alter the metaphorical and literal borders between themselves and others.

This study raises questions that will not be unfamiliar to anyone who observed or participated in events that year: Can individuals with seemingly little power alter larger structures? How do individuals topple systems and cultures of inequality? How do those who seek sociocultural and political transformation engage and dwell with those who disagree, those who are oblivious or, even more extreme, those who are disinterested in change? Can certain expressions of solidarity produce durable changes that build a new status quo?

In this dissertation, I define and explore multiple forms of solidarity that can exist in schools, but all of the forms reflect an unexpected connection, a unity, across difference. Cliques, gangs, sports teams, interest groups, school spirit all are manifestations of solidarity. However, in this study, I was interested in how, when, and why young people seek new ways of interacting across identity differences and power differentials, and specifically in the possibility of innovative forms of solidarity in schools. I am interested in the youth who are often the tacit subjects in

discussions of the cultural matters of schooling—in this case, neither the "bullies" nor their "victims" but instead the "witnesses." In this study, I do not examine the experiences of *any* witness to the ostracism of minority or marginalized populations. Instead, I specifically focus on witnesses who, through choice or circumstance, decide they have the ability to harness their relative privilege to rectify an inequitable circumstance.

I am interested in young people who cross the literal and metaphorical borders that determine difference and when, why, and how these crossings occur. The literal borders the youth encountered are the boundaries between home and school, between one community and another, between one identity and another, between one nation state and another, between various places and spaces where difference is tolerated, extinguished, or celebrated. The metaphorical borders these youth navigated are the cultural and sociopolitical boundaries between various identities that determine identities, worth, and power. In this study, the concept of a border is both a metaphor and a conceptual orientation.

Theoretically, there are many possible ways that young people make sense of difference and think about the borders that mark difference, power, and privilege. Some may ignore or do not see the difference between themselves and others; some attempt to eradicate the differences; some embrace the differences; some tolerate the differences. How difference is negotiated in schools is no small matter and rightfully scholars have spent considerable time attempting to reveal problematic ways of negotiating difference (e.g. bullying, xenophobia, calls for colorblindness, segregation, etc.). This study builds on those findings, and explores the potential and

constraints of one associative form that young people can manifest in schools—solidarity across difference. I am interested in solidarity for its potential to be a distinct form of association—different from both neoliberal multiculturalist ethics of tolerance as well as from xenophobic instincts.

This is a study of how and why young people employ solidarity across borders. I explored when young people deem solidarity sincere or urgent. I examined how young people believe acts of solidarity can affect the literal and metaphorical borders that are sites of identity, power, and privilege negotiations in people's lives. When someone declares that they are in solidarity with another, they are acknowledging difference and a presupposed distinction. For example, if I need to state that I am in solidarity with a family member that is because there is a question of our unity. Acts and declarations of solidarity reflect border negotiations. Solidarity determines, maps, and establishes a connection that is not explicit. Therefore, the examination of how, when, and why young people enact solidarity offers a lens through which to look at young people as border crossers, revealing how they navigate the borders that demarcate difference.

Some forms of solidarity reflect a desire for literal physical survival—*I am crossing this literal or metaphorical border that exists between us to help you because I believe our mortality, our fates, are intertwined*. Other forms of solidarity reflect a desire for connection, belonging, similarity—*I am connected to you because I don't see the borders, the differences, between us, our similarities are more discernible than our differences*. Other forms of solidarity do not depend on similarity and, in fact, presuppose difference—*We are declaring our solidarity publicly and*

repeatedly to declare that our struggles might be different but our objectives are the same.

The young people in this study sought out specific forms of solidarity across various dimensions of difference. They strategically employed various types of solidarity—including human, social, civic, political, and cultural solidarities. Human, social, and civic solidarity binds people based on perceived homogeneity—e.g. we are all human, we are all Christians, we are all Black, we are all Americans. Political solidarity unites people based on political beliefs or motivations, in spite of the borders between them, in a commitment to alter the status quo and produce political change. Cultural solidarity, a concept based on the hopes and goals of the students in this study, melds the goals and interests of multiple forms of solidarity and reflects an interest in altering the ways people understand and make meaning of the world and relationships within it. The solidarity these young people sought to build often went beyond political activism or a commitment to social change, beyond camaraderie, tolerance, or acceptance, and instead emphasized the need for social, political, and, in the young people's minds, most importantly, cultural change.

Among others, this study orbits around a group of students of relative privilege and seeks to tell the story of, for example, an 18-year-old young man who identifies as straight, and re-founded the defunct Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) at his all boys' suburban private high school in order to address both the homophobia and sexism at his school. There is a 16-year-old sophomore at an urban co-educational public school, who identifies as able bodied and began a program to build connections across disability in order to address the rampant bullying and fear of

students with disabilities specifically in the cafeteria in her school. There is Salam a 16-year-old junior who identifies as wealthy, male, American, and straight, who seeks to understand his ability to address the inequalities he sees around him in his school and in his community, especially in terms of global poverty, gender inequalities, and homophobia. There is a 15-year-old junior who identifies as able bodied and from a financially stable home, who spends most of her afternoons at a soup kitchen for people who are HIV positive and homeless, and runs multiple campaigns to address the global spread of HIV/AIDS and global poverty. These and many other young people are the focus of this dissertation.

The young people in this study perceive their work to be more than community service, leadership, or social/political activism. They understand themselves as forging new ways of being with socially and politically marginalized people. I have chosen to tell their stories because their process of coming to or being in solidarity across differences reflected a self-perceived change in how they interacted with or understood the borders that determine difference.

This study captures a hyper-dynamic and messy process of *coming to* and *being in* solidarity across social identity differences. In Chapter 1, entitled *Borders, Solidarity, and Difference in High School*, I situate this study within the field of multicultural education, explain the human affiliation of solidarity, introduce post-colonial cultural studies, explain how this orientation perceives literal and metaphorical borders, and the relationship between solidarity and borders. In Chapter 2, entitled *An Ethnography, Two Sites of Study, and a Researcher*, I explain the methodology and contextualize the study, the participants, and myself as a researcher.

Chapter 3, entitled *Encountering the Borders: A Journey towards a New Relationship with Difference,* explores the commonalities and departures in the students' journeys that led these youth to consider and/or seek solidarity as a form of association across identity differences. Chapter 4, entitled *Remapping the Borders: Enacting Solidarity as Helpers, Messengers, Advocates, and Activists*, reviews the various roles the students took on as they enacted, declared, and negotiated solidarity across difference in their schools and communities. In Chapter 5, entitled *Fostering New Relationships with Borders*, I discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the study and specifically how to nurture solidarity across difference in schools.

Dedication

For my loving and wise parents, who have always listened, with patience and enthusiasm, to my stories and observations and unfailingly asked me to share more.

And for my infamous, imaginative, and delightful siblings (those who have joined me along the way and those who have been there from the beginning), nieces, and nephew, who have taught me when to sit down, be quiet, and listen to others.

Thank you.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the administrators of "City High" and "Boys High" for giving me anonymous and extensive access to their students and school environments. Administrators at both schools called their willingness to open their doors to a cultural researcher an act of courage; I agree. Most importantly, I would like to thank the students of this study who generously and enthusiastically shared their ideas and lives with me.

My deepest thanks to my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Barbara Finkelstein, who taught me to think about the world in new and unexpected ways. You have made this process more fun and more demanding than I ever imagined it could be. This has been one of the most intellectually fascinating experiences of my life, and I know, without a doubt, that your perspective, patience, openness, and creative mind made that possible.

Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Francine Hultgren, Dr. Michael Paolisso, Dr. Noah Drezner, and Dr. Sherick Hughes, for your time, support, thoughtful critique, and unique perspectives. Specifically, I want to thank Dr. Hultgren for your unwavering support of my interests, encouraging my qualitative researcher's "eye," and telling me to go explore ethnography further on the other side of campus. Thank you to Dr. Paolisso, for being my guide as I explored ethnography, for being open to many ways of doing ethnography, and for bringing humor to my learning curve. Thank you to Dr. Drezner and Dr. Hughes for your enthusiasm about my work, your formidable commitments to issues of equity and justice, and for allowing me to learn from and with you.

x

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Borders, Solidarity, and Difference in High School

This study is a story of how, when, and why a particular group of cultural and social border crossers—students of relative privilege[1]—discover the borders between groups and enact solidarity as a way to remap those borders. The students in this study are part of a new generation of justice workers. In order to protest marginalization and inequality, they forge solidarity across the sociocultural and political borders that declare identity differences. This study documents how these young people discover their interest in and capacity to alter the once seemingly intractable lines that maintain power, privilege, and identity.

This is a story of exploration, discovery, and personal agency. The students in this study traverse the fine lines that determine cultural possibility and influence social change. This is a story of inequality and privilege, not solely as a social construction, or a reflection of structural inequalities, but as a condition that specific high school students of relative privilege grapple with and seek to understand and remedy. It is about the contours of identity, privilege, and power, not just as they are declared or predetermined, but as they are negotiated, imagined, pursued, enacted, and rejected by young people.

This multi-sited ethnography focuses on the experiences of young people in two college-preparatory high schools, one public school, one private school, on the East Coast of the United States. The first, City High,[2] is a co-educational high school located in an

---

[1] In this study, I use the term *relative privilege* to refer to the special *unearned* entitlements or protection given to specific groups within a society. Unearned privileges are, for example, the economic, cultural, social, and/or political privileges that often come with certain identities such as those that come with being able-bodied, white, heterosexual, or economically privileged (Hill Collins, 2003; Kimmel, 2003; McIntosh, 1988; Weber, 2001). I am choosing the term "relative," versus, for example, unearned because privilege is comparative and contextual and therefore should be qualified.

[2] Both names of the schools are pseudonyms.

industrial downtown area of a large city. The second, Boys High, is an all-boys private high school in a suburban community proximate to a different city. I selected these two schools for several reasons. First, within both school settings there were curricular frameworks, instructional practices, elective subjects, philosophical beliefs, and extracurricular activities that likely enabled acts of solidarity across social identity differences by the students. These schools were unquestionably amenable to, if not encouraging of, youth expressions of leadership, youth ownership of the school settings, and interested in proactively building opportunities for their students to understand difference.

Second, the socioeconomic status and demographic configurations of each school are distinctly different, thus allowing for an exploration of privilege, solidarity, and identity politics in different contexts. Finally, both schools have distinct but not unique experiences with bullying behaviors across multiple identity differences—including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and dis/ability—and have actively and aggressively attempted to alter the culture of their schools through interventions intended to build solidarity. This study documents the struggles and successes that a group of young people has had while advancing justice in the worlds of their communities and schools.

"We need to change the way people think about each other:" Seeking new associations across difference

Early on in the study, I end up standing on a platform waiting for a train surrounded by a group of teenagers from City High. We are on a field trip. They are dressed in their uniforms of bright cornflower blue button down shirts and khaki pants but each of them has found a way to change the uniform just enough so that you forget it

is a uniform—a pair of bright florescent orange sneakers on this student, a huge flowery scarf on that student, a gold skullcap on another. It is a crowded loud platform and we are standing close. They are talking about what they should do for the next school assembly. "Maybe hand out candy with a note on it like 'Respect our differences'?" says Blanca, "Or something more in your face?" About four of them are animated over this candy idea, "Yeah," says the one of two boys in the group, "They always listen when you give them candy." The students laugh.

Two of the students, Jasmine and Melissa, are clearly distracted by an elderly woman sitting on the stairs not far from us. They are looking at her and then looking at each other and raising their eyebrows, in a kind of half-gossipy, half-concerned way. Without saying a word, just with a few glances and shrugs and one instance of finger pointing, they bring other students into their investigation of this woman. I look at the woman and I am not sure what exactly they are investigating. It is about 3pm and she is carrying a few heavy-looking bags. It is rare to see people sitting on the stairs at a subway station—high traffic and excessive grime usually keep people away—but there are not that many seating options and she does look worn down.

Within seconds, I realize that all of the students, even those who are seemingly deep in thought about the candy messages—"*Which message is the best? What can we say that will make them think? 'Differences are cool,' or 'We respect you for who you are'*"—are making eye contact with one another, looking over at the woman on the stairs, and executing the staring non-stare that urbanites perfect by an early age. I wonder what I am missing. I find myself going up on my tiptoes and tilting my head to see around a pole and study this woman.

Jasmine whispers (well, subway platform whispers), "I think she can't breathe and maybe she needs help." A few kids giggle nervously, and then peek over each other's shoulders. "I am just going to ask her if she is okay," states Jasmine, in an exasperated tone, and she walks over. The rest of the students pause with meaning—some of them look at each other and widen their eyes like this is the craziest idea they have ever heard, others are glancing at the ground with discomfort, one pulls out her cell phone and says, "I can call 911." Others tell her to wait. I can't hear what Jasmine says to the woman but within seconds, Jasmine has returned, shrugs, and says nonchalantly, "Nah, she is good." I peek around a pole to look at the woman on the steps. She is smiling at the students and nodding approvingly. I look back at the group; and, without missing a beat, they have begun to discuss which type of candy they should get for the assembly.

Later, I ask Jasmine why she decided to approach the woman and she shrugs and barely pauses before saying, "We need to change the way people think about each other in the subway." It would be easy to read this interaction between Jasmine and the woman on the stairs as an act of pity or charity or human solidarity—caring for another human being at a seemingly urgent moment. It could also be understood as civic solidarity—this is what it means to be a good fellow citizen—or even just politeness or respect for elders. It is harder to figure out where each of those concepts ends and another begins.

The explanation Jasmine gave for why she approached the woman changes any understanding of the moment that I had. This type of explanation—what I came to think of as a macro "we need to build a culture of solidarity" explanation for a micro act—was common in my year with the young people in this study. When I was standing on that platform craning my neck to better understand what they were seeing, I did not know

where this ethnography was taking me and I definitely did not think that this moment would symbolically reverberate throughout a study of solidarity in schools. Jasmine's explanation is about a desire to change the ways people, perhaps most especially strangers, relate to one another. It is about altering the cultural expectations of how, when, and why strangers interact with one another, advocate for one another, and feel responsible for someone else's ability to thrive.

In this Chapter, I begin with the questions that framed and guided this study. I then discuss the significance and contribution of the study within the areas of the culture of education, multicultural education, solidarity theory, and youth studies. I then review various solidarity theories and explore how these theories influenced my thinking about the experiences of the students in this study. Finally, I explain the connections between my conceptual orientation of post-colonial cultural studies, and specifically, how those theorists conceive of borders, and why this framework is particularly rich in thinking about relationships that youth have across differences. In that section, I also explain the connection between literal and metaphorical borders and solidarity as a human affiliation.

Research Questions

Three primary research questions guided and influenced the selection of sites, methodology, and overall design:

- How, when, and why do young people with relative privilege build solidarity across identity differences?

- What are the characteristics of the solidarity that these students are enacting?

- What do their enactments of solidarity reveal about how young people navigate the borders that demarcate difference and the role of schools in that process?

Student agency and voice serve as a focal point around which the study pivots. While the study is situated within school settings, my primary interest is in the cultural beliefs, understandings, and assumptions, i.e., "the habits of heart, mind, and association" (Finkelstein et al., 1998), with which relatively privileged young people enter into solidarity across difference. I explore the experiences of these students and how they make sense of difference, solidarity, and identity, in an effort to understand the way they are involved in activities that attempt to build, or reflect, solidarity. Yet, I am also centrally interested in the role of schooling and how learning nurtures the development of various forms of solidarity. This includes an interest in the benefits gained, or risks involved, in the development of solidarity by these young people and by extension, the characteristics of their school communities that hinder or support the process.

Significance of the Study

A generation of scholars has begun the essential and complicated work of documenting inequality and discrimination in education based on various dimensions of constructed social identities (e.g., Banks, 2009; Delpit, 2005; Fine, 2004; Freire, 2000; Gay, 2000; Giroux, 2001; Hill Collins, 2009; hooks, 1994; Hughes, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Noguera, 2008; Spring, 2009; Takaki, 1994; Tatum, 2003). The analytic and descriptive value of applying these theories to both educational practice and education theory is powerful in the capacity to ferret out and reveal structural inequalities in school and society. The focus in these critical theoretical frameworks has been on exposing and revealing dilemmas of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, citizenship, language, and/or dis/ability. Understandably, these scholars have focused on those who have paid the price for a profound lack of equity in

schooling. Yet, this focus on inequality and discrimination has not been as revealing about the exercise of student agency and young people's abilities to act as agents of social change.[3] Scholars typically have not, with their emphasis on the structure and existence of inequality, directly or thoroughly addressed the potential that young people of relative privilege have to either perpetuate *or* break structures that maintain systems of inequality.

Therefore, this study contributes to the corpus of work on the connections between education and structural inequality while revealing a pocket of possibility that is often missing from the discourse—the potential and essential role of youth of relative privilege in resisting systems of oppression and inequality. This study proceeds on an assumption that all young people have the potential to be active and essential participants in interrupting systems of inequality now *and* in the future, and not just passive and susceptible pawns who are subject to the beliefs of the adults and cultures that surround them.

While most multiculturalist, social justice, and critical theory scholars acknowledge that deficits exist in the schooling of privileged populations, the focus is almost solely on creating anti-racist teachers and pedagogy.[4] Many scholarly conversations focus primarily on comparing the schooling of privileged and marginalized populations. For example, discussions often focus on the disparities between various

---

[3] However, there are some interesting studies such as Ginwright, Noguera, and Cammarota's (2006) *Beyond Resistance!: Youth Activism and Community Change* which discuss the role of minority urban youth as social change agents.
[4] See Au, 2009; Bigelow & Peterson, 1998; Cowhey, 2006; Lee, Menkart & Okazawa-Rey, 2002; Loewen, 2007.

groups, such as the focus on the racial achievement gap[5] (Chenoweth, 2007; Noguera 2003; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Paige & Witty, 2010; Rothstein, 2004). Another a common discussion in the multicultural education literatures is the cultural gap between White, middle-class female teachers in classrooms and the predominately low-income students of color they teach (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Paley, 2000).

Systematic change does necessitate identifying the sources of inequalities that are outside the control of young people in school and detract from their capacity to succeed in school or forge less marginalized identities. Among the more urgent deficiencies within schooling is the lack of physical and emotional safety for some marginalized populations, a lack of educational opportunities for others, or the problematic beliefs of the significant adults in their schools. While these concerns are central — and need continued and consistent attention — there also needs to be a focus on the patterns of association that relatively privileged students develop with marginalized populations. Systemic change then *also* requires addressing those who knowingly and/or unintentionally further that marginalization, and not just when, for example, they become the relatively privileged adult teachers of marginalized youth.

A focus on teacher practices or textbook content is unvaryingly relevant to the advancement of multicultural teaching and learning. Yet, the focus on adults and curriculum has obscured and perhaps even negated the role of students as social change agents. Privileged young people are not inevitably future perpetrators, and marginalized

---

[5] Gloria Ladson Billings (2006) critiques the term "achievement gap" which she argues should be reframed as "educational debt" as the concept of a "gap" focuses on the disparity in achievement versus the educational debt that is owed by society due to generations of inequitable schooling.

youth are not simply victims. Acts of solidarity reflect the capacity and human agency that can enable young people to upend systems of oppression and inequality. As Kimmel (2003) notes, often inequality is thought about "from the perspective of the one who is hurt by inequality, not the one who is helped" (p. 6). Using their privilege to advocate for change, many of the young people in this study are actively thinking about, and in many cases addressing, their seemingly predetermined role in structures of inequality.

Defining and Exploring Solidarity

Solidarity is under-theorized across fields especially in comparison to other eighteenth and nineteenth-century republican ideals like liberty, equality, or democracy (Bayertz, 1999; Brunkhorst, 2005; Pensky, 2008; Scholz, 2008). Some theorists argue that the relative absence of solidarity in scholarly discussions is due to a belief that solidarity is in a perpetual normative state or is an obvious result of other sociopolitical processes such as liberty or equality (Pensky, 2008). However, the claim that solidarity is less discussed because it is commonly seen as a positive and inevitable consequence of liberty or equality seems to ignore the historical contexts of the term. Due to the popular uses of the term, it is possible that solidarity has been characterized as potentially divisive or un-American. Solidarity sometimes is vilified as connected to Marxism, socialism, communism, grasping labor unions, or ethnic-based segregation.[6] At its best, solidarity is connected with idyllic Scandinavian welfare states, yellow ribbons to bring home troops, red HIV/AIDS awareness ribbons, behind-the-iron-curtain 1980s Polish trade unions,

---

[6] A recent example of the vilification of solidarity was the 2010 debates in Tucson, Arizona about Raza/Chicano Studies in the Tucson Unified School District. Governor Jan Brewer signed a law, S.B. 1070, in May 2010, to prevent "classes that advocate **ethnic solidarity**, that are designed primarily for students of a particular race or that promote resentment toward a certain ethnic group" [emphasis mine]. The media's coverage of the ban of ethnic studies classes focused on the idea that "ethnic solidarity" was incompatible with being American.

Gdansk shipping yards, and the charismatic activist/politician Lech Wałęsa. Thus truncated, the full possibility of solidarity as a robust form of association is revealed in the work of only a small number of solidarity theorists.

This study aims to reveal how *young people* conceive of and enact solidarity in daily life. The literature, on the other hand, is very focused on the theoretical and philosophical threads that characterize solidarity. However, there are important grounding concepts in the literature that are helpful in providing a worthwhile glimpse into the potential meanings and the terrain that characterizes solidarity in schools and among young people.

Scholars theorize two primary functions for solidarity—revolution and evolution (Brunkhorst, 2005, p. xvi). Solidarity that forms in order to achieve "revolution" is one that seeks a sociopolitical and/or cultural transformation that most consider radical. Solidarity that accompanies "evolution" is functional—largely unintentional and seemingly status quo. Yet, the development of solidarity is not a simple, monochromatic process, especially as it is practiced in daily life and not just when it has implications for survival (save me!) or status (elect me!). To make the concept more complicated, the colloquial use of the word solidarity often is about implying a commitment that may or may not be realized. For example, claims of "being in solidarity with the people of Haiti" after the earthquake of January 2010 have meant many different things such as compassion, sympathy, activism, charity; not all of these different meanings equate to the level of commitment that various forms of solidarity imply or require.

Many forms of solidarity imply associations with others who may be strangers or may be familiar. Entering into solidarity with strangers does not presuppose intimacy

and, in fact, solidarity often, although not always, demands relationship with people you may never meet. The connection to strangers is an interesting characteristic of solidarity as a type of human affiliation. It is possible, for example, that a young person who identifies as an ally of people with disabilities, might only feel a sense of solidarity or connection with someone that she personally knows, rather than with the greater population of people with disabilities outside her immediate awareness. However, solidarity, like all cultural processes, is an ongoing and ever-evolving process, not a product or final destination (Williams, 1977). Therefore, solidarity might begin with people we know and might lead to a larger commitment to strangers.

There are a series of very convenient historical examples of rallying cries to build solidarity. Most theorists, across disciplines, agree that the concept of solidarity came to wide usage during the French Revolution (Brunkhorst, 2005; Bayertz, 1999; Pensky, 2008; Scholz, 2008). During the French Revolution, with the tripartite motto "*liberté, égalité, fraternité!*" (Brunkhorst, 2005), and since, the use of the concept of solidarity *as kinship* is most common, used primarily as a rallying cry for strangers from a *homogenous* grouping to "rise up" against a common oppressor. Marx's (1848) solidarity among the working class, the "racial solidarity" calls in 1897 of W.E.B. DuBois (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 184), the sisterhood solidarity of the 1960s and 1970s American women's movement, and the Solidarity movement of 1980s Poland, all were largely about creating *bonds between strangers with a similar marginalized identity* in order to alter oppressive systems of power and privilege.

Yet, more recent uses of the term have not presumed homogeneity and in fact some purposefully use the concept of solidarity to speak about the strengths and struggles

of relationships across difference. "Global solidarity," for example, is a newer concept in the literature that speaks about the undeniable connections between different people due to globalization and globalized communication (e.g., Olesen, 2004): Japan is hit by an earthquake, and the London stock market plummets (Hawkes, 2011); Troy Davis is on death row in Georgia for the murder of a police officer, his impending execution is protested in France (Brumback, 2011). While these global connections are actually an ancient phenomenon (e.g., a famine here leads to a migration there), the interest in global solidarity and the ability to document it reflects a more recent historic trend to bind people who see themselves as worlds apart. Similarly, the post-colonial feminist scholar, Mohanty (2003) asserts that intersections within movements for change, rather than identity politics of similarity or difference, should be the foundation for solidarity. Mohanty defines solidarity as a "praxis-oriented" struggle, which assembles because of "mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests" (p. 7).

In this study, I am particularly interested in *solidarity across difference* because of what it illuminates about the potential and limitations of solidarity as a form of association that can lead to cultural change. While some forms of solidarity may cause connections between strangers, especially in moments of perceived danger or perceived harmony, most forms of solidarity do not require social, political, or cultural change. In fact, many forms of solidarity rely on the idea that solidarity should be a status quo or obligatory affiliation—e.g. we should feel connected to all members of our family, we should respect all elders, we should feel pride in being connected to all the citizens of our nation state. Due to the dynamic and slippery connotation of solidarity, below I begin with an exploration of various constructions of solidarity.

Forms of solidarity. According to the 2012 Oxford English Dictionary, solidarity is a state "*of being perfectly united or at one in some respect, especially in interests, sympathies, or aspirations.*"[7] This study conceives of solidarity as both a noun (unity or connection) and as a process (being in or coming to solidarity). Forms of human connection or affiliation acquire a whole range of seemingly straightforward labels such as community, friendship, family, among many others, all of which possess a connotation about a type of relationship. All of these relationships are grounded in a form of *unity* that usually results from some form of perceived connection. Yet, who *is* or who *is not* considered family, for example, may be more complicated than a casual use of the term implies.

As Scholz (2008) discusses "most appeals to solidarity appear to be deliberate differentiations from unity, camaraderie…sympathy, or community" (p. 2). For example, a young person who identifies as straight might join the Gay/Straight Alliance in his high school because his friend does and he wants to be with his friend. His initial motivation then, at least in an exploration of solidarity, may be described as camaraderie, yet over time he might become politically and personally committed to reducing homophobia and heterosexism in his community. As this example reveals, the development of solidarity, like most other human affiliations, is a process. Indeed, the depth, potential, form, and limitations of solidarity can change over time, between localities, and/or due to the action of individuals.

By definition, all forms of solidarity are a type of affiliation, but the goals, contours, and purposes of the affiliation may differ. Bayertz (1999) argues there are four

---

[7] "solidarity, n." (2012). OED Online. Oxford University Press. Retrieved from http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/184237?redirectedFrom=solidarity (accessed November 04, 2012).

different types of solidarity: human, social, civic and political. Bayertz says that *human solidarity* renders humanity into a cohesive unit with an interest in basic survival. He presents s*ocial solidarity* as a condition that binds particular groups or societies together based on some form of constructed commonality. C*ivic solidarity* goes beyond human or social solidarity, and is invoked within a nation-state or institutional body, and indicates the shared responsibility between members of a polity for one another. Bayertz contends that *political solidarity* describes a collective commitment to a cause that seeks to produce social or political change.

Since all forms of solidarity have intentional and premeditated purposes, the distinctions between the motivations and potential outcomes of these affiliations should be considered. Human solidarity, as Bayertz (1999) conceives of it, engenders feelings of moral connection between all humans. Human solidarity — the seductive claim that we are all humans, and therefore feel morally bound to one another — when articulated in a school context, might lead to the belief that building tolerance towards or acceptance of social identity differences is a sufficient approach to multicultural education. If the main goal of a school's multiculturalist intervention is to promote the concept that "we, as human beings, are all the same" and that only superficial differences exist, e.g. skin color or religion, the practices of a school might proceed on an assumption that the promotion of human solidarity will result in an equality of treatment.

Such human solidarity approaches neglect to acknowledge that there are inequalities that directly contradict claims of humanistic similarity. These refutations of "all humans are the same" are reinforced, structurally and interpersonally, through repetition in everyday life of hierarchical constructions of who is normal, who is

deserving of respect, who is worthy of protection and who is not—constructions that often negate or at least devalue any human solidarity claims.[8] Human solidarity, like social solidarity (discussed below), is grounded in the ability to see similarities, e.g., *I am in solidarity with you because we are both human beings and deserving of respect*. When someone perceives a difference to be more than superficial, the solidarity often disintegrates, e.g. *I am not in solidarity with you because while we both may be human beings, your values/beliefs/behaviors are different enough from mine that you do not deserve my respect*. A reliance on a belief that differences are only superficial also neglects larger systems of inequality that go beyond individual prejudice. For example, an interesting human solidarity type of response to racism is reflected in calls for color blindness—a notion that de-historicizes, de-politicizes, and de-contextualizes the roots and manifestations of racism in the daily lives of people.

A human solidarity approach may be an especially deficient strategy for nurturing respect and equality among strangers. An inability to build human solidarity in the midst of encounters with "foreignness" results from someone's belief that the way a stranger looks, acts, speaks, moves, or thinks reveals that the differences may be more than superficial. If there are powerful systems of inequality that exist before students even enter school, then a human solidarity approach is likely to be insufficient as an ideological pivot for the nurture of solidary beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes.

---

[8] For example, Vendantam (2009), citing psychological studies, suggests that White children, as early as age three, associate positive adjectives with images of White faces and negative adjectives with images of Black faces. He argues that these associations are culturally constructed and reinforced and extend from the implicit and sometimes explicit messages of racial bias that children absorb through cultural and social processes. Similarly, repeated studies of the Kenneth and Mamie Clark's (1947) study of the positive and negative adjectives that African American children associate with White and Black dolls respectively (Markowitz & Rosner, 1996).

Social solidarity unites social groups. These groups can be connected due to identity similarities such as religion, genetics, ethnicity, language, disability, race, ideology, and politics, among others. Social solidarity, like human solidarity, is preserved only as long as the sameness overshadows remarkable disparity or as long as it is desired or needed. An interesting example of the emergence of social solidarity in this study was found at Boys High where students often spoke of the immediate sense of community and support that came from joining an athletic team—joining the lacrosse team, for example, meant instant social status, a clear sense of identity, and a community of peers. Some students at both schools also spoke about how a form of social solidarity, referred to as racial or ethnic solidarity in the literature (e.g., Alberts, 2005; Chong & Rogers, 2005), laid out a path for them in terms of friendships, where to sit in the cafeteria (see Tatum, 2003), and who to trust when they were struggling.

Civic solidarity is generally considered responsible for the cohesion of nation states. It is as responsible for the patriotism of post-9/11 America, as it is for the nationalistic pride that often accompanies the Olympics, and the creation of Social Security in the United States. Civic solidarity, which I also discuss as institutional solidarity, is purposefully connected to the idea of citizenship and an "allegiance to principles" or ideals (Brunkhorst, 2005).

Civic or institutional solidarity often is necessary when social solidarity does not bind a nation or institution due to the diversity of the people or ideas within a polity. Yet, social solidarity is often invoked in order to fortify civic solidarity. For example, at Boys High, the school furthered their institutional solidarity through the use of the concept of brotherhood—*if you are a fellow student at Boys High, you are my brother*. At City High,

they also used similar social solidarity concepts to reinforce the institutional solidarity—they had groups that were both about brotherhood and sisterhood. In this study, I extend civic solidarity to institutional solidarity because the characteristics that tend to bind civic units also bind institutions. At Boys High and City High, there was profound institutional solidarity within each of the schools that was invoked both by the adults and youth in order to limit or lessen the divisions within diverse school environments.

Political solidarity "unites individuals based on their shared commitment to a political cause in the name of liberation or justice and in opposition to oppression or injustice" (Scholz, 2007, p. 38). The uniqueness of political solidarity as a sociopolitical concept may be that it is explicitly about a *tactical* or *strategic* connection with people who are often *strangers* in order to achieve social and political *change*. Political solidarity is a dynamic process that transcends particular beliefs, political groups, and local communities. In the hands of some, political solidarity can justify murder or conflict and can define who is evil and who is not.[9] Indeed, political solidarity is an active, sometimes invisible, sometimes urgent state of mind and action. Political solidarity as enacted by students in this study reflects these difficulties, subtleties, and actions. Friendship might, for example, lead to advocacy. Justice can be realized and then acted upon. Casual commitments can become deeply held beliefs.

---

[9] Some scholars argue that political solidarity does not inherently seek justice—that political solidarity is that which can band white supremacists together as much as it is that which creates a civil rights movement (Bayertz, 1999, p. 16). Scholz (2008) disagrees with this claim. She argues that participants in most political movements *believe* that their cause is just and champion the abolition of what they see as "unjust" social circumstances In her view, only those movements which maintain basic human rights (maintain human solidarity) constitute political solidarity. This is a fascinating argument which presupposes that political solidarity (and perhaps other forms of solidarity) rely on human solidarity as a foundation, an act of political solidarity then necessitates human solidarity impulses. While this concept is compelling, I believe it is a romanticization of political solidarity that perhaps abridges its usefulness as a concept because it requires that benevolence be a tenet of solidarity.

Marx and Engels (1848) also theorized political, or what they called, revolutionary solidarity. Marx and Engels claimed that what some saw as solidarity between peoples (e.g., employer and employee) was actually the result of systems of oppression. Marx's perspective positions solidarity not as an inevitable function of order or a natural result of modernity, as Durkheim (1933) suggested, but instead as a tool, which people could use for either revolutionary change or status quo oppression.[10] Marx used the concept of solidarity to make a point about the exploitive nature of relationships between workers and capitalist elites and the importance of social movements to build solidarity among proletarian groups. Marx's construction of solidarity claims a goal of affecting change, which is how I conceive of political solidarity (in contrast to human, social, or civic solidarity) in this study.

In Marx's theoretical wake, an array of sociological and cultural theorists went beyond the economic determinisms of Marx and explored concepts of cultural hegemony and human agency as important features in the construction of inequality and hierarchical social and political arrangements and practices (Gramsci, 1971; Hall, 1986; Lears, 1985). The concepts of cultural hegemony and human agency complicated the idea that systems of inequality were only about violent forms of overt oppression but also about more insidious constructions of what was "common sense" or "normal." The concept of human agency, for example, exposes a dynamic between both coercion and consent as lynchpins not only in the reproduction of inequality but in the transformative power of human

---

[10] While the definition of political solidarity I am using this study claims a goal of affecting change closer to the Marxist construction, Émile Durkheim (1893), refining the work of Auguste Comte, developed much less revolution-oriented goals for forms of solidarity. Durkheim asserts that solidarity is the *raison d'être* that explains the existence of modern societies despite the profound differences represented within them.

agency as well. Building on the works of these theorists, this study foregrounds the power of the youth in this study but also the relationship between the reproduction of inequality, structures of oppression, and the possibilities and constraints of human agency.

Anzaldúa (1987) presents solidarity not as a tool to facilitate change, but as an indication of change itself. According to Anzaldúa solidarity results from an acknowledgement and questioning of systems of oppression [(e.g., the "fictions of white supremacy" "[the] need [for] a new masculinity" (p. 100-104)]. The process of solidarity is far from simple and littered with ambiguity. Kruks (2001) warns about the risks of a false or incomplete solidarity having the potential to lead to the further objectification of a marginalized population, over-identification, and cultural appropriation. This study builds on these theoretical constructions of solidarity through looking at how relatively privileged young people enact and experience solidarity across the literal and metaphorical borders that determine identity differences.

Border Theories from Post-Colonial Cultural Studies

Borders establish differences, carved and constructed over time. Borders indicate where an individual or group believes someone's influence, power, ideas, space, or relationship ends and another's begins. Most important to this study, borders also mediate our relationships to and across difference. Depending on a particular border and/or an individual's understanding of the permeability or malleability of that border, difference may be more or less accessible.

This study does not portray borders as inherently positive or negative, but nor does it present them as neutral. The borders between home and school are what allow a young person to join a Gay/Straight Alliance at their school despite homophobia in their

home; or why a student's deeply held religious beliefs might be hidden in a school setting even though those beliefs are what sustain the student. The borders between one student and another allow them to be self-protective and form their own ideas and opinions. Some borders confine and restrict growth; others are frontiers and sites of possibility.

Borders mean different things to different people and their meanings change over time. Some borders should be honored and upheld; others should be extensively questioned and transgressed. Often borders should be honored and questioned simultaneously. Rather than presenting essentialist views of borders, this study is interested in how young people understand their possibilities and constraints in terms of influencing borders that they deem problematic. Therefore, this study examines how a group of young people thinks about and relate to the identity, power, and privilege borders that establish difference and how they attempt to reorder, blur, or influence those borders.

While often utilized to examine forced or non-consensual processes of colonization or border crossing, "borderland" and "border crossing" theories and specifically the theories that come from post-colonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha (1997) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), offer a unique heuristic for analyzing the process of how the young people in this study develop solidarity across identity differences. Borders are the socially and politically constructed peripheries that establish *here* or *there*, *them* or *us*. Borderlands are the areas around these demarcations where dynamic cultural processes transpire due to "encounters" across metaphorical and literal boundaries. Border crossing and borderland theories offer ways of examining and understanding those encounters and the new cultural identities they form.

The borders featured in this study are both literal and metaphorical. There are literal borders like those between home, neighborhood, and school or between the hallway, the cafeteria, and specific classrooms. There are metaphorical borders like those the students see between certain identity categories—boy/girl, American/foreigner, straight/gay or able-bodied/disabled. This study documents the students' encounters with specific borders due to experiences of migration and the migrations that result from those encounters. For example, a student who identifies as biracial (Black and White), middle class, and lives in a racially mixed suburban neighborhood, enters a new school in a new community (a literal migration). This migration leads him to realize how he is seen in a predominantly White wealthy neighborhood (encounters with identity borders and cultural borders). This causes him to seek out opportunities to spend time in a working class Black neighborhood far from his home (a new migration as a result of an encounter).

The migrations in this study are primarily intellectual, cultural, and emotional, but are fueled and invigorated by literal migrations—to new neighborhoods, new schools, new spaces, and new lands. There is a whole range of expectations, realities, rules, limitations, and possibilities that govern and maintain the borders between these spaces. There are borders that determine who and how someone has power[11] or privilege or both. The borders that the students in this study encounter often simultaneously have multiple dimensions—ideological borders, cultural borders, political borders—and the students in this study are often grappling simultaneously with the overlap of these borders. The

---

[11] In this study, many of the references to power refer to what the literature calls "power over," meaning the power that comes from systems and structures of inequality. This type of power is contrasted with internal (power within) or collective (power with) power (Starhawk, 1987; Kreisberg, 1992).

borders discussed in this study have social, emotional, cultural, political, symbolic, literal, and material consequences, often at the same moment. Below I discuss the conceptualization of borders and borderlands that frames this study.

Borders and borderlands. Unlike in the United States, where "the border" often refers to a single, physical, and broad border to the South (despite the multiple other large borders),[12] Europeans and others have had to choose their border metaphors more carefully. Germany, for example, has nine physical borders with various states and those borders shifted widely in the 20th century. An American-centric perspective can therefore lead someone to consider only geopolitical border crossings and can ignore that borders can shift often and widely (Blatter & Clement, 2000). Therefore, the power, importance, and diverse differences across all of the literal or metaphorical borders that exist are sometimes overlooked. Additionally, American border crossings in popular culture, for example, tend to focus on the departure from one culture and the arrival in another. Due to this dichotomous oversimplification of how space is divided, navigated, and experienced, as well as the relationship between space and culture, the rich complex cultural experience of border crossings is sometimes lost.

In Foucault's 1967 essay, *Of Other Spaces*: *Heterotopias,* he says that the present epoch will be fixated on *space*. Specifically he argues that this focus on spatial relationships, juxtapositions and hierarchies between spaces, on imagined potential spaces (utopias) and contrasted spaces (heterotopias) offers "the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (p. 24).

---

[12] See *Crossing the blvd: Strangers, neighbors, aliens in a new America* (Lehrer & Sloan, 2003) for a discussion of how Queens, New York City is one of the largest border spaces in the U.S.

Borderland and border crossing literatures reflects this focus. According to Gloria

Anzaldúa (1987), "borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to

distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line" (p. 25). She continues to explain

the result of a border, the "borderlands" that emerge from the false dichotomy that

borders form. She defines a borderland as "a vague and undetermined place created by

the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (p. 25).[13] Anzaldúa is speaking about

both literal borderlands—the spaces that arise around borders, where multiple languages,

cultures, ideas, ways of thinking and ways of being intersect—and metaphorical ones like

the life experiences of, for example, multiracial, multi-religious, transgender, or

multinational individuals or groups.

Despite Anzaldúa's dynamic understanding of borders, commonly borders are

presented as linear and rigid. With this common understanding of borders as fixed,

people may believe that borders are "naturally formed," crossings are to be avoided,

borders provide safety, and "border policing" is necessary to maintain the separations that

borders uphold. Borders are rarely seen as historical, political constructions and instead

there is a sense of borders determining the contours of a "homeland" or a natural, fixed

"self."

From the perspective that all borders are "natural" or "normative," the only

healthy choice then is identity assimilation, or segregation. When someone instead of

assimilating or segregating begins to edge closer to cultural "in-betweens," whether out

---

[13] For a critique of Anzaldúa's portrayal of borders and borderlands, see Alonso (2004). Alonso argues that Anzaldúa's (1987) romanticization of border dwellers, or *mestizas*, obscures the role of some mestizas as colonial agents. While I understand this critique and see its historical value, Anzaldúa's intention was to characterize a new cultural identity based on oral traditions, not to document a specific history of colonial powers. Anzaldúa is also clearly speaking about multiple borders—both literal and metaphorical—not just the history of the colonialization of the U.S./Mexico border. Additionally, Arrizon (2006) argues that the blending of history and mythology is a form of Chicana resistance.

of choice or circumstance, they often begin to see the limitations of borders and binary notions of identity. From socio-political and cultural perspectives, the shifting parameters of identity, language, power, and space, are inevitable and complex processes that result from migration and encounter. Presumed cultural borders are perpetually being (re)mapped, ignored, and challenged.

Due to these migrations and encounters, spaces and identities become subject to blurring and blending. Borderlands are areas *in-between*. They are the cultural terrains which make it clear how ambiguous, non-dichotomous, and complicated the topography of difference really is. Creole languages, for example, emerge in the borderlands. Often borderlands, or frontiers, are considered most different from the places they are in-between. Similarly, as Tauchert (2002) points out, often those who inhabit the "in-between," the borderlands between cultural identities, are considered the most radical and most unlike the cultures they are "in-between" (p. 186).

Migrations to culturally ambiguous identities, locations or positionalities, and the development of new cultural territories can threaten those who are unacquainted with, apathetic towards or fear the possibility of life on the borders. Borderlands, according to Anzaldúa (1987), can be psychological, physical, spiritual, among many other types, but all represent, or literally are, territories where people of multiple cultural identities occupy and a relationship between them results. Anzaldúa succinctly captures the experience of "living on borders and in margins…[it] is like trying to swim in a new element…There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind…with the unique positionings consciousness takes at these confluent

streams" (p. 103). This borderland positioning, or lens, offers a unique transcultural perspective.

Cultures, and by extension cultural borders, are as much historically, linguistically, economically, psychologically, and socially created as they are politically formed (Giroux, 1991). Henry Giroux (1991) speaks about *border pedagogy*, which is a pedagogy that helps people to traverse established boundaries that determine "difference and power." When the borders that determine power and privilege are questioned, those borders can become distorted. Homi Bhabha (1994) furthers this concept by examining the role of power in cross-cultural exchanges. He also develops a concept of borderlands (which he refers to as a borderline) and speaks about it as the "contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 54). He refers to those who inhabit these borderlands or borderlines as hybrids, as someone whose cultural identity is the result of a complex cultural amalgamation which can result in a cultural identity distinct from the cultural terrains surrounding it (Bhabha, 1994, p. 58).

Cultural identity borders often are heavily policed and patrolled, because these borders have been constructed to maintain binaries that do not reflect lived experience. In the case of gender, for example, border patrol is extreme—there are essentialized and universalized notions of a male/female gender binary that are pervasive. Some of the most violent hate crimes in the United States target those who are perceived as violating gender roles—whether due to gendered cultural understandings of who they should romantically (and sometimes even platonically) care for, how they should express themselves, or identify.

Anzaldúa (1987) and Bhabha (1994) explore the cultural experience of living outside those groupings, in variant cultural space, or borderlands, where clear boundaries are "not located within categories whose boundaries are fixed and stable, but subject to blurring, hybridization, and transgression" (Brown, 2000, p. 46). This study explores if, when, and how young people in high school enact, experience, and imagine solidarity and if these ways of thinking about solidarity can distort the seemingly unyielding borders between various identity groups. This exploration of the potential of solidarity to alter a young person's beliefs about difference may then contribute to emerging multicultural conversations about schooling.

The relationship between solidarity and borders. In this study, encounters across difference are ubiquitous. This study uses border crossing and borderland theories to examine enactments of solidarity that occurs across the borders that claim to distinguish exclusive discrete identities. Identities that are offered as binaries (White/Black, man/woman, gay/straight, able-bodied/disabled, etc.) often maintain systems of power and privilege. These borders determine who receives the economic, cultural, and/or social privileges that come with certain identities in the United States such as being able-bodied, white, heterosexual, male, Christian, an American citizen, among many others (See Pincus, 1996; Weber, 2001).

The identity borders between groups or individuals determine expected forms of human affiliation. Depending on the context, some borders are malleable—e.g. *while you are White and I am Korean, we are still family* (see Pearson, 2010). Depending on the context, borders that seem superficial to outsiders could seem profound to insiders (e.g.,

how interracial or interreligious marriage is perceived in various locations and how those perceptions are highly context dependent).

Solidarity is often part of, a product of, or predictive of the emergence of other forms of association. Family or community, for example, presupposes various forms of solidarity including human and social solidarities. Solidarity can blur, transgress, reaffirm, or alter borders between groups or individuals. Yet, solidarity is unique in its relationship with borders. Solidarity presupposes a border negotiation—e.g., *we claim solidarity because our unity, our association, our connection, needs to be declared, asserted, and named*. The depth (or breadth) of our affiliation is not clear without solidarity's invocation because there are borders that make us seem disconnected.

Many forms of solidarity rely on borders being ignored or irrelevant (e.g. social solidarity among various Latino subgroup populations). Other forms of solidarity acknowledge borders while attempting to re-map them (e.g. the political solidarity claimed in buttons that were popular in the 1990s and early 2000s that declared "I am straight but not narrow," meaning I am straight but I do not think in a narrow way about sexuality). The youth in this study tease, reject, ignore, accentuate, and alter borders which are, in their particular contexts, heavily guarded and seem intractable. They do this through invoking various forms of solidarity across multiple borders.

In Chapter 2, I begin with a review of my methodological and epistemological orientation. I reveal the contours of the study, the extent of the fieldwork, and how my positionality may affect my interpretations. In Chapter 3, I describe the process that brought the young people in this study to enact solidarity across difference. In Chapter 4, I discuss how the students manifested solidarity via various roles—as helpers, as

messengers, as advocates, and as activists—and the limits and possibilities in these various forms of action. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation through discussing the applied and theoretical implications of this study.

Chapter 2: An Ethnography, Two Sites of Study, and a Researcher

The auditorium of Boys' High is spacious and bright. A group of teenage girls wearing grey wool pleated skirts, knee highs, and white polo shirts, are on stage tapping their feet, swaying to the beat, snapping and singing *Man in the Mirror* by Michael Jackson. The audience is mainly high school age young men, all wearing their uniforms of suit jackets, ties, and dress pants. There is a sprinkling of teachers and a few other adults in the back of the auditorium. I am sitting in the very back row in a corner next to a mother who has come to hear her son give a lecture on what "fraternity" means (and doesn't mean) and why brotherhood, especially brotherhood across identity differences, is important. The girls' acapella group is the opening act before the lecture—the girls attend a private all girls' school in a distant city.

In the row in front of me is a group of boys clearly only marginally interested in the singing girls or quite successful at seeming, but not being, bored. When the girls sing the chorus, "*I'm looking at the man in the mirror…I'm asking him to change his ways…*" for about the third time, one of the boys in front of me turns to the student next to him and faux-whispers, "Is she telling us to change our ways?" They burst out laughing. The timing is comically right on and there is something in the swagger of the girls in the front of the room that makes you think maybe they *are* speaking to them and not just doing a random Michael Jackson mash-up tribute. I smile. A teacher a few rows away quickly, pseudo-stealthily strolls over, stands at the start of the row, and stares the boys down. They quickly sit up straighter, stop laughing and face forward. After glaring at the boys for a beat, the teacher glances back at me and I quickly lose my smile and sink a little lower in my seat.

My interest in ethnography came from my attraction to understanding daily moments like this one and even more mundane ones like finding the rituals and routines associated with the start or end of the school day. Ethnography allows the opportunity to observe, participate, and sometimes do both at the same time. The ethnographic methods altered my questions, how I sought out information, and how I understood the information I discovered. I also believe my observations changed how the participants in my study thought about me, asked me questions, and offered their insights. Van Maanen (1998) defines ethnographies as "documents that pose questions at the margins between two cultures" (p. 4). I see this ethnography as a document that poses questions and presents partial answers at an encounter between multiple cultures.

In this Chapter, I begin with a discussion of why I chose ethnography as the methodology for this study, I review the sites of study, and I discuss how I conceive of culture and cultural processes. I then discuss the choice to do a multi-sited ethnography, my fieldwork experiences, and how I analyzed my data. Finally, I discuss my ethnographic lens and how my positionality may have affected this study.

Why Ethnography?

Ethnographic fieldwork creates what Agar (1996) calls a "strum" on a guitar, a partial tale of a cultural group or cultural phenomenon within a group. Agar offers two metaphors to understand how ethnography used to be presented and how he conceives of his own ethnographic work. The first metaphor seeks to illuminate the manner and product of (what he calls "old-fashioned") ethnography as an illusionary "disk" which was presented as able to reflect the whole of a group's culture—a culture which was presented as suspended in space and time. Agar's second metaphor presents ethnography

as a guitar pick which seeks to reveal "partial" cultural "patterns that elucidate their interconnections" (p. 13). The "disk" conceptualization of ethnography assumed bounded notions of community and culture. Agar's "strum of the guitar" metaphor instead acknowledges both how nuanced and boundless culture is (imagine the multitude of strums a guitar pick can offer), and the role of the ethnographer in exploring particular and partial cultural questions. This type of "partial" ethnographic tale, presenting a glimpse into a cultural group, is commonly traced back to Margaret Mead's (1928) work which "focused on a particular problem" (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002, p. 7) within a culture. This study reflects that tradition with a particular cultural question—how high school students enact, experience, navigate, and understand solidarity across identity differences.

I selected a methodology that values observation, not just conversation, and that allows for an exploration of how a cultural group works. Ethnography allows me to simultaneously privilege the voices of the young people and the larger cultural context of the school. Additionally, as Creswell (2007) argues, ethnography can be particularly appropriate when a researcher is exploring collective "issues such as power, resistance, and dominance" (p. 70), concepts that are deeply connected to this study.

While a common claim of ethnographic research is to make that which seems *strange* into something *familiar*, instead, in education, researchers have used ethnography to make that which seems *familiar* more *strange* (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2000; Spindler & Spindler 1982). Cultural ways of being are often difficult to detect by those immersed in them. Therefore through seeing routine and habitual educational practices as foreign, scholars are able to imagine alternate cultural possibilities. Ethnographic school research, unlike many common ethnographic field sites, has widely been based in the

"home" context of the researcher and so the task of these studies is to explore a field site that is very similar to one that the researcher often has experienced intimately as a student, sometimes as a teacher, and/or as a parent. As Agar (1996) explains, when the site of an ethnographic study is more familiar, the differences and "depths of interpretation" can become more nuanced (p. 244).

While ethnography can illuminate the familiar and the strange, common mistakes occur in ethnographic studies that limit the analysis. Among other issues, a common pitfall in school settings has been a tendency to romanticize the resistance and agency of students while getting caught in the belief that young people's behaviors and beliefs are either excessively active or passive (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2000). For example, in this study, due to the unique interventions in these schools, it would be a mistake to attempt to describe the involvement of these young people in these solidarity-oriented activities as either the result of a super lone actor activist or a primary manifestation of a school or community culture. Rather, an individual's actions are the reflection of a complex interaction between multiple overlapping forces including, context, culture, structures, systems, personality, and freedoms, among many other factors.

A Discussion of Culture & Cultural Encounter

Ethnography is a cultural endeavor—a process that seeks to explore, explain, and/or examine culture. As a researcher, I bring a series of assumptions which shape how I see, know, and perceive cultural matters. Some of these assumptions about culture, especially the ones most connected to how I conducted my fieldwork, are captured below.

I am compelled by the value of Geertz' (1973) thick description and his portrayal of culture as public—not in someone's head but shared. I have employed thick description in this ethnography and sought out public understandings. Yet, my work is heavily influenced by post-colonial theorists' less reified and less bounded notions of culture. I am interested in culture as the highly fluid "habits of heart, mind and association" (Finkelstein et al., 1998) and the post-colonial focus on concepts such as cultural congestion (Finkelstein, *In press*), "third [cultural] spaces" (Bhabha, 1997), and in-between cultural terrains (Anzaldúa, 1987). This study therefore adapts a definition of culture that stresses the heavily context-dependent fluidity and dynamism of cultural representation, cultural identities, and cultural matters.

Appadurai (2005) resists using the noun *culture* because the use of the term implies that culture is a coherent substance that can be defined. He instead seeks to use the adjective *cultural*, which he believes better explains the contextual differences that exist around us. Appadurai (2005) claims that if culture is understood to be a noun, as a physical substance with boundaries, we are returning to "scientific" groupings which "we have certainly outgrown" (p. 12). Appadurai's claim that we have grown beyond these puerile concepts reflects an interest in embracing the complexity of cultural identities, and cultural encounter, and a rejection of imaginary segregation and false boundaries. However, in many cultural contexts, it is more than common to rely on the "scientific" groupings that Appadurai dismisses.

Increasingly cultural borders blur as Appadurai (2005), Bhabha (1997), Giroux (1986) and Anzaldúa (1987), among others, suggest. As discussed in Chapter 1, the border crossing and borderland theories of these post-colonial scholars offer ways of

examining cultural encounters and the potentially new cultural spaces these encounters form. These scholars theorize the meanings, constraints, and possibilities for constructed peripheries that establish insiders or outsiders, here or there, them or us, concepts that are the basis for determining community or outsiders. These post-colonial "borderland" and "border crossing" theories offer a unique heuristic to explore the complicated process of diverse youth developing solidarity across identity differences in two different school settings.

Sites of Study

I have selected two unique school settings. I was given access to these two settings through professional connections. The first school, City High, is only five years old and is a public school. It is co-educational and in a bustling industrial section of a major city in the U.S. Ninety-eight percent (98%) of the students receive a free or reduced lunch, which is a state designation that correlates with the poverty level of the students' families. Racially, the school reports that the students identify as 1% White; 77% Black; 21% Latino, and 1% Asian and every student takes public transportation or walks to school. The school was recently relocated to a newly constructed building which is shared with two other schools. In terms of gender, the public school is 65% girls/young women. Ninety four percent (94%) of City High's students attend college and 92% are first generation college students.

The second school, Boys High, is a private all-boys' secular school, has a large campus of rolling green hills and multiple buildings, and is surrounded by a forest on two sides. This school is over one hundred years old and 17% of the students receive financial aid for the tuition that is approximately $30,000 per year. Racially, the private school

reports that 83% of the students identify as White, and 27% of the school's population identifies as students of color. One hundred percent (100%) of students at Boys High attend college.

As seen in Figure 2.1, the schools locations are vastly different but they are both in the United States and geographically only a handful of hours away from each other. Both of the schools have great facilities for their students and despite being in very different locations both schools offer different benefits and drawbacks. For example, the grounds of Boy's High lend itself to a strong athletics program for their students and the location of City High leads to tremendous and ample urban experiential education experiences.

The schools' admissions policies differ. Boys High has an extensive application process for admission that includes the review of elementary school transcripts, a written application form, letters of recommendations, and entrance testing. City High is an unscreened population, meaning attendance is open to residents of the city if appropriate paperwork is completed and the school has not yet reached enrollment capacity. At City High, no admissions' testing is necessary. Both schools have approximately 430 students in grades 9 through 12.

Figure 2.1. The flags outside of Boys High (left) and City High (right).

            Both schools have multiple solidarity-oriented interventions within their schools. Some of these interventions are curricular and some are extra-curricular. Both schools have a Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA). They also both have community service programs that attempt to connect their students with communities/people who are different from themselves, and various multicultural or multiracial alliance clubs. Both schools also have programs that pair students from their school with students with disabilities in neighboring schools. City High has an advisory group for young men that attempts to reframe understandings of masculinity and among other issues address issues of homophobia, misogyny, and sexism. At Boys High, an ethics curriculum included courses and lectures which address issues of navigating difference and sexism.

Within the school settings, I conducted fieldwork in the hallways, in club spaces, on athletic fields, during field trips, in the cafeteria, at assemblies, in classrooms, in homerooms, on the streets surrounding City High and on the grounds of Boys High.

Multi-Sited Ethnography

I conducted a multi-sited ethnography despite the logistical struggles involved in having two sites (Hage, 2005; Horst, 2009). I chose to study two sites and such different locations because privilege is a contextually relative concept and so therefore the multi-sited design allowed me to explore the experiences of very diverse students. Multi-sited ethnography allows for a construction of concepts or ideas based on the researcher's interaction with multiple people in multiple contexts (Marcus, 1995; Sorensen, 2008; Weissköppel, 2005). Multi-sited ethnography accounts for a "deterritorialization of culture," or what Appadurai (1996) calls "global cultural flows," and can capture cultural matters that transcend space and time. Multi-sited ethnography creates a way to have a more robust sense of a cultural process—in this case, how young people within the same nation-state, for example, might think about solidarity, difference, privilege, and inequality.

Rather than comparatively formulated, my fieldwork and my analysis are co-constructed across both settings, with the goal of identifying a more nuanced understanding of the experiences, choices, and lives of these youth in various contexts. While cursory or superficial assumptions of privilege at each site may rest on race and class, both sites have youth with relative privilege based on some identity characteristics. In both schools, there are White youth, young men, able-bodied youth, American citizens, straight youth, and Christian youth; as well as marginalized youth—racial

minority youth, youth with disabilities, non-American citizen youth, LGBT youth, and non-Christian youth. Yet, how privilege *and* marginalization are experienced in both of these settings is inevitably different based on context—the demographics, how various lived identities intersect, as well as the philosophy and culture of the schools and surrounding communities. Conducting this study in both of these sites allowed for an exploration of concepts and affiliations that may or may not be contextually bound.

Fieldwork

I began my fieldwork in March 2010 and completed it in July 2011. My fieldwork included participant observations including informal interviewing (Agar, 1996), unstructured interviewing and semi-structured interviewing (Bernard, 2006, pp. 210-213). Fourteen students were my primary key informants due to their ability to communicate their beliefs (Bernard, 2006) and interest in participating, although I engaged with twenty students in total. I divided my time between City High and Boys High, spending approximately 7-10 days a month in one or the other school.

My observations included watching the beginning of the school day, the changing of classes, dismissal time, lunch time, attending assemblies, attending classes, going to special events, athletic or drama performances, looking at online blogs the students frequented, watching movies or television shows that students indicated were informative, attending fieldtrips, and walking the halls and grounds of the school. I also read student work, school publications, such as school newspapers, and watched online videos about the school or members of the school community. This type of directed and undirected participation in "usual and unusual activities," "hanging out" (Dewalt &

Dewalt, 2002) in a community, and documenting the experiences using field notes are what often distinguishes ethnographic methods from other types of qualitative research.

In both schools, I initially met with a series of teachers, administrators, counselors or/and student leaders in order to get suggestions of rich sites for observation, and names of students they recommended. From these conversations, using snowball sampling techniques, and through observations, I developed an initial group of ten informants at each school, 20 informants in total. Through the course of the study, 6 students at Boys High, and 8 students at City High became my primary informants (see Table 2.1).

Based on students' comfort levels and interest, generally interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. I spoke with the 14 key informants multiple times

Table 2.1

*Key Informant Demographic Information & Interview Schedule**

Pseudonym	School	Gender (Self-Identified)	Race (Self-Identified)	Grade	Interviews**
Adrian	Boys High	M	Mixed	11	5
Blanca	City High	F	Latina	12	5
Cyan	Boys High	M	Black/White	11	5
Debara	City High	F	Caribbean Black	12	7
Elvis	City High	M	Chicano/Black	11	5
Gael	City High	F	Black	11	3
Hank	Boys High	M	White	12	2
Javis	City High	M	Afro-Caribbean	12	3
Jel	Boys High	M	White	10	3
Kelly	City High	F	Black	11	2
Kevin	Boys High	M	White	12	2
Salam	Boys High	M	Pakistani	11	5
Scout	City High	F	Latina	10	5
Terra	City High	F	African American	11	5

*More demographic information included in the narrative. This only includes demographic information that every informant felt comfortable not being anonymous or confidential.
**Does not include informal interviewing—only unstructured and semi-structured interviews.

informally, but the unstructured and semi-structured interviewing occurred between 2 and 7 times with the average being 4 interviews over the course of the 14 months. Most semi-structured (and some unstructured) interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for the purposes of further analysis. I did not record any interviews with two informants due to their hesitation with being recorded. During and after those interviews, I took notes and checked with the students about any direct quotes I wanted to attribute to them.

At the beginning of the study, I spoke to students informally in small groups in the halls, at lunch in the cafeteria, on school trips, and during the change of classes. The primary purpose of this conversational style was to build rapport, get a sense of the students and the school and let them get a sense of me. Consistent with Bernard (2006), my informal interviews provided an essential opportunity to interact with the students, get to know the schools and students, build rapport, shape the ideas that framed later interviews. Perhaps above all else, these initial informal interviews served to improve the overall quality of our interactions over time.

Unstructured interviewing is distinguished from informal interviewing because it is clear that the conversation is an interview and the ethnographer has certain ideas or questions in mind. Unstructured interviews are directed conversations but at the informants "pace," the interviews on "their own terms" (Bernard, 2006, p. 211). This style of interviewing is ideal when the informants "would not tolerate a more formal interview" (Bernard, 2006, p. 213). The unstructured interviews in this study were conversational in style, and with many students (although not all) I would prompt the student with a few questions, and the student would then speak for the majority of the conversation, with slight prompts or redirections by me for clarification or to develop an

idea. The conversations sometimes felt private or personal and the rigidity of even semi-structured interviews would render such conversations difficult.

I used semi-structured interviewing only late in the study with students who were more comfortable with me in order to explore targeted themes or concepts. I refer to this interviewing as semi-structured because it was the only time I used a list of questions as a guide, and because the conversation style became much more question/answer than the unpredictable dialogue of most of the interviews. During the semi-structured interviews, I often brought direct quotes that were taken during earlier interviews and asked them to talk more about those ideas. Sometimes the semi-structured interviews were also to check my assumptions about an emerging theme or my understanding of a particularly rich observation or conduct what some qualitative researchers refer to as informal member checks.

Profiles of the participants and the researcher. All demographic information presented in this dissertation was self-identified or self-determined, including the pseudonyms.[14] All of it was obtained through the interviews. Adrian, Kevin, Cyan, Hank, Jel (short for Jello), and Salam were the key participants at Boys High. Blanca, Debara, Elvis, Gael, Javis, Kelly, Scout, and Terra were the key participants at City High. Below I offer short descriptions which reflect how the students identified. The information is different based on requests for anonymity (beyond just pseudonyms, some students asked for additional protections) and the comfort the students had in identifying different aspects of their lives.

_____

[14] I altered two pseudonyms due to my own concerns about anonymity.

Adrian, a junior at Boys High, saw himself as in solidarity with more marginalized people of color, women, and members of the LGBT community. Adrian identified as racially "mixed;" his parents were Black and White. Adrian identified as a serious athlete, straight, did not identify a religion, and said that he liked his school. He said that his family was financially "fine," and that they "always had enough."

Blanca, a senior at City High, was the president of the GSA at City High and saw herself as an ally of people who identified as gay, lesbian, questioning, or transgender. Blanca identified as Latina, bisexual, was the first in her family to go to college, and is bilingual in English and Spanish. Blanca did not religiously identify and said that she "liked her school" and "most of her peers." She indicated that her family struggled financially. She matriculated to college at the end of this study.

Cyan, a junior at City High and one of the leaders of the multicultural student alliance at Boys High, identified as in solidarity with people living in poverty, women, and members of the LGBT community. Cyan identified as biracial or Black (his father is Black and his mother is White), an athlete, and that he liked his school and most of his peers. He said that his family was financially "comfortable" and "solidly middle class" despite not being as wealthy as the other students at Boys High. His parents had attended college; he would be the second generation in his family to attend college.

Debara, a senior, and Terra, a junior, were the co-founders of a youth organization at City High which seeks to reduce global poverty and address the spread of HIV in the U.S. and abroad. Debrara and Terra saw themselves as an allies of people who are sick, people living in poverty, people living in countries in the midst of warfare, and members of the LGBT community. Terra believed she had been an ally of people who live in

poverty and people who are HIV+ for over a year when we first spoke. Terra identified as African American, straight, an American citizen, and female. She did not indicate a religion. She indicated that her "family struggled with money but always got by," that her parents had experienced some college, but did not graduate, that she liked her school and most of her peers, and that she was an average student. She wanted to attend college and thought she definitely would.

Debara identified as Black or African American, straight, and an immigrant from Jamaica. Debara was Christian and indicated that her family "family struggled with money but always got by," that she liked her school and most of her peers, and that she was an above average student. Debara lived with her mother, was the first in her family to go to college, and she matriculated to college at the end of the study. Debara said that she spoke "Jamaican" at home, "it is different than American English; it is like a different language."

Gael, a junior, identified as an ally of people who are homeless and those who are sick. Gael identified as Christian, Black, and straight. She said her family "had enough" to get by financially. Gael identified as an average to good student and said that she usually liked her school. She spoke English at home and was not comfortable speaking about her family's educational history.

Hank, the president of an organization at Boys High that seeks to build relationships between youth with disabilities and able-bodied youth, saw himself as an ally of people with disabilities and youth, and with people who identify as LGBT. Hank indicated that he had been an ally of people with disabilities for 4 years. Hank believed homophobia and sexism were the most serious issues at his school but that "bullying is

not a huge issue" at Boys High. He played varsity lacrosse and soccer and was part of his school's honor committee, all of which he felt was integral to his identity. He was born in the U.S., identified as straight, and that his family financially "always had enough money to eat, pay for housing, and buy me what I wanted." Hank's father died when he was in the 8th grade and his father's death definitely impacted his interest in becoming an ally of marginalized populations. Hank liked his school and most of his peers. Hank said that he was a very visible leader at Boys High, a strong student (but not one of the top in the school), and that his family spoke English in his home. Hank matriculated to college.

Javis, a senior and the founder of the multicultural student alliance at City High, saw himself as an ally of people in Africa and people living in dire poverty outside the United States. Javis was an immigrant from the Caribbean when he was a young teenager. Javis identified as male, Black, and straight. He lived with his mother and said that his family's financial situation had changed over time, but he presently felt his "family struggled with money but always got by." Javis felt he was an average student and a very visible leader in his school. He would be the first in his family to go to college.

Jel, a sophomore and the founder of an organization at Boy's High which raises money and collects supplies for children living in poverty in Africa, saw himself as in solidarity with youth living in poverty around the world. At the beginning of this study, he indicated that he had been an ally of youth living in poverty for over 3 years. Jel identifies as White, male, straight, American, and Christian. He indicated that his family always "had enough money to eat, pay for housing, and buy me what I wanted." He grew up with both of his parents in his home, with multiple siblings, and speaking English in

his home. He indicated that he did not like Boys High, but he did like most of his peers. He thought he was one of the strongest leaders in his school and that he was academically a strong, but not one of the top, students in the school. Jel's parents went to college and he believed he would definitely go to college as well.

Kelly, a junior, saw herself as an ally of people who are poor around the world. Kelly identified as straight, Black, and did not indicate a religion when asked. Kelly said she "sometimes" liked her school and liked "some" of her peers. She was struggling academically in school and was not sure if she would go to college due to financial and academic concerns.

Kevin, who identified as straight, was the president of the Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) at Boys High and saw himself as an ally of women, members of the LGBT community, and people of color. He indicated that he had been an ally of these groups for approximately 3 years. Kevin identified as White, American, and indicated that his family was financially very comfortable. Kevin felt he was a top student and a very visible leader at Boys High. Among many other activities at Boys High, Kevin wrote a blog for a major national news service discussing political issues. Kevin matriculated to college.

Salam saw himself primarily as in solidarity with people living in poverty (especially those in South Asia), women/girls, and members of the LGBT community. He indicated that he had been an ally of these groups for close to five years when we first spoke. Salam identified as Pakistani, an American, male, and straight. He identified as growing up a Sunni Muslim, but that, "now I believe in my own brand of a more mystical Islam greatly influenced by Buddhism." He indicated that his family financially "always

had more than enough." He grew up with both of his parents in his home, multiple siblings, and he said that he likes his school and most of his peers. He believed he was one of the most visible leaders in his school and that he was one of the top students academically in his school as well. He spoke English, Urdu, and Punjabi at home with his family. Salam wanted to go to college, believed he would "definitely" go to college, and would be the second generation in his family to go to college.

Elvis and Scout were the co-founders of a youth group at City High that seeks to build relationships across ability. They both identify as allies of the Disability Rights Movement. Scout also identifies as able-bodied, straight and in solidarity with the LGBT community. Scout identified as Catholic, Spanish or Latina (her family were immigrants from the Dominican Republic), and female. Scout was a serious athlete in her school and was involved in baseball, martial arts, kickboxing and handball. Scout said that her family "struggled with money but we always got by" and that she grew up with both of her parents in her home, with multiple siblings, and that she moved to the U.S. as a young child. She likes City High and likes most of her peers. She indicated that she is an average student, speaks Spanish at home, and thinks of herself as a visible leader in her school. Scout wanted to attend college and would be part of the first generation of her family to go to college.

Elvis identified as Black or Latino, male, straight, able-bodied and said that he does not have or practice a religion. He was born in California and indicated that his family financially "struggled and sometimes didn't have enough." He mainly had lived with his mother throughout his life. Elvis is the oldest of multiple siblings, speaks Spanish at home, believes that he is a strong leader and academically strong in his school.

He likes City High and likes most of his peers. Elvis was not sure if college would be possible financially but he wanted to attend college. He would be the first generation of his family to go to college.

I identify as in solidarity with anti-racism movements, gay and transgender rights movements, disability rights movements, as well as immigrant, international and economic human rights movements, among others. I believe I have been an ally of anti-racism and disability rights movements since childhood, someone focused on economic and international rights issues since I was a young teen, a straight ally since college, and an ally of transgender movements since young adulthood in 2001. Throughout my life, since childhood, I have been involved in various solidarity-oriented activities across identity differences like the ones the students in this study are engaged. I identify as White, straight, female, upper middle class, an American citizen, and as religiously spiritual. My family "struggled financially growing up but always got by" and I grew up with both my parents and multiple siblings. We only spoke English in my home. I was the second generation in my family to go to college.

Data Analysis

The analysis of my data began almost immediately through the process of writing my ethnographic field notes. During the first few months of fieldwork, I generally explored how concepts of inequality and all forms of solidarity seem to manifest themselves in the lives of these young people. I simultaneously wrote notes from my fieldwork and documented emerging possible themes, variations, and patterns. While most of my persisting themes did not emerge until about three to four months in, I believe that even the early themes were useful in helping me to make sense of what was

occurring, the patterns that I was seeing, and this enhanced my ability to think both across the schools and within specific settings.

As is common in qualitative in-depth interviews, my interviews became more focused as the study progressed based on the development of rapport and my ability to narrow my thematic interests. Despite reaching thematic saturation in spring 2011, I continued interviews and observations until the summer. I then coded interview data, the artifacts, and some of my field notes in Atlas.ti (a qualitative analysis software program) in both deductive and inductive ways or what Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) refer to as focused and open coding.

The deductive or focused coding was based on the themes that emerged throughout my data collection and based on the literature. For example, the focused coding included codes such as "experienced painful marginalization" or "witnessed painful marginalization" (based on my field experience) and "human," "social," "civic," "political" solidarity (from the literature). The inductive or open coding was based on my review of the transcripts and any rich moments or concepts that seemed compelling. The open coding process included codes such as "family influence," "curriculum," and "athletics." After my preliminary coding, I examined how codes seemed to connect, how those codes reflected specific themes, and which themes seemed most salient and substantial. I wrote memos based on these themes (which became the basis for the sections in my Chapters 3, 4, and 5) and then re-coded as necessary. Additionally, I presented my preliminary findings to colleagues and my chair throughout my time in the field and formally at conferences and to my dissertation committee at a data meeting in fall 2011 order to challenge my assumptions and question my thinking.

Epistemological Orientation

"Epistemological, organizational, locational, and stylistic" (Adler & Adler, 2008, p. 1) differences exist between ethnographers. In the last 30 or so years, it has become common to identify your ethnography within an array of ethnographic tropes. There are humanistic ethnographic tropes which perceive culture as shared meaning that researchers can accurately capture, yet (in contrast to earlier traditional positivist ethnographers) portray individuals as creators, not just pawns, of culture (Brewer, 2000). There are postmodern ethnographies which reject any form of shared narrative due to the unique positioning of each person at each moment in time. There are feminist ethnographies that center issues of gender and power (Visweswaran, 1997; Wolf, 1996). There are critical ethnographies that center issues of inequality and call for ethnographers to resist "domestication and move from [presenting] 'what is' to 'what could be'" (Madison, 2005, p. 5). Despite the distinctions, there are many overlaps between various tropes, analogous methodological considerations, and shared dilemmas (Bernard, 2006).

This ethnography borrows from many ethnographic traditions and I see possibilities and constraints in each. No one perspective fully captures the process or products of this study. Epistemologically, I agree with Agar (1996), that my tale is one of many possible tales and with Van Maanen (1998) that ethnographic representations of culture are "most assuredly not neutral" (p. 1). I also am aware of the importance of historical context—a common ethnographic Achilles' heel (Adler & Adler, 2008, p. 2).

Methodologically, I find the heightened reflexivity and transparency of critical ethnographies imperative. Yet, as an adult depicting the opinions and experiences of young people, I found a principally critical ethnographic lens to be too thematically

predetermined. Critical ethnographies attempt to capture "what should be" (Madison, 2005). While I feel strongly, especially in the case of ethnography in the field of education, that my study should present critical ethnography's focus on "what could be," this is not the sole (or primary) purpose of this study—for I believe that "what is" is equally valuable in educational ethnography.

My ethnographic style, therefore, is in the tradition of recent ethnographies such as Jon Jackson's (2005) *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity*; C.J. Pascoe's (2010) *Dude You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*; Alan Peshkin's (1986) *God's Choice: The Total World of a Fundamentalist Christian School*; Dawne Moon's (2004) *God, Sex and Politics: Homosexuality and Everyday Theologies*; and L. Janelle Dance's (2002) *Tough Fronts: The Impact of Street Culture on Schooling*. While some of these ethnographies are more "traditional" than others (e.g., Peshkin, 1986), or "confessional" than others [(e.g., Jackson's Anthroman (2005)] or more critical than others (e.g., Moon, 2004), my work reflects these ethnographies in the use of rich description, reflexivity, and the transparency of the limits and possibilities of their studies.

Positionality of the Researcher

I put in place multiple strategies in order to disrupt typical adult/youth relationships in school settings, to not be blinded by my positioning, and to avoid being exploitive as a researcher. These strategies included reciprocity with the schools, the creation of informal and flexible relationships with the youth, and the acknowledgement (and utilization) of my various identities in relation to the youth. These are briefly described below.

Reciprocity. Institutionally, I offered both schools a reciprocal exchange. At City High, I helped develop curriculum and interventions to foster student leadership throughout the school in both students and teachers. I also conducted youth and adult trainings on how to nurture and expand student leadership. At Boys High, they requested a summary of suggested adjustments to curriculum, philosophy, and practice. At both Boys and City High, the administrators asked that at the completion of the study I present relevant findings to their faculty/administration.

Informality and flexibility. To counter typical power dynamics between adults and youth and to foster rapport, I carefully considered the context of my interactions with the youth such as where to meet, how to dress, how to present the study, and my role in the relationship. It was quickly apparent that the quality of the interview (i.e., richness of the data and authenticity of the dynamics) improved with my ability to be more casual in dress and body language. There was tension between creating an adult "look" that was both accessible to the students (jeans, for example, seemed to help) and simultaneously not seeming unprofessional to the adults. This was perhaps more true at Boys High where the dress is very standardized—most teachers are men who wear suit jackets and ties— and the combination of a large spacious campus and few women made my presence feel more obvious and sometimes even disruptive to a very sequestered community. Boys High was also a more formal culture, especially between adults and youth. City High, on the other hand, shares a school building with two other schools and so there is a lot of familiarity with random adults wandering around. So while I think City and Boys High are both very close knit communities where outsiders are noted and discussed, the

location and set-up of Boys High makes distinctions between adults-who-belong and adults-who-are-outsiders more palpable.

In order to alter the dynamics between the students and myself, I chose informal settings for interviews and conversations. Most of the interviewing at City High took place in a remote corner of a hallway at a table or outside on the steps of the school building during lunch or afterschool. We frequently met over food and when we did, the conversation often seemed deeper and less stifled. At Boys High, we often met in an empty conference room or outside under a tree on a bench. The students rarely wanted food (they were big fans of their cafeteria) but I often tried to offer something to distinguish conversations with me and other adults. Remaining flexible in scheduling and agenda also appeared to increase our rapport and distinguish our relationship from more typical interactions with adults in the school setting. A repeated assertion of flexibility—I always gave the option of rescheduling an interview at the last minute or ending the interview early so they could spend time with their friends or study or have a break— helped to emphasize that their commitment was on their terms and that our relationship was different from other adults in their lives.

Impact of identity differences and similarities. Although flexibility and informality helped mitigate age and generational barriers, it is less clear how other dimensions of my identity (e.g., race, socioeconomic status, gender identity and expression, sexuality, religion) influenced my fieldwork. I think my gender at Boys High was most salient and affected how I was perceived, perhaps most especially when discussing gender-related issues.

I believe there were moments where specific aspects of my identity (e.g., White, female, graduate student) became more important to the youth, particularly in moments where I believe the youth were negotiating perceived differences or similarities and attempting to establish connection. For example, very early in the study at City High, a student in the Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA), Blanca, accurately introduced me to a group of students as a "straight ally" even though she had never asked me how I identified and I had never told her. Also at Boys High, without any indication on my part of how I identified, a student asked me what I thought of a speech that was given about homophobia as a "straight ally."

I initially believed these accurate assumptions of me being straight had to do with a combination of factors, perhaps primarily being about a cultural assumption of straightness unless there is a clear indication otherwise (see Chesir-Teran, 2003). But I later realized that, in the case of Boys High, repeatedly students stated that it was not safe for youth or adults at the school to publically identify as gay, and so I think the students I interacted with were hyper aware of identifying everyone who they perceived as combating homophobia as "straight allies." This labeling claims both the protection of being seen as straight (*I am not gay so don't harass me…*) and a gesture of solidarity (*But I am not okay with homophobia*).

In the case of City High, I came to realize that adults who come to GSA meetings clearly and almost immediately identify as gay (perhaps as a form of generational solidarity with gay youth), and adults who do not identify are predictably straight (a cultural norm which I unconsciously and perhaps problematically upheld). I do think the identification of me as a straight ally was particularly important to Blanca and the

students she was with during that initial meeting. While GSA meetings often included straight students, on that particular day all the students who were present identified as gay and so an understanding of the identity of a strange adult could affect how they interacted with me or each other, how they disclosed information, or engaged with the study.

In general, in terms of socioeconomic status and physical/mental ability, I think the students generally perceived me as similar to them—or at least spoke in ways that indicated they thought of me as "in group." Especially later in the study, the use of "we" by students when discussing solidarity activities/beliefs sometimes was invoked in a way to include me. Two examples include (emphasis mine) "I think it is important that *people like us* take care of those that need medicine or food" or "Don't you think that *when we fight* for the rights of the disabled it is because we have loved someone with a disability?"

Religion and race were also salient identities at a few points throughout the study. Cyan, who identified racially at different points as bi-racial, mixed, or Black/White, asked me if I was "mixed" during one of our conversations. While I identify as White, and was honestly surprised that I would not be perceived as White, racial identification was common in the context of both schools. Another student asked me not to identify her (even using her pseudonym) as Catholic in the study due to a fear of prejudice towards Catholics. Her Catholicism was deeply connected to her commitment to solidarity across difference, yet her perceptions of my religious identity as not as a Catholic (which is correct, but was assumed by her) was seemingly a disconnecting process as evidenced by her statement to me, "Because you aren't Catholic it is hard to understand, but [the prejudice towards Catholics is] bad." Both of these conversations were highly nuanced and reflected complicated understandings of heavily contextualized identity and prejudice

(e.g., *you may be White, but in this community you might be perceived as a racial outsider*) as well as perhaps an interest in establishing or confirming commonality or difference.

Delimitations of this Study

The delimitations to this study are both methodological and, of course, a reflection of the study's design. The participants in this study are in specific high schools within the United States that have school interventions that theoretically are solidarity-oriented. Additionally, the key participants are *not* a member of the populations they are in solidarity with and are youth with some form of self-perceived relative privilege based on some dimension of their social identity. The choice to focus on this population means that this study does not focus on the beliefs and lives of multiple other groups (although they informed some of the questions). Other populations then, including the beliefs and feelings of the marginalized populations these young people see themselves in solidarity with, the adults involved with these young people, and other youth in these school settings, etc., are not the focus of this study.

Time and space delimits this study in multiple ways. I was not in both schools during the same times due to the schools being in different cities. This meant I observed, for example, one school during the first weeks of school in September and another during the last weeks of school in June. This could result in maturation distinctions that may be very enlightening but will not be addressed in this study. I mediated the effects of this issue, as much as possible, by rotating my fieldwork between the sites as much as possible over the course of each month. Anchoring the fieldwork only within the school settings, versus the home or in multiple sites, impacts my findings. While I attended

events outside of the school setting, my focus on the school perhaps eclipsed the power of, for example, the home in the development of solidarity.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that the power differentials and social identity differences between the young people in this study and me offer both constraints and possibilities. In both sites, there are youth who have some social identities that are different from mine. Discussions of privilege and power and social change across social identity differences, therefore, will be impacted by this reality. I reflected upon this during my fieldwork and earlier in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Encountering the Borders:
A Journey towards a New Relationship with Difference

This chapter provides a glimpse into how a group of young people became personally, politically, and culturally committed to strangers. It is a story of how, when, and why relatively privileged young people discover and decide to influence the borders that determine and mediate difference. This chapter charts a series of sometimes accidental, sometimes fortuitous, and always haunting encounters with individuals, with groups, with ideas, and with circumstances that shaped how these students later engaged with the borders that separate one group from another.

Each of the students separately detailed a similar journey where they discovered that the rigidities of the worlds they inhabited were straightjacketing them and people they love. They came to realize that the borders that delineated *insider* or *outsider*, *native* or *stranger*, *deserving* or *undeserving, similar* or *different, us* or *them*, no longer were dependable. Their once taken-for-granted assumptions became scrambled, and so too did their understandings of difference and similarity, of connection and conflict.

Similarity had once been obvious; distinctions between groups had, in the past, seemed clear. Identities once seemed discreet and binary—rich or poor, Black or White, gay or straight, able-bodied or disabled, American or foreign, privileged or marginalized. However, now this scaffolding seemed flawed. They came to believe that their constructions of difference and similarity—their understandings of how people could interact with specific borders—were oversimplified by custom and tradition. Whereas they once sorted the world according to prescriptions they had inherited from their cultural mediators—home, school, the media, popular culture, the streets, family, role models, and their peers— they came to perceive these border prescriptions as unsound.

Their new understandings led them to seek out connections with people who once they deemed strangers, outsiders, and outcasts. This chapter explores how these young people came to realize how, when, and why borders are drawn, determined, and reinforced.

Regardless of their level of relative privilege, each experienced or witnessed painful identity-based marginalization—for example, the torment of a peer with a disability, the violent attack of an uncle who was perceived to be gay, or the dire poverty of orphans. In response, they began to question the borders that sustained fixed understandings of power, identity, and privilege. Each spoke about how this questioning altered how they saw themselves and others. They began to integrate new understandings of difference and similarity into their sense of self and their understandings of the world. Each then sought out multiple opportunities to experience contact across difference such as talking with teenagers in other parts of the world, forming school groups that were explicitly about cultural encounter, seeking opportunities to travel to unknown places, or attending protests in support of the rights of groups they previously had not considered. They repeatedly rehearsed spotting marginalization, questioning the borders that maintained that marginalization, and then integrated their new discoveries about inequality and difference into their cultural understandings. This journey led them to continue to build connections across difference and to imagine solidarity as a possible form of affiliation in the midst of diversity.

Their journeys of discovering the borders between groups and attempting to alter those borders were not linear. However, they point to specific "tipping point" moments where they witnessed and explicitly grappled with the borders that maintain systems of inequality. The journey they documented—of 1) witnessing/experiencing

marginalization, 2) questioning the borders that allow marginalization, 3) reimagining those borders that determine identity, power, and privilege, 4) integrating new understandings of difference into their sense of self, and 5) actively practicing and rehearsing this new consciousness—resulted in new ways of imagining and understanding difference.

Marginalization

The young people in this study came to recognize moments of identity-based marginalization. In some cases, their own experiences of marginalization led them to question how they marginalize others and how they understand the borders that maintain power, identity, and privilege. In other cases, witnessing the marginalization of others led them to question their role in that marginalization. Regardless of whether they personally experienced the marginalization, or witnessed it, the result was that they began a journey that led them to forge solidarity with populations they perceived to be more marginalized than themselves. The experiences of marginalization that the students discussed ranged across a spectrum of experiences—some were violent, some were silencing, invisibilizing, or dehumanizing—all were painful. Whether they experienced or witnessed identity-based marginalization, it set them on a path towards seeking out a new relationship across difference.

One morning, the young men of Boys High, including Cyan, Jel, Kevin, Salam, Hank, and Adrian, are sitting in the auditorium listening to one of their peers—a young man they perceive to be very privileged and popular—give a talk on identity-based discrimination. This peer is a senior at Boys High and he begins by speaking about a few incidents that were about gender-based discrimination/violence that occurred in the larger

Boys High community in the recent past.[15] After the events became known in the larger community through media coverage, when this young man would wear a sweatshirt or hat with the Boys High logo on it, people would make comments. He tells about an incident where he was wearing a Boys High sweatshirt at a professional athletic game in a nearby city and a person came up to him, gestured to his Boys High sweatshirt, and asked him "are you all rapists?"

As he tells this story, his peers are uncharacteristically still and staring at him. He says that while he is like the majority of students at Boys High—"straight," "White," "from a comfortable home," "Christian," academically successful, all positions of privilege—his recent experiences of marginalization reveal how no one is immune to becoming the outsider, a presumed criminal, due to stereotyping. He insists that the only solution to this kind of typecasting, this identity-based preconceived notion, is for him and his peers to resist similar stereotyping of others.

An emerging commitment to solidarity evolved for all the students in this study due to a personal experience of marginalization. Salam, a junior at Boys High who was ethnically Pakistani, stemmed his commitment to others across identity borders to his earliest memories of marginalization. He was often called "Mexican" when he was in elementary school. This label was both inaccurate and clearly meant to be derisive. As a child, he accepted this labeling, "If this is the only way you can understand my difference and accept me, I will be Mexican." His peers saw him as someone who did not belong— as someone from another place, from across borders, far away, foreign, unknown. He struggled with the labeling but also wanted to belong. He could not figure out if

---

[15] In order to preserve the anonymity of the participants and school, more details of the incidents cannot be explained and are slightly altered to protect the participants.

belonging would come with accepting the assumed label or correcting it. His early experiences of invisibilization and prejudice framed how he thought about difference and how he came to understand the relationship majorities had with borders and identity differences.

Similarly, Elvis, a sophomore at City High, also discussed how hard and confusing it is to be mislabeled and invisibilized because you are in the minority. He spoke multiple times about moving from Los Angeles to his current city and how his dress and "look" both as Chicano (in a region with more Puerto Rican and Dominican Latinos) and his L.A. dress as well as his shyness, targeted him as an outsider at City High. That labeling and purposeful ostracism was very painful for him, "they kept referring to me as *emo* and saying things like, 'are you crazy,' before I even spoke to them…I was silenced." Salam and Elvis were invisibilized through others' understandings of foreignness and their discomfort with anyone from across perceived cultural, racial, linguistic, national borders.

Javis, a senior at City High, spoke about how painful it was for him the first time he was called a "nigger" when he was a young teen and had just moved to the Southwest U.S. from the Caribbean,

> Me and my cousin came from Subway to get food and stuff and we were walking down the block and a big pickup truck stopped right past us and a White person, he called us both niggers. It was the first time I dealt with that, and that's what happened and then I didn't know how to deal with it so I just kept walking. He just looked back, he said, "You niggers, you niggers, this…" we had other people in school say niggers [but clearly, it is different]…[W]e hear it coming from this type of person, it hurts.

Both pain and shock at being targeted this way shaped Javis' understanding of prejudice and marginalization. Javis, Salam, and Elvis were all surprised at the ease with which

they were dehumanized and/or invisibilized by prejudice. For all of them, this marginalization came after moving from one place to another—a migration across borders that some people around them actively rejected. For them, their experiences of prejudice and marginalization, often clearly painful stories, shaped their commitment to others.

Some of the young people, like Scout, a sophomore at City High, also spoke about how witnessing the marginalization of people they loved was painful and led them to think about new ways of connecting across difference. Scout's co-founding of the program where able-bodied students and students with disabilities "hung out" together was directly connected to how people interacted with her little brother, who has a cognitive disability. "They judge him before they know him, they can't see how amazing he is, they only see the disability."[16] When she witnessed the bullying of cognitively disabled students in the school cafeteria, Scout decided she wanted something to change, "I don't know how to say it. It was just so awful to watch. I just don't understand it—how could you think this, this…is okay?"

Kevin, a senior at Boys High, spoke about watching his mother navigate the gender dynamics at work and at Boys High, "She is a successful attorney and the only thing they want her to do here is sell [flowers] for a fundraiser…" Those gendered understandings of what his mother is capable of framed his understanding of the insidious nature of sexism and homophobia which he understood as connected systems of

---

[16] Some disability theorists would argue that this framing of someone as "amazing" *despite* their disability is grounded in ablist thinking. It misses the contours and insidious nature of discrimination, and reflects what is no longer culturally acceptable in terms of race or gender (to say, for example, that someone is great *despite* the fact that they are a woman or *despite* the fact they are a person of color would be obvious examples of sexism or racism). Theorists argue that disability (or other dimensions of identity) shape how people experience and understand life and so are part of, not in spite of, what makes up someone's personality or ways of interacting with the world (Milam, 1993).

inequality. Kevin also spoke about how some of his favorite teachers had to hide their sexuality at Boys High and how problematic that seemed to him. "No one is out [as gay] at [Boys High], it just doesn't seem safe, and so while friends might know—and there definitely are gay people here [it is hard to come out until attitudes change]."

Like Kevin, Debara, a senior at City High, spoke about the prejudice her mother encountered in her community. Witnessing the marginalization of someone you love—a mother, brother, best friend— was a common impetus for solidarity in this study and reflects the influence of witnessing marginalization. Debara's mother struggled to find work due to her accent after they immigrated from Jamaica to the United States. Debara also spoke multiple times about her uncle's experience in Jamaica of getting acid thrown in his face because he was perceived to be gay as a moment that changed how she thought about the borders that define and assert difference, "How can I be straight and be different from those men that threw the acid? Just saying it or thinking, is that enough?" Debara's witnessing of this hate crime against her uncle leads her to ask questions that reflects complicated thinking. On the one hand, she was articulating her desire to distance herself from the prejudice she associates with being straight. On the other, she was attempting to determine how one declares and forges solidarity under such extreme circumstances. This incident made Debara realize how deep the fear of those on the other side of identity borders can make someone.[17]

---

[17] Judith Butler (as recorded in Zajdermann & Buzareingues, 2006) in speaking about the death of a teenage boy in Maine by a group of his peers because of "the way he walked." She states, "It seems to me that we are talking about a deep panic or fear, an anxiety that pertains to gender norms. And if someone says,' you must comply with the norm of masculinity, otherwise you will die.' Or 'I kill you now because you will not comply.' We need to then start to question the relationship between complying with gender and coercion."

Jel, a sophomore at Boys High, spoke about how witnessing the marginalization of children in an orphanage in Africa[18] altered how he understood his own privilege, his own wealth and the wealth of others. "I went there thinking, 'this will be no big deal…I will go work at this orphanage and then can go see [the sites]'…but I spent time there and it made it so I built relationships and I couldn't ignore the realities of how they lived their lives and [how] I lived mine."

In all these cases of experiencing or witnessing marginalization, the students pointed to specific encounters which led them to think about power, privilege, and identity differently. No matter whether they experienced the marginalization themselves or witnessed the marginalization of someone they cared about, they all pointed to a moment where pervasive and painful marginalization came into view and began to frame their thinking.

Questioning Borders

Due to their experiences of marginalization, the students came to question connections between the borders that determine power, privilege, and identity. They began to see privilege as conditional and contextual (e.g. you can be in dire poverty as a child but then be solidly working class as a young adult or you can be seen as straight and status quo in one setting and gay and a threat in another just based on the way you talk or walk). They questioned systems of privilege. The questions led them to specific realizations including discovering that privilege and status shifts based on contexts and a

---

[18] Specific country not mentioned in order to protect anonymity.

realization that identity-based privilege offers false protection. Through their process of questioning systems of privilege, they began to see identity differently—less as a binary, more as a spectrum, and to see the ambiguity in identity. The realizations they came to, discussed below, altered how they understood identity, power, and privilege.

For Javis, the shifts in privilege and identity over time and space caused him to feel dislocated from the communities where he once belonged. While he grew up in a very poor part of Saint Vincent, an island in the Caribbean, he and his mother were now able to own things that as a child he never imagined he would have:

> Because before in Saint Vincent, we never had certain things. We never had money to buy certain things. [We knew people who] had to rob and steal [to get what they needed]. I never did it personally, but I've seen the people - tourists coming from Europe, they have the new phone, the new iPod and stuff, and you look at them like it's disrespectful because we don't have [anything], we can't afford it. And you flash it in front of our face. So I see people robbed for their phone and stuff. [But now if I go home to Saint Vincent], they see me… [and *I* have the] bags and the phone, you know?

He sees privilege in a sophisticated way—as a concept that shifts based on context and time. He understands that his privilege has changed with his immigration to the U.S. in comparison to the relatives and friends that are still in the Caribbean. While in the U.S. he knows that he is not "anywhere near rich," when he is compared to those he grew up with, his relative class privilege cannot be ignored.

Salam, like Javis, also had an understanding of privilege and power as relative concepts and as contextually and temporally dependent. Salam spoke about how when he goes to Pakistan, how hard it is for him to see how his relatives treat the "help" in their homes and the poor on the streets:

> I kind of was just distressed by [how] we'd go in the house and [it would] be like a nice big house and everything and to have so many servants and I just like - I kind of have gone stressing about the wealth gap.

> The fact that over in that house there's like 15 servants living there and they don't even have nice clothes or anything and I just thought this is weird and like how the kids there - like my cousins they wouldn't take stuff up to the sink and wash stuff and put it in the dishwasher and it's my habit, so I would do that and then like the servant would run to me and be like, "No, I'll do it," and I just kind of like that to me was kind of weird and it's like it's like a hierarchy in this house and this is weird to me...

> And then you go on the streets and see the kids begging and someone with a missing leg or arm who has like a cup or a tin cup kind of ask for money or whatever and people is just brushing them off and like treating them like trash, I guess, and that to me was just - I thought like - what happened to like you know "everyone's equal" and treating people like they're actually human not just objects or like just trash.

Salam spoke about how he watches these interactions and he is sure they are wrong, yet he does not know if being American allows him to be outraged. While he never used this term, Salam definitely was struggling with concepts such as cultural relativism and moral absolutes. While Salam sought to understand how people could treat each other so poorly across difference and about how his American privilege might keep him from fully understanding the dynamics in Pakistan, he did have a sense that privilege, in and of itself within *any* context, limits what can be seen and understood.

The realization that their own identities and privilege were complicated sometimes led the students in this study to foster solidarity with others across difference. For example, Blanca mentioned that she felt that her identities as Latina (in a primarily Black student school population), female, and bisexual, made it possible for her to be the president of the GSA without as many risks as, for example, a gay Black young man would experience as the president of the GSA at City High. This assertion indicates that, in the culture of City High, Black men experienced more policing of the borders that

determine "acceptable" sexuality.[19] She understood that if she was straight she would have more relative power, and she felt that "bisexuality would probably not be helpful if I was a guy." She also discussed that her "way of presenting [her]self" also made it possible for her to be the president of GSA at City High and not struggle as other students might. While she had difficulty explaining what she meant by "presenting herself," she seemed to be indicating female beauty standards of long hair, the way she dressed, looked, etc. protected her in the context of City High.

The young people's various analyses of privilege, power, and identity/ expression was not usually as intersectional as Blanca's analysis, nonetheless, they did understand privilege as an impermanent form of power and protection.[20] The students discovered that there were risks involved when a person with relative privilege enacts solidarity across identity differences. They thought that their privilege would protect them but they discovered that it did not. They discovered that the policing of borders between identities was strict and that association across difference would mean marginalization. For example, Elvis spoke about how he had some student's at City High ask him if he was "retarded" because he "hung out and was friends with" students with disabilities. Even the implication of connection between the students in this study and marginalized populations led them to experience harassment. Debara also spoke about feeling isolated within her family when her mother found out about her LGBT activism as a straight ally, her mother "kinda freaked out…like totally, I was grounded for a really long time." In

---

[19] For discussions of how Black male sexuality is culturally and politically experienced and regulated see scholars such as Hall, 1997; Hemphill, 2007; Johnson, 2008.

[20] This concept is discussed by some scholars of privilege (e.g. Kimmel, 2003).

both of these cases, as in many others, the young person was assumed to be part of the

marginalized population when they were not—Elvis identifies as able-bodied, Debara as

straight.

Even in cases when belonging to a marginalized population was not assumed, the

students were still told by the adults around them that they should be concerned about the

risks involved in becoming associated with a marginalized population. For example,

before Kevin decided to run the Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) at Boy's High, the

counselor sat him down and asked,

> 'Oh, will your parents be okay with this?' Essentially [he was saying], 'Don't do
> it if you don't want to [because it is risky]'I certainly thought about it. I certainly
> thought…how is this gonna be received? Will I do any good? Will I be doing
> more harm than good? And I think I decided ultimately that I was, I guess,
> confident enough with my sort of position at [Boys High], the friends I have and
> what I do here, that I didn't feel that it would be - that if there was negative
> pushback that it would not be so great that it would kind of dissuade me from
> doing this.
>
> So I did think about it. I did think pretty carefully. Less in terms of like, "Oh my
> God, what's going to happen," and more in terms of, "How can I tailor the
> message we put out there so that kids are going to understand it and be able to
> relate to it?" And that's something I still think about a lot. But yeah, there was - I
> guess I certainly thought about it. I wouldn't go as far as to say apprehension, but
> I think ultimately my decision, you know, this is something I want to do and I
> think the benefits outweigh the costs.

Kevin's quote reflects a cost/benefit risk assessment and a sociocultural analysis of his

privileges in the context of Boys High. He decides to run the GSA because he is

"confident enough" with his "position" at the school—a reflection of his popularity, the

strength of his friendships, the values of the people around him, and his own ability to

rally people around an issue he thought was important. In his case, it seems he believes

while his straight privilege, in and of itself, may not be enough to protect him, the

intersection of his straight privilege with his academic success, his verbal skills, his strong friendships, a supportive family, teachers who back him, etc. offers enough privilege that he would be insulated from the possible backlash.

Like Kevin, Debara, and Elvis, most of the students involved in work across disability and sexuality felt the most vulnerable in terms of risks faced due to the political/social/cultural marginality of the populations they were aligning themselves with—also perhaps reflecting the sometimes "hidden" nature of these identities. Many of the young men at Boys High who were involved in the GSA seemed to identify themselves, consistently and adamantly, as straight. This reaction seemed to reflect anxiety about being confused as gay. However, the students definitely pushed back on that interpretation. For example, Cyan said that while he would get teased gently for going to GSA meetings, he did not think anyone assumed he was gay for going to them,

> Cyan: Really, no one is questioning what I am, they are just teasing.
> Me: Do you think the teasing is homophobic?
> Cyan: [Pause.] Maybe. Some of it; not all of it. But, it is also like just *new* or something. [Emphasis mine.]

The claim of "newness" indicates that the concept of straight allies was rare and unexpected in the Boys High and larger cultural context. Strong examples of border policing came up around unfamiliar or "new" issues of gender and sexuality in both schools. This concept of newness underscores how acts of solidarity have the potential to alter or blur the borders that determine difference. In Cyan's claim that it was "new" for a straight person to advocate for gay rights, he is making it clear that usually straight people stay far away from the borders that delineate differences in sexuality.

The students often mentioned that the "new" ways of interacting with difference was not well received by majority populations. An interesting and complex example of

this was the marginalization Salam felt from his peers in trying to address issues of

sexism. Salam was not allowed to go to school dances or date girls. He felt his peers did

not understand his family's expectations and definitely did not understand why he

maintained them, "They just haven't heard of anything like that before so they see it as

stupid or fear based or something." While he was not sure about all the expectations or if

he would follow them once in college, he did believe that these cultural regulations or

expectations led him to respect women in ways that his peers did not,

> I think one of the problems is like when you do interact with like, girls here, it's
> always dances. And so it's always gonna be kind of like you only see
> [women/girls] in that context or, you know, 'Do you want to be my date or like
> whatever to this prom?' And it is a little bit like objectification there.

He believed that the borders that determined allowable romantic

relationships/interactions across gender in his family made him think about women with

more respect and made him question male privilege and the sexism in the U.S. in ways

that his peers did not. "If the only way some kid here [at Boys High] ever interacts with

girls and women is through music videos and the dances and at parties, what does that

say about the purpose of relationships with women?...I learn with women…I know them

differently." Salam believed that learning with women altered men's relationships with

them. Other students at Boys High also discussed this idea that to know women

differently, they needed to interact with them in various ways—not just as prom dates or

through the media. Specifically, they seemed to feel this was important in terms of their

peers—they had sisters, mothers, and teachers—but they needed to know the young

women *that were their peers* differently.

Adrian, a junior at Boys High who identified as straight, who described himself as

"keeping my head down and out of the way," seemed to hesitate to discuss going to GSA

meetings with even his closest friends, "they know I went, I guess, some of them go, but we don't need to talk about it." While the various negotiations of identity difference may be about the unexplored bias and prejudice of the "allied" straight youth, these negotiations are also about mediating the risks that the students faced as they built solidarity with marginalized populations. While the risks that a privileged person faces while enacting solidarity are often far from the risks that marginalized populations face every day,[21] the consciousness of losing privilege through being in solidarity across difference was omnipresent. It was definitely more poignant for those who were aligning themselves politically, culturally, and personally with marginalized populations such as sexual minorities or those with disabilities.

Yet, most of the students in this study seemed to focus on or acknowledge the personal benefits of being in solidarity more than the risks. The focus on the benefits of being in solidarity *despite the risks* may reflect the protection their privilege offers (e.g., a specific student's performance of masculinity, as a stellar athlete, for example, "protects" them due to its assumptions of heteronormativity or ablebodiedness). However, the focus on the personal benefits of solidarity also could reflect an important political and cultural negotiation of the intersections between identity and privilege. For example, when I asked Blanca, a senior at City High and the President of City High's GSA, about what she thought about straight allies repeatedly asserting their heterosexuality, and she said that politically she thought it was smart even if it was a reflection of a fear of being understood as gay, "It is all just a process and what we need now, here [at City High] is

---

[21] There have been historical moments where those in solidarity faced similar risks to those who they were allied with, such as during the Holocaust or the Civil Rights movements, but these examples are exceptional and rare (Arsenalt, 2006; Hagedorn, 2002; Monroe, 2008).

[people who declare that they are] allies." Blanca's assertion that the formation of solidarity and understanding your privilege is a process reflects the experiences of the youth in this study. The process of unpacking privilege was part of the process of understanding the complexity of identity for the students in this study.

Reimagining Borders

The students all came to reimagine the borders between identities. They began to erase or reject binary notions of identity and as a result began to see the ambiguity in identity categories. Their process of questioning privilege led to a new sense of identity as a spectrum. They also began to understand that identity binaries, like Black or White, gay or straight, American or not American, poor or rich, in some cases obscured lived experience and was connected to inequality. Scout, Elvis, and Hank, three of the six participants in the study who saw themselves as allies across ability, for example, often spoke about how we all have strengths and weaknesses, just some people notice, and others people do not. Debara, Gael, and Terra, who also focused on issues of dis/ability but specifically in terms of illness/disease, also constructed difference similarly—that it was on a spectrum of "normalcy." They came to reject the hard lines that distinguish one group from another.

While the students often referred to their connections across difference in binary terms (straight/gay, man/woman, American/not American, able-bodied/disabled),[22] they

---

[22] Despite this understanding of lived experience of identity being a reflection of a spectrum, the students also did strategically label difference (e.g., "I am able-bodied, he has a disability"). Labeling of difference can reflect the limits of language but it also can be the reflection of an understanding of actual differences and in many cases it seemed the students invoked the labels to make it clear they understood that their life experiences were different from another's. Some of the students even spoke about their use of labels because they felt that labels were the easiest and clearest way to communicate difference and that blindness around difference was both practically and politically problematic.

discussed privilege and identity in more nuanced ways. It seemed this identity labeling was strategically invoked as a declaration of political solidarity with those they perceived to be more marginalized than themselves. They often invoked nuanced understandings of privilege and identity to explain or perhaps even to ground their commitment across difference. While the students often invoked or strategically articulated identity binaries, they also spoke about how binary constructions of identity confined them and obscured important aspects of who they are and who they want to be.

Many of the students in this study dwell, by choice or circumstance, in-between the borders that determine cultural divisions. Some are immigrant youth who are balancing home/school cultures, countries of origin and arrival, multiple languages, religions, and cultural notions of childhood/adolescence and adulthood. Some inhabit two, three, or more cultural worlds defined by race, or by sexuality, or by socioeconomic status or by intersections of these identity structures. Some have "hidden" identities, such as a less visible and/or less severe disability, which led them to build solidarity across ability. Some do not fit neatly into discreet categories, which make them question where they belong or how to reconcile the messages in multiple cultural spaces. Even those who are thought of as comfortably within the borders between identities spoke about a process of reimagining difference and questioning the borders that determined who they were, who they were supposed to be, and who they could become. For example, Cyan is decidedly dwelling at the intersections of multiple cultural borders and has learned to navigate them even when they are constraining him.

Cyan often talks about the different spaces he navigates—the town of predominately White wealthy families near Boys High with French patisseries,

Argentinian gelato bars, Baroque fountains, boutique stores, gourmet markets, versus the basketball courts of the working class Black communities he frequents on the weekends. As he navigated across the borders of these different spaces, he often contrasted the spaces in the same conversations and spoke about how race, class, gender, masculinity, was demarcated in each space through dress, education, behavior, speech.

Cyan is biracial, his father is Black and his mother is White, and he often referred to himself as Black in our conversations and less frequently as biracial. He told me about a time when his biracial friend's father, who is White, once came to a basketball game in the Black community, how someone screamed out, "Someone's lawyer is here!" While he laughed about this being said, he was making a specific point—a point tinged with disappointment or sadness—that Whiteness is foreign in these spaces, something to be defined and addressed, and Whiteness will always be seen as an outsider, even when connected to an "insider." He spoke about noticing how skin color spectrums are discussed on the courts.

Similarly—but the nuanced differences are palpable—Cyan also spoke about how frequently when he is walking down the street in the main town center near Boys High, White girls, his own age at other private schools in the area, would clutch their bags or cross the street when they were walking towards him and how much that confused him,

> "Don't they know I am just a boy? I guess I wish just once one of them would smile as she walked by. I always do. I am such a nice kid, wearing my uniform, but they are afraid because I am Black…the same happens here [at Boys High] sometimes [in the hall], I will come around a corner, and a White kid will jump…don't they know that if I am still here [at Boys High] then I have to be nice?"

Cyan is frustrated and hurt that he is perceived as a threat in a space he enters every day—the hallways of Boys High—as well as in the community surrounding Boys High.

His claim that his "boyhood" or his dress or his niceness, or his ability to succeed at Boys High, should protect him from being seen as an outsider, reflects a desire to be seen outside of stereotypes and prejudicial notions of self/other, insider/outsider.

Due to his experience as a border crosser, he struggled with others' fear of borders, border crossers, and border dwellers. He was sophisticated in his navigation across and between the borders of the communities he inhabited but he still startled at other's discomfort with his presence. His experiences on the streets surrounding Boys High or in the hallways of the school were clearly somewhat confusing and frustrating experiences for him. His questions about these moments reflect a fascinating intersectional analysis of identity and oppression. Through his questions, Cyan asked if you are young, from a well-respected school (not having been kicked out, "if I am still here"), and dressed nicely, will the majority still only see you as a threat? Does class or educational privilege or age protect you from being perceived as an outsider/threat? He was also perpetually aware of the risks involved in his crossing of borders—e.g. on a basketball court, how his White mother may be invisibilized—and what is lost when he, as a border crosser, is not allowed to inhabit the borderlands.

Despite Cyan's declaration of his boyhood, he is about 6' feet tall, 16 years old, and one of the most self-possessed young adults I have ever met. His invocation of boyhood and niceness in the context of Boys High contrasts with his desire to be seen as a man and formidable in the context of the basketball courts, "I want them to see me as a team member and someone who could beat them, not as a kid." He spoke about what he takes and leaves in all of his interactions. He was confident in his instincts about what delineates respectable manhood and boyhood. Frequently, he spoke about how he is, for

example, mesmerized by the talent of someone on the court and then did not want anything to do with how that same player communicated anger or frustration, "I respect this part of you and I wish it were a part of me; [but] *that*—that is not who I want to be."

Cyan's negotiation of the borders between boyhood and manhood, or the hallways of Boys High and the basketball courts of city neighborhoods, or of the wealthy White and working class Black cultures and neighborhoods, have led him to realize the ambiguity across, between and around identity borders. Cyan was taking chances; he was using his skills, talents, to lead others. He was trying to make sense of his encounters with those he wanted to connect with, but who seemed to reinforce identity binaries which limited him. He sometimes was clear about what he saw as problematic—and sometimes lost that clarity.

Cyan, like most of the youth in this study, is situated in-between multiple cultures—the culture of his home, his school, his cafeteria table, the various basketball courts he navigates, the neighborhood of Boys High, the neighborhoods of his weekends, the culture of his home, among many others. The formal and informal settings within Boys High have different rules, ways of being, habits of associating, habits of how familiarity are established and maintained that lead Cyan to a feeling that "image is more important to the school" than deep internal change. He was clearly frustrated by this—but he also deeply believed in the potential for Boys High to be better. He presented the image versus substance focus as more of an adult (administrator/teacher) problem, "my peers don't think about that so much," and that if the students could just figure out that, for example, it is okay for someone to be gay, to be Black, what respect across gender looks like, then "everything would be okay."

Cyan often discusses the media representations of Black men and how much they impact his daily life and impact his peers' perceptions of Black men. When I ask him about the White student who jumps when he comes around the corner, he does not hesitate to say it is about media portrayals of Black men, "they see all that on the news and stuff." I push him on this idea multiple times, but he is sure—he sometimes will talk about the values of the families of his peers but only gently, "maybe their parents say certain things but the media..."

Cyan, like most of the young people in this study, is positioned by choice, in some cases, often by circumstance, into being the exception to the cultural binaries people seem to rely upon. He dwells in what Anzaldúa (1987) calls the borderlands. This positioning was often a place simultaneously of power—a place that allowed him to sneak closer to one side or another as needed, to distance himself as needed, to claim just enough power to make change on a basketball court or in his school's classroom, but not enough to be seen as a threat—and of marginalization. Cyan is a sophisticated border dweller, and finds places, like his cafeteria table in Boys High, or the Multicultural Student Association, or as a mentor in a basketball program, or even eventually as the President of student government, where his peers, his mentors, the adults around him see his blending as an asset.

Like Cyan, Salam, also a junior at Boys High, is also navigating the crevices that surround borders. His understandings and experiences of cultural borders are, in many ways, different from Cyan yet there are interesting similarities. Both Cyan and Salam, like many of the students in this study, see tremendous ambiguity in their own identities and repeatedly questioned if they belong more here or there, why they need to choose a

cultural home, whether diversity inherently contradicts community and whether their uniqueness—in identities and thinking—implicitly marked them as outsiders.

One 70 degree idyllic sunny day in the middle of winter, Salam and I are sitting on a bench on the campus of Boys High. He quietly repeats a question I had asked earlier in the day, almost to himself, "In what ways do I see myself as connected with people who I think are different then me?" Then he closes his eyes. Salam is different from most of the other participants in the study. Most of the participants in this study enter into solidarity in groups, in collectives, as part of activities, which, in many cases, they have started. Salam, on the other hand, measures his solidarity not in his level of commitment or behaviors, but much more in how his thinking and feelings change, adjust, and expand.

While all of the participants spoke about intense internal changes that were the result of questioning and altering how they related to others, Salam's thinking made me realize how powerfully internal coming to or being in solidarity could be. He was very active in his school, part of student government, in many clubs, and sports, but unlike most of the other participants, Salam thought of connection as more spiritual—in thoughts and feelings—than enacted through social engagement. His spirituality frames that focus and he says that he often blends concepts, beliefs, practices from Islam and Buddhism in order to find a spiritual home for himself. On this day, like most others, he often takes thoughtful pauses between his ideas. He closes his eyes and says,

> I close my eyes sometimes. It helps you kind of gain perspective…On a day like this, I always find when you close your eyes...

He pauses, opens one eye, smiles and looks at me shyly like he had forgotten for a moment that I was there, but then closes his eyes again:

Well, some people say when you close your eyes it's like the world is off or whatever or it's, like, done…But for me it's completely opposite because when you close your eyes, it's like you realize the world can function without you and you don't have to do anything; that basically everything continues and you feel the breeze continue to come across your face and that's a sure thing…

I think that's kind of a powerful experience because I think then you kind of realize everything in perspective and realize how, well, you really don't count for much for yourself but when you think about you in relationship to others or [you as] resistance to the breeze, things are different. Life becomes about you within a much bigger picture.

Salam always insisted he was very detached from the world—even though to me, he seems profoundly connected to the world, but perhaps frustrated with it—and that it was when he discovers or searches for connections that he feels he is most alive. Believing that connection across difference is one of the purposes of life leads Salam to reimagine the borders between himself and others. He knows he has changed over the past few years as he has sought out ways to understand his relationship to others. He seemed especially interested in understanding his connections to those people who others tell him he is the most different from, like the servants in his relatives' homes in Pakistan, or the poor on the streets, or those he sees treated with disrespect in his school community such as "women or people who are gay." He seemed to be grappling the most with his role in the maintenance of poverty, and often speaks about "small" moments of interaction influence his thinking.

Salam often discusses how language confines or expands your thinking. His border tongues—a mix of English, Urdu, and French—are very important to him and to his understanding of the world. "Sometimes I will be speaking with my cousins in Pakistan in Urdu and I will just be talking and talking and then out of nowhere I will realize I am speaking in French, which they don't know… it just sneaks in there." This

experience of language reflects an in-between positioning, a cultural identity that teeters on the edges and intersections of multiple borders. His discussions of religion are similar to his discussions of language—how religion or language shape thinking, and how the introductions of multiple tongues or spiritual practices open up possibilities.

Salam often theorized why or how declarations of difference and similarity seem to be more important than assertions of kindness and connection. He believed that an overreliance on logic leads to segregation, "I sometimes wonder if it is the overly rational thinking we are taught here [at Boys High] keeps us from realizing our connections when difference is all we can see? Difference is logical. Connection is…maybe more spiritual."

Salam's focus on habits of thinking was a conversation I had with every young man at Boys High—the connection between what they learn, how it is taught, and what that pedagogical orientation communicates about difference, both implicitly and explicitly. In every one of our conversations, Salam explored disconnections he saw around him. He often asked questions. Sometimes the questions were more literal, "Could there be any value in national borders, or nationalism or patriotism?" "What does that," he points to the American flag, "tell us about who we are and who we can become?" Sometimes the questions were more existential, "Are we meant to sort ourselves [by difference]?" Rarely do his questions feel rhetorical, even though the content of them might imply otherwise. Salam, like most of the students in this study, was asking questions to understand how to upend divisions he sees as insidious, how to understand his role in that process, and how to use the privileges he perceived that he had to change the world—or at least their piece of it.

Like Salam, all the young people in this study found themselves through a process of questioning, and both the questions and the answers they explored have come to chisel their sense of who they are and who they want to be. This process of chiseling led the students to integrate new ways of questioning and imaging borders into their sense of selves and sense of the world.

Integration

Some of the students spoke extensively of being born into an inevitable borderland consciousness due to their complex identities, the identities of their parents, or the migration of their parents to new lands. Others had experiences over time which altered their thinking to reflect a borderland consciousness. Part of this process was that the students discovered that questioning and re-imagining the borders that determine difference was liberating. The process of reimagining difference was cathartic for the students. All of the participants indicated that the reimagining of difference and the blurring of the borders that separated themselves from others had changed who they were or how they saw themselves.

Many of the students discussed being depressed, insecure, scared, lost, "a follower," "difficult," "in trouble" or "selfish" before their reconceptualization of their relationship with others. It was as if their re-imagining of difference led them to become unfettered by once seemingly intractable cultural understandings or expectations. Above all else, it seemed that the agency of the students—their ability to alter their understandings of others and act on that knowledge—was most influential in shaping their path forward. Their consciousness and enactments of solidarity revealed new potential paths forward in the midst of diversity and struggle. Out of all the students,

Gael, a junior at City High, seemed the most shocked by the changes she witnessed in herself.

One afternoon, Gael and I are sitting at a counter eating ridiculously good pizza at a place down the street from City High. The place is packed with nannies with kids getting flavored ices and students from the multiple high schools in the area grabbing a slice after school. Gael was shyer than most of my participants but constantly sought me out in the halls just to say hi. She spent every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and some Thursday afternoons, from 2-6pm for the last five months at a soup kitchen for people who are HIV positive. "You wouldn't even recognize me if you met me last year," she whispers and smiles shyly. "I was a pod person before this. I could have never looked you in the eye. I guess I was depressed. I wasn't me, that's for sure."

Gael, like Debara and Terra, two other students at City High, were some of the most regular and consistent volunteers the soup kitchen ever had,

Gael: I shake my head when my friends say I am doing community service or service-learning. They don't get it. Neither do the teachers.

Beth (gently): So what would you tell them you are doing?

Gael: I don't know. I say hanging out but I know that doesn't say enough. I know it is more than community service. I don't think community service makes you become someone you are supposed to be...I found myself. I am meeting people I never thought I would know. I am not afraid anymore…

People see me caring about them and they are right. I don't need to know all of them or like all of them but I tell them through my work that I think they deserve respect and dignity and that my dignity is connected to theirs.

I guess the problem with things like community service or whatever is that it is about doing stuff. It doesn't capture the

emotions or soul. It sounds too normal—like homework,
homework doesn't make you a different person.

Gael suggests an almost spiritual ("the emotions or soul") implication to the work she did

at the soup kitchen and consistently underscored and contrasted her experience with what

she thought people label it as—seemingly to distinguish it from what she perceives to be

more common or everyday experiences. In her assertions, "you become someone you are

supposed to be...I found myself" and "I am not afraid anymore" she is making explicit

that her encounters with cultural "others" was deeply and personally transformative.

Before her first volunteer experience at this soup kitchen she had never met (that

she knows of) someone who was HIV positive. She spoke about her sense of belonging in

this soup kitchen as so exciting, liberating, and confusing to her—"it is not where I would

think I would be at home." There is something in the encounter with people she thought

could not be more different from her—"what could I have in common with them? They

are homeless, they are sick…"—and a feeling of connection across this difference that

sets Gael free. She still saw their lives as profoundly different, yet she sees them as kin,

"family now, I guess, I am not sure how else to [explain our connection]."

Like Gael, Hank, a senior at Boy's High, also felt his solidarity with youth who

have cognitive/emotional disabilities, altered how he saw himself, what he thought he

was capable of , and how he understood who he was. Hank and I were sitting in a small

coffee shop a few days after he graduated from Boy's High. He could barely contain how

excited he was about graduating—his smile was epic. Jazz music and an espresso

machine make us move seats twice so that we can hear each other (and so my recorder

will be able to pick up more than just Miles Davis). Hank kept pulling on his Boy's High

baseball cap as he told me about his morning at a local school for cognitively and

developmentally disabled youth. He shakes his head and smiles,

> I don't know—I have changed so much from that kid that first walked in there. I didn't know Asperger's from anything else when I started…I was really insecure. It scared me a bit when I realized how much I love hanging out with those kids. At first I thought, 'Sure, whatever, it will look good to colleges.' They say I need stuff like this. But then one of my friends was like, 'You know you don't need to go every day for colleges to give you credit for it.' That's when I realized that I wasn't going for someone else—definitely not for the colleges. I was going for me. I just felt so different about myself.

Hank's solidarity across ability was most important to him when it was an

interaction between him and a child at the school, "small moments" that his peers and

adults rarely witnessed. Partially, I believe, the importance of this work to Hank was that

before he began it, he had no knowledge of disabilities, or a spectrum of disability, which

he now speaks about with confidence and nuanced precision. He mentioned repeatedly

that he was very "awkward" when he began volunteering at this school for youth with

disabilities four years before and was shocked that he was able to get through the first

few visits,

> And then, I don't know, I kept going back, and I started going once a week, and it just became really easy. The kids…I started working with younger kids like nine and ten years old, and they responded really well to me. I try to treat them like normal kids, and not like they were different than me. So, basically I became involved and I just started going back more and more, and it just became consistent. I did that for the whole four years…and now I kind of want to work with kids with disabilities [throughout my life]…

Hank's joy when he speaks about his time with these students was palpable. It was

shockingly similar to the joy I feel from Scout, Terra, Gael, Jel, Debara, and Elvis, the

students who work across ability/health, when they discuss their solidarity-oriented

activism. They speak how becoming less fearful of disability and reframing their

understanding of ability/illness/health altered how they understand their own and other's ability.[23]

Having an opportunity to discover the borders between ability and disability or between other identity binaries, altered how these students understand themselves. Their discoveries changed how they understood the distinctions between themselves and others. This process of reframing and altering understandings of difference led to a comfort with ambiguity and the messiness of identity. Simultaneously, it seemed to lead to a strong moral imperative and responsibility that accompanied their process of redefining and reimaging difference. In Hank's experience, like in the experiences of almost all the students in this study, time was also very important—building relationships over time, getting to know people who are different from you, not just having a short-term engagement across difference. Integrating new ways of thinking about identity, a comfort with ambiguity, new understandings of community and difference, seemed to liberate the students, and, eventually, led them to seek out further opportunities to connect across difference, a process I refer to as rehearsal.

Rehearsal

Over time, the young people became more comfortable with various border negotiations; they became able to identify marginalization, and to integrate these new discoveries into their understandings of themselves and others. Many of the students spoke about seeking out opportunities to practice this process of thinking about difference in new ways. This practice could be seen as a rehearsal, of sorts, where the students

---

[23] Evans, Assadi, & Herriott (2005) discuss how people's fear of becoming disabled furthers prejudice against those with disabilities or marginalized illnesses.

refined their ability to understand and reimagine difference. As Terra, a junior at City High, described it, "I just look around and think, what don't I know about this group [or this group or that group]? What do I think about them? And then I find a chance to [discover what I don't know]." Practicing their new understandings of difference shifted their cultural understanding of the world.

For example, over the past two years, Debara actively sought out interactions with people whom she saw as different from herself and rehearsed connecting across difference. Debara believes her work to eradicate global poverty, the spread of HIV, and hunger is "the most important thing I have ever done…It just completes me." She felt her attempts to build solidarity and forge connection across identity differences reflected the culmination of a lifelong process. Her process of questioning of borders happened over the course of her life through her experiences as an immigrant in America, and through witnessing the marginalization of her mother in the U.S. and her uncle in Jamaica. As an immigrant from Jamaica from a single parent working class home, her family struggled with being branded as outsiders even in a city of immigrants. Despite this in-between or possible borderland positioning, Debara grappled with where cultural differences begin and end.

As part of her work to end global poverty, the spread of HIV and AIDS, and violence, Debara was part of a group of City High students that Skyped with a group of Iraqi teenagers. This experience allowed her to practice her new ways of thinking about difference. When speaking about her first Skype conversation with young men in Iraq, one of whom has since become a close virtual friend, she talked about her process of realizing their similarities and differences,

>So we start talking and [the Iraqi teenage boys] are like 'we love the American TV show 90210' and I am, like, oh-my-god, that is my best show! I got so excited— You know 90210!!!??? So crazy. In Iraq! And then this guy says 'so all of you also have beautiful houses and big fancy cars?' I am like NO! I grew up in [distressed urban neighborhood]. I live in [a different neighborhood] now—so, much better, but still. It is still dangerous and crime is everywhere—drugs, shootings, and stuff.
>
>He was so surprised that there is violence in America. But then I thought—was like—'Do *YOU* have a big house or fancy cars?' And he was like 'No! We don't.' And I was like, 'Yeah, we don't either.' And then I thought, you are so cute and you dress like us and you might be poor like me? And live in violence? I mean war—but maybe it is similar? I don't know. But then I think you are more like me then those people in [a neighborhood near her home in the U.S.] that have strawberries every night for dinner. Strawberries are so cheap in [that wealthy neighborhood]. I saw it on the street. 3 containers, $5. I could walk and be there in 10 minutes but *here* it is $5 for 1 [container].
>
>Isn't that so weird that it might be true that maybe I have common stuff with this guy in Iraq? We talked about global warming. And so now we Facebook every day and he is teaching me Kurdish and telling me how much fun they have during the holidays. I want to go Iraq during their holidays now. They have a blast he says.

The questions in this quote reflect a negotiation of the borders between *here* and *there*, *us* and *them*, and about the journey towards solidarity with a group you perceive to be very different than yourself. Before this first Skype conversation, Debara said she was uninterested in speaking to someone in Iraq and did not know what they could discuss. Yet, in the quote above, Debara documented a process of coming to understand difference across nationality, race, gender, religion, and class.

Debara sought out similarity rather than difference. She initially conveyed shock at the possibility a teenager in Iraq would know her favorite television show. She then dispelled myths about her "group" (Americans), as all being wealthy as is portrayed on television and attempts once again to ascertain connection ("are we both struggling with violence?"). She wondered if this young man could understand her life. She is shocked by

her physical attraction to him. She questioned the similarity of violence in different contexts ("is war the same?") and seemed to desire this connection. She then decided that his life/identity/experience may be more similar than those she is "supposed" to be more connected with, e.g., Americans that live close to her but whose lives seem profoundly different to her. She wanted to establish connection (language, holidays, etc.) despite her confusion or shock that there are similarities.

Debara's journey reveals how identity differences and similarities are navigated, negotiated, blurred, and determined. At first, I thought her description of meeting this Iraqi teen for the first time was deeply grounded in an attempt to establish a form of *human* solidarity—*we are similar and will be similar until I discover you are more different than I think you are*. Yet, I think embedded in this quote is a process which reflects a complex negotiation of difference and similarity. The questions that Debara asked indicate a level of engagement that is beyond a human solidarity level of commitment. The strawberry reference, for example, seems to be an attempt to understand a spectrum of difference and what types of differences matter more than others—*do class distinctions trump nationality? Does experience of violence forge connection?* Debara then explained how she thinks about their connection now (months after they first Skyped),

> [The Iraqi teens] were fasting when we first talked, like not eating all day. And [we] discussed the burning of the Muslim Bible by that man in Florida?[24] And the mosque thing?[25] [It was an intense and important conversation.] His English

[24] Reference to the threatened burning of the Qur'an by Reverend Terry Jones in September 2010. Jones ended up burning it in March 2011. See http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/florida-pastor-terry-joness-koran-burning-has-far-reaching-effect/2011/04/02/AFpiFoQC_story.html

[25] Reference to the debate about the building of Park51, a proposed Islamic community center in Lower Manhattan, that began in the Spring of 2010. See www.nytimes.com/2010/05/26/nyregion/26muslim.html

sometimes makes me confused but until I learn his language I just need to figure it out. So I made sure he knows not all Americans are...I don't know...haters like those burning their Bible. I want the world to be different. That isn't me.

This declaration of political solidarity—"I am not a hater" and "I want the world to be different"—and the comment about learning his language perhaps indicates an understanding of her privilege and also a rejection of prejudice.

Like Debara, all the students were engaged in complex and frequent opportunities to question the borders that separated themselves from others. This practice of seeking out and encountering difference, labeling marginalization, questioning the dimensions of difference, and incorporating new understandings of difference was pervasive. While some, like Jel or Debara, were more comfortable asking these questions in relationship to those oceans away, others, like Salam or Blanca, would ask questions about the student sitting next to them or the unseen and unknown stranger in another part of the world.

Summary

The young people in this study unknowingly shared a journey towards solidarity across difference. Their journey also reveals that they share beliefs, habits, and experiences that drive their behavior, and define how they think about and interact with difference. The students in this study witnessed or experienced marginalization, questioned the borders that maintained that marginalization, reimagined those borders, integrated new ways of understanding those borders into their sense of self, and sought out opportunities to practice thinking about difference in new ways. This process led them to confront the culturally inherited and culturally imposed borders that differentiate groups and people from one another.

This process of confrontation led them to consider solidarity as a possible form of affiliation across difference. This process came to shape the foundations of their imaginations and have led them to believe, even when this belief seemed counterintuitive, that change is urgent and possible, and needs to be both internal and external. In many ways, their interest in enacting unity across difference, or what this study calls solidarity, reflects a desire to heal a world they believe is broken, but not broken beyond repair.

Chapter 4: Remapping the Borders: Enacting Solidarity as Helpers, Messengers, Advocates, and Activists

The young people in this study encountered various borders that maintained their privilege, delineated identity groups, and determined power. For these students, their encounters with difference and inequality, documented in Chapter 3, led them to question the rigidity and the purposes of the borders they discovered. Whereas once they stayed far from the borders that determined difference, in this chapter I explore how the students came to engage with those borders and how they sought to influence those borders through various acts of solidarity.

The students believed that their acts of solidarity could alter, diminish, blur, and/or remap the cultural and sociopolitical borders between themselves and others. Some students believed they could change a border by crossing over the border consistently and frequently. For example, Gael believed the act of going almost every day to a soup kitchen for people who were HIV+ "brought hope" and "communicated respect" from her community to theirs. Some believed the border would change if they redistributed resources across the border—as goods or services or both. Others believed they could change the relationships their peers had to the borders that defined difference. Elvis, for example, wanted his peers to "no longer be scared of or be mean to" people with disabilities. Some believed that the borders between identity groups would only change if those with power were able to recognize how a specific border maintained marginalization. Some, like Scout, believed borders were illusions, caused inequality, and should be erased. In order to ease the borders she perceived to be between ability and disability, Scout created sustained opportunities for her peers to meet people across ability.

The students' acts of solidarity often were reflective of how they thought they could influence a border. For example, Adrian, a junior at Boys High, believed that "gay people should be treated the same as I am as a straight person." Adrian was shy with most people but also seen as a strong athlete, so while he did not give speeches in his school or vocally protest the homophobia in his school, he defined his acts of solidarity as literally walking into GSA meetings despite the "jabs" from his peers. This act of solidarity reflected Adrian's beliefs about the borders that determine acceptable masculinity and sexuality in his school and community. This act of walking into a GSA meeting reflected Adrian's belief that people's fear of "others" may be lessened by his act of crossing into a presumably gay-friendly space as a straight person. Adrian believed this act of crossing the border between the heterosexist spaces of Boys High into a gay-friendly GSA space would alter the borders between these two cultural contexts.

The students' acts of solidarity reflected an interest in specific long and/or short term goals. The various acts reflected varied personal, political, and cultural commitments. Adrian, for example, wanted more of his peers to stop saying "that's so gay…it is like saying the N word." Their acts reflected their interest in change at different levels—individual, institutional, systemic (Pincus, 1996). Adrian wanted his peers to change—he desired an individual level of change—but he also wanted the school and his community to think about these issues differently—a desire for cultural change. He felt that he could set an example through his own "learning, like I never thought about these issues before last year." The students acted both based on their ideological understandings of solidarity as well as what acts of solidarity were within their scope of possibility.

The students' various manifestations of solidarity reflected different understandings of what it means to be in solidarity across difference. [26] Their acts reflect different forms of solidarity, including human, social, civic, political, and cultural solidarity. Their actions also, perhaps above all else, reflected what a student understood solidarity to be and the abilities he or she had. Some forms of action required extensive time commitments; others reflected specific abilities such as effective public speaking; still others involved personal, including physical, risks.

In order to influence the borders that maintain difference, the students enacted solidarity in disparate ways at different moments. In some cases, students were *helpers*, who believed their acts of solidarity should be acts of service and meeting the immediate and urgent needs of others. In other situations, students saw themselves as *messengers* who were attempting to spread a different way of understanding and experiencing difference. Some students became *advocates*, who assessed the status quo and advocated for new ways of thinking across difference. Some of the students were *activists*, who protested the way things were and promoted new relationships with difference and similarity at both individual and systemic levels.

All of the students—helpers, messengers, advocates, activists—sought to build solidarity, but did so with different levels of personal agency, imagination, empathy, and intervention. The forms that a student's actions took reflected an overlap between what

---

[26] Platt and Fraser (1998) also found this in a review of letters of people who identified as allies and sent to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King during the Civil Rights Movement, "Their diverse and similar commitments are to a structurally and culturally multidimensional movement. Diverse and shared commitments tie supporters and participants to the movement by way of separate and overlapping frames and conceptions of solidarity" (p. 176).

they believed solidarity looked like, what they could offer their cause, and what the environment of the school or their community made possible.

Many of the students slipped in and out of the helper, messenger, advocate, and activist role based on what they believed they were capable of, what *being in solidarity* meant to them, and/or what seemed important at a given moment. All of their actions—helping, spreading messages, advocating, and enacting activism—contributed to the development of solidarity across the borders that determine and maintain difference. Their acts of solidarity often intertwined, flowed between and from one to another, fed on each other all the while becoming gateways to altogether new combinations. This chapter explores the forms of solidarity that these students enacted.

Helpers: Crossing the Borders

When students acted as helpers were all deeply committed to individual and habitual acts of service. They believed that helping others who they saw as different from themselves was an act of kindness, compassion, and humanity that could not be replicated in other ways. Helpers sought to change the borders that determined who was deserving and undeserving by literally entering into the spaces that marginalized populations inhabited and offering support usually in terms of labor or resources. They believed the frequent and persistent act of crossing borders between, for example, their community/school and a soup kitchen would change the relationship between people in both spaces.

Helping is often critiqued in scholarly and grassroots discussions of activism (e.g., Endres & Gould, 2009; King, 2007; McClure, 2005; Morton, 1995). The famous and ubiquitous Aboriginal activist quote, "If you have come to help me, you can go home

again. But if you see my struggles as part of your own survival, then perhaps we can work together" (Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s)[27] is a clear call for distinguishing help from solidarity. This quote reflects a historical moment when pity and charity framed how White people interacted with Aboriginal populations in Australia. The distinction between "help" and "solidarity" is important to many minority groups partially because of the ease with which helping becomes charity and how charity can maintain or further status quo power dynamics between groups.[28] Charity maintains and often bolsters the borders that maintain systems of inequality. Charity allows privileged populations to feel they are making a change when in reality it is a stop-gap or band-aid measure that allows people with power to ignore the systemic inequalities that marginalize individuals or groups.

Despite the clear distinctions that many scholars and activists make between helping and solidarity, many of the students in this study saw their helping as acts of solidarity.[29] The concept of helping was invoked by every student in this study semantically at some point—"I just want to help," "Everyone needs help," "I hope I am being helpful," "I guess I want to be a helper." Some of the students, like Blanca, were wary of the word and its presumed negative connotations. "I try to be helpful, I guess, but not in the typical 'helper' kind of way, in a larger way, they don't need my help, they

---

[27] Relayed by aboriginal activist Lila Watson (1985).

[28] A fascinating example of this is in a recent ethnography about the building of a military base in Ecuador and how the local community came to see the transnational peace "activists" who tried to stop the creation of the military base as more imperialistic than the U.S. military due to the pervasive intervention of the "activists" (Fitz-Henry, 2011).

[29] As King (2007) argues, the main concern when examining acts of generosity from majority populations is "the ways in which certain techniques of volunteerism and philanthropy get taken up and deployed and how they enable or constrain particular forms of social belonging and political action" (p. 476).

need my respect and time and vote," said Blanca when talking about her own understanding of the enactment of solidarity-across-difference. The notion that someone's "respect, time, and vote" is different from help may be counterintuitive. Why is voting for the rights of another not helping them? Why does helping not mean respect? What is problematic about the concept of help that leads activists to shy away from the concept?[30]

Partially, the distinction Blanca asserts between help and solidarity seems to be a departure from human/social goals (e.g., friendship, kindness, generosity, etc.), to include more political/cultural objectives (e.g., rights, equality, equity, etc.). The rejection of human/social solidarity and the interest in political/cultural solidarity implies a distinction of goals—whether or not to alter the status quo, and if so, how. However, while some of the youth who saw themselves as helpers did not overtly (or consciously) seek to change systems of power, most did believe that their actions as helpers would alter the circumstances for a marginalized population. They believed that acts of helping would alter the borders between groups.

The students' acts of helping in this study often seemed to reflect various commitments and goals. As discussed in Chapter 1, various forms of solidarity are often based on basic human instincts of connection and/or presumed homogeneity and *may* disintegrate when difference manifests. Yet, the helping I witnessed in this study sometimes seemed grounded in an understanding of difference and a complex (and sometimes sophisticated) search for commonality. For example, Debara often spoke

---

[30] Some feminist theorists have argued that care taking is a form of labor—emotional labor—and is under acknowledged and often dismissed in discussions of labor due to the value placed on more typically male forms of labor (Guy and Newman, 2004). Similarly, it is possible that care taking may be dismissed and/or under acknowledged in social movements as important for similar reasons.

about discovering the commonalities between herself and those who were homeless and

HIV+. She believed her family's need for support when they immigrated to the U.S. from

Jamaica was similar to her help for those who are hungry, isolated, and ill. She thought

her helping would change the options and possibilities for people who were severely

marginalized. On a daily basis, she entered into a soup kitchen and believed this act

altered beliefs about who was worthy of dignity and respect. While she was clear about

their differences, her commitment to supporting others in the midst of diversity was a

value she championed.

At other times, students, such as Terra, a junior at City High, also spoke about

helping as an act of political or cultural solidarity as well:

> I think when I am dishing out food, putting it on someone's plate who is hungry
> and who is not supported by most people, it says 'I know you deserve what I get.'
> [It says] that we are connected and that this is normal. They always say to me—
> "you keep showing up," and I say, yes, that is because this is what is right, this is
> what you deserve, and just because everyone doesn't see it, doesn't mean it isn't
> true.

Through almost daily rituals, Terra connects her own rights with those who she serves at

the soup kitchen. She is attempting to set a new normal—one where she attempts to assert

through an act of helping that what she receives, food at every meal, is what they deserve

as well. Through serving these individuals, she embodies her political and cultural

commitments and forms a relationship she believes should exist across the borders that

determine class differences. Terra's serving, therefore, seemed to be a form of political

solidarity—a commitment to a cause that seeks to produce social or political change

(Bayertz, 1999).

Terra's desire to set a new way of associating across health/disability (in this case,

chronic illness) and wealth (Terra identifies as being from a working class background)

reflects a desire for cultural change, what I refer to as cultural solidarity. Cultural solidarity is a solidarity that explicitly seeks to achieve cultural change, a change in the ways people think, feel, perceive, and associate with those they consider different from themselves. In this case, Terra seems to be building cultural solidarity by developing a culture of connection and commitment to those who are ill and experiencing extreme poverty.

In another case of a helper, Jel, a sophomore at Boys High, went to a small orphanage in a country in Africa[31] to volunteer for a month for his thirteenth birthday, "[When I] turned 13 [my] parents [took me] on a month's trip over there… So I went there when I was 13 and I fell in love with it." He returned to school a "new person," began to raise money and send supplies to the orphanage and then began a club to collect resources for the orphanage. He set out to raise $10,000 to buy a crate to have medical supplies delivered to the orphanage. He convinced a group of his peers to raise the money with him and they held car washes, mowed lawns, cleaned out garages, and over the course of two years were close to raising the money. He wanted to bring a group of his peers as well to work at the orphanage. "I really liked it, so I wanted to get [other Boys High students] involved because they don't really have much over there and they really need all the help they can get. So I just wanted to get [Boys High] involved, so that's what I've been trying to do this year."

Jel unquestionably saw an urgent need across borders of nation and class—clothes and medical supplies needed to be rationed at the orphanage due to the scarcity of those items. He tried to get his peers as committed to supporting the orphanage as he was: "But

---

[31] Actual country not named to allow for anonymity.

they can only commit to it to a point, they don't know the kids I know, they probably just

see it as good for colleges or fun to do something together. They will have to go there to

learn [why this is really important]." Jel's claim that his peers can only "commit to it to a

point" indicates that he believes cultural or political solidarity commitments can only

occur with more knowledge and experience. He believes that with knowing the children

at the orphanage the acts of charity of his peers may come closer to a form of social,

cultural, or political solidarity.

Out of all of the students in this study, Jel was, beyond a doubt, the most focused

on the concept of helping as an act of human solidarity, yet he was careful to explain why

he thought what he did "goes beyond what I think…charity is:"

> [At first] I thought it would just be a really cool thing to do, something I could say
> I've done, but once I got there it just opened your eyes in so many ways and you
> don't wanna just sit back…You wanna help as much as you can. It's just one of
> those things that you don't know what it's going to be like 'til you're there, so I
> feel like anyone who's willing to travel that far…they're gonna be able to see and
> say why they're really [advocating for the orphanage].

Jel believes that such an effort reflects movement from charity to solidarity. Other

students indicated this as well. For example, multiple students talked about differentiating

the peers that "feel" connections across difference (acts of solidarity) that shape their

actions versus just doing what they thought they should do (acts of charity), and how the

passion and commitment looks different. At both schools, students talked about students

that do community service projects to "look good to adults" (e.g., to get into college)

versus the risks and time commitment involved in enacting solidarity. As Blanca

explains, solidarity "can sometimes be service but [it depends on] what is the drive

behind that service?" This distinction between *service as charity* and *service as solidarity*

indicates that motivations, rather than specific types of action, may define what is or what is not an act of solidarity.[32]

The students in this study reported actively struggling with issues of pity, paternalism, and power differentials. As helpers, they often said comments such as this one from Gael, "Everyone needs help sometimes…I might tomorrow, they need it today." These claims reflected a belief that anyone could end up in a difficult place and need help. All of the students claimed urgency in their acts of solidarity, regardless of whether they were helpers or activists. Helpers, however, seemed to frame the urgency differently—the goals were often day-to-day and about basic survival—to feed someone, to provide medicine, etc. While most of the helpers were working on urgent needs— feeding those who were hungry, sending medical supplies to those who were sick—there were those students who saw themselves as helpers in seemingly less urgent settings, such as when developing relationships with peers who were cognitively disabled. In some cases, it seemed the "helping" instinct was driven by paternalism and protectiveness.[33]

In an experience that seemed to typify the paternalism that sometimes crept into the actions of students who identified as helpers, one afternoon I was sitting in a small classroom eating lunch with a group of students from City High and from a neighboring

---

[32] However, King (2007) argues that acts of charity reflect a problematic neoliberal understanding of citizenship, where "Contemporary discourses, strategies, and tools of generosity reflect and produce a remolded view of America as a conflict-free and integrated nation whose survival depends on personal acts of philanthropy… By according responsibility for the health and welfare of individuals to personal generosity, we simultaneously deploy a constricted understanding of the economic, political, social, and cultural forces that converge to shape problems" (p. 489).

[33] Similarly, Endres and Gould (2009) argue that for their White students, experiences of charity and volunteerism "potentially provides a context for students to rehearse and affirm White privilege. Significantly, we observed that students performed White privilege even after being taught about theories of Whiteness. Although our students should have been equipped to at least recognize and potentially challenge the roles of White privilege… most did not…because it allowed them to approach working with underserved and underresourced community members as privileged Whites who were providing charity, instead of acting as students and allies" (p. 419).

school, SSD, a school for physically and cognitively disabled youth. Two students from City High, Jennifer and Christopher, sat next to Clarissa, a student from SSD, who has physical and cognitive disabilities. They ate lunch together over the past few months but Clarissa's attendance was sporadic so every time they met, they seemed to have to re-learn how to be with one another. Often they ate and then did some activity together—played games, listened to music, or went to the gym. One day, after a long bout of silence,

Jennifer:	Are you going to do something tonight?
Clarissa (very sarcastically):	*Of course*, I will do *something*.
Jennifer (clearly uncomfortable):	Oh, cool, what are you going to do?
Clarissa (shouting with annoyance):	I am going to talk to boys *online*!

The school halls are littered with cyber safety posters, and it seemed Clarissa had seen them too, based on how she seemed to be challenging the room with the "online" part of her response. Jennifer waited a moment, looked at me and back at the teacher who was looking down, and realized neither of us were going to say anything, and so she said quietly but with an air of adulthood and authority,

| Jennifer: | That is dangerous for you, Clarissa. Don't talk to men online. |

Jennifer then proceeded to enlist other students in explaining the dangers of talking to strangers online. After some considerable discussion about whether or not Clarissa should go online, Clarissa rolled her eyes and said,

Clarissa:	I will tease boys online if I want to tease boys. You are not my mother. How old are you? I am going to be 18 next week.
Jennifer (quietly):	I am just worried about you, that's all.
Clarissa:	You are not my mother. You are not my mother. You are not my mother!

In my year with these youth, there were many moments when solidarity across difference was offered, brokered, and rejected. Sometimes, like in the interaction above, it was offered, brokered, and rejected within a matter of minutes. Jennifer attempted to enact a form of solidarity through warning Clarissa of the dangers of online romantic/sexual conversations with people. Clarissa and Jennifer (and many other students from City High) then proceeded to broker this offering. Finally, Clarissa's declaration of "you are not my mother" is a rejection of the paternalism that can creep into relationships across difference especially when a person is perceived to be vulnerable.

After this exchange between Clarissa and Jennifer, I asked Elvis, who was part of the above conversation, if he thought the same conversation would have happened if all the students had been City High students, or students they assumed did not have a disability. Elvis said he did not think so, "I guess we think our peers can protect themselves better." The idea that the students from SSD are not peers and that the students from SSD cannot protect themselves reflects the type of paternalism that seemed to creep up in this study especially in terms of disability.

This perceived vulnerability of a population, and potential for an "ally" to protect and model healthy or safe ways of living life was scattered throughout various students' motivations. Interestingly, solidarity across gender seemed to invoke a naming of helping as negative while maintaining some of the dynamics of helping that were obvious across other dimensions of difference. For example, Salam, Kevin, and Cyan, all spoke about how the oppressive gender dynamics at Boys High could be undone through not seeing girls and women as "needing protection" and instead, Salam said, reflecting common

comments, "as peers who may or may not think and act like you... I think when you see girls like, you know, in the classroom being smartest in the class or one upping you on the test or whatever, you kind of realize [they deserve respect]."

The young men at Boys High who believed they were in solidarity with women often made what I would call "girl power" claims as to why women should be respected—girls/women were "impressive," "smart," "thoughtful," and "ambitious." These claims of the "greatness of women" seemed to be in response to their new understandings of gender discrimination, gender power relations, etc. Historically, majority or privileged populations who are struggling with their own privilege and power sometimes label minority populations, who they do not see as a threat, as great or impressive (e.g., model minority stereotypes).[34] However, for the young men at Boys High, their claims of women being great also seemed to reflect their sense of urgency in trying to reduce the prejudice in their school and a way to convince their peers to respect women.

The idealization of girls/women was similar to the veneration Gael, Terra, and Debara invoked when speaking of the people who are HIV positive. As Terra said, "I guess I thought they would all be grumpy and scary, and maybe all gay men? But then they were like girls and women and teens and some gay men, but some straight too, and then they were so nice. Like everyone. And grateful. So grateful and kind." This

---

[34] Similarly but even more complex, disability theorists (e.g., Black & Pretes, 2007; Howe, 2011; Milam, 1993) have discussed the concept of "supercrips"—the idea that people with disabilities are "heroes," or in other words, outrageously admired for their "courage" and determination. This stems from the belief that life with a disability must necessarily be horrific and unsatisfying, and as such, we must admire persons with disabilities for being able to live "the way they do." Much like portraying disability as a form of lesser self-worth (as is often the case with the "disability as pity" stereotype), placing persons with disabilities on a pedestal is another way to denote this social group as "other". This form of prejudice was pervasive around disability over the past 50 years and perpetuated by programs like Jerry Lee Lewis' telethons (Weiner, 2011).

statement of unexpected diversity and niceness of the target population seemed almost to be a justification for their actions. I believe this may partially have been because helping was very interpersonally driven—direct and frequent interaction—and they often got questions from their peers about their sustained commitments to "strangers."

I challenged the claims that target populations were ubiquitously "nice" by asking questions like, "People are never rude? Never unfriendly? Always happy? Was there ever a hard interaction with someone?" etc. Students would often concede that people were not always nice. Gael, for example, when talking about working at the soup kitchen for people who were HIV+ said repeatedly how shocked she was at how kind and grateful everyone was, "It is like nowhere else I have ever been—they thank me and seem to think what I am doing is so much more than it is." When I asked her how she would handle it if someone was not kind she said, "Well, everyone is human, right? We all have bad days."

On the one hand, it is possible to believe that the student's fixation on the niceness of the people they were building solidarity with reflected how previously unknown these populations were to the students. However, it also seemed that their shock that poor people or sick people or disabled people were "so nice" seemed to be reflective of how majority or dominant populations can objectify or exotify people who they perceive to be different from them. A population is so foreign that the assumption is that they are different from other (perhaps majority?) groups.

The students often had few previous encounters with the populations they were building solidarity with—Elvis had little to no experience with people with disabilities. Jel had never interacted with children in an orphanage or children in severe poverty or

children outside the United States. Hank had never encountered people with autism

before. But, the young men who venerated women, of course, had interacted with girls

and women prior. I believe it is possible that the "unknown" aspects of women these

young men were just discovering were knowledge about sexism and about the structural

and institutional inequalities that impacted the culture of their school and communities.

Acts of helping in this study neither indicated the presence or absence of

solidarity. Even when the helping seemed like an act of charity, the young people in this

study would indicate their concerns about the dynamics that the helping sometimes

established. The intentions and thinking behind the act were more important to

understanding whether the students were seeking to build or foster solidarity. While

sometimes an act was unquestionably more grounded in charity, most of the acts looked

the same. Acts often are not enough to determine whether the intention is to alter

(solidarity) or maintain (charity) the status quo.

For example, Hank, the senior at Boys High, who worked with children with

autism, spoke directly about the dangers of seeing himself as a helper: "I didn't try to

help them or anything, I just tried to be there, stayed making jokes and being really

normal just like a normal teenager." Hank spoke about when the kids he worked with

would sometimes say mean things to him, he responded like he would with any peer,

walking away or confronting them when they treated him badly.

Some students negotiated helping and the pitfalls of helping; some students were

unaware of the pitfalls and only saw an urgent need they had the potential to meet. Some

students believed their acts of service would change the borders between themselves and

others and bind them to become a community. Some believed the borders that kept

certain groups from receiving basic needs just needed to be crossed by those with resources, like themselves. Others believed the mere act of crossing into disadvantaged communities repeatedly would result in new relationships and new possibilities for everyone.

Sometimes, in the midst of helping, the students wanted their helping to communicate a message to those around them. As Terra explains, "The kids [at City High] see me walk out the door of the school and they know where I am going, not to shop or eat somewhere, that I am going to feed someone who is hungry…they see that." Terra wanted her actions to send a clear message to her peers—a message that it was her and, by extension, their responsibility to give *their* time to helping those less fortunate than themselves.

Messengers: Confronting the Borders

Many of the young people in this study—Debara, Blanca, Gael, Kelly, Hank, Jel, Adrian, Cyan, Elvis, Terra—spoke about a version of "spreading" solidarity. They were messengers, sending concise and concrete messages to their peers and the adults around them. They sent messages in order to impact or shape larger cultural trends such as prejudice reduction campaigns. They communicated messages that they believed would draw attention to the existence of specific borders and how those borders affect others (e.g., your beliefs about youth with disabilities is destructive). They believed the messages they were sending would challenge the borders that determine who deserves respect or equality. Their interest in spreading messages seemed to come from their own experiences of receiving powerful messages from others. They believed that through messages, solidarity across borders could be infectious—they had personally experienced

this contagion—and that it was part of their work to spread new understandings of a minority or marginalized population.

In speaking about her belief that the act of building solidarity was contagious, Debara spoke about her solidarity with LGBT rights activists as starting with "good peer pressure," and wanting to be accepted, and then her feelings becoming something deeper. She traced her activism to when she was 14, and was asked by a friend to come with her to a GSA meeting. Debara grew up in Jamaica, which she describes as "a very homophobic culture."[35] She was unsure about attending a GSA meeting, but agreed to go because clearly her friend thought it was important. After that, she agreed to go on a bus trip to the state's capital to attend a civil rights protest for members of the LGBT community:

> I just went because it was a trip and because my friends were going…I didn't think about what it was for…but wow, the second I walked off that bus, I knew I had entered something different…I guess it was soon after that I realized this was important.

Debara believes this opportunity to be surrounded with people with the same message—"LGBT people deserve the same rights"—made her question her own homophobia. She then realized "how important it is just to hear these things" and that I could spread messages that would make people think too. Once Debara became seriously committed to addressing issues of poverty and preventing the spread of HIV, she realized that for her it was important to make and spread a clear message, "On bracelets, posters, it needs to be all around them" (see Figure 4.1).

---

[35] Dr. Michelle Rowley speaks about how the American-centric notion of the Caribbean as a dangerous place for members of the LGBT community obscures the presence of LGBT peoples in the Anglophone Caribbean. Due to this simplification, she discusses how citizenship and queerness in Jamaica is presented as antithetical. (Presentation, Consortium on Race, Gender, and Ethnicity, University of Maryland, March 2, 2012).

Figure 4.1. Students wore bracelets like these every day. These were

specifically about fighting poverty and reducing the spread of HIV in

Africa. These were Debara's bracelets.

Spreading the word about solidarity-oriented thinking and activities seemed to almost be

a way-of-life at City High. There were posters everywhere and multiple button

campaigns. Blanca explains why she thinks the posters and buttons are important:

> Right, a lot of posters, a lot, lot, lot of posters…They had to draw something and do a[n anti-bullying] slogan [on the buttons]. And that's something that's not only within [Student Government or GSA]. It's not only within a club, but within the school. So students got to interact with [student leaders], and they get to be part of the school. So in that way they feel like they are part of the school and [what the school stands for] and that's something that's important.

> I think just putting the posters up, all the kids wearing the buttons, like, a lot of the kids they tend to follow that. So if they see that [their peers are wearing it and saying homophobia is not okay on a button] they catch on and they're like, "Oh, okay, well maybe I do need to allow diversity and stop saying this is [gay].

Blanca felt that the buttons and posters set a culture of tolerance within City High. The

students used these buttons to establish cultural, and sometimes political, solidarity

within the school. The buttons sent a message that this was a space where certain

comments were not tolerated. While Blanca felt spreading messages was not the main

purpose of the GSA—"I think we are here as a community space—safe space, I guess,

mainly for gay youth"—she also felt the messages that GSA spread were a huge part of

that. While I once would have considered posters and buttons forms of "passive"

education, in the context of City High and in Boys High, anything put in writing and on a

wall or on a website or worn felt actually far from passive. It seemed instead to be a

perpetual blunt reminder of the politics and/or values of the school.

Blanca felt the buttons created a critical mass of students who were clear that City

High would not be a place where homophobic language or comments would be tolerated:

> So I think they know the consequences now for bullying, and I think the school
> has definitely gotten more strict, but I feel like we still need to enforce and we
> don't enforce [no bullying] enough, especially the teachers. They're not going to
> report something like that because they don't - they think of it as a game between
> the kids. But the buttons make it clear between us at least.

Blanca believed that buttons are the way students communicate to each other what was

allowed. She made it clear that the buttons are most successful as peer-to-peer

communication, declaring what is unacceptable and perhaps setting new cultural habits of

mind and association across difference. She thought that the adults are not able to and/or

do not address the homophobic bullying at City High and did not take the buttons

seriously. Blanca believes that the buttons communicate a cultural expectation that

students have for each other.

At City High, the buttons and posters introduced and perhaps even somewhat

normalized the idea of being gay. Javis, who was not a straight ally, for example, said

that the culture of City High altered his feelings about what it meant to be gay:

> *Beth:* Yeah, it's interesting that you said the Gay-Straight Alliance messages
> [here at City High] really have impacted you. And that you haven't really

done anything with [the GSA] but even just seeing the posters, it's made you think…Do you think you would've thought those things before you came to [City High] or do you think you would have gotten those messages anywhere else?

Javis: Truthfully, no…in the Old Testament, it preaches that homosexuality or lesbian is abomination. So people in the Caribbean could be killed for being a homosexual or lesbian. [But] when I come to America, I see a lot of acceptance, I see gay couples walking in the street holding hands. And at first because I grew up around [the belief that being gay was an abomination], it angered me. Because you can't do it, it goes against what God has said…

[But at City High], I felt like there's a lot of acceptance between the groups, trying to bring both groups together, the straights to the gays. Now I can accept it. When I see two couples, that's a lifestyle, it's not my lifestyle, it's theirs, I have heard this clear message [here at City High]. Before, I came to this school, I probably would be angered about it. But now it's just - that's the way they live, it's not my lifestyle, I can't control their lifestyle, I have no authority to do that.

And as I said before, I am spreading a message that everybody is similar, everybody is alike. So that would just contradict what I'm saying, what I feel. So I feel like that's a great attempt to bring both groups in. That's [what] I learned from groups here, that you have to accept it, because that's life…And maybe someday I even be more accepting. I don't know.

The posters that students put up cause Javis to question his own discomfort with LGBT issues. Javis did not realize he could have peers and neighbors who were gay or straight allies. The posters and buttons alone—he never attended any GSA meetings or events—made him think about and accept that possibility.[36]

Javis started a multicultural alliance at City High because he believed it was important to spread messages of connection and unity across racial/ethnic/religious differences, "I learned things immediately. Things I wouldn't learn elsewhere. Each time,

---

[36] Similarly, Dave (2011) in writing about ethnographic fieldwork in India talks about how the presence of a poster at a protest that said "Indian and Lesbian" puts into view a new possibility of identity—that you can be both Indian *and* a lesbian—and allows those who view the poster to imagine the intersection of these identities. Through this declaration, new cultural possibilities are formed.

people shared their culture, taught us why they did stuff that was weird to us and taught

us why it was important to them." Javis' interest in "stuff that was weird" reflects a desire

to make the strange familiar, a fundamentally cultural endeavor, an act of cultural

exchange. He would wear various shirts and jewelry in order to educate people about

difference and further his message of solidarity across racial/ethnic difference. Javis often

wore a pendant of Africa (see Figure 4.2), as an act of solidarity with people in Africa:

> But people see this [necklace with Africa on it], maybe sometime they'll come to me, "Hey, what is that? Can you explain that to me?" That helps me spread out the message. When people ask me what it is. After they hear what it is, they go to a friend that never knew what it was, probably tell their friend what it is, and that's how it goes. Maybe…it makes me feel like a messenger…
>
> Yeah, not God's messenger, but a messenger is what it is… a messenger of who you stand for [and who you connect to]. So this is a message for who I stand for. If you see this, you see the message of yeah…he supports African culture. So that's the message I try to send out from this, to when I try to explain to people that don't know about it, I feel like I'm the messenger to them, because now they know what it is and can tell their friends…

This idea of being a messenger, then, is also about claiming space and communicating

Figure 4.2 Javis wore a pendant of Africa as a way to spread his message of

solidarity with the people of Africa.

what a certain space should stand for or against. Often, the messages seemed to be attempts at establishing what a student wanted to be culturally normative.

Sometimes, like in the case of Javis' Africa pendant, messages served as reminders of an idea or concept outside the everyday view of their peers. Other times, the messages were more banal and perhaps even unintentional. For example, Javis discussed how the clothes everyone wore also communicated their connections, their values and who and what they cared about--"You wear Gucci" and you communicate certain material interests; "you wear one of those 'gay is okay' buttons," and we understand what you are communicating; "you wear Africa around your neck," and everyone will understand your message as well. He also believes that by wearing the African pendant, he is reminding himself and others of his connections and commitments. Javis' pendant, the posters, the buttons were material goods that established building and enacting solidarity as a cultural norm within City High.

The students had clear goals when sending their messages in their schools and communities. The students who sought to spread messages of solidarity were often sophisticated message makers and very aware of the solidarity messages being communicated around them whether it be from their peers' posters/buttons, teachers, politicians, or music. Javis also believes that music is a way to send messages of solidarity and commitment and can be more powerful than any other type of action or claim of connection:

> Yeah, I think about myself as in solidarity [with everyone that feels moved when they hear reggae music]. I feel that way because they say music is a universal language. So a Bob Marley song, even if you don't speak English, but if you listen to the rhythm it can reflect [meaning of the] song. You don't have to understand what he's saying, but you can understand what the song is about just by the title, the beat, the feeling in his voice…

So when I listen to roots music, I can reflect, and connect to the people and say I know they listen to the same song, have the same struggles…Little connections [between strangers], you know?

He plays music to remind himself and educate others about how people are connected to one another. He believes that to enact solidarity he needs to pass on the message of connection and love that can be best communicated through music:

A good Bob Marley song that speaks solidarity is Redemption Song. Because the music, it tells me of an emancipation of mind from mental slavery. They say slavery is gone, it is gone, but there still is mental slavery where people feel like they can't do certain things because they've locked themselves inside this cage…So if you say like, a form of mental slavery is stereotypes.

But…if you emancipate yourself, the limitations, the prejudice will eventually disappear, it's unlimited, the things you can do…So I feel like the music…it taught me to emancipate myself, to look past [my assumptions]. That's how you sort of break yourself out of mental slavery…I feel like at the end of the day I can try to spread the music [and it's message of solidarity] to my friends, but it's their choice if they want to take and listen to it.

Above all else, Javis wants to spread a message of solidarity he believes is progressively liberating individually and collectively.

Blanca, on the other hand, has more daily interests in sending messages. She wants to send messages that establish a baseline of respect and safety:

I wonder if maybe all the signs and stuff around the school impact them [other students and teachers]…I guess sometimes I think why don't you just fake it until you feel it? Then at least you wouldn't hurt us while you are figuring out your homophobia or whatever. You don't have to support me, just don't be cruel.

Whether the goal was more micro or more macro, the students sought to spread messages as an act of solidarity.

The students not only created messages they also analyzed the messages about connection/disconnection across identity differences. Specifically, they discussed the

influence of people with power when they advocate or interrupt solidarity. Salam felt

such messages were infinitely important in building solidarity across difference:

> I think - I guess in a larger sense sometimes there's politicians who are [not] Muslim but they might be advocating for improved awareness of [respect for Muslims] like I guess a lot of them are…not doing more than sending a message, "Hey now, not all Muslims are all terrorists and the majority are really good people and whatever," and I really respect people who do that because they have not experienced anything that a Muslim would, but they definitely empathize with what their going through and that's like - I think like that's something that everyone should be doing.

Salam deemed even short, basic messages as valuable in their ability to establish an

expectation of empathy and therefore connection. Similarly, he tried to send similar

messages that would create a sense of empathy for those he was in solidarity with:

> Kind of like – an instant cliché but like - you know - like, "Walking a mile in another person's shoes," and …I definitely think it's true. Where you can't really judge people until you kind of think about it or imagine yourself in their place even if you - I mean, a lot of times it's hard. But for me I think if I was in a place of someone - a gay person - at the school here, like I just can't imagine how like how hard that would be. So…I just try to emotionally invest in [what it would be like to be gay at Boys High] and empathize, that's the way I can help.

Sending messages using idioms like "walking in another's shoes" allowed students to

capture larger commitments and morals that they wanted to guide their peers.

Similarly, Blanca spoke multiple times about the influence of public figures in

building solidarity across groups, "Like Obama, right? So he hasn't said gay marriage is

okay[37] but he did the YouTube video where he was like, it is okay to be gay.[38] Just one

video, right? That message is powerful here in this school. He is a leader and he is like,

'No, [homophobia] isn't right.' We all notice that. We hear it." Similarly, multiple

---

[37] President Obama later spoke publicly about his support for gay marriage in May 2012 (Calmes and Baker, 2012).
[38] As part of Dan Savage's "It Gets Better" Campaign (2010-Present, see www.itgetsbetter.org), President Obama did a video message: http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/10/21/president-obama-it-gets-better

straight students at City High talked about how when Ricky Martin, the pop singer, came out as gay, it was powerful for straight youth to hear his message to gay youth that you should believe in yourself and be comfortable with being gay.

Salam often analyzed what he believed were anti-solidarity messages from the adults around him. He evaluated the actions of adults as clear messages about how they felt about difference:

> I think a problem that I find here [at Boys High] is that people tend to be overly rational and that they kind of forget there is spirituality and I guess that comes from [Boys High only] studying Western Philosophy…I really liked the class and I thought it was really cool, but I was just thinking that I wished that we had like some more like Eastern philosophy or something because that to me is just as important…there's almost like a real attitude or message that Western ways are the best and I'm not saying that the Eastern way is better I think it's just that there's [ideas] from both civilizations, that can be beneficial and I think that's what you'd gain from having more Eastern philosophy exploration.

Salam believed that the lack of diversity in the curriculum, "lack of women writers, thinkers…or non-Western history or philosophy," at Boys High reflected a lack of respect for difference.[39] Like Salam, many of the students spoke about the pro/anti messages of solidarity that the adults in Boys High and City High communicated. The students were active evaluators of the messages around them. This constant evaluation led them to be careful about their own messages and led them to try to convince adults to become messengers themselves. Similarly, Blanca, Kelly, and Terra at City High talked about how important it was to them to see adults supporting their causes. As Terra explained when talking about the involvement and support of adults, "It shows they understand that [my activist work] is important."

---

[39] The literature also discusses the importance of representation and culturally relevant curriculum (e.g., Nieto & Bode, 2008). See also, Teaching Tolerance's curricular suggestions and multiple subject reading lists: http://www.tolerance.org/activity/culturally-relevant-curriculum

Cyan believed that Boys High sent a message of "discomfort with people of color" and a lack of solidarity across race when two informal policies were put into place over the previous year. The first was the result of an incident at a school dance sponsored by a Black Student organization at Boys High where three students got very drunk. Boys High administrators said that if the Black Student organization ever wanted to have a dance again they would need to hire off-duty police to monitor the party, "I guess if that was just a rule for every potential party but because a few kids mess up, then you are not comfortable with [the Black students] having a dance anymore?" Similarly, at a school fundraiser festival there was one booth run by a Black family, "there was like a resistance against their…booth," and a belief that the family was "taking too much money…when they weren't." The school then had the booth monitored heavily and it was the only booth to be monitored:

> It's kind of like disheartening in a sense. But, I guess to the whole community, [the surveillance of the booth run by a Black family] doesn't really mean anything, [what it means to us Black students].
>
> Kind of like this year, I signed up to take a history course called History or Survey of African Civilizations, 'cause there's, like, that course and then Black Voices. Those are like the - like two classes where you can actually learn about, like, Black history and that type thing. And we get an email, like, almost a couple of weeks ago, and it was like, "We're no longer offering Survey of African Civilizations", so now it just leaves, like, a single class that you can take…and then I ask why Africa is [left out of the curriculum]. I knew nobody else, like, really cared – and…of course, it's like, "He's black. He's gonna ask about Africa."

In these cases, Cyan makes it clear that he felt the school put informal policies in place that led to the policing/marginalization of Black people on Boys High campus, "I am not saying the dance didn't need policing, or the booth, I don't know, but what I am saying is

that these things…add up and we notice it." These policies communicated messages of distrust and a lack of solidarity across difference.

The students in this study were active messengers and very aware and critical of the messages that surrounded them—messages of solidarity, messages of intolerance, and messages of difference. The messages they sent and that they scrutinized were the messages about how to think about the borders that they believed delineate difference and maintain inequality. Messengers made sure that their communities were aware of various borders. Their messages relentlessly made the borders that maintained privilege and power visible. They sent messages that they believed confronted borders that maintained inequitable circumstances for others. Many of the messages of solidarity they received or noticed came as the result of the advocacy of their peers.

Advocates: Negotiating the Borders

The term advocate comes from the Latin, "advocatus," as one called to aid, a pleader, or a witness. It literally translates, "to call" and in Middle English meant "one who intercedes for another," and "protector, champion, patron" (Stevenson & Waite, 2011). The students who often took on an advocate role definitely understood themselves as champions of a cause. Whereas messengers relied on a collective communication campaign, advocates built structures to make certain messages (e.g., "gay marriage is a civil right") less culturally foreign. Whereas messaging did not rely on active debate or discourse, advocates were deeply committed to dialogue with those who agreed and disagreed with them. Advocates sought out conversations with those they understood as people with power (administrators, teachers, student leaders). They believed that dialogue

could lead to change. They were committed to change, but believed that change was slow and iterative.

Advocates, like messengers, brought attention to how certain borders caused inequality, challenged those borders, and attempted to alter those borders. Advocates went beyond messaging by negotiating with those in the majority or those in power about borders that they believed maintained inequality. For example, Kevin believed that his role as a straight ally was to advocate for gay rights and building a culture of respect for LGBT rights at Boys High—reflecting social, political, and cultural solidarity. His advocacy took many forms—sometimes reflected in meetings with the principal, sometimes representing the GSA at open houses, and sometimes confronting or discussing the homophobia of his peers. As a reflection of a common act of advocacy, he sought out opportunities to have conversations with other straight youth, who he saw as homophobic. This type of engagement goes beyond messaging because it is an exchange, an engagement with others, not just an assertion of ideas or beliefs like messengers commonly undertook. He believed this was his role as a straight ally. He spoke about specific experiences of negotiating with his straight peers about their homophobia:

> There's one guy, he's a very conservative Baptist and certainly has his religious views and cultural views that he's been taught, but we actually, through conversation, we're able to sort of get to the point where I wasn't bringing him over to my side. I wasn't going over to his side. We are able to agree, 'Look, whatever you believe, when you come to school there are certain standards of behavior. You have to treat people a certain way.

> No one's trying to go against your religious beliefs, but regardless of who someone is, when you're at [Boy's High], whatever you think, the best thing is just not to say anything at all,' and that was actually kind of the way we were essentially able to connect. We talked about constitutionalism and the same rights that protect his right to practice his religion and be who he is also protect a gay person's right to live a safe and happy life. So I've actually had positive experiences come out of people who certainly did not agree with me starting out.

Kevin almost acted as an ambassador attempting to build common ground. He re-founded

the GSA and really attempted to build a cadre of straight allies, "before the GSA really

was just a small clique and they didn't try to build allies."[40] He did this by framing clear

issues for his peers and creating an opportunity for straight students to stand up and

advocate for gay rights in general, and specifically, a less homophobic Boys High:

> I think there are - I think kind of the reason [the GSA has] grown is there are - I
> mean basically everyone knows someone in their life that's gay. It could be
> someone who's very far away. It could be your best friend. But I think there are a
> lot of people at [Boys High] who, you know, knew someone who's gay or had a
> positive experience with someone who's gay, and as they saw that we had this
> group, that more and more people were joining it, those people were all of a
> sudden willing to say, "You know what? I can take kind of a role in this. I can go
> from being sort of a passive person who agrees to an active person who agrees."

Kevin believed his role was to build a space for *both* advocates and messengers to enact

their versions of solidarity:

> So I think there are a lot of people who always felt, "You know what? If they
> were an established group [that combats homophobia and includes] kids I respect
> and who are respected within the community, who are meeting and talking about
> these issues, I would go. I would go to that, but I don't want to be the person who
> starts it," or, "I don't want to speak up about it and all of sudden I'm the weird guy
> in the room." So I think that's where a lot of our growth has come from, those
> people who always kind of agreed, but needed that community and needed
> maybe, it's safety in numbers or, yeah, someplace where they could feel safe.

Kevin explains how important community is when you are a messenger and how

advocates often build the foundation for that community. He seemed to believe that his

advocacy built a culture at Boys High that was more comfortable with straight allies.

---

[40] While I did not interview anyone involved in the GSA before Kevin's re-founding of it, it is possible that
it was a more exclusionary group in order to protect members in it. While Kevin's perception might be
correct, the students who began the GSA at Boys High clearly were taking a risk and the politics of the
GSA may have been different from how Kevin later perceived them.

Kevin's claim that people agree but need safety in order to spread messages reflects the ability of advocates to bring ideas that were once culturally unpopular into view.

Kevin, a senior, began the GSA in his sophomore year building those numbers and convincing his peers that they needed to assert their solidarity—even if they were marginal. By the time I met Kevin, he had built a group of approximately thirty young men at Boys High who attended GSA meetings. He purposefully targeted confident students in the school. He felt these students could be role models and would not be shook by homophobic comments. He believed these students would be most successful in navigating the risks of being in solidarity across the borders that determined acceptable masculinity at Boys High. He had the GSA focus on how individual students could advocate for a less homophobic Boys High:

> But one of the things we talk about a lot and we try to get guys to do is if someone says something or if somebody is acting in a way that you feel is homophobic, find the time to sit down and talk to them. Don't just yell at them. Don't just - there's a sense in activism that if you're waving your sign and you're saying what you believe really, really loud that the other person is automatically gonna get it, whereas what happens most of the time is they just kind of get defensive and they don't want to listen to it.

Kevin believed that the borders that maintain homophobia and heterosexism would be altered through dialogue, diplomacy, and negotiation. Kevin felt strongly that it was only through advocacy conversations—"this is why I believe this needs to change"—that change on the individual level, and later the school-level, would occur:

> So kind of a big thing we talk about a lot and try to get our members to do is whoever it is in your life, whether it's a friend at school or someone outside, have a conversation, a series of conversations where you understand where they are coming from. They then understand where you're coming from. And you can kind of ultimately have some sort of common ground, which I know and I've talked to people sort of in the GSA community where people do similar things. I have people who say, "Oh, that'll never work. You just have to be louder than them. You just have to counter them."

It's a tough line. I mean on one hand your principles aren't any less deeply held. You're not giving way to them. But our job is to make them understand where we're coming from and understand where they're coming from. It's not just - it's reaching an understanding, not just tell them stuff, those who might disagree with us. So that's been kind of a big focus of ours and that's, I think, the toughest thing to do because you can't just fit it into an hour long seminar. You can't just fit it into a classroom discussion.

Kevin felt that other forms of action—especially certain acts of activism and relaying basic messages of solidarity— would just shut down dialogue, lead to superficial acceptance, and not result in cultural and political change. He felt that students had to have the opportunity to explore why they believed what they believed and that speakers are not enough: "I think what is far more powerful, although far harder…are those kind of one-on-one personal conversations with people you respect that could actually change the way you view an issue."

Kevin advocated for change at both the individual and school level and believed that solidarity required ideological shifts. He thought that Boys High needed to alter how its policies and practices communicated sexism and homophobia:

The number one thing I'd say is you can't tackle homophobia issues without tackling sexism. The negative reaction to someone being gay, I guess [is a] negative reaction to this perception of being feminine, [the idea that you are] completely lame…Which is scary…So that's actually one of the things that I said to the [Principal] and my mom has actually been saying for a while [to Boys High], and that is you've got to tackle sexism and homophobia kind of as one.

So I certainly think they are linked, and I think anyone who didn't sort of believe that at [Boys High] certainly believes it now [after the series of sexism-based incidents], because somebody who is - I'm not saying everybody who's sexist is automatically homophobic, but I think they tend to go together and people sort of understand that whenever you're dealing with disrespect, because of a perceived, I guess, weakness or perceived femininity in a highly male environment, that whether a person is gay, whether a person is female, that those [forms of disrespect] are connected…So I think while it was not kind of a direct - while the [sexism-based incidents] last [year] were not directly related to homophobia, I think there's definitely a link there culturally.

Kevin advocated for a different culture around issues of homophobia and sexism at Boys High. He worked within the school system and often met with the administration of Boys High to further the changes he sought. Kevin believed institutional policies and practices could pave the way towards solidarity. If an institution declared that the culture of the institution was committed to eradicating sexism and homophobia, the students would be as well.

Similar to Kevin's advocacy, Scout, a junior at City High, advocated for systemic change within her school around issues of disability. She met with the Principal of City High to request the opportunity for City High to share their extensive afterschool activities program with another school that shared City High's school building that was for students with disabilities (SSD):

> My friend, [a student at SSD], wants to be a basketball player and then he says that his school doesn't offer afterschool activities as our school does, because I told him I take kick boxing activity on Thursday and baseball on Friday and he's like, "You get them?" I'm like, "Yeah." I told him, "What do you get?" and he's like, "We get homework." I go, "What do you mean you get homework?" He's like, "We come and all we do is homework and we do homework on Saturdays," and he says how his school just focuses on academics…

Scout felt that SSD's lack of athletics and afterschool activities reflected a lack of equity in the schooling of youth with disabilities. She was outraged by the lack of "fun" opportunities for students at SSD and believed it reflected inequalities in the schooling of disabled youth. As City High and SSD shared the same physical space, Scout did not understand why the opportunities were so different. She also personally had benefited from the athletics and afterschool activities at City High, and wanted her friends at SSD to have the same opportunities to engage in art, music, dance, sports, service, etc.

In the hyper-segregated lunch room that City High and SSD shared, Scout

requested that the lunchroom aid allow students from City High and students from SSD

to get in line together for food. As she explained, "students [from City High] have

literally screamed in shock and fear when one of the students from [SSD] walked by

them…they have no comfort with disability or difference…they seem to think that [SSD]

students will attack them or something. It is bizarre." She believed the literal borders

between the spaces youth with disabilities and able-bodied youth occupied in her

cafeteria led to inequality. She believed when these boundaries were more fluid the able-

bodied students would become less fearful. She spoke in a frustrated manner about this

one time when a student at City High got upset in the cafeteria:

> I thought it was so ridiculous. There are twins [at SSD]…and this [City High] girl got scared 'cause [one of the twins] accidentally – you see our cafeteria, to get to the line, the food line, their school has to cross through our tables to get to the line—and one of the twins passed through there 'cause he didn't see another way to go…so he just thought it was normal [to walk that way]. He passed there and this girl screamed like he was gonna attack her, which I thought was so ridiculous…That was when I knew I needed to make sure things changed. The fear [of students at SSD] was insane.

Soon after, Scout and Elvis began a program to bring students with cognitive disabilities

together with students who identify as able-bodied because of the bullying she witnessed

in the cafeteria and also due to how people treated her little brother. Scout experienced

some push-back at first from the adults around her about better integrating the cafeteria:

> I am not saying "Oh yeah, let's have all the classes integrated," because obviously they can't…but otherwise I don't feel like they should be – even if we crossed, like, they let me cross to their side now because they know I'm friends with them, but before they wouldn't let me cross. The security guard would tell someone to wait. Now we understand that it's a whole lunchroom for everybody.

Scout fought hard to better integrate the cafeteria at City High but in my time in the cafeteria it still felt very segregated by ability.[41] The security guards, teachers, and most students seemed to actively maintain the separation. I asked one of the teachers at SSD why she thought the segregation in the cafeteria was so intense she said that she thought it was because the teachers at City High were uncomfortable with the cognitive disabilities of her students. She liked the teachers from City High and felt that they really tried but that, "they have a very distant relationship with disability, even when they are actively trying they have a very charitable, tolerance attitude. They are uncomfortable with our kids… and you can tell." Scout said that the adults do not want City High students even playing with SSD students even though, "we can play together. Kids sometimes mess up, right? And then they should sit out, but isn't that the case with all kids?" There was definitely a spectrum of disability at both City High and SSD, but most of City High's students and teachers lacked a comfort with SSD students.

Scout worked very much within the systems of her school and her community to make changes. She wanted to provide the students with disabilities around her the same opportunities she had. She saw herself as a "voice"[42] for students with disabilities. She often saw herself as a helper—"I just want to help make it better here"—but her actions went beyond supporting individuals and meeting urgent needs. Like all acts of advocacy in this study, Scout was working towards systemic change including curricular, policy, programmatic alterations in her school.

---

[41] Tatum (2003) argues that groupings by race are important to racial identity development. It is possible, then, that youth benefit from being together if they share physical or cognitive disabilities. However, the feelings of both the students and teachers I spoke with at SSD as well as Scout was that the segregation in the shared cafeteria was the result of prejudice towards and isolation of students with disabilities.

[42] Recent feminist and disability scholars have problematized this idea of someone with more sociopolitical power "giving voice" to marginalized populations. This idea assumes that certain groups do not have the ability to speak for themselves (Ahmed, 2000; Ashby, 2011).

Activists: Contesting the Borders

Activists generally are understood to be outside the formal "systems" and explicitly anti-status quo. The term generally relates to direct action and is romantically connected with protests and iconic political rebels. The activist students in this study sought multiple paths for change, sought out systemic as well as structural and individual change. Activists seemed to see their own concerns as deeply connected to those of others and were more easily able to articulate those connections. They felt the risks that others faced due to marginalization threatened themselves as well. They were quite clear that how the majority of people saw identity borders was problematic.

Whereas advocates worked within systems to address issues of inequality (e.g., speaking to a principal to get something changed) activists purposefully seemed to ground the potential for change outside of formal power structures. While they did want the structures and people with power to change, activists often expected more, and often demanded more, of their peers. Blanca, for example, sought out activists and fostered activism at City High:

> When you go into activism, become an activist, you have the chance to change everything, to set everything for the future generations. So if I wanted to, you know, raise awareness about something that I feel strongly about, then that [impacts] the way I speak and the way I come off to a lot of people. That means that I have to be a good representative and a good leader to be able to persuade other people to think the same way or to at least agree.

> Yeah, I think activist is more political and volunteering, helping, is more of, you know, it's a social thing. It's something that you do for your own good. It's something that makes me feel good. Honestly, I think if I had to choose between the two I would…enjoy helping people, but helping them is only temporary, right? As opposed to activism where you could really go out and do something and not only change that one group of people, but a whole bunch of other people.

As Blanca explained, the students in this study enacted activism in order to attain systemic change. She felt that being an activist was inherently an act of political and cultural solidarity.

Activism, in Blanca's mind, altered status quo politics and cultural norms; it was long lasting and impacted future generations. Blanca believed helping was valuable but fleeting and would not result in sociocultural and political transformation and that activism reflected a deeper solidarity, understanding, and commitment to a marginalized population. Her claims of the extent of activism's impact, "not only change that one group," reflects her belief that activism contests and alters borders. The risks Blanca associated with activism were connected to how activism has the potential to contest borders. She believed the risks associated with activism are not the same as the risks associated with any other form of solidarity. As she explained, "I think that there's more helper straight allies than activist [straight allies], because to be an activist you have to… be fully committed to risking it all."

Blanca's analysis of activism reflecting more risk than, for example, acts of helping reflected Debara's experience as well. Debara was often praised by the adults in her life for the work she did in a soup kitchen for people with HIV/AIDS but when a poster supporting LGBT rights was found by her mother, she was severely punished: "I have been careful since then. I haven't done marches. I will just make sure people are taken care of in the soup kitchen."[43] Debara thought about the distinction between

---

[43] In *Respectably Queer*, Ward (2008) discusses the pressure that many progressive activist organizations in the U.S. feel around building diversity that is anticipated and comfortable or 'respectable' or predictable diversity. Similarly, students in the study talked about enactments of solidarity that others would perceive as "respectable" solidarity—solidarity that felt safe within their cultural settings.

activism and helping in terms of risk rather than as an ideological difference. She

believed advocacy and helping were socially acceptable acts of social change.

Blanca understood helping versus activism as a reflection of personal and political

commitments. However, she agreed that activism was limited among her peers due to the

risks involved in activism:

> A lot of students, you know, at this age a lot of kids aren't ready for [those risks].
> They're not ready to be out there, especially relating to LGBT issues. So it's
> something that a lot of people - like a week ago I could have had a whole bunch
> of straight allies going to [the state capital to fight for gay marriage], but they're
> probably only going to do it to get away for the weekend, you know, to go to [the
> state capital]. So it's just, like, you have to - most of the students in this school
> are helpers, more helpers, if not anything else, helpers.

Blanca indicates that helping, for example, may be a gateway to other forms of solidarity

and that the intellectual/emotional understandings and political demands that come with

other forms of solidarity may not be common or possible as a young teen. She also

described how valuable it has been for her to witness acts of solidarity that were not just

about helping:

> It would change [how I saw someone] who said they were in solidarity with me, if
> they were activists [rather] than helpers. I'd be more inspired and more, like,
> passionate about that person or I'd just become more involved in my work, if I see
> an activist ally. If I was to see that, then that'd be, like, 'Then change is possible.'
> But to be a helper, it's like you're committed, but you're not fully committed. But
> it's okay because I know that I have your support and that's just fine. One person
> could help out a great deal.

Blanca's assertion, "Then it's possible," is a claim that she believes change around issues

of inequality is only possible via activism. She felt that helping sometimes reflected a

lack of commitment but was a start, and that any form of support was valuable. She

believed that activism indicated a deeper commitment or acceptance, "it's so much more

strong to be an activist for something that you may not be, but that you support and that

you accept."

Kevin felt that activism along with advocacy led to cultural equality. He

understood this combination of activism and advocacy as a reflection of how societies

move towards social change. He believed that advocates and activists both had their place

in inspiring and affecting social change:

> But I think if you can draw a parallel, and certainly a lot of people in gay activism
> have done this between African American civil rights, kind of moving from, I
> guess, legal equality to sort of cultural equality. And that's not to say there's no
> longer racism in the world, but certainly strides have been made, you know, that
> that is ultimately the process that gay rights has to follow, you know, where
> you've got sort of, I guess, legal equality and that then leads to cultural equality.

Kevin mainly advocated for change in his school and community. His solidarity was

deeply grounded in dialogue and advocacy. Kevin's activism was reflected more in his

long term interests in and thinking around a culture of solidarity in his school. He wanted

what I believe would be seen as radical cultural change at Boys High.

While many of the students seemed to grapple with the illusion of power that was

connected to certain identity borders, activists seemed sure that identity borders merely

maintain power and determined confining constructions of difference. Commitments to

activism were easily spotted inside and outside the school environments. These students

were quite confident, righteous about actions and tenacious in their belief that solidarity

is a moral imperative and only possible by contesting the borders that maintain power and

privilege.

Summary

Most students enacted their solidarity through multiple forms of action, yet were

most likely to manifest their beliefs about the potential to build solidarity across

difference through one or two specific forms of action. However, these roles are not a rigid taxonomy and fixed definitions are more obscuring than revealing. All of the students' enactments were dynamic, employed aspects of human, social, and civic solidarities, and often sought to build cultural solidarity in their schools and communities. While their specific acts often manifested as human, social, civic or political solidarity, they wanted cultural change. They wanted the borders between groups to change and they wanted the permeability and malleability of those borders to change.

Gael was, above all else, a helper—this reflected the overlap between what she believed she was capable of and what she felt her acts of solidarity could offer. Scout was an advocate for people with disabilities who also dabbled in sending messages and activism. Terra was a helper most afternoons at the soup kitchen for people who were HIV+ but during the school day and in her community, she was a messenger and activist, fighting for the rights and status of people who were disabled, poor, and/or ill.

When students took on the role of helpers, their actions had a micro-focus. They observed an urgent and basic need for an individual or pocket of individuals—hunger, safety, housing, medicine, etc.—and they attempted to meet that need immediately. Helping was often construed as a form of solidarity without the context of time or society. It was personal and focused on the present moment. When they sought to build community around issues of justice or inequality, they often acted as messengers or advocates attempting to build an understanding of differences. As advocates, they sought specific iterative institutional changes and dialogues across difference. When students wrestled with foundational and systemic structures, and attempted to inspire widespread, collective, and substantial political/cultural change, they were activists.

While helpers crossed identity borders and believed that the crossing in and of itself would alter relationships across the borders, messengers sat on their side of the border spreading simple yet important messages of connection, respect, and value for those on the other side. Advocates sought out opportunities to debate and discuss the impact of borders on people's lives. Advocates also sought political and cultural changes across borders. Activists attempted to obliterate, redraw, and/or blur the political and cultural borders that determined difference. Activists seemed to already believe that the borders were just illusions that maintained power.

While helpers also often enacted a "safe" and "respectable" version of cultural change, they did not necessarily explicitly seek it out in others; they believed their actions were visible to others. Messengers believed in cultural change but believed that basic actions and beliefs led to cultural change. Advocates believed dialogue and raising the voices of the marginalized above the clamor of the status quo led to cultural change. Activists sought to illuminate and address the source of issues and macro questions of justice that affected micro spaces and lived experiences. Each of these various enactments was an attempt to alter the relationships across the sociopolitical and cultural borders that determined difference. All of the youth in this study wanted to change how they and those around them related to marginalized populations. They believed attempts to build solidarity were the way to enact change. They attempted to build solidarity in different ways based on their own skills and their own understandings of justice, inequality, power, and social change.

Chapter 5: Fostering New Relationships with Borders

The young people in this study shared a similar journey as they built solidarity across identity differences. They discovered multiple cultural, social, and political borders that regulated their lives and furthered systems of inequality. They questioned and reimagined the borders that regulate identity categories, unearned power, and the privilege of specific groups. They discovered various forms of solidarity as a way to carve a path towards social, political, and cultural change.

Notwithstanding the important diversity within and among these students, this dissertation documented the similarities in their beliefs and experiences that drove their commitment to solidarity, and defined how they thought about and interacted with difference. The similarities among these young people were palpable. These similarities suggest that these young people share a cultural universe with similar habits of thinking, feeling, acting, and relating to difference. All of them were seekers of justice and new ways of associating across difference. They all were unquestionably excited and empowered by the learning curves that come with encountering strangers. They all had a sense of righteousness that bolstered them in moments of disconnection with the status quo cultures that surrounded them. All of them had dimensions of privilege that made them understand their lives as fortunate. Most of them also indicated life experiences and/or dimensions of marginalization that allowed them to form a grounded and authentic empathy towards those with less privilege. Most of them gravitated towards the borderlands in-between various cultural and identity groups.

Each of them shared a willingness to transgress cultural and social norms. Each of them sought out opportunities to identify and witness injustice. Each was able to discern

specific asymmetries of power and privilege. Each believed that their acts of solidarity made a difference. Most struggled to avoid paternalism, charity, and pity in their acts of solidarity with marginalized populations. Some wanted radical change. Others saw themselves as caretakers, separate from larger movements. Some were spiritually motivated. Some were motivated by a guttural instinct that disparities are unacceptable. Others had highly refined and cerebral justifications for their choices. Some were able to enact their solidarity in very public and communal ways; others' acts were more hidden, more logical, or more emotional.

They all actively rejected specific identity, power, and privilege borders that fostered inequality and degradation. They repeatedly navigated and/or explored liminal (in-between) or marginal (peripheral) cultural terrains. They were all, to varying degrees, comfortable with ambiguity in identity and sought to make others comfortable with the murkiness of identity as well. They believed deeply, and often brashly, in their ability to make change, and the value of that change. Above all else, they were able to see marginalization as a problem, and were able to see themselves as part of the solution.

Building and Enacting Solidarity: A Journey

These young people sought to build solidarity because they witnessed and/or faced the lived consequences of marginalization based on identity differences. For some of the young people, these events happened when they were young but left painful, indelible scars. For others, the events were recent and brought into focus a power or privilege dynamic that they perceived to be unjust. Regardless of when the events occurred, they saw the experiences as life-defining. Through witnessing or facing marginalization they began to question and reimagine their own and others' identity,

power, and privilege. Their questioning and reimagining of identity became part of how they saw themselves and how they understood the world. Their new found way of questioning framed how they moved forward and interacted with the world.

Their diverse acts of solidarity revealed a common belief that individuals can affect the borders that maintain marginalization. For some of them, helping was an act of kindness and service that they believed was essential for changing their communities. Others sought to spread foundational social justice ideologies to those around them and closely evaluated the messages that others spread with their words and actions. Some were advocating for new ways of interacting and thinking across difference. Still others were activists who wanted to affect both individual lives *and* systemic and structural issues that maintain marginalization. Many of the students moved between various acts of solidarity and had periods of time when they were enacting multiple types of solidarity at once. Many of the students believed that helping had been a gateway to other types of solidarity such as advocacy or activism.

The various ways these young people enacted solidarity revealed that they understood borders as relatively permeable and malleable. Blanca believed that all gender and sexuality borders are merely a reflection of oppression and should be eradicated; Salam believed that the borders that determine gender should not regulate power. Scout believed that the borders that determine dis/ability are false delineations that merely maintain the power of some; Elvis believed that encounters across the borders that determine ability will lead to a kinder world. These dynamic and multiple ways of understanding borders reflect both new discoveries and static ways of thinking about difference. However, all their actions and thinking were grounded in a deep belief that

individual and collective agency can influence culture. Despite the commonalities and departures, the journeys of these students provide lessons to scholars, educators, and policy makers when determining how to foster new relationships across difference in schools.

Research/Theoretical Implications

Multiple conceptual choices and theoretical findings from this study are worth noting and offer implications for scholars examining similar phenomena.

Research about marginalization/discrimination in schools needs to center the agency of students in interrupting systems of inequality. As explained in Chapter 1, there is tremendous value in understanding how the witnesses of bullying/discriminatory behaviors and relatively privileged populations think about and respond to such patterns of behavior. Similarly, my focus on the acts of students (versus adults, policy makers, distribution of resources, etc.) was informative. I recommend more studies which balance student agency, adult concerns, and structural/institutional/cultural constraints.

The types of agency young people readily enact as well as the types of agency they do not see as feasible in schools are worthy of continued and sustained study especially as they relate to the development of healthy relationships across difference. This study explored both imaginative agency—the ability to imagine the world in new ways—as well as the agency to work towards social change. Identifying additional dimensions of personal agency for students will provide scholars and educators additional ways to foster agency in school settings. While many of the students in this study had become leaders in their schools, it is important to examine the experiences, habits, and

thinking of students who are relatively privileged and not enacting solidarity in order to expand how we understand relationships across difference in schools.

Studies of inequality should address, in terms of methodology and conceptualization, the *relative* nature of privilege. The focus on relatively privileged youth is also a lens that is worthy of continued study specifically when thinking about how to make schools more comfortable with difference and sites of social and cultural change. Relative privilege exists in all educational environments. Privilege should be examined in multiple spaces in order to understand its dimensions and how it plays out in the thinking and lives of youth. The multi-sited construction of this study, therefore, allowed for a unique exploration of privilege that is necessary in the education literatures.

The choice to focus on both a suburban private school with an exclusive admissions policy and a tuition of approximately $30,000/year and an open admissions urban public school revealed similar struggles in how relatively privileged young people navigate relationships across difference. I would recommend that scholars continue to think about what privilege and marginalization mean in dynamic ways and while centering the importance of *context*. For example, Blanca's conception of herself as relatively privileged in the City High context due to being an intersection of Latina, bisexual, and meeting specific female beauty standards, might have not been captured in other studies of relatively privileged populations. This is the same for Cyan or Adrian as men of color in a predominately White Boys High environment or Javis as an immigrant or Elvis as Chicano in the predominately African American City High context. However, the students' own dynamic understandings of privilege led them to build solidarity with more marginalized groups in ways that impacted the cultures of their schools.

To define privilege only in terms of tremendous wealth, Whiteness, and maleness,

etc. misses important curricular, pedagogical, and philosophical opportunities in school

settings. Static definitions or understandings of privilege obscure agency and regulate

individuals as more or less powerful subjects than they are. [44] Researchers should

carefully attend to the common pitfall of presenting privilege in universal, versus

contextual, terms in their research design, data collection, analysis, and documentation.

For example, I believe complicating privilege when determining your sample is one way

to address this issue. I also think that qualitative methods which include observation

necessitate a focus on interactions between individuals and groups and demands that the

researcher capture ideas and opinions beyond just the main subjects of study (e.g.

Clarissa's declaration, "you are not my mother"). Research designs that include across

difference samples are potentially the most concise and thoughtful way to address this

issue (e.g., studies of privilege that include gay and straight youth from a GSA or able-

bodied and disabled youth from a program like the ones in which Scout and Hank were

involved).

Post-colonial border theories are conceptually rich as tools to explore how

relatively privileged populations interact with dominant culture ideologies. The use

of border metaphors is a common trend in cultural studies and this study attempted to

straddle the theoretical and applied use of border theories. This study contributes to the

---

[44] However, I do think that a focus on privilege can make marginalized populations
objects of a power relationship, a concern which needs to be perpetually addressed. For
example, the young people at the SSD school, or the gay youth in the GSAs at both
schools, or even the Iraqi teen who became close friends with Debara are all barely
brought into view in this dissertation due to who was being studied. This choice could
render these groups/individuals invisible. Scholars should be careful to address this issue.

literature that sees borders as neither inherently positive nor negative, as inevitably coherent nor as illogical, but as omnipresent in people's everyday lives and a way of thinking about issues of justice and cultural change. The discursive use of borders in this study provided a conceptual mechanism to balance structure with agency, marginalization with privilege, constraint with possibility. Other studies should consider whether they can do the same.

In this study, I simultaneously explored about how literal and metaphorical borders play out in young people's lives, how young people attempt to understand, explain, impact, and engage power borders, privilege borders and identity borders. I located some of the borders young people navigate in their everyday lives. The experiences of these youth contribute to border theory. The students had seen, at one time, certain privilege, power, and identity borders as innate. They sometimes invoked borders as fixed for strategic purposes. They sometimes saw all borders as malleable. Their beliefs about borders changed over time and through experience.

In everyday life, these youth understood certain identity borders as porous or false, as is the case of how Scout saw dis/ability, Hank saw the line between his "own awkward behaviors" and the autism spectrum, or how Cyan sometimes understood race. For other students identity borders were unyielding as how Gael understood the borders between her life as fed, working class, and HIV negative, and those who are hungry, poor, and HIV positive. However, Gael believed that by consistently crossing the borders between her own community and the community of others, she changed the balance of power and privilege. The students' interactions with and beliefs about borders changed based on context, time, space, and experience. Many of the youth in this study saw

privilege as contextual and temporal; however, they also maximized their ability to utilize their privilege while struggling to understand this dissonance.

The borders discussed in this study are often simultaneously ideological borders, cultural borders, and political borders. How individuals and groups interacted with the borders revealed dynamic and multiple lived consequences often at the same moment. As seen in this study, a border can be a horizon or possibility for one person and a restriction or restraint for another. I documented how cultural fears or ignorance of the borderlands, the in-between, and border crossings, led to struggles for some of the students. I explored how young people reject and alter borders. Emerging scholarship is becoming quite adept at addressing borders as more than spatial, and instead as often simultaneously liminal, temporal, irrelevant, and omnipresent depending on context and condition. Further studies that center dynamic border thinking will lead to new ways of understanding the connections between privilege, inequality, identity, and marginalization.

Studying multiple dimensions of identity and inequality at once provides an important conceptual lens. Looking across multiple dimensions of difference allowed this study to comparatively examine how young people enact solidarity. The choice to focus on how relatively privileged students interact with the borders that determine difference (i.e., maintaining a conceptual frame focused on enacting solidarity), allowed this study to examine relationships across multiple dimensions -- sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, gender, dis/ability, nationality. Since this study focused on how relatively privileged students interact with the borders that determine difference, this frame was conceptually succinct and created fertile ground for theoretical and applied implications.

Studying solidarity across multiple dimensions, instead of just sexuality or race or ability, provided an opportunity to see the distinctions between and among various commitments across difference. For example, the students' discourse across various dimensions of identity revealed differences in their level of sophistication in terms of understanding the dynamics of marginalization and prejudice for specific identity groups. For dimensions such as sexuality, many participants spoke in ways that revealed a richness and depth of understanding of how homophobia and heterosexism impact everyone. For dimensions of dis/ability and class, the students' perceptions and discourse were generally more superficial. Often they depended, on compassion, than an understanding of how ableist or classist beliefs impacted everyone's life. In terms of gender, some of the participants heavily relied upon inadequate "girl power" or "girls are amazing" arguments to tackle acts of violent sexism that were occurring around them. These distinctions between how relatively privileged populations think about identity differences are instructive and have applied and theoretical implications.

Similarly, recognizing the differences in occurrences of discrimination across these various dimensions in these two schools also highlights and supports the differences in the ways allies' spoke about them. To illustrate, both schools in my study had more obvious daily incidents of homophobic harassment whereas the ableism, classism, and sexism were often (although not always) more nuanced, occurred in spaces that adults did not frequent, and more structural. Thus, the phenomenon of solidarity as the focus of the study allowed for the discovery of such differences across multiple dimensions of difference.

I would recommend, however, that scholars are careful when looking at multiple dimensions of inequality to note the limitations of this conceptual approach. The focus on multiple dimensions of difference did not always allow me to capture important variations within identity groups. For example, Scout and Elvis were allies of peers with cognitive disabilities; Hank was in solidarity with children who had emotional disabilities; Terra, Gael, and Debara with adults and teens who had physical disabilities/chronic illness. These distinctions were important. There was profound diversity within constructs such as disability, gender, race, class, or sexuality and this study was not able to capture those nuances due to a focus on the variability between but not within dimensions of difference. Thus, it is important for scholars who use this approach to note such limitations as well.

Similarly, the focus on identity categories meant that despite seeing interesting examples of solidarity among, for example, athletes versus non- or less-skilled athletes at both schools, it was outside the scope of this study to look at such examples. I would suggest that scholars look at how such interest or skill groupings override or accentuate other issues of diversity (e.g., relationships across identity differences in athletic teams). In-group solidarity, or social solidarity, among other types of ideological groupings would also be interesting and informative in understanding how to address issues of privilege and power in school settings.

This study also purposefully looked for sites of possibility (i.e., interventions/experiences in schools that built solidarity across difference) in diverse school settings. However, other types of solidarity are similarly relevant to understanding issues of solidarity and diversity in schools and also understudied. For example, there is a

rise in White pride and/or anti-foreigner pride groups in colleges and high schools throughout the United States and Europe. Studying these groups would offer a glimpse into the youth social movements that are antithetical to the work of students in this study but would be instructive in addressing issues of discrimination in schools.

In order to reveal how solidarity is enacted in daily life, solidarity theory needs to be more dynamic and less rigid. This study also reveals that more complex and dynamic constructions of solidarity better reflect how young people enact solidarity in their daily lives. While the use of specific types of solidarity do serve a diagnostic purpose, the blending and overlap that seems to be inherent in acts of solidarity may mean that the use of labeling obscures important matters. For example, in this study, a focus on *political solidarity* primarily would have meant not seeing most of the youth who primarily were helpers or messengers. I believe this would be a missed applied and theoretical contribution to an understanding of solidarity across difference in schools. In future studies of how solidarity is enacted in the daily lives of youth, I would recommend a fluid and open conception of solidarity.

In using solidarity as a conceptual lens to think about metaphorical encounters across the borders that determine difference, I entered rich terrain. This focus allowed for an examination of how young people think about difference, think about connection, and think about their role in relationships across difference. However, it meant that, due to limitations of time and resources, I needed to focus on specific youth in the schools who were most visibly allied across difference. I would recommend, therefore, that scholars think about looking at examples of solidarity across difference on a typical school day or in an unexpected space such as gym class, athletic games, school dances, or the cafeteria.

Examining solidarity in temporal ways or in specific sites would provide scholars with opportunities to study young people who are less conspicuousness in school settings.

Due to the fluid and dynamic enactments of solidarity in daily life, the concept of cultural solidarity provides scholars a theoretical apparatus to capture how some young people think about and build solidarity across difference. Finally, in terms of theoretical implications, cultural solidarity, a concept based on the hopes and goals of the students in this study and discussed in Chapter 4, melds the goals and interests of multiple forms of solidarity. Cultural solidarity is a concept that seeks to capture an interest the students had to alter the ways people understand and interact with difference. The students in this study enacted various forms of solidarity (including human, social, civic/institutional, and political solidarity) for many reasons but their long-term goal was to alter the cultures of their homes, communities, and schools. Like the concept of political solidarity, which is an act of connecting based on a desire for political change, cultural solidarity in these school settings was a solidarity that formed among those who desired cultural change. Scholars should consider whether acts of human, social, civic, or political solidarity are attempts to further or instill specific values, habits, and beliefs within a cultural group. If so, the concept of cultural solidarity, as a form of solidarity which unites individuals who desire cultural change, is worthy of further exploration.

Policy and Pedagogy Implications

Based on the experiences and beliefs of the young people in this study, there are a series of pedagogical implications that are worthy of note for administrators, educators,

and others interested in how to build school cultures committed to nurturing solidarity across difference.

School cultures can enable or limit students' capacity to enter into and enact solidarity. While this study focused on students, there is no question that the students were shaped by their school environments. In both schools, there were policies, philosophies, programs, opportunities, and most importantly, adults and peers who pushed where they believed these schools could go. Boys High had experienced difficult, and often public, moments of cruelty across difference. City High struggled as well with some public events that they believed were violations of the spirit and the philosophy of the school. The less public events seemed to be just as significant to the students. These schools were at a place in their history where the administration, many teachers (although not all), and many students welcomed change.

Adult and student leaders within school settings should think about and evaluate their goals for specific interventions. Unlike in other school settings where public struggles with bullying or other forms of violence could result in defensiveness and superficial change, the struggles these schools faced led them to want internal and sincere change. In order to create lasting change, some adults in these schools were comfortable with students taking ownership over some specific interventions. The schools allowed for and often facilitated public conversations around issues of homophobia, racism, and sexism in the school communities and in the larger communities. The students, over time, became very comfortable with the idea that their schools were "in process"—communities that were attempting to figure out how to become better multicultural spaces, through hard work.

The histories of struggle and the documentation of the leadership of their students in the midst of this struggle provide notable lessons to other schools. In the case of City High, the founding principles allowed the school to nurture and foster leadership that was explicitly about social and political change. City High had been founded on principles of equity and social justice and so conversations around power and privilege and prejudice were natural extensions of that commitment. If schools are able to create (or recreate) missions and philosophies to guide and ground comfort and celebration of difference, the development of solidarity across difference is a natural extension of those commitments. Additionally, City High had proven itself to be a site of successful academic preparation and this success allowed the school to focus on building a culture where more students would thrive. Administrators should think about how to allow these types of interventions in all schools including ones that are academically struggling. It is possible that solidarity-oriented interventions could foster student success, student leadership, student ownership/ investment in their school, and pride in a school environment. Researchers should also think about studying solidarity in spaces that are not as successful in preparing students academically as City and Boys High are.

Boys High, on the other hand, as a site of study, offered different but connected lessons. Boys High was undergoing a very public reprimand due to a series of events that called into question the role and perhaps negative impact of all-boys schooling. This public reprimand was painful for many of the students of the school who definitely wanted Boys High to change in certain ways but also loved their school. Most of the young men had deeply ambivalent feelings about how outsiders understood and portrayed their community. I believe this public reprimand was important in the process of spurning

lasting cultural change in the school; however, the media was unquestionably limited in its coverage of the events and demonstrated little and possibly no concern for the impact of their coverage on the students and teachers in the school.

The tremendous leadership of students at Boys High, for example, in terms of developing relationships across difference and addressing the issues within the school was completely ignored by the media. As is often the case in coverage of schools and issues of diversity, the focus was almost solely on the sites of struggle and violence, obscuring the sites of hope and possibility. Schools and the media should think about how to address this imbalance and their ability to feature both the strengths and the struggles of school communities in the midst of tragedies due to discrimination. Many of the students at Boys High felt strong pride and love for their education at Boys High and the principles of brotherhood and honor that had been fostered in the school community. The young men also wanted profound change and were rightfully afraid that the public rebuke would lead to an image shift but not a true and lasting cultural change.

Despite the cultural and structural limitations that existed in both schools, such as an overwhelming public relations focus, the schools fostered leadership among their students. Both of these schools were open to change and had a solid foundation that allowed them to be comfortable with change. Both schools were also concerned about appearances and this concern was frustrating to the students to whom I spoke. I would recommend that schools facing similar circumstances have conversations with their students about negotiating external image concerns with the everyday struggles the students themselves are having within the school community. Not unlike the common

invoked Vietnam-era quote, "dissent is patriotic,"[45] it behooves schools to create a school culture where disagreement does not reflect a lack of school spirit. An understanding of school spirit as including critique was common at Boys High where Kevin indicated that his appreciation of Boys High led to his campaign to change it and where Cyan's frustration with racial issues at Boys High led him to run for Student Government president.

Effective and authentic adult/student relationships facilitate the creation of solidarity across difference. Educators should think about ways to quietly and actively support the leadership of students. The students made it clear that the praise and investment by the adults around them bolstered their commitment to building connections across difference. The adults they valued clearly respected them even before they were leaders in the school, believed in them, saw their potential even in what Blanca referred to as "darker times," like when she was "not yet a leader" or when she struggled with being a positive role model. The adults that supported them understood there were different ways to lead and that Elvis or Salam or Jel would lead in profoundly different ways and that all of those ways were important for the health of the school community. Both schools had adults who quietly and persistently nurtured leadership in students.

Many of the students in this study were not typical student leaders—they were quieter students, they were students who were less traditional leaders. This almost pervasive commitment at both schools to nurturing leadership in less likely suspects was clearly impacting the school communities. There are many student leadership models and student leadership programs that can help with that process, as similar programs did for

---

[45] Saying often misattributed to Thomas Jefferson or Howard Zinn. See
http://www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/dissent-highest-form-patriotism-quotation

the youth in this study. Utilizing these programs to support the leadership development of students can allow schools to build a cadre of students who are informed in issues of justice and leadership and can quickly and confidently impact school communities.

Both schools had adults who were committed to and fluent in issues of diversity and social justice. These adults fostered leadership in students. Cyan went to his first GSA meeting at Boys High because a coach suggested he should. This type of adult attention was invaluable to the students. The coach communicated to Cyan that he saw him as a leader. The leadership of every student in this study was initially supported and later championed by an adult in the school community. In the cases of Jel, Hank, Cyan, Blanca, Terra, Debara, Gael and Elvis, adults in the school community—counselors, teachers, administrators—were the primary force that brought them to even consider becoming an ally to a marginalized population.

Specific curricular and extracurricular opportunities can foster and strengthen acts of solidarity by students. This study revealed that solidarity across difference can be nurtured in high school students. Programs and policies can foster new ways of thinking about difference. City High was beginning to do justice-oriented international trips for its students. Schools that have experienced deep and painful psychosocial and cultural injury through acts of violence or bullying are ripe for the use of these types of interventions.

In both schools, the faculty and students did not think a Gay/Straight Alliance would be well-received. In the first few years of the program at both schools, the GSA was hidden from most of the student body. Initially, they used to meet in the basement in a classroom with paper over the windows. Four years later, it was rare for me to enter the

school without the GSA being as visible as any other group in the school. When the GSA started at Boys High, it was similarly hidden. Now, at Boys High, it is promoted at Admissions Open Houses. At City High, the 2012 Day of Silence (where students pledge to be silent to protest the silencing of others due to homophobia), included pledges by over 100 students (a quarter of the student body). These are significant cultural shifts and reflect a long and arduous journey for these school communities. The power of the GSA at both schools is unquestionably advanced by the leadership of students and by adults who are comfortable with youth leadership and youth ownership of the school. The adults serve as a smart, thoughtful, behind-the-scenes safety net, recruiters, and intellectual prods. The adults who seemed most respected by the students were quiet and humble but also intellectually ferocious in their attempts to help the students navigate their own privilege, power, and identities.

Both schools are working to build a new culture around gender/sexuality as well. City High's interventions include speakers, extracurricular activities, theme-based advisories that attempt to build a healthy understanding of masculinity and femininity. These interventions seem to be slow acting but are a daily reminder of the importance of this work. Both schools seemed less clear on how to address conflict around class and disability both inside and outside their classrooms.

City High also was struggling to address the tensions between African Americans and Caribbean Blacks as well as between Latinos and the various Black communities in their school. I do think that more curricula around these dimensions of difference would benefit high schools tremendously. For example, understanding various histories of forced versus voluntary migration and the implications of those histories on communities

or discussions about how systems of oppression and seemingly scarce resources impact minority group relations would be of value to schools like City High. Black student alliances which attempt to address ethnic/cultural conflicts similarly would be of value.

Opportunities for leadership around issues of inequality are unquestionably essential. Intellectual exchanges, such as coursework, lectures, guest speakers, fieldtrips, opportunities for conferences (there are conferences throughout the United States and world for social justice issues that would be appropriate for teens), are essential in the development of students who seek to build solidarity across difference. I would recommend that schools ask external organizations for trainings to help adults and students think differently about issues of identity.[46] Grassroots justice organizations often have staff that run trainings or at the very least can help schools think about how to avoid common pitfalls when building "service" types of experiences in communities not your own.

Supporting students as they found a GSA or Multicultural Alliance is a way to begin to build a culture of solidarity in a school community. All of the students in this study were given the opportunity to be cultural change agents and leaders at their schools. Adults in the school community unquestionably nurtured the leadership of these students.

Short interventions can create an important inspirational foundation for the development of relationships across difference. Based on the students' experiences, I

---

[46] Organizations like Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (see www.glsen.org/) have made GSAs seemingly ubiquitous within a decade. Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance curriculum has also been widely spread. The compelling aspects of the curricular and extracurricular activities of programs like these are they provide materials for short interventions as well as longer interventions. I believe that gender organizations (working for women's and transgender rights), poverty organizations, and other identity-based prejudice reduction groups should look to these models and attempt to market and package these types of interventions to secondary schools, perhaps, in particular, those struggling with or recovering from identity-based violence.

recommend that educators/administrators think about the use of short interventions to begin the development of solidarity across difference in their schools. In both schools, short interventions, such as day-long interactions across difference, gave students an opportunity to have a glimpse into the experiences of strangers. These opportunities were sometimes set up as days of service but not solely. They were also often followed up by longer term opportunities and conversations about privilege, specific dimensions of identity (such as understanding dis/ability or HIV/AIDS or poverty or sexuality), and historical and modern systems of oppression. I would highly recommend such interventions especially when conducted by individuals who are familiar with how to make these opportunities explicitly about understanding macro and micro issues of justice, access, and historical legacies of discrimination, etc.

For example, at City High, almost all students had been impacted by the passive (posters, buttons, etc.) education around difference, as well as the carefully constructed trips to witness the critical community work that occurred in various communities (e.g. trips to domestic violence shelters, dynamic and unique soup kitchens, schools in prisons, community gardens, etc.). These trips moved the conversation from, "look at the poor people who are hungry" to, "look at how communities are addressing struggles in their communities." This shift, especially when it focuses on the innovations in marginalized communities, allows one-day opportunities to be about entrepreneurship and leadership versus pity and squalor.

I would recommend that schools always balance "service" types of opportunities in the communities of strangers with opportunities to address issues in ones' own community. Creating educational (not just pro-social) objectives surrounding these types

of trips are important. For example, educators may want to frame such an experience as a chance to understand oppressive circumstances within historical contexts as well as a chance to learn from how communities address issues. Both schools were quite strong when providing these types of opportunities around issues of race and international issues. They struggled to have as effective opportunities around issues of disability, class, or gender.

At Boys High, there was a curriculum of talks about issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion from fellow students, teachers, community members, and famous speakers. The lectures were followed by conversations among advisory groups. While the students at Boys High felt some of these talks were more effective than others, the permanence of these talks in their weekly schedules definitely made it clear to the students that this was a priority of the school.

Students at Boys High were clear that curricular changes were essential. I believe schools struggling with gender/sexuality/race issues like Boys High would be served by gender, ethnic, and international (specifically subaltern) studies coursework. The school is hyper academic and while ideally all of their curriculum would become more integrated, the presence of such coursework would give intellectual heft to their claims of valuing diversity and minority/marginalized populations. The young people in this study were clear that contact and exposure led to some of the most important intellectual and emotional pivots in their thinking about difference. Single sex/single gender schools should think about this while attempting to address the documented gender issues that occur as a result of single sex education (see Campbell and Sanders, 2002; Connell, 2002; Douthirt Cohen, 2012; Jackson, 2010).

Despite the struggles faced in both school communities, there were multiple well-conceived and intentional opportunities to discuss and address prejudice, fear of difference, and students' own struggles due to identity. Salam felt his opportunities to write creative non-fiction essays about the complexity of his own identity in his 10th grade classes altered how he saw himself and his confidence in the school community. Debara's opportunity to Skype with Iraqi teens was arranged by her school. Blanca was sent by her school to a social justice leadership camp when she was a first year in high school before she "had any sense of what it meant to be a leader." The extracurricular and curricular activities had a profound impact on the students in this study—the opportunities shaped their commitments, their understandings of themselves, and their belief that they could cause change.

Similarly, certain classes really fostered their critical thinking and other classes seemed to suppress it. Most of the students spoke about teachers and courses where they saw questions similar to the ones they were asking as they questioned systems of inequality. There were classes that exposed them to new ways of thinking, foreign ways of thinking, and dynamic ways of understanding the world. This coursework seemed to mirror many of the questions they were asking as documented in Chapter 3 around issues such as systems of inequality, contextual privilege, different forms of power, the history of youth-based social movements, complicated lived experiences of identity, ambiguity, fear of difference, etc. I believe that schools that are attempting to build more connections across difference, and specifically solidarity, should think about ways to introduce these concepts into their formal and informal curriculum. All of these interventions, of course, require the presence of adults in the school or community who are trained to facilitate

these conversations. However, both City and Boys Highs also relied upon external programs and organizations to help foster these understandings in adults and students. Other schools can do the same.

Where We Want to Go

Among the greatest lessons these students' journeys offer us is their highly developed ability to recognize an environment's potential and capacity for cultural change. The students were able to spot sites that allowed for or facilitated deep and sustained border crossings. They were able to envision what changes they wanted in their schools and communities. They became informed and sophisticated optimists about the potential of their schools to serve as sites of cultural change. I will end this dissertation with one of the experiences we shared which captures the students' keen instincts for what cultural change looks like and a surprising amount of clarity about what form it might take.

One afternoon I was on a fieldtrip with Blanca and other students from City High's Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA). We were on a trip to visit an alternative school for youth most of whom have been "safety transferred" (meaning moved from their high school because of literal safety concerns) out of mainstream schools usually due to transphobia or homophobia.[47] From the second we stepped into the alternative school, the City High students seemed to be in awe. At one moment, their admiration was directed at the intricate and beautiful murals on the walls. At the next moment, they were excited by how students dressed, with "so much color" and "individuality."

---

[47] This school addressed the pervasive physical and emotional violence directed at LGBT youth or youth who were perceived to be outside of gender or sexuality norms.

Then we passed a young male student carrying a school bag with the inscription, "I kiss boys" on its side. It was then that I heard the first whispers, "Oh, I need to leave [City High] and transfer here." They immediately realized that this bag, used to carry schoolbooks, was a cultural indicator of a space that was safe, riddled with pride, fun, and self-respect. The presence of this bag meant more than most of the "Safe Space" buttons on the shirts of City High allies. This bag meant you could have fun, be adolescently provocative *and be gay* in this school. Their comments and excitement made it clear: a few miles away from City High, this school was a new and different world that they liked.

While waiting for our tour guide, we entered a classroom that was a chance to dance on Wednesday afternoons, "for afterschool exercise and fun." There was music playing and students dancing and laughing in the center of the room. Blanca and I sat down next to each other in two of the chairs strewn around the classroom. The joy in the room was palpable and like nothing else that I have ever felt in any school. Blanca turned to me and mouthed, "This is amazing, right?" I nodded in agreement.

A dancing student kept looking over at me. I was one of two adults in the room, the only White person in the room, and clearly a stranger. After a few more glances, the student, who was about 14 or 15, came over to us. The student said in my ear, competing with the music, "I don't know you." I nodded, smiled, and began to respond, but before I could, the student mouthed, "Watch this." The student did a dance move, then turned and posed, and screamed, "See? Now I am a boy…" and then the student turned again, posed differently, and said, "And now I am a girl!" The student kept posing differently and said

"Girl!…Boy!…Girl! And now, Boy!" Blanca and I smiled and nodded with appreciation and respect.

The poses were exceptional and it was unquestionably true, with a pretend flip of the hair, or a different look, different eye contact, or a change of the body's posture, the student seemed to crisscross the borders between and in-between various gender identities and expressions. I could not help but think that Judith Butler's (1990) concept of gender as a performative repetition of stylized acts in time was captured better by this teenager than any scholar could ever explain it. This student's interaction with us was not just a display of border crossing. It was also a challenge, a question, from this student to strangers. It was a declaration of space and a cultural assertion—*this is my space, this is who I am, this is my way of being here, I will not change for you*. I looked at the City High students and they seemed to be transfixed by the ambiguity of borders and the comfort with crossing, re-crossing, and altering borders so vividly on display before us.

Later, Blanca just kept shaking her head and talking about how powerful it was to be in that room and how that room reflected what she wanted to be the result of her acts of solidarity:

> This is where I want [City High] to go. I am not sure we can do it…but [that school] did, right? So maybe?... I wanted to go in there and dance with them. Like, 'Let me dance with you…' Are things changing? I mean if you had told me when I was 14 that I would see kids who are dancing in drag at a school and that adults were cool with it, I don't think I would believe it. But, [it is happening]. It isn't [here at City High]…but maybe it could be. Not today. But that doesn't mean it won't be tomorrow. "

Blanca, like the other students in this study, believes there is profound courage involved in encountering, altering, and crossing borders. She wants her school to become more comfortable with ambiguity in identity and to embrace those who dwell on and around

borders. Her solidarity includes a desire for a cultural shift where identity borders are permeable and pliable and the borders that maintain systems of privilege and power can be erased. The students' actions and experiences gave them a profound sense of hope— what I would refer to as an *educated* hope—whittled over time by what they made happen, what they wanted to happen, and what they had seen was possible.

The students' acts of solidarity were part of a desired transaction. They are building solidarity and want schools to do the same by changing their practices, philosophies, staffing, programs, and pedagogy. They want their schools, communities, and peers to build solidarity *with them*. They are role modeling the connections across difference that they want others to build. They want schools that can foster solidarity across identity difference, build comfort with the ambiguity and complexity inherent in identity, and nurture young people who are becoming a new generation of social, political, and cultural justice workers.

Appendix

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Project Title	**Constructions of Solidarity by High School Students:** **An Ethnographic Study of Youth Allies**
Why is this research being done?	This is a research project being conducted by Beth Douthirt Cohen under the guidance of Dr. Barbara Finkelstein (Principal Investigator) at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting your son or daughter to participate in this research project because your son or daughter is part of a club or organization in their high school where they do work that supports the human rights of other people. The purpose of this research project is to understand how high school students think about concepts of solidarity or alliance with communities or identities that are different from their own.
What will my child be asked to do?	Your son or daughter would participate in conversations about their schooling and life experiences which have led them to do work where they advocate for others. These conversations will **always** be optional and will take approximately no more than one hour per month *outside of class time*. The name and location of the school will not be revealed in any of the resulting documents and your child's name will never be used (pseudonyms will be given). From the experiences of your child, scholars and educators can better understand the possibilities and constraints of activities, programming and policies like those at your son/daughter's school.
What are the risks of this research?	Risks to your son or daughter are minimal and are the same as would be encountered in normal day to day experiences which include the social consequences of voicing opinions within a school community. However, this risk is mediated through 1) all conversations between the researcher and the student being kept confidential, 2) in any documentation of the conversations, the subjects and the location of the study will be anonymous (the locations will only be referred to using pseudonyms and with very general identifiers such as "urban public co-ed high school in the Northeastern United States" or "suburban private all-boys school in the Northeastern United States," etc.) and 3) the participants will review all direct quotes for accuracy.
What are the benefits of this research?	Benefits to the students involved in the study are numerous as the methodology offers many informal and formal opportunities for the students to discuss the activities they do in their school community. The students will only reveal what they are interested in discussing. The students will be able to express themselves confidentially, anonymously and without the pressures normally associated with adults who are a part of a school setting. This will offer the students an opportunity to discuss and voice their life experiences that have led them to this work and the resulting consequences of this work on their social well-being. In addition, the findings will expand researchers and

	practitioners' understandings of the cultural constraints and possibilities for schools in supporting young people's leadership.
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	Your child's participation in this research is **voluntary**. You or they may choose to end their participation at any time or not to take part at all. Participation is not at all connected to your child's participation in any school activity and if they decide not to participate in this study or if they stop participating at any time, they will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.
What about confidentiality?	We will do our best to keep your child's personal information confidential. To help protect confidentiality, the following will occur: (1) No names of students will be used and the location (city, state, school name) of the study will not be revealed nor any information that could lead to the specific identity of the school (2) Your child will be referred to using a pseudonym and no clearly distinguishing information will be revealed in resulting documents (3) through the use of an identification key, ONLY the researcher will be able to link information to his/her identity; and (4) only the researcher will have access to the identification key. **PLEASE SELECT ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:** **___If my child is comfortable with it, I <u>agree</u> to the recording of the conversations between the researcher and my child for transcription purposes <u>ONLY</u>. I understand these conversations will be confidential.** **___I do <u>not</u> agree to the recording of the conversations between the researcher and my child for transcription purposes only.** Transcriptions of the conversations will be kept for a period of ten years in accordance with University of Maryland requirements. Your child's identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose information to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities that comes to our attention if your child or someone else is in danger. Transcriptions of the conversations will be kept for a period of ten years in accordance with University of Maryland requirements. Your child's identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose information to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities that comes to our attention if your child or someone else is in danger.

What if I have questions?	This research is being conducted by Beth Douthirt Cohen under the guidance of Dr. Barbara Finkelstein at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Barbara Finkelstein at: 3110 Benjamin Building, College of Education, Department of Education Policy Studies, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742. Dr. Finkelstein's email is bf@umd.edu. **Beth Douthirt Cohen's contact information is bdc1@umd.edu (that is bdc and the number 1) and her phone number is 443-255-7667.** If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678 This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.
Statement of Age of Subject and Consent	Your signature indicates that: • you are at least 18 years of age and the legal guardian of the student who will participate; • you understand the research that will occur; • your questions have been fully answered; and • you freely and voluntarily choose allow your child to participate in this research project.
Signature and Date	**PRINT NAME OF SUBJECT** **(Name of your child)**	
	PRINT YOUR NAME **(Parent or legal guardian)**	
	SIGNATURE **OF PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN**	
	FULL DATE (M/D/YEAR)	

Revised 05/05/10

MINOR ASSENT FORM

Project Title	Constructions of Solidarity by High School Students: An Ethnographic Study of Youth Allies
Why is this research being done?	This is a research project being conducted by Beth Douthirt Cohen under the guidance of Dr. Barbara Finkelstein (Principal Investigator) at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are part of an activity, club, or organization where you do work that supports a marginalized or minority population. The purpose of this research project is to understand how high school students think about relationships with communities or identities that are in some way different from their own.
What will I be asked to do?	You will be asked to participate in conversations that explain your experiences, which have led you to do work where you advocate for a marginalized or minority population. The conversations **will always be optional** and will generally take no more than one hour per month outside of class time. You may chose not to participate at any time without any penalty. The name and location of the school will not be revealed in any of the resulting documents and your real name will never be used.
What about confidentiality?	We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, the following will occur: (1) No names of students will be used and the location (city, state, school name) of the study will not be revealed. (2) You will be referred to using a pseudonym (meaning a made-up name that you can choose) and no clearly distinguishing information will be revealed in resulting documents (3) through the use of an identification key, the researchers will be able to link your comments to your identity; and (4) only the researchers will have access to the identification key. **During each conversation we have, the researcher will ask you if it is okay if she records the conversation only for the purposes of clearly remembering what you say. In any recordings we will only use your pseudonym.** Your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with official representatives of the University of Maryland, College

	Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
What are the risks of this research?	Risks to you are **minimal** and are the same as would be encountered in normal day-to-day experiences including, for example, the social consequences of voicing opinions within a school community. However, this risk is less because 1) all conversations between the researcher and the student are confidential, 2) in any documentation of the conversations, the subjects and the location of the study will be anonymous and 3) the participants can review all direct quotes for accuracy.
What are the benefits of this research?	The benefits to you include providing you with an opportunity to discuss the important work you are doing in your community and to further explore the impact that it can make on your learning and life opportunities. You are also able to express yourself without the pressures normally associated with discussions with adults as your comments are kept **anonymous and confidential.** There is so much that educators, administrators and researchers can learn from your experiences. For example, beyond benefits to you, this study will expand researchers and practitioners understandings of how young people conceive of this leadership, how they experience it, and the possibilities for this work within school communities. Additionally, it is important for researchers and practitioners to have more opportunities to hear the opinions and ideas of high school students. You will offer them that opportunity.
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	Your participation in this research is voluntary. You or your parent/guardian may choose to end your participation at any time or you can decide not to take part at all. Participation is not at all connected to your participation in any school activity and if you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized in any way.
What if I have questions?	This research is being conducted by Beth Douthirt Cohen under the guidance of Dr. Barbara Finkelstein at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Barbara Finkelstein at: 3110 Benjamin Building, College of Education, Department of Education Policy

	Studies, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742. Dr. Finkelstein's email is bf@umd.edu. **Beth Douthirt Cohen's contact information is bdc1@umd.edu (that is bdc and the number 1) and her cell phone number is 443-255-7667.** If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678**
Statement of Assent	*Your signature indicates that:* • *the research has been explained to you;* • *your questions have been fully answered; and* • *you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.*
Signature and Date	**NAME OF MINOR**	
	SIGNATURE OF MINOR	
	DATE	

Revised 05/05/10

Bibliography

Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P. (1997). *Teaching for diversity and social justice: A sourcebook*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Adler, P. A., & Adler, P. (2008). Of rhetoric and representation: The four faces of ethnography. *The Sociological Quarterly, 49*(1), 1-30.

Agar, M. (1996). *The professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography*. San Diego: Academic Press.

Ahmed, S. (2000). *Thinking through feminism*. London: Routledge.

Alberts, H. C. (2005) Changes in Ethnic Solidarity in Cuban Miami. *Geographical Review, 95*(2), 231-248.

Alonso, A. M. (2004). Conforming Disconformity: "Mestizaje," Hybridity, and the Aesthetics of Mexican Nationalism. *Cultural Anthropology, 19*(4), 459-490.

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands : the new mestiza = La frontera* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute.

Anzaldúa, G., & Keating, A. (2000). *Interviews = Entrevistas*. New York: Routledge.

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large : cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press.

Arrizon, A. (2006). Imaginary Spaces: Aztlan and the `Native' Body in Chicana/o Feminist Cultural Productions. In, *Queering Mestizaie: Transculturation and Performance.* Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press,49-82.

Arsenault, R. (2006). *Freedom riders: 1961 and the struggle for racial justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ashby, C. (2011) Whose "Voice" is it Anyway?: Giving Voice and Qualitative

Research Involving Individuals that Type to Communicate. *Disability Studies Quarterly, 31*(4).

Atkinson, P. (2001). *Handbook of ethnography*. London: Sage.

Au, W. (2009). *Rethinking multicultural education: Teaching for racial and cultural justice*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.

Banks, J. A. (2009). *The Routledge international companion to multicultural education*. New York: Routledge.

Bayertz, K. (1999). *Solidarity*. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Bernard, H. R. (2006). *Research methods in anthropology: qualitative and quantitative approaches* (4th ed.). Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London ; New York: Routledge.

Bhabha, H. K., & Peet, R. (1997). The Location of Culture. *Area, 29*(4), 378.

Bigelow, B., & Peterson, B. (1998). *Rethinking Columbus: The next 500 years*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.

Black, R. S., & Pretes, L. (2007). Victims and Victors: Representation of Physical Disability on the Silver Screen. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities (rpsd), 32*(1), 66-83.

Blatter, J. and Clement, N. (2000). Cross-border cooperation in Europe: Historical development, institutionalization, and contrasts with North America. *Journal of Borderland Studies, XV*(1).

Blumenfeld, W. J. (2006). Christian Privilege and the Promotion of "Secular" and Not-So "Secular": Mainline Christianity in Public Schooling and in the Larger Society. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 39*(3), 195-210.

Brewer, J. D. (2000). *Ethnography*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

Broido, E. M. (2000). The Development of Social Justice Allies During College: A Phenomenological Investigation. *Journal of College Student Development, 41* (1), 3.

Brown, S. G. (2000). *Words in the wilderness : critical literacy in the borderlands*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Brumback, K. (September 22, 2011). Troy Davis supporters gather around the world to protest, mourn. *Christian Science Monitor*.

Brunkhorst, H. (2005). *Solidarity: from civic friendship to a global legal community*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.

Calmes, J. and Baker, P. (May 8, 2012) Obama says same sex marriage should be legal. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/10/us/politics/obama-says-same-sex-marriage-should-be-legal.html

Campbell, P., and J. Sanders (2002). Challenging the system: Assumptions and data behind the push for single-sex schooling. In *Gender in policy and practice: Perspectives on single sex and coeducational schooling,* ed. A. Datnow and L. Hubbard, 31–46. New York: Routledge Falmer.

Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (2008). *Revolutionizing education: youth participatory action research in motion*. New York: Routledge.

Card, C. (1996). Rape as a Weapon of War. *Hypatia*, *11*, 5–18.

Chenoweth, K. (2007). *It's being done: Academic success in unexpected schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Chesir-Teran, D. N. (2003). Conceptualizing and assessing heterosexism in high schools: A setting-level approach. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *31*, 267–280.

Chong, D. & Rogers, R. (2005) Racial Solidarity and Political Participation. *Political Behavior, 27*(4), 347-374.

Cladis, M. S. (2003). *Public vision, private lives: Rousseau, religion, and 21st-century democracy*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

Clifford, J. (1983). On Ethnographic Authority. *Representations, 2*, 118-146.

Clifford, J., & Marcus, G. E. (1986). *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Comte, A., & Jones, H. S. (1998). *Early political writings*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Connell, R.W. 2002. *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Cowhey, M. (2006). *Black ants and buddhists: Thinking critically and teaching differently in the primary grades*. Portland, Me: Stenhouse.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Dance, L. J. (2002). *Tough fronts: The impact of street culture on schooling*. New York: Routledge.

Dave N. (2011). Indian and lesbian and what came next: Affect, commensuration, and

queer emergences. *American Ethnologist, 38*(4), 650-665.

Delpit, L. (1995, 2005). *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: Norton & Co., Inc.

DeWalt, K. M., & DeWalt, B. R. (2002). *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.

Dill, B. T., & Zambrana, R. E. (2009). *Emerging intersections: race, class, and gender in theory, policy, and practice*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Douthirt Cohen, B. (2012). Reimagining gender through policy development: the case of a 'single-sex' educational organisation. *Gender and Education,* 1-17.

Durkheim, É. (1954). *The elementary forms of the religious life*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Durkheim, É., & Simpson, G. (1933). *Émile Durkheim on the division of labor in society*. New York: Macmillan.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Evans, N. J., & Broido, E. M. (2005). Encouraging the Development of Social Justice Attitudes and Actions in Heterosexual Students. *New Directions for Student Services, 110*, 43-54.

Evans, N., Assadi, J., & Herriott, T. (2005). Encouraging the Development of Disability Allies. *New Directions for Student Services, 2005,* 110, 67.

Evans, N. J., & Wall, V. A. (1991). *Beyond tolerance: Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals on campus*. Alexandria, VA: American College Personnel Association.

Falzon, M.-A. (2009). *Multi-sited ethnography: Theory, praxis and locality in contemporary research*. Farnham, England: Ashgate.

Fanon, F., & Philcox, R. (2004). *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove Press.

Fine, M. (2004). *Off white: readings on power, privilege, and resistance* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Fine, M., & Weis, L. (2003). *Silenced voices and extraordinary conversations : re-imagining schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Finkelstein, B. (In press). Teaching outside the lines: Education history for a world in motion. *History of Education Quarterly*.

Finkelstein, B., Pickert, S., Mahoney, T., & Barry, D. (1998). *Discovering culture in education: An approach to cultural education program evaluation*. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation.

Foucault, M. J. (1967, 1986). Of Other Spaces. *Diacritics, 16*(1), 22-27.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). New York: Continuum.

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Giroux, H. A. (1991). *Postmodernism, feminism, and cultural politics: redrawing educational boundaries*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Giroux, H. A. (1997). *Pedagogy and the politics of hope: theory, culture, and schooling: a critical reader*. Boulder, Colo.: WestviewPress.

Giroux, H. A. (2001). *Theory and resistance in education: towards a pedagogy for the opposition* (Rev. and expanded ed.). Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey.

Gordon, T., Holland, J., & Lahelma, E. (2000). *Making spaces: Citizenship and difference in schools*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Gramsci, A., Hoare, Q., & Nowell-Smith, G. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Grewal, I., & Kaplan, C. (1994). *Scattered hegemonies: postmodernity and transnational feminist practices*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Guy, M. E. and Newman, M. A. (2004). Women's jobs, men's jobs: Sex segregation and emotional labor. *Public Administration Review, 64*, 289–298.

Hage, G. (2005). A not so multi-sited ethnography of a not so imagined community. *Anthropological Theory, 5*(4), 463-475.

Hagedorn, A. (2002). *Beyond the river: The untold story of the heroes of the Underground Railroad*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Hall, S., & Du Gay, P. (1996). *Questions of cultural identity*. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage in association with the Open University.

Hall, S., Jhally, S., & Media Education Foundation. (1997). Stuart Hall: representation & the media [videorecording]. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation.

Hall, S., Morley, D., & Chen, K.-H. (1996). *Stuart Hall: critical dialogues in cultural studies*. New York: Routledge.

Hawkes, A. (March 12, 2011). Japan earthquake rocks London stock market. *The Guardian*.

Hemphill, E. (2007). *Brother to brother: New writings by Black gay men*. Washington, D.C: Redbone Press.

Hill Collins, P. (2000). *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (10th ed.). New York: Routledge.

Hill Collins, P. (2009). *Another kind of public education: Race, schools, the media, and democratic possibilities*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Hooker, J. (2009). *Race and the politics of solidarity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

hooks, B. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Horst, C. (2009). Expanding sites: The question of 'depth' explored. In M.A. Falzon (Eds.), *Multi-sited ethnography: theory, praxis and locality in contemporary research (pp.119-133)*. Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Howard, G. R. (2006). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Howe, P. D. (2011). Cyborg and supercrip: The paralympics technology and the (Dis)empowerment of disabled athletes. *Sociology, 45*(5), 868-882.

Hughes, S. (2006). *Black hands in the biscuits, not in the classrooms: Unveiling hope in a struggle for Brown's promise*. New York: P. Lang.

Jackson, J. (2010). 'Dangerous presumptions': How single-sex schooling reifies false notions of sex, gender, and sexuality. *Gender and Education*, *22*(2), 227–38.

Jackson, J. L. (2005). *Real Black: Adventures in racial sincerity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Johnson, E. P. (2008). *Sweet tea: Black gay men of the South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Kidwell, C. S. (1992). Indian Women as Cultural Mediators. *Ethnohistory, 39*(2), 97-107.

Kimmel, M. (2007). Racism as Adolescent Male Rite of Passage. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 36*(2), 202-218.

Kimmel, M. S., & Ferber, A. L. (2003). *Privilege: A reader*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.

Kohlberg, L. (1981). *The philosophy of moral development: moral stages and the idea of justice* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Kreisberg, S. (1992). *Transforming power: Domination, empowerment, and education*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Kruks, S. (2001). *Retrieving experience: subjectivity and recognition in feminist politics*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Kumashiro, K. (2009). *Against common sense: teaching and learning toward social justice* (Rev. ed.). New York: Routledge.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). What we can learn from multicultural education research.

Educational Leadership, 51(8), 22-26.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Fighting for our lives: Preparing teachers to teach African American students. *Journal of Teacher Education, 51*(3), 206-14.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2005). Is the team all right? Diversity and teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 56*(3), 229-234.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). 2004 George and Louise Spindler Award Lecture: It's not the culture of poverty, it's the poverty of culture: The problem with teacher education. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 37*(2), 104-109.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher, 35*(7), 3-12.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Landsman, J. (2001). *A white teacher talks about race*. Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press.

Landsman, J., & Lewis, C. W. (2006). *White teachers, diverse classrooms: A guide to building inclusive schools, promoting high expectations, and eliminating racism*. Sterling, Va: Stylus Pub.

Lears, T. J. J. (1985). The concept of cultural hegemony: Problems and possibilities. *The American Historical Review, 90*(3), 567-593.

Lee, E., Menkart, D., & Okazawa-Rey, M. (2002). *Beyond heroes and holidays: A practical guide to K-12 anti-racist, multicultural education and staff development*. Washington, D.C.: Teaching for Change.

Lehrer, W., & Sloan, J. (2003). *Crossing the blvd: Strangers, neighbors, aliens in a new America*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Loewen, J. W. (2007). *Lies my teacher told me: Everything your American history textbook got wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Lomawaima, K. T., & McCarty, T. L. (2006). *"To remain an Indian:" Lessons in democracy from a century of Native American education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Madison, D. S. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.

Marcus, G. E. (1995). Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 24*, 95-117.

Markowitz, G. E., & Rosner, D. (1996). *Children, race, and power: Kenneth and Mamie Clark's Northside Center*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Marx, K., Engels, F., & Findlay, L. M. (2004). *The communist manifesto*. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press.

Marx, K., Engels, F., & Jones, G. S. (2002). *The communist manifesto*. Penguin classics. London: Penguin.

Marx, S. (2006). *Revealing the invisible: Confronting passive racism in teacher education*. New York: Routledge.

McClure, Molly (2006, January 1). Solidarity not Charity: Racism in Katrina Relief Work. *A Katrina Reader*. Retrieved from: http://www.cwsworkshop.org/katrinareader/node/461

McDonald, A. E., & Banks, C. A. (2007). *White teachers, diverse student*

populations: The impact of privilege. Thesis (M.A.T.). Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

McIntosh, P. (1988). *White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies*. Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, Center for Research on Women.

McLaren, P. (1995). *Critical pedagogy and predatory culture: oppositional politics in a postmodern era*. New York: Routledge.

McLaren, P. (1997). *Revolutionary multiculturalism: Pedagogies of dissent for the new millennium*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

McLaren, P., & Giroux, H. A. (1994). *Between borders: Pedagogy and the politics of cultural studies*. New York: Routledge.

Mead, M. (1928). *Coming of age in Samoa: A psychological study of primitive youth for western civilisation*. New York: W. Morrow & Co.

Milam, L. W. (1993). *CripZen: A manual for survival*. San Diego, CA: MHO & MHO Works.

Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Monroe, K. R. (2008). Cracking the code of genocide: The moral psychology of rescuers, bystanders, and Nazis during the Holocaust. *Political Psychology, 29*(5), 699-736.

Moon, D. (2004). *God, sex, and politics: Homosexuality and everyday theologies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Morton, K. (1995). The irony of service: Charity, project and social change in

service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *2*, 19–22.

Nieto, S. (2010). *The light in their eyes: Creating multicultural learning communities* (10th anniversary ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Nieto, S., & Bode, P. (2008). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

Noguera, P. (2003). *City schools and the American dream: Reclaiming the promise of public education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Noguera, P. (2008). *The trouble with Black boys: Essays on race, equity, and the future of public education* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Noguera, P., & Wing, J. Y. (2006). *Unfinished business: Closing the racial achievement gap in our schools* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, a Wiley imprint.

Noguera, P., Ginwright, S. A., & Cammarota, J. (2006). *Beyond Resistance! Youth activism and community change: New democratic possibilities for practice and policy for America's youth*. New York: Routledge.

Olesen, T. (2004). Globalising the Zapatistas: from Third World solidarity to global solidarity?. *Third World Quarterly, 25*(1), 255-267.

Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1994). *Racial formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge.

Paige, R., & Witty, E. P. (2010). *The black-white achievement gap: Why closing it is the greatest civil rights issue of our time*. New York, NY: AMACOM, American Management Association.

Paley, V. (1974). Experiences in color blindness. *The School Review, 82*(3), 455-467.

Paley, V. G. (1979, 2000). *White teacher*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Pascoe, C. J. (2007). *Dude, you're a fag: Masculinity and sexuality in high school*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pearson, H. (2010). Complicating intersectionality through the identities of a hard of hearing Korean adoptee: An autoethnography. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 43*(3), 341-356.

Pensky, M. (2008). *The ends of solidarity: Discourse theory in ethics and politics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Peshkin, A. (1986). *God's choice: The total world of a fundamentalist Christian school*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pincus, F. L. (November 01, 1996). Discrimination comes in many forms: Individual, institutional, and structural. *American Behavioral Scientist, 40*(2), 186-94.

Rippe, K. P. (1998) Diminishing solidarity. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice, 1*(3), 355-374.

Rothstein, R. (2004). The achievement gap: A broader picture. *Educational Leadership, 62*(3), 40-43.

Sandoval, C. (2000). *Methodology of the oppressed*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Scholz, S. J. (2008). *Political solidarity*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Shelby, T. (2002). Foundations of Black Solidarity: Collective Identity or Common Oppression? *Ethics, 112*(2), 231-266.

Sleeter, C. E., & McLaren, P. (1995). *Multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and*

the politics of difference. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Sørensen, E. (2008). Multi-Sited Comparison of "Doing Regulation". *Comparative Sociology, 7*(3), 311-337.

Spindler, G. D., & Spindler, L. S. (2000). *Fifty years of anthropology and education, 1950-2000: A Spindler anthology*. Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.

Spring, J. H. (2007). *Deculturalization and the struggle for equality: a brief history of the education of dominated cultures in the United States* (5th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Spring, J. H. (2008). *The intersection of cultures: multicultural education in the United States and the global economy* (4th ed.). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Starhawk, . (1987). *Truth or dare: Encounters with power, authority, and mystery*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Stevenson, A., & Waite, M. (2011). *Concise Oxford English dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sorensen, E. (2008). Multi-sited comparison of doing regulation. *Comparative Sociology, 7*(3), 311-337.

Subasić, E. (2008). *Political solidarity as a social change process: Dynamics of self-categorization in intergroup power relations*. Thesis (Ph.D.). Australian National University.

Takaki, R. (1993). Multiculturalism: Battleground or meeting ground? *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 530*, 109-121.

Takaki, R. T. (1993). *A different mirror: A history of multicultural America*. Boston:

Back Bay Books.

Tatum, B. D. (1992). Talking about race, learning about racism: The application of racial identity development theory in the classroom. *Harvard Educational Review, 62*(1), 1-24.

Tatum, B. D. (1994). Teaching White students about racism: The search for White allies and the restoration of hope. *Teachers College Record, 95*(4), 462-76.

Tatum, B. D. (1999). When you're called a racist. *The Education Digest, 65*(1), 29-32.

Tatum, B. D. (2003). *"Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?": And other conversations about race*. New York: Basic Books.

Tatum, B. D., & Knaplund, E. G. (1996). *Outside the circle?: The relational implications for white women working against racism*. Wellesley, MA: The Stone Center, Wellesley College.

Tauchert, A. (2002). Fuzzy gender: Between female-embodiment and intersex. *Journal of Gender Studies, 11*(1), 29-38.

Thomas, D. C. (2001). *The theory and practice of Third World solidarity*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Tyler, J. M., Jackman-Wheitner, L., Lenox, R., & Strader, S. (1997). A change-model approach to raising awareness of gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues among graduate students in counseling. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy, 22*(2), 37-43.

Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago guides to writing, editing, and publishing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vendantam, S. (2010). *The hidden brain: How our unconscious minds elect*

presidents, control markets, wage wars, and save our lives. New York: Spiegel & Grau.

Visweswaran, K. (1997). Histories of feminist ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 26,* 591-621.

Wall, V. A., & Evans, N. J. (2000). *Toward acceptance: Sexual orientation issues on campus*. Lanham, Md: University Press of America.

Watson, L. (1985) *'Decade for Women'*, speech given at United Nations Conference, Nairobi, Kenya, July 15-26.

Weber, L. (2001). *Understanding race, class, gender, and sexuality: a conceptual framework*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Weiner, J. (2011) The end of Jerry Lewis telethons: It's about time. *The Nation.* Retrieved from http://www.thenation.com/blog/163119/end-jerry-lewis-telethon-its-about-time#

Weis, L., & Fine, M. (2005). *Beyond silenced voices: Class, race, and gender in United States schools* (Rev. ed.). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Weissköppel, C. (2005). In and Out: Doing Ethnographic Research in a German-Sudanese Sufi Brotherhood. *Bayreuth African Studies Series, 75,* 113-132.

Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and literature*. Oxford [Eng.]: Oxford University Press. York: Routledge.

Wolf, D. L. (1996). *Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.

Zajdermann, P., & Buzareingues, A. de. (2006). *Judith Butler: philosophical encounters of the third kind.* Brooklyn, NY: First Run/Icarus Films.

Zuberi, T., & Bonilla-Silva, E. (2008). *White logic, white methods: Racism and*

methodology. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.