Negotiating Border Crossing: Influences of Social Identity on Service-Learning Outcomes

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This article presents the results of a narrative case study exploring the influences of social identity on the outcomes associated with a short-term immersion program focused on HIV/AIDS. Presented in the form of contextual, individual, and shared narratives, results suggest that participants crossed developmental, interpersonal, and cultural borders. Further, these "border crossings" facilitated powerful learning experiences that were inextricably tied to the context of HIV/AIDS. The findings of this study offer implications for educators interested in promoting developmental and civic outcomes through service-learning.

> God of Love, we confess our day to day failure to be human…
> We confess that we cut ourselves off from each other and we erect barriers of division.
> We confess that by silence and ill-considered word we have built up walls of prejudice.
> We confess that by selfishness and lack of sympathy we have stifled generosity and left little time for others…(from Riverside Church bulletin, March 16, 2008)

And so began the service at Riverside Church on our Sunday in New York City, the first full day on what would become the students' moniker for their experience, "ASB-New York." Little did we know that this reading would foreshadow the week to come. Our week as participants in an alternative spring break (ASB) program was spent not in a church but in a health center. Our days were spent on the "discrete unit," the place those living with AIDS called their home, and on the "elopement floor," so called because it housed residents deemed most at risk for flight. Here we assisted the recreational therapists; organized activities, discussions, and games; and visited with residents who rarely saw anyone from the outside world except those who worked at the health center. For many, the health center was a last stop; thus the leitmotif emerged for considering the realities of walls of prejudice, generosity, and silence.

The purpose of this article is to present the results of a study designed to explore the meaning college students made of their experiences as they crossed borders into unfamiliar physical, developmental, social, and cultural territories. To capture the richness and the complexity of their experiences, we tell this story by presenting their individual and shared narratives and a rich description of the context serving as the springboard for the narratives.

"Thinking and Talking About AIDS": Educating College Students about HIV/AIDS

In 2004, 13% of new HIV infections reported to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control occurred among youth ages 13-24 (U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2008). In addition, only 20.7% of college students report having ever received information about AIDS or HIV infection from their college or university [American College Health Association (ACHA), 2008], yet even when they know how to prevent HIV transmission, college students still engage in risky sexual behaviors (Opt, Loffredo, Knowles, & Fletcher, 2007). Although disquieting, statistics about U.S. college students are far less staggering when weighed on the global scale of HIV incidence (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2008). A daunting task facing college and university educators, then, is the need to educate students about HIV/AIDS in ways that translate into individual behavioral change.

Service-learning offers a promising fit for educating students about HIV/AIDS (Jones & Abes, 2003) and furthering their civic responsibility; however, few researchers have investigated specific service-learning strategies such as alternative spring break programs, despite their increasing popularity. Thus, a need exists for research that examines particular ser-

vice-learning experiences and investigates the meaning individuals make of HIV/AIDS and the sociocultural contexts in which service is situated.

Service-Learning and Short-Term Immersion Programs

Two theoretical strands inform our study: (1) canonical literature on the developmental benefits of service-learning and short-term immersion programs and (2) applications of critical and multicultural theory to service-learning through a blend of developmental and multicultural perspectives. This "critical developmental framework" (Jones, Gilbride-Brown, & Gasiorski, 2005) allowed us to investigate developmental border crossings using a critical lens appropriate for telling stories about HIV/AIDS (Düttman, 1996).

Developmental Outcomes and Service-Learning

Although service-learning first emerged in response to critiques of the traditional college curriculum (Eyler & Giles, 1999), there is now enough literature about service-learning to constitute a "canon" about this pedagogical practice. Developmental gains through service-learning are well documented (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jones & Abes, 2003; Jones & Hill, 2001; Milofsky & Flack, 2005; Rhoads, 1997; Youniss & Yates, 1997). Such gains often bridge the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive domains of development (Jones & Abes, 2004) and result in students' increased ability to trust their internal voices, build internal foundations, and secure internal commitments (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

Characterized by immersion in a culturally-specific setting for a short period of time, alternative break programs offer one promising yet understudied approach to service-learning (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Ivory, 1997; Rhoads & Neururer, 1998; Wade & Raba, 2003; Wessel, 2007). Prior research has identified student development, understanding community and self through cross-cultural engagement (Rhoads & Neururer, 1998), transformative educational experiences (Wessel, 2007), and challenges associated with re-entry (Ivory, 1997) as outcomes of alternative break programs (Hui, 2009), yet these studies give limited attention to the larger social contexts in which the service is situated. In the few studies where context is considered, developmental outcomes are explicitly linked to community service contexts that serve as the springboard for the meaning-making and transformations that occur (e.g., Jones, Rowan-Kenyon, Cilente, Hui, & Niehaus, in press; Kiely, 2005). Even in studies attending to context, much of the collegiate service-learning research is based on data collected using a snapshot approach, focuses on immediate rather than longer-term influences, and foregrounds individual development rather than structural change (Jones & Abes, 2004).

Critical and Multicultural Approaches to Service-Learning

Research has shown service-learning settings to be ideal for the use of critical, transformational, and multicultural frameworks (Butin, 2005a; Cípolle, 2004; Hayes & Cuban, 1997; Kiely, 2004, 2005; King, 2004; O'Grady, 2000; Pompa, 2002; Rosenberger, 2000). Central to critical and multicultural approaches to service-learning are the social structural realities in which school and society alike are embedded, with particular attention to race, class, gender, and other forms of difference, as well as constructs of mutuality and reciprocity (Rosenberger, 2000). Hayes and Cuban (1997) identified two concepts from critical theory—Giroux's (1992) notion of border pedagogy and Anzaldúa's work (1987/1990) on cultural borderlands—as fundamental to a theory of service-learning as border crossing. Examples included "physical borders" as well as "social boundaries," "borders of identity," "institutional borders," and "cultural borders" (Hayes & Cuban, pp. 75-76). In more recent examples, Gilbride-Brown (2008) applied critical race theory (Solórzano & Yasso, 2002) and critical discourse analysis (Foucault, 1972; Freire, 1971) to an examination of service-learning pedagogy. Camacho (2004) interrogated issues of power and privilege circulating in a service-learning project in Tijuana, Mexico. Although critical and multicultural theory may incidentally highlight individual learning, such approaches to service-learning generally focus on complex social structural issues rather than personal or interpersonal development (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

One notable exception is the work of Kiely (2004, 2005) who, drawing upon the work of Mezirow (2000), conducted a longitudinal case study focused on the transformation students experienced as participants in an international service-learning program. Kiely's investigation resulted in a model that identifies five interrelated learning processes that lead to transformative service-learning: contextual border-crossing, dissonance, personalizing, processing, and connecting. In particular, Kiely (2005) identified contextual border crossing as a major theme and teased out four dimensions of context that influence students' transformations: personal (e.g., students' biographies), structural (students' social identities such as race, gender, religion), historical (context related to the site, which in Kiely's case was Nicaragua), and programmatic (specifics of the trip

such as nature of the immersion, living conditions, program characteristics).

In naming these contextual influences on border crossing, Kiely's work extends the scholarship of Mezirow (2000), Daloz (2000), and others on transformative learning as "a deep shift in frame of reference" (Daloz, 2000, p. 104). In their study of individuals who met criteria for leading lives of commitment, Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks (1996) identified patterns in experiences of those committed to the common good. Among many conditions found to cultivate transformative learning in this study, only "*a constructive engagement with otherness*" (Daloz, 2000, p. 110) was shared by all participants. Other salient conditions included reflective discourse, the presence of a mentoring community, and opportunities for committed action. Scholars such as Kiely (2004, 2005) described both contextual influences on and conditions that foster transformative learning experiences for students. However, little scholarship exists to guide service-learning educators toward best practices for ASB trips that facilitate transformative learning and border crossing.

A Critical Developmental Approach

A growing body of scholarship blends developmental and critical approaches to investigate contextual influences on student development (e.g., Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007; Villalpando, 2003; Willie, 2003). Such theoretical intersections render a nuanced picture of student development and learning, viewing individuals in context, and offering a critique of the larger social contexts in which they are situated. Because alternative break programs seem ripe for investigation from both developmental and critical perspectives, the theoretical framework that guided this study utilizes the "critical developmental approach" developed by Jones, Gilbride-Brown, and Gasiorski (2005). This integrative framework incorporated theories of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Kegan, 1994), critical whiteness (Frankenberg, 1993), and critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2003). It reflects a developmental understanding of students but also "acknowledges…the privileging conditions that situate students in service environments …structures of inequality…, and the potential of service-learning as a critical pedagogy that opens up the possibility for anti-oppressive change" (Jones et al., p. 21).

Several service-learning scholars adopted such a framework (albeit by different names) in their approaches to the study of outcomes associated with service-learning. For example, Rhoads (1997) developed a framework of critical service-learning and Butin (2010) coined the term anti-foundational service-learning. This hybrid theoretical framework offered an emphasis on investigating both individual development that takes place in the context of community service sites as well as the larger social issues and contexts that spark such development. Specific to this study, we were interested in developmental outcomes associated with an ASB trip, but also in placing these outcomes within a developmental context that included an examination of the borders students crossed through their experiences, necessitating a focus on the specific context of the trip.

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' narratives about the meaning they made as they crossed physical and developmental borders on an ASB program focused on HIV/AIDS. In particular, specific research questions included: (a) what is to be learned about the nature of the experience through the stories told over time?; (b) what are the narratives associated with participants' sense of self, relationships with others, and future plans?; and (c) what difference did a trip focused on HIV/AIDS make to the narratives told? This study focused on ASB student narratives, both immediately after the trip and one year later.

Methods

Initially part of a larger constructivist multi-site case study investigating outcomes associated with short-term immersion programs, this study examines one site in detail using both case study and narrative inquiry. The analysis of narratives is embedded within the single case of the New York City ASB program (Stake, 2005) and is characterized by "retrospective meaning making—the shaping or ordering of past experience" (Chase, 2005, p. 656) in the revealing of one's experiences through stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In addition, as Auerbach (2002) noted, "Many scholars turn to narrative to study the instantiation of power relations and oppositional voice" (p. 1371). This study focused on people living with AIDS in a health center hidden away from the outside world, yet embedded in the social structures of silence, stigma, and discrimination surrounding this epidemic. The study also focused on interactions between health center residents and students, as well as the critical voices of student participants about issues of power and privilege in their lives on campus and beyond.

It is important to note our role as researchers and narrators of these stories. In particular, the primary investigator (first author), serving as a faculty advisor on the trip, was fully immersed in the research setting as a participant observer and thus has a narrative of her own (Chase, 2005). The role of faculty advisor primarily involved managing money and being available in case of emergency. Trips were student planned and led, and all the study partici-

pants were aware of the dual role of faculty advisor and researcher. She brings a narrative voice to the interpretation, and particularly to describing the details of the context that is informed by years of prior involvement with AIDS service organizations and research on college students engaged in HIV/AIDS-focused service-learning. The other two researchers were not on the trip but were involved in all other aspects of the study. All three researchers had been involved in service-learning programs as student affairs practitioners.

Context of the ASB Program

The context of this study was one of more than twenty ASB trips conducted at a large, mid-Atlantic research-intensive university. The philosophy of the sponsoring community service learning (CSL) office was one grounded in student leadership. Thus, the trips were planned by student trip leaders selected through a competitive application process. Student trip leaders determined the service conducted during the trip, provided for pre-trip orientations, arranged the logistics of the trip, and facilitated reflection during the trip. Trip leaders worked closely with professional staff in the CSL office, all well-versed on the principles of good practice in service-learning. However, in the interest of student leadership development, many of the particulars were left to the discretion of the trip leaders. For the New York trip, participants met several times before the trip to learn about the service work they would be doing and a bit about the site itself. During the week, we spent time at a health center, well known for its care for people living with AIDS. We met at the end of each day with the center's volunteer coordinator, who helped us process our experiences. In addition, each night a different student led a structured reflection for participants. The students were fully immersed in the experience during their five days in New York; however, it became apparent that not all of them knew much about AIDS, a topic left relatively unaddressed in their pre-trip orientations. Instead, trip leaders focused on group cohesion and the opportunity to "give back" during their spring break, a motivation that seemed to propel all of the participants.

Sampling and Data Collection

Data was collected for this study in two phases. First, the New York City ASB trip was purposefully sampled (Patton, 2002) as part of a multi-site case study investigating students' perceived outcomes of short-term immersion programs. The multi-site case study project included four immersion trips and a final sample of 37 participants, including five from the New York trip. These five responded affirmatively to an email sent by the primary investigator (PI) to all nine New York trip participants. This group of five included four women and one man, one participant who identified as queer, two participants of color and three White participants, and four juniors and one sophomore. All participants chose pseudonyms used in this article.

During this first phase of the research, data collection involved the PI's field notes from participant observation of all aspects of the trip, document analysis of student journals, and one post-trip semi-structured interview with each participant. Although these data were collected as part of the case study project, the interview questions were designed to elicit storytelling and personal narratives from participants focused primarily on their experiences on the trip itself.

The second phase of the project involved semi-structured interviews with all five participants one year after the ASB-New York trip. In these interviews we sought to determine longer-term influences of their experiences. With each participant, we revisited the results of the first interview and asked how their thinking and behavior related to HIV/AIDS, engagement in service, and post-graduation plans had evolved or changed over the previous year. Our focus here was not exclusively on longitudinal outcomes, but also on how participants' shorter-term meaning making became integrated (or not) into longer-term actions and perceptions. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Data collected from phase one were analyzed using a constant comparative analytic strategy (Charmaz, 2006) with emphasis on both the individual cases within the multi-site case study and across the cases. Phase two enabled the explicit focus on narratives of individual ASB-New York participants. Therefore, we reanalyzed phase one data sources (journals, participant observation field notes, and post-trip interviews) by re-reading every transcript and generating codes. Characteristic of narrative inquiry, we then compared codes to generate themes that illustrated the stories participants were telling about their experiences. Each researcher independently read, coded, and generated themes from every interview and document. We met regularly to compare our codes and themes, which enabled us to develop the emerging storylines. As data analysis moved from more descriptive to interpretive, we realized that we not only needed to preserve individual narratives and examine shared themes across all the narratives, but we also needed to illuminate the influential context from which the narratives emerged. Thus, we presented the findings as three narratives: contextual, individual, and shared.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were utilized to establish trustworthiness of the findings. First, we shared a narrative summary of our findings with participants to member check our results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, triangulation of data sources and the use of multiple researchers enhanced the credibility of the findings (Fassinger, 2005). Third, our prolonged engagement with the data generated thick description, which advanced transferability of the results (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

Findings

We present the findings in three parts. First, because the setting of the trip was critical to the narratives that emerged, we present a contextual narrative, informed by participant observations, that describes where and how students spent their time and thus the physical borders crossed. Next, we introduce each participant through an individual narrative that captures what stood out for each as well as several of the developmental and social boundaries crossed. Finally, we discuss several storylines shared by all participants emphasizing the larger cultural borders of negotiating power and privilege. Each narrative is introduced with a quote from a participant as illustrative of the theme presented.

Contextual Narrative: "That Was a Hard Hitting Trip" (Laila)

On the rainy Saturday morning that marked the beginning of ASB-New York, the energy, anticipation, and trepidation of what was to come was palpable as we all met, many for the first time, at the closest Greyhound bus station to the university. The group fell in with each other quickly, with an easy familiarity that belied the initial nervousness and the short time they had actually been acquainted. On the bus, they joked about their new identity as "ASB-New Yorkers." One participant quipped, "ASB New York. It first started when I really wanted to help people and then I just couldn't stop."

Run by the Roman Catholic diocese, the health center where we spent most of our time was one of the first in New York to respond to the epidemic numbers of individuals dying of AIDS in the 1980s. The mission of the health center emphasizes the importance of a nurturing environment in which all are treated with dignity and compassion. However, even with these values clearly evident in many of the staff with whom we worked, we also witnessed occasions when "discrete unit" residents were ostracized or ignored. The most compelling example was the health center's Holy Thursday service. During the washing of hands ritual in which health center staff gently dipped each individual's hands into a bowl of holy water, discrete unit residents were instead asked to stick their hands over the bowl so the staff member could simply pour the water on their hands, precluding any of the gentle touch provided to the others in attendance. Aeriel wrote about this in her journal:

> We then took some residents down to the Holy Thursday service for the "Washing of the Hands."…When [resident's name] saw me standing near the front he hopped up, picked up a chair and rushed it over to me. Then sadness struck again when washing hands, one of the ladies that *worked* there wouldn't touch any of the discrete units' hands. A freaking employee there! These people are just desperate for physical touch.

Observing this (mis)handling of residents during the Holy Thursday service left a deep impression on ASB-New York participants. Indeed, Sasha commented, "That just solidified why I was on the trip…Especially if you work in a hospital environment, for you to still be standoffish, that stood out to me the most. It was just ridiculous." In the health center setting, participants' encountered people and situations that brought HIV/AIDS to life, an irony not lost on all given that many residents were near the end of their lives.

Most of our time at the health center was spent on the floors of the discrete unit. None of us knew quite what to expect the first day we arrived, but the calm, helpful, and generous demeanor of Steve, the volunteer coordinator who provided our orientation, helped allay the unstated anxiety hovering in the tiny room. During a building tour, Steve introduced us to residents as we encountered them, telling them where we were from and that we would be back to spend time with them. One man, sitting comfortably in his wheelchair with a twinkle in his eye and a big toothless smile, quickly retorted, "Don't worry. We're not going anywhere." Steve asked us each why we were there at the health center and to keep reflecting on this question throughout the week. Why were we there? Several in the group were pre-med and "wanted to learn about AIDS," others emphasized an interest in "hands-on nature" of our work and the interest in "putting a human face to a disease" they knew little about, and all were eager for a "new experience in a new environment."

By night we returned to the Youth Hostel on the Upper West Side where we collapsed into our bunk beds, experiencing community living in gender-segregated, shared bedrooms and bathrooms. At the hostel, emotional reflection sessions occurred, both the formal ones deemed necessary by the student trip

leaders and more informal, organic discussions in the bunk room late into the night. As Victoria recounted: "Tonight was an amazing conversation. What was so wonderful about the conversation was that we laughed, cried, thought, got passionate about, and learned through the debate/discussion, which is not something that happens everyday."

Individual Narratives: "Everyone has a Story" (Victoria)

Sasha. Sasha was drawn to ASB trips as "a way to get involved on campus and just learn." A public health major, Sasha was a student trip leader with a vivacious personality, knowledge about HIV/AIDS, and a commitment to safe sex education. A Black woman and junior, Sasha noted that most of her prior knowledge placed "the face of AIDS like some poor dying kid in Africa." The health center setting enabled her to put faces and names to those living with AIDS. She conversed easily with residents, commenting that "as a Black woman and most of the patients were Black, it is important to have someone who looks like you to help you out."

Sasha loved a good debate and thrived on learning from the different backgrounds of her ASB-New York peers. The trip helped her to develop the skill of asking questions about "why they think the way they think rather than just getting mad." Late night discussions in the "girls' room" covered all kinds of topics, but Sasha commented, "we all had each other's back."

After the trip, Sasha organized a campus-wide HIV testing campaign, calling out her peers with grace and wit because "[i]n this day and age, you have to get crazy to get your point across." Noting how the trip "prepped me," she commented, "I just thought why not take this a step further and try to get kids tested on campus." Realizing public health work was not just about "leaving your mark" but also "teaching people how to be self-sufficient," Sasha found that the trip "changed my outlook as far as what I want to devote the rest of my life to." She planned to attend graduate school in public health to continue her work with HIV and youth.

Aeriel. Aeriel had done community service before college, but she always thought about HIV/AIDS in terms of people suffering in faraway places. When she learned about the New York trip, Aeriel reflected that "it hit me that people in the U.S. need help too." Interacting with residents gave her the experience of "culture shock" and placed her "way out of my element."

As a blonde White woman from a small town, Aeriel felt she was "constantly defending my identity" and "that people put me into this little box of what they expect me to be." On the trip, she marveled at what she learned from the residents and the other students who were actively committed to service. After the trip, Aeriel lost some friends who disagreed with her decision to "save the world," yet she became more open-minded and appreciative of the feeling of community on the trip. Quick-witted and easygoing, Aeriel connected with several residents, finding the experience emotionally draining but uplifting because of the graciousness, hospitality, and positive attitudes of the residents and staff.

A year later, Aeriel fondly recalled the residents and the trip. Although accepted to the Peace Corps, Aeriel turned down this opportunity at her mother's urging. Unsure of her post-graduation plans, Aeriel summarized, "I want to help people, I want to find something, I want to make a difference."

Lee. Lee applied to the New York trip because of his personal commitment to working with HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, yet prior to the trip he had "never put a face to AIDS." The "intense" nature of direct contact with the residents sometimes made Lee uncomfortable, and he struggled to come to terms with the limits of his ability to help, ultimately realizing "the best you can do for a person is just to be there for them."

During and after the trip, Lee reflected intently on his queer identity and his stereotypes about HIV/AIDS: "[f]or me, historically, through my lens, it has always been White gay men having AIDS, and seeing that isn't always, that isn't the face that it is right now." Lee also noted that identity affected the experiences he and his peers had in working with the residents, comparing his identity as a White, privileged male to Laila's and Sasha's experiences as Black women.

The emotional challenge of direct contact with the residents, coupled with a day spent shadowing administrative staff at the health center, helped Lee realize his passion for behind-the scenes-work, or "indirect service." The following year, Lee was proud to be selected as a trip leader for the next ASB-New York trip. He planned to return to campus for his fifth year or "victory lap" ready to apply to the Peace Corps and complete an internship at a nonprofit "doing a lot of work with LGBT Youth."

Victoria. With an easy smile and gentle nature, Victoria believed that "everyone wants to be loved and acknowledged." She was the first to talk comfortably with residents, seeing herself as someone who "gets right in there," yet she wondered, "[h]ow are [the residents] perceiving me—this little White girl coming to help for her spring break?" and "why do I get these privileges and others don't?"

Victoria often vacillated between conflicting ideas. On one hand, she commented, "I am always wondering if I should renounce all of the comfort my life

provides me and go live with the poor," yet despite her intentions, she mentioned inadequate time and worried about "flaunting" her ability to "take a break from life to volunteer" with youth in D.C. or internationally in the Peace Corps. After the trip, Victoria suggested future students should live on meager daily allowances to simulate poverty, rather than dining in restaurants. During the trip, however, she bought mementos from her time in New York, such as "cool earrings and a pashmina."

One year later, Victoria continued to reflect on how to integrate her intentions and her actions, commenting, "It's been a year of trying to learn more about what's going on in the world I guess." Initially a double major in public health and romance languages, Victoria dropped her language major because "I didn't feel it was practical enough for me" and picked up a conflict resolution minor. She also co-led an Alternative Winter Break trip, promoted ASB via Facebook, and started "dumpster diving," or salvaging discarded food from local organic markets. Searching for ways to live up to what Sasha deemed her, "the girl who wants to save the world," Victoria sought to connect her academic interests with her need for practicality. Experiences with the residents served as a "catalyst" for her to "see public health working in a community and …start thinking about what I want to do as a career."

Laila. Laila's mantra on the trip and afterwards was "it's the little things," like giving one's time to others. An international student from Kenya, Laila recognized "HIV is such a big thing at home," yet the New York trip was her first time interacting with "people who have full blown AIDS." Laila was amazed by how quickly the students on the ASB-New York trip formed relationships with the residents. Spending time with residents helped her think about how "people matter and family is important," leading her to appreciate knowing her family and friends would take care of her if she were living with a terminal illness.

Aware of the residents' mortality, Laila felt apprehensive about "opening up," yet she was able to relate with them. Despite feeling emotionally drained at times, Laila was pleasantly surprised by how happy the residents were and wanted to adopt the motto of one of them, "too blessed to be stressed," in her life.

In the year following the trip, Laila returned home for a visit to work "with orphans who have AIDS," wanting to work "especially with the kids because they are 100% innocent." Her plan following graduation was to return to Kenya to put her degree in economic development into practice. Laila relished the opportunity to use what she understood as a fresh, younger perspective to work with issues of poverty for people in Kenya in regards to health care, clean water, and infrastructure.

Shared Narratives: "The Stories that Got You in Your Heart" (Sasha)

"It's so real" : The power of personal interaction. Face-to-face interactions and the opportunity to develop relationships with people living with HIV/AIDS made a deep impression on participants. As Lee wrote in his journal, "I've never put a face to AIDS, but after today, everything seems so much more real." One year later, participants recalled stories about interacting with residents. Confronting stereotypes about the face of AIDS as "some poor dying child in Africa," their connections with residents allowed students to understand, as Sasha captured, "It's definitely not true. We found young to old, frail to strong who had AIDS….that hits home. This could be my face. This could be me."

Laila, from Kenya, offered a different perspective: "Because where I am from, I know that AIDS is an epidemic and you have to fend for yourself and try to get food, barely no money for medicine…. So I really appreciated what [the health center] does as a whole because not many people are able to have that…." Participant after participant spoke vividly about the individuals they met. Indeed, these memories are what stayed with them a year after the trip. As Victoria summarized, "What I will take away—the actual face of AIDS." Similarly, Aeriel reflected a year later that "I think I remember the people more than anything…The people are still in my head. I can picture them." The power of personal interactions as the most compelling aspect of the trip was articulated well by Sasha: "Now I see the face, I know the names, I shook their hands and now I can tie it all together….the stories that got you in your heart."

"Our little bubble" : Getting out of one's element. Several participants talked about how the trip helped them get out of their comfort zone or "bubble." For some, this bubble had to do with one's friendships and the larger racial and cultural dynamics of the campus. Participants experienced "the bubble" to varying degrees, and these experiences were often shaped by their social identities. Reflecting in year one on how his queer identity influenced relationships with peers on the trip, Lee shared, "I had to temper that so I could have that cohesion and not alienate anyone." Developing cohesion with his peers helped Lee to step out of the "queer bubble" characterizing his college experience. Although Laila appreciated that the trip offered some participants a chance to communicate across barriers, she remarked that for her this experience was not new: "I think I've always been able to communicate with everyone, just because I live in a different society than my own, and

I have to." Similarly, Sasha did not relate to the campus bubble idea, stating, "I wouldn't say I was out of my element.… Even before the trip I tried to open my mind to different things, so I feel like I was a little bit more prepared for just whatever came on the trip." For Sasha, the trip was not an exception to but an extension of her college experience.

Victoria and Aeriel experienced the notion of the campus "bubble" in yet another way. One year after the trip, Victoria shared that in a recent get-together with Sasha: "It was 50% black and 50% white and [Sasha] and I are the only two people sitting together at a table where it was not segregated by color. …I personally don't even know where to start trying to branch out when everyone just wants to stay in their comfort zone with people they know." The "bubble" made returning to campus a challenge. For those who had experienced the campus as a "bubble" prior to the New York trip, upon their return it became possible at times to step outside the "bubble" by maintaining friendships with peers from the trip and interrupting the racial dynamics on campus. As Lee commented, "It's also semi-permeable, the bubble, in that I'm more willing to try things I wasn't before." In addition, nearly all of the participants spoke of the difficulty they had in communicating to friends and family what transpired for them during the trip. Several of them used the same phrase, "there are no words," to convey the challenge of capturing what they experienced in a meaningful way. Using a poignant analogy, Aeriel conveyed:

> I was reading this article on autism the other day and how these people have all these emotions they can't express and how frustrating it is to have all these things you want to say but you can't. That is me. Because there are no words to tell people how much it meant to me and how much I learned and just what an amazing experience it was.

Similarly, Lee explained, "Without actually being there and experiencing it you can't quite articulate what exactly went on…you can't really convey that in a take home message."

"I want to find something" : Clarifying and renewing career plans and commitments. Whether considering the Peace Corps, nonprofit work, or graduate school, participants described their ASB trip experiences as a contributing "catalyst" for finding one's career path. Where participants differed was in their personal sense of agency to follow through with newfound or reaffirmed ambitions to "help people" after the ASB trip. For Lee, Sasha, and Laila, the trip reaffirmed their passion for working with HIV/AIDS prevention and education. Sasha spent much of her year following the trip doing HIV/AIDS and STD prevention with youth. She also coordinated HIV and STD testing on campus every month, noting that "[w]e do this so AIDS and STDs is just not something we talk about only on World AIDS Day, it's something we talk about every day. …I guess it's all linked to my experience in New York, which is so funny." Lee also continued his work with HIV/AIDS prevention, sharing, "I've still held…the same beliefs, after the trip. It hasn't really modified me other than again strengthening my commitment. And just being able to speak from experience, as opposed to facts and figures."

Although Victoria and Aeriel continued searching for their paths, they affirmed the influence of ASB-New York on their journeys. As Victoria stated, "[t]hese alternative break trips are also very empowering and make you realize that work with policy is very important," continuing, "[i]t also helped me think about just so many things…like how our society treats people with any sort of disease or any deviation from what we consider healthy and 'normal.'"

Participants recognized and wanted to emulate the dedication and commitment the staff of the health center demonstrated daily to individuals living with HIV/AIDS. Aeriel shared, "it was nice to see that you can be passionate and involved in your work but you're not consumed by it." Although unsure of her "calling," Victoria expressed, "I would like to help a population that would really benefit from my help and that I feel called to I guess in a way. But I don't feel like I've found that yet…I don't know how I want to help people but I want to help people." When "re-entering" campus after the trip, Aeriel initially struggled to find relevance in her academic major: "I'm so over English… How silly is it that I need a degree to help people that I want to?" Many participants continued working with HIV/AIDS prevention and education. However, whether or not a clearly defined career path related to HIV/AIDS prevention and education continued or emerged, all participants shared a renewed interest in helping people fueled by their experiences on the ASB-New York trip.

Confronting the "walls of prejudice" : Encounters with stigma and discrimination. Every participant reflected on the stigma and discrimination surrounding the experiences of people living with HIV/AIDS, whether through witnessing acts of discrimination among health center staff, among the residents themselves, or recognizing some residents as rarely visited by loved ones, all telling reactions that revealed the depth of stigma and discrimination. As described in the contextual narrative, the most glaring example of stigma deeply impacting all of the participants occurred as they witnessed the hospital staff pass over residents of the "discrete unit" in the hand cleansing ritual. As Laila noted, "I

thought that if I was able to notice that, they for sure must know that and I can not even begin to comprehend how that must make them feel." Participants also commented on what they perceived to be the abandoning of the residents by family members. In a poignant example, Lee conveyed his shock at learning that the boyfriend of one resident "left him there and hasn't seen him since."

In addition, participants commented on the power (and surprise) of witnessing "discrimination amongst the patients." For example, Victoria noticed a resident who was lying on a stretcher in the hallway. She shared: "She was kind of curled up and her arms were stuck in a distorted position as if she had cerebral palsy. No one was paying attention to her as if she didn't comprehend what was going on….I started talking to her …I wonder when the last time that someone talked to her was."

These encounters with stigma and discrimination were foreshadowed by an especially compelling experience on the first day at the health center, when several participants witnessed—and then discussed with others during a reflection session that evening—an incident which brought them face-to-face with AIDS and their own fears and stigmas. Both Aeriel and Lee described this incident, which started with a game using a beach ball passed around among the residents in a common room. As Lee wrote in his journal:

> It was going really well until a really frail gentleman in a wheel chair got hit in the nose and bled on the ball. The entire game stopped and they had to bleach the ball and sanitize our hands….We played a little more after the blood incident but this was the first time that contamination came to mind. I got scared that I might get HIV from the patients.

Similarly, Aeriel commented on how quickly the staff responded to this situation and "such a huge deal for a simple nosebleed. That was like a smack in the face…'oh, this is what it's like if you have AIDS.'"

Discussion

The purpose of this inquiry was to create narratives that conveyed the meaning students made of their experiences during an ASB trip focused on HIV/AIDS. What students witnessed during their time at the health center was indeed "like a smack in the face." Analysis of participants' narratives suggested that they crossed contextual, developmental, social, and cultural borders on the trip in ways that rarely occurred on campus. In both the short and longer-term, participants wrestled with how to integrate what they had experienced and learned into their daily lives and their sense of self. Confronting their own privilege, often for the first time, participants' constructions of their own identities were destabilized and reconstructed (Butin, 2005b), and they began to think more deliberatively about their own behaviors, beliefs, and service commitments. Participation in this HIV/AIDS focused service-learning experience prompted students to rethink what they had previously taken for granted, wrestle with unexpected situations and emotions, and reexamine and retrace the developmental and physical borders crossed through their experiences.

The service-learning literature often includes references to the possibilities of "border crossing" (e.g., Hayes & Cuban, 1997; Kiely, 2005) and carries an implicit notion that border crossing is both unidirectional and inevitable (Gilbride-Brown, 2008). That is, students cross developmental, cultural, geographic, racial, and economic borders, to name but a few of the possibilities, and are changed as a result. Like Giroux's (1992) notion of border pedagogy which "decenters as it remaps" (p. 136), in this study, borders were approached, crossed, and retraced. One year later, participants still conversed easily about the trip and quickly recalled stories about other participants and residents. The contexts of HIV/AIDS and the health center created a powerful push into a previously unknown world. However, the pull back into the lives they left behind also was strong, and they discussed the difficulties of integrating all they observed and learned into their former lives and selves.

What is to be learned about border crossing from this study? To address this question we use a critical developmental framework, which suggests that not all borders were crossed by all students and that not all border crossings were sustained. The setting of the trip may constitute what Mezirow (2000) referred to as a "disorienting dilemma" (p. 22), generating dissonance that facilitated the initial crossing of developmental borders. However, as time passed, the less navigable cultural borders of power and privilege placed significant demands on participants, making it hard to sustain the developmental gains. Sustaining the lessons gained from border crossings were further complicated because of the fleeting nature of the context once the ASB trip had ended. The nature and duration of immersion experiences like ASB trips have been addressed by other researchers (e.g., Camacho, 2004; Kiely, 2005) in relation to the intersections between developmental outcomes and the contexts of such trips. Finally, as pointed out by Taylor (2000), "Despite this more in-depth research into the catalysts of transformative learning, there is little understanding of why some disorienting dilemmas lead to a perspective transformation and others

do not" (p. 300). Our findings suggest that the intersections of context and participants' social identities may shed some light on perspective transformation via service-learning experiences.

Border Crossing and Developmental Decentering

Service-learning, some would argue, is fundamentally about decentering, as the border crossing metaphor implies (Giroux, 1992). Educators hope that something powerful happens for students who enter environments and experience life circumstances often dramatically different from their own, and that students will then integrate what they learn, with lasting implications for their cognitive, psychosocial, and moral development. In other words, educators hope for service-learning to offer decentering experiences that create dissonance, and that students will then "remap," in positive and constructive ways, the rocky terrain of their future engagements with those different from themselves. As educators, we remain hopeful about this claim, yet as researchers our findings suggest that decentering, while an important part of the meaning-making process, is fraught with challenges that make remapping a troubling and often painful task.

The concept of decentering created by dissonance is not new to student development; indeed, it is integral to developmental growth and meaning-making. Kiely (2005) elaborated on this idea by identifying the differences in type, intensity, and duration of dissonance in relation to longer lasting shifts in worldview. Paired with Kiely's work, results of this study suggest that not just the presence of dissonance, but more so the nuanced nature of it, influences the decentering process and thus the borders students cross. Applying a critical developmental lens (Jones et al., 2005), which weaves together three theoretical strands (self-authorship, critical whiteness, and critical pedagogy), to the presence of dissonance illuminates more fully the intersections between the individual and the privileging conditions that place students in community service contexts. These intersections, in turn, bring to light the complexities of border crossing that occurred (or not) for students during and after the ASB trip.

Such complexities are apparent when examining the "our little bubble" shared narrative. Although experienced in different ways, the notion of leaving the campus bubble represented the developmental, social, and cultural borders students crossed on the trip to New York. From a self-authorship perspective (Baxter Magolda, 1999), confronting the realities of life in the discrete unit represented the Crossroads, or a point at which students experienced dissonance with external "formulas" about themselves, the health center residents, HIV/AIDS, and their senses of purpose in college and beyond. However, students experienced this crossroads, including when and where it occurred, very differently, and some of these differences seemed linked to students' racial identities, consistent with a critical whiteness perspective (Frankenberg, 1993). Finally, Lee's observation about the bubble being "semi-permeable" after the trip, paired with an individual narrative of commitment to the ASB program as an educational practice and HIV/AIDS as a social issue, evokes core concepts in critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2003), such as the foregrounding of students' lived experiences (in this case, in an ASB program) to mobilize a critique of inequitable power structures.

One challenge associated with decentering is that it is influenced by the assumptions participants bring to service-learning experiences and by students' social identities. For example, Butin (2005a), in describing students' reactions to tutoring migrant youth, discovered the "implicit assumptions and norms they carried into the service-learning experience about doing good, about 'serving,' about the value and method of teaching, and about the notion of youth as passive and thankful subject" (p. 99). In our study, participants reflected decentering when they found that they weren't able to "save" the residents, or noticed residents' deep gratitude at simply being alive ("I'm too blessed to be stressed," as one resident chanted continuously), or wondered aloud about what "helping" really looked like. This disconnect between what participants expected from the residents and what they actually experienced brought students to new, if tentative, understandings about their own life experiences and opportunities. Such realizations brought an array of emotions such as guilt, anger at the injustices they witnessed, sadness, and appreciation for their own circumstances. This finding is similar to the personalizing Kiely (2005) discussed as individual responses to the service contexts. However, viewed through a critical developmental lens, the developmental decentering that students experienced on the trip was complicated by the cultural borders crossed.

A critical developmental framework also exposed that students with marginalized social identities experienced decentering differently than their peers with dominant identities. Much of the research on service-learning is based upon samples of primarily White students, reflecting differential participation rates in service-learning among White students and students of color (e.g., Gilbride-Brown, 2008; Swaminathian, 2007). The students of color and the queer student in this study appeared to experience less angst and dissonance about the impact of border crossing, primarily because, as Laila noted, they cross borders all the time. As Sasha commented, "I

wouldn't say I was out of my element" as a result of encountering HIV/AIDS as a social issue; rather, what decentered her was the chance to "see the faces" and "know the names" of those living with AIDS. Similarly, HIV/AIDS was not a new topic for Laila because it "is such a big thing at home [in Kenya]," yet getting to know residents with full-blown AIDS was new, as was realizing the impact of daily kindnesses and other "little things" toward improving the lives of others. For Lee, again decentering was not about encountering HIV/AIDS for the first time, but instead was about leaving his "queer bubble," learning that it was not just "White gay men" who had AIDS, and that the emotional challenges of direct resident contact made "indirect service" a better fit for his long-term sense of purpose.

These findings are consistent with what Gilbride-Brown (2008) found in her study of students of color at a predominantly White institution who engaged in service-learning. She raised the question: "What if these borders are borders crossed in every other educational context but the service-learning experience for students of color at predominantly white institutions?" (p. 137). These results suggest limitations in a solely developmental analysis and demonstrate the contribution of a more critical lens. Indeed, for historically underrepresented students, engaging with communities typically "served" through service-learning may constitute a more familiar terrain than the college environment. It is not that students with marginalized identities in this study were not engaged in meaning-making as a result of their experiences; rather, the dissonance experienced by the White, non-queer-identified participants looked different than that experienced by the students of color and the queer-identified student, who live with dissonance as a typical part of their college experiences. This finding may reflect differences in cognitive complexity among students with dominant and marginalized social identities, as researchers have suggested that the developmental tasks of dealing with racism (Torres, 2009) and heterosexism and homophobia (Fassinger, 1998) promote cognitive complexity.

Sustaining Border Crossing and Remapping

Very little research exists addressing longer term influences of alternative break programs specifically. The results of this study provide some insights into what transpired for participants in the year that had passed since ASB-New York. Immediately upon their return, all the participants were emphatic about the power and intensity of their experience. The "bubble" of campus life was broader, or "semi-permeable" (Lee), indicating remapping along the line of new perspectives, changed outlooks, and openness to new points of view. However, several fault lines emerged in this remapping process as students struggled with their new knowledge and how to integrate it into their lives and sense of purpose. In other words, absent the context that the trip provided, how would participants sustain their engagement with HIV/AIDS? Indeed, several participants recognized privilege in their ability to "walk away" from this context (both literally and developmentally). However, students learned from residents' reactions that "what you are doing is making a difference," a lesson that not all participants were able to sustain.

In a study exploring the enduring influence of service-learning on identity development two to four years after a service-learning course, Jones and Abes (2004) reported positive shifts in the complexity of thinking about self and others, the nature of commitments and future plans, and the degree of openness to new people and experiences. Our findings are consistent with these, but what was of particular interest to us was the HIV/AIDS focus of this trip and how the border crossing into the territory of HIV/AIDS might be sustained. Here we found great variety among the participants. Victoria and Aeriel struggled to remap and readily admitted that they had not found their passion or cause or calling in any meaningful way. Lee, Laila, and Sasha, on the other hand, were moved by action and energy to extend their experience into their lives and career plans. They were able to see how HIV/AIDS touched their own lives, which resulted in "wanting to do more" (Laila), "carrying it on into my life" (Sasha) and developing a "more activist identity" (Lee). This finding suggests implications both for participants' sense of purpose and career plans, but also in the development of their commitments to active civic participation and involvement in critical social issues, which necessitated confronting their positions of privilege.

In a model focused on White students' experience with privilege through service-learning, Dunlap, Scoggin, Green, and Davi (2007) describe a stage called the "divided self." White students in this stage have difficulty reconciling the guilt that emerges and either become immobilized by guilt or ardently defensive of their privilege. Although not immobilized, Victoria identified guilt as an obstacle when she considered "renounc[ing] all of the comfort my life provides me and go live with the poor" but hesitated to do so for fear that others would perceive her as "flaunting" her privilege. One year later, "dumpster diving" constituted a compromise that helped her bridge this gap, albeit tentatively. She also remained troubled by racial and ethnic balkanization on campus but still lacked strategies for addressing it. Similarly, defensiveness about her privilege was evident to Aeriel when reflecting on

pre-trip college experiences in which she was "constantly defending my identity." Although emergent at the beginning, Aeriel's sense of a "divided self" was apparent one year later (turning down the Peace Corps because of her mother's concern vs. her own statement, "I want to make a difference"). Thus, for the White students in our study, remapping appeared to take place along a "fault line" that threatened to widen, not diminish, the gap between their new and former selves. Absent the compelling context of the ASB trip, White students found it difficult to sustain the dissonance they had experienced, perhaps lacking a meaning-making filter (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) to help them navigate the once-familiar terrain of their pre-ASB lives.

For the women of color and queer man on the trip, the remapping process looked very different. Seemingly unfettered by guilt or angst related to her own privilege, Sasha returned to campus after the trip with renewed passion and drive to promote HIV awareness and safer sex, spearheading a campus-wide campaign. Similarly, Laila had plans to go home to Kenya to work "with orphans who have AIDS," while Lee was busy planning the next year's ASB-New York trip, noting his own trip experience "hasn't really modified me other than again strengthening my commitment." Despite differences in their individual paths, these three students shared an approach to remapping that, like their decentering experiences, reflected an engagement with HIV/AIDS-related service that seemed inseparable from their social identities.

Examining differences in remapping among students with dominant and marginalized social identities is an understudied area, particularly in relation to transformative learning (Taylor, 2000). Such a focus may help to make sense of the temporary decline in social efficacy (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) that some students experience after service-learning participation. Indeed, students with dominant social identities may experience a sharper decline when they realize, after powerful experiences with service-learning, the profoundly unyielding nature of many of the social problems they sought to "solve" via service-learning. Because students with marginalized identities are more likely to have encountered these issues in their own lives, their sense of efficacy as agents of social change may not be shaken by even the most compelling service-learning immersion experiences. Thus, they may already have the cognitive complexity or "filter" (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) necessary to help them navigate the process of remapping the territory of their pre-ASB lives. This finding is consistent with research that suggests that students with marginalized identities will develop greater cognitive complexity as a result of negotiating their racial or sexual identities (e.g., Fassinger, 1998; Helms, 1995; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005).

Finally, the remapping process that emerged for students with dominant and marginalized social identities evokes the notion of "*a constructive engagement with otherness*" (Daloz, 2000, p. 110), one of the conditions for fostering transformation. Particularly relevant to this study, for these constructive engagements to have staying power, there must be "an acknowledgment not simply of difference, nor simply of commonality, but of both and of the interplay between them" (p. 110). Perhaps due to greater cognitive complexity, ASB participants with marginalized identities were able to maintain this acknowledgment, and thus a constructive engagement with otherness, long after the trip had ended. By maintaining such engagements, the students of color and the queer man in this study may have been able to sustain interpersonal and sociocultural border crossings, and thus navigate the remapping process, more nimbly than those with dominant identities.

Implications and Limitations

Several implications emerged from this study. First, much of the research on service-learning highlights short-term outcomes and often points to initial indicators of transformation. However, if educators are to understand how transformation occurs, more longitudinal research is needed to examine how students continue to make meaning and integrate what they say they have learned in the short term into their lives. Our study suggests that, at the one year mark, such transformations do not always occur, but a longitudinal view may produce other results. This finding is consistent with research, such as Camacho's (2004) work and Kiely's (2004, 2005) longitudinal study, which suggests that a sustained service-learning experience is needed to produce truly transformative outcomes.

Results of this study also suggest that service-learning educators can be more intentional about developing educational interventions and curricular integration to wrestle with the barriers to border crossing, assisting students in navigating the decentering and remapping processes, and thus sustaining the benefits of border crossing. Consistent with program characteristics found to promote learning outcomes (Eyler & Giles, 1999), structured post-trip reflection opportunities may promote ongoing development and learning. Educators also will benefit from recognizing that meaning-making is influenced by students' social identities, assumptions they bring to the experience, and the context of the service environment. In particular, our results indicate that remapping is influenced by the complexity of the social issue investigated and the perceived relevance

of that issue in the campus environment. Also critical is future research on the service-learning experiences of historically underrepresented students. Foregrounding their experiences is likely to shift what we know about service-learning in terms of both process and outcomes.

Several limitations are important to note. Although focusing on specific narratives enabled us to locate participants' stories within the context in which they emerged and was a strength of this study, it also required us to make difficult decisions about which narratives to highlight. We felt strongly that, with five participants, the reader should get to know each; however, the contextual narrative and shared narrative were equally powerful and helped to fill out the individual narratives. The critical developmental lens also enabled us to address implicit data (Charmaz, 2006) and surfaced the importance of social identities in relation to contextual influences. Again, more could be said here, but we did not want to stray too far from the narratives that anchored the study. Finally, although this study did provide a longer-term view of meaning-making and outcomes associated with service-learning, these participants are still in their formative years, so it remains to be seen what the real staying power is of such trips.

In summary, our results demonstrate both the potential power and tenuous nature of border crossing in the context of service-learning experiences, particularly when social identities are considered. The critical developmental lens utilized in this study indicates that despite the simultaneity of physical, developmental, and cultural borders crossed during the trip, sustaining these border crossings after the trip became complicated because of the intersections of individual identities, the setting of the trip, and the larger social structures of privilege and oppression. The context provided "a hard hitting trip," which laid the foundation for developmental borders to be crossed and the realization that "everyone has a story." Students also crossed cultural borders by interacting with individuals different from themselves, getting out of the comfort of campus life, and encountering stigma and discrimination. These experiences prompted them to consider new possibilities for their lives in college and beyond, suggesting that in some ways this alternative break program facilitated precisely the outcomes service-learning educators strive to achieve. However, the optimism generated by these findings is tempered by the longer-term results that illuminate the tenuousness in these developmental gains given the challenge of sustaining the lessons learned from the compelling context of the trip, which for some was easy to forget once the realities of college life reemerged.

Thus, this study reaffirms our role as educators, committed to the social justice foundation of service-learning, in helping students to resolve some of the dissonance between the developmental and cultural domains of service-learning and to connect these domains through educational interventions focused on complex issues such as HIV/AIDS. These narratives build the case for not only providing rich contexts for students to cross developmental borders, but also the importance of facilitating longer-term commitments to social change among students engaging in service-learning through a focus on the cultural borders of power and privilege.

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