6-2017

# Narrating Power and Injustice: How Young People Make Sense about Fairness

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NARRATING POWER AND INJUSTICE:

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE SENSE ABOUT FAIRNESS


by


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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Narrating Power and Injustice: How Young People Make Sense About Fairness

by

Svetlana Jović

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Our concrete embodiments as members of a specific class, race, and gender, as well as our historical situations play important roles in shaping our perspective of the world. The goal of this dissertation was to explore how different socioeconomic circumstances shape adolescents' sense-making about fairness and their capacity to relate to different actors in a social situation including an instance of injustice. Additionally, the study explored the systematic shift in youth's sense-making – their capacity to adjust one's ways of knowing and being, depending on the perspective they assume and different others they address. I used narrative methodology to explore linguistic enactments of *relational complexity*, the capacity to imagine and embody the thoughts, feelings, intentions, and values of another person.

The study involved 64 adolescents of high-school age (M=17), recruited from contrasting socioeconomic backgrounds of New York City. Narrative as a sense-making tool was used as the data collection/production and analysis approach. Youth's narratives (*n*=256) were elicited as responses to a vignette they read, depicting an ambiguous social situation in which occurrences of deception and exclusion might have occurred. Participants were invited to retell the story from the three perspectives: that of the self, object, and subject of injustice. I explored how diverse

youth read the story in terms of injustice present in it; how they position themselves inside the story. Are they closer to the position of the "victim" or the plausible "culprit," and which do they humanize more?

The findings, triangulated through three different analytic strategies (psychological state expression analysis, character mapping, and plot analysis), point harmoniously at differences in sense-making processes among adolescents from socioeconomically contrasting backgrounds. Youth from less privileged backgrounds showed greater flexibility in adjusting their experience, knowledge, and communicative styles to different others they addressed. They showed greater sensibility for different actors' perspectives, and seemed to be more skillful at relating to, and performing as, both the object and subject of injustice. These young people narrated more directly about injustice, naming names. Being more sensitive to multiple actors' perspectives makes these participants better at reading power relations and better at performing it while positioning themselves as different stakeholders. People sensitive to injustice realize that perspectives of perpetrator and victim differ as an effect of their previous unfavorable experiences, their rights and responsibilities for retribution, their different access to resources in the face of injustice, and their own sense of entitlement (or restraint) to expect and demand mitigation or reversal of injustice.

A major contribution of this dissertation is a theoretical model it proposes that enhances the understanding of the contextual, situated nature of psychological functioning. Additionally, I conceived a study design and methodology that allowed access to this dynamic and relational nature of social cognition. Finally, unlike deficit-centered approaches, this study redirects our attention toward the developmental potential of socioeconomic adversity and the ways in which it may enhance youth's socio-cognitive skills. This skill of adjusting one's ways of knowing and

being to different others is a great asset; however, we should not romanticize the reality of the

challenges that may bestow this epistemic advantage upon underserved youth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many colleagues, friends, and family members (and even random strangers) who supported me throughout this, rather long, PhD adventure, not all of whom I can name here. I guess I should be grateful for that as well, and take it as a testament to the breadth and strength of the social support I have had all these years.

My deep gratitude goes first to my advisor and dissertation chair, Professor Colette Daiute, who has shaped my intellectual trajectory in the most profound ways. The type of psychologist and researcher that I have become, is largely the result of her mentorship and her academic work. Colette generously shared all her academic *saviors* and *savoir faires,* while showing confidence in letting me *adopt, resist,* and *transform* her work, making it somehow my own in the end. I am grateful for how masterfully she balanced the guidance and supervision she provided me throughout the course of my PhD studies, with the freedom and independence she allowed me to have, which was necessary for me to thrive. I understand now, at the end of my academic training, that only the best of teachers can do that.

Thank you to Professor Joseph Glick, who was also there from the very beginning of my PhD training, and who never failed to intrigue and challenge me intellectually. Joe has the power to bring to light the most fundamental epistemological and ontological questions in a most unpretentious way. I am deeply indebted to the rest of my dissertation committee, Drs. Debbie Sonu, Fernanda Liberale, and Lois Holzman, for the most insightful reading of my work. Their feedback strengthened the cogency, rigor, and relevance of my work. I owe a special thank you to Lois for being my first mentor when I just moved to New York, and for leading me, indirectly, to The Graduate Center.

My advisor, Colette Daiute, wrote to me once how glad she was "to work with [me], to experience [my] joy with intellectual work and with life." Those who have met me can (rightfully) assume that my parents did far from a perfect job with me, but one thing they did well is to nurture and incite my curiosity from the time I could remember, and this consuming and infectious love for life. Both my parents and my sister, Daca, made me fascinated by the world around me. And that is how my incessant inquiry has started. Their unwavering love and support helped me be brave to venture out, travel far, and think and dream big.

To Marko, who has supported me in all the ways in which you can support a person. Thank you for giving me reasons good enough to stop working, for making me laugh until I cry, and for making me want to become the person you already think I am.

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**Introduction**

      Characteristic of growing up in contemporary urban settings in the US is a remarkable

diversity in cultural, socioeconomic, racial and ethnic, and technological sense. The lives of

youth are characterized by heterogeneous material and symbolic contexts through which they

navigate daily. An important and unfortunate aspect of such diverse urban contexts are the stark

socioeconomic disparities across various communities. Home, neighborhood, and school

environments, to name only a few, differ vastly across urban areas. Growing up in the South

Bronx produces rather different life histories than growing up on the Upper West Side,

Manhattan, or Long Island City, Queens—the locales of participants in this study. These

different environments are likely to impose various, and even contrasting demands in terms of

the expected and valued ways of knowing and being in the world. Our concrete embodiments as

members of a specific class (or race and gender, for that matter), as well as our concrete

historical situations play important roles in shaping our perspective on the world. Therefore, the

goal of this inquiry is to explore how different socioeconomic circumstances may shape youth's

worldviews, and the way they make sense of and act upon issues of injustice, in particular.

      In this dissertation, I explore how adolescents' varying socioeconomic histories influence

their sense-making about fairness and their capacity to relate to different stakeholders in a social

situation revolving around unfairness. More specifically, I focus on young people growing up in

a hyperdiversified environment such as New York City, which stands as an epitome for

numerous social, economic, cultural, political, and demographic changes pertinent to the

transition into the new millennium (Sassen, 1991). The challenges and opportunities experienced

by young people in today' society are ultimately formed by relations of wealth and poverty. In addition, adolescence is the time when youth exhibit a more sophisticated understanding of the social structures that bear relevance on their lives. With that in mind, I set out to explore how construals about fairness of people may differ among youth occupying different socioeconomic positions.

Diversification of youth's daily lives calls for development of flexibility, the skill of being able to adjust the way they relate to different others, using multiple media and genres of communication. The ability to read the relevant features of a social situation and to adjust the way we communicate so we optimize the interpersonal transaction is of increasing importance in today's world. It makes us skillful participants in various sociocultural practices, with diverse others and in diverse contexts. This competence of being able to vary knowledge and experiences via the use of different expressive media – *relational complexity* (Daiute, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2016) – is a context-dependent extension of perspective taking. It regards context as the constitutive aspect of the *skill*, rather than the background, or setting in which the skill is being enacted. Michael Tomasello argued that what originally differentiated the human species from other primates was our capacity to read each other's intentions and mental states (1999). I find these words relevant in considering the importance of this skill. This capacity for intersubjectivity, or "mind reading" is, therefore, a precondition for our collective life in culture. Such collective life would not be possible were it not for our "human capacity to organize and communicate experience in a narrative form" (Bruner, 2002). This socio-cognitive skill of being flexible and adjustable while relating to diverse others is of particular importance for young people growing up in culturally hyper-diverse environments such as New York City, if we are to achieve a harmonious and effective "collective life in culture" (Bruner, 2002).

In addition to studying how young people growing up with different economic resources make sense of fairness in their social environments, this study also focuses on the ways adolescents *use* narrating to consider fairness in diverse relationships. My research design employs narrative analysis methods (Daiute and Nelson, 1997; Daiute, 2010, 2014; Labov & Waletzsky, 1967; Peterson & McCabe, 1983) that allow for the systematic and reliable analysis of sense-making. Since I am interested in how adolescents make sense of fairness in ambiguous social situations as they take perspectives of different stakeholders, I use narrative to explore sociolinguistic enactments of the skill of imagining the thoughts, feelings, intentions, and values of another person. The current inquiry continues the sociocultural tradition started by Lev Vygotsky of exploring how the cultural tool of language (and narrative) serves to mediate the dynamic relationship between individual and sociocultural setting. I examined how the social context may bring about the narratives youth create around the issue of unfairness.

In order to bring out and make manifest the skill of relational complexity, I created a study design that invited participants to engage with multiple narrative contexts, assume perspectives of multiple social actors (e.g. the self, object and subject of injustice), and enact their respective intentions, wants, and cognitions through various narrative strategies. Inviting multiple perspectives and voices, and applying multiple narrative analysis strategies, afforded a richer understanding of the multiple layers of meaning youth expressed about fairness through different narrative positions. The participants were asked to read a vignette describing an ambiguous social situation involving unfairness with the aim of exploring how adolescents' previous experiences inform their sense-making of the given prompt. I wanted to explore if youth with diverse histories would make different meaning about people's intentions (to possibly act unfairly). Further, I wanted to see how individual young people justify, denounce, or identify

with situations involving unfairness; how they relate to the positions of the instigator and the excluded character; and how youth use the affordances of the different positionings inherent in writing activities included in the study design. Exploring these questions may offer a window into adolescents' possibly distinct worldviews driven by differing socioeconomic conditions.

Chapter 1 of this manuscript provides a rationale for the current study. The study aims to address problems in the world – of growing up in contemporary, diverse urban environments, and problems in current theoretical and methodological approaches to studying youth. In Chapter 2 I introduce the reader to the sociocultural discursive approach used to frame the study and develop a method. In the transition from a theoretical Chapter 2 to the Methods chapter, I discuss the design approach I took in this dissertation that aims to account for the context-sensitive and relational nature of psychological processes. Finally, the study results are organized around two axes, each of which is addressed with a separate results chapter. The first results chapter presents the findings organized around four narratives activities in which study participants were engaged. It addresses the shift in adolescents' narrative strategies as they engaged with different genres of communication, aimed at different audiences, and taking different actors' perspectives. Chapter 5, the second Results chapter, presents findings for different socioeconomic groups, discussing the differences in sense-making among youth coming from divergent backgrounds. The results are discussed at the end of each Results chapter, leaving us with a more concise discussion and conclusion addressed in the final Chapter 6.

**CHAPTER I**


**RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND**



Young people growing up in New York City live in multiple cultural systems beyond the boundaries of one tradition, communicate in multiple languages, manage the complexity of multiple reference points, and are, overall, shaped by often discordant patterns of their social milieu. Studying youth in such a diversified and vibrant context necessitates a theoretical and methodological approach that reflects the dynamic nature of the individual-society relationship, with its ambiguities and inconsistencies.

The design and theoretical grounding of the methods employed in this study embody a way of doing developmental research that takes into account the interdependence of the individual and the sociocultural. I use a dynamic approach to studying the development of individuals in society, which addresses problems historically and relationally, as they develop. Even when the variability and complexity of people's ways of being is acknowledged, as well as the notion that psychological functions emerge from social experience, the methodological approaches used in developmental research are still often static and individualistic. The approach embraced in this dissertation places great importance on designing a research study in a way that allows the development of complex, sometimes even contradictory meanings, in context.

In this chapter I will establish the rationale for the current study by addressing the problems in the world that call for an inquiry of this sort, as well as the problems in current theories and methods.

**Challenges in the World: Growing up Urban**

**Contemporary New York City Context: Growing up in a Global City**

During the past several decades, New York, as one of few *global cities*, has undergone massive and parallel changes in its economic base, spatial organization, and social structure (Sassen, 1991). The most commonly regarded globalization processes, such as: the expansion of telecommunications and information technologies; the reduction of national barriers to trade and investment; and increased capital flows and the interdependency of financial markets (Leary, 1998), have surely contributed to the changing demographics of the city. After its population reduced by 10% during the 1970s and 1980s due to white flight, staggering crime rates, de-industrialization, and urban disinvestment in general (Low, 2014), the city's population has been rising since, at a particularly drastic rate during the 1990s.

Today, no racial or ethnic group represents a majority of the population. The following is the demographic composition of New York City according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015) estimates for the year 2015: White, 42.6%; Hispanic or Latino, 29.1%; Black or African American, 24%; Asian, 14.1%; Some other race: 16.1%[1]. With foreign-born mothers accounting for 51% of all births, approximately 6-in-10 New Yorkers are either immigrants or the children of immigrants (Lobo & Salvo, 2013). Concurrent with growing ethnic and international diversity, the city has experienced a broadening gap in its citizens' income and material and social conditions of living. Rising income inequality is a national problem, but it is particularly prominent in New York City. It is a city that simultaneously harbors multiple zip code areas in

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[1] The percentages do not add up to 100 since people could check multiple boxes for race.

which the annual median income per household exceeds $200,000, and the poorest congressional

district in the entire country – the South Bronx – where 47% of children and youth live below the

poverty line[2] (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Inherent to growing up in contemporary urban settings in the US are stark disparities in

diverse young people's experiences across the various environments they navigate on a daily

basis. Growing up in different neighborhoods of New York City entails living in sometimes very

differing material and symbolic worlds that consequently produce rather different life histories.

There are undeniable systemic differences in class background that can be observed across the

range of social indicators such as: income, health, education, employment chances, literacy

levels, mortality rates, and so on. Class, in this immediate empirical sense, does not function as

some kind of "external" social reality. Rather, it is integral to the processes whereby individuals

interact, negotiate, contest, and collude with societal institutions such as families, schools, and

the criminal justice system (Wyn & White, 1997).

Experiences of youth living within the same environment are more similar to each other

than to experiences of young people living across distinct neighborhoods. Different

socioeconomic backgrounds can be regarded as distinct *social fields* (Bourdieu, 1993), that is,

social arenas characterized by similar potential to (re)produce monetary capital, or other forms of

capital – *social* and *cultural* – that also have a potential to eventually get translated into monetary

capital. Bourdieu argued that any competence becomes a capital to the extent that it facilitates

appropriation of a society's "cultural heritage" but is unequally distributed, thereby creating

opportunities for "exclusive advantages" (Bourdieu 1977) (how "cultural heritage" is defined is

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[2] As defined by the Office of Management and Budget and updated for inflation using the Consumer
Price Index, the weighted average poverty threshold for a family of four in 2012 was $23,492.

negotiated through power relations, and that could be a focus of a whole new inquiry). Higher socioeconomic positions, especially in the context of New York City, surely provide better access to the "cultural tools" (e.g. high-quality schools, availability and proximity of numerous extracurricular, artistic, and athletic contents and activities) that have a strong potential to facilitate appropriation of a society's cultural heritage, and lead to a more privileged positioning in the social field.

Bourdieu further maintained that members (*agents*) of the same social field share a basic set of thoughts and feelings organized around schemes which are used to classify and qualify persons and objects (Bourdieu, 1989). With this notion in mind, I wanted to explore how distinct ''social fields'' may shape and be shaped by individuals' sense-making processes. I will continue this conversation in the following section, but a disclaimer is due before I continue talking about socioeconomic background, and the inconsistencies, contradictions, and ambivalence through which this attribute is lived.

Socioeconomic status was used as the main research site selection criterion in this inquiry. Participants were recruited from youth organizations based in rather distinct neighborhoods of New York City: South Bronx, Riverdale (Bronx), Kingsbridge (Bronx), Long Island City (Queens), and Upper West Side (Manhattan). Nonetheless, I am cognizant of the systematic differences in the ethnic composition of the samples drawn from poor/working class and middle class neighborhoods, where we expect to see virtually only youth of color – mostly Black and Latino – in more impoverished neighborhoods, while the demographic composition becomes more diverse as we transition to more affluent areas of the city. Any research with youth involving the issues of power should be sensitive toward youth's ethnic minority-majority status and the degree of privilege inherent to their ethnic and socio-economic position (Aveling

& Gillespie, 2008). The cultural contexts of adolescents' daily lives are structured by asymmetries of power that take different forms in different contexts, and this is even more relevant when it comes to ethnic minority youth for whom the social structures are pointed toward additional challenges (Aveling & Gillespie, 2008). Development of minority youth entails adapting to numerous power imbalances (e.g. rich–poor, White–non-White, citizen–immigrant, cops–youth, parents–children, teachers–students, etc.), and learning how to recognize, make sense, and cope with such asymmetries. That said, it is not the primary purpose of this dissertation to disambiguate racial/ethnic from socioeconomic differences, which would require an inquiry far beyond the scope of the current one.

Further, while using the socioeconomic status as an organizing/grouping variable, I acknowledge the danger of using this term which often obscures numerous within-class differences related to racial and ethnic background, immigrant status, language practices (Heath, 1983), and so on.  One of the assumptions on which this inquiry is based is that the effect of the socioeconomic position overpowers the effect that youth's other positionalities (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003) might have on how they interpret what they observe and experience (Bourdieu, 1987; Lareau, 1987, 2003).

Using narrative as a cultural tool of complex relational interactions, I will investigate how adolescents' varying social worlds influence their sense-making about fairness and their capacity to relate to different stakeholders in a social situation revolving around fairness. I will examine the ways in which youth's experiences of broader society influence their relationships and reactions in local contexts. In the daily contexts of adolescents' lives, such as schools and out-of-school youth organizations, youth's interactions are influenced by the macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in which they are embedded. These macrosystems confer different

affordances based on race/ethnicity, class, and gender (Deutsch & Jones, 2008), yielding different meaning about fairness and people's intentions that diverse youth may make. Thus, people's intentions, and thoughts and feelings in general, may be read differently, depending on the social location diverse teens occupy. With this notion in mind, I will end this section that took a more sociological take on class and social structure, and move to the next section that takes a more psychological turn by addressing the *embodiments of social structure* – more immediate ways in which social structure enters the individual.

**Diverse Socioeconomic Histories**

The challenges and opportunities of young people in society are ultimately shaped by relations of wealth and poverty. Structural inequalities shape both the opportunities available to young people and the "process of youth" itself (Wyn & White, 1997). These differences in circumstances and outcomes are particularly visible in contemporary urban contexts in the US. Social class has a central presence in young people's lives, thus the concept of class relations must also occupy an important place in the analysis of youth. Young people growing up in contrasting socioeconomic circumstances live in very different material and symbolic worlds that afford rather different experiences. An assumption I explored in this dissertation is how these respective worlds enter and shape the psychological world – how differing histories shape individual sense-making about social relational issues revolving around fairness.

Anette Lareau (2003) offered an insightful exploration of how social structural forces do and do not shape crucial aspects of daily life, with the aim of learning about the impact that social stratification has on life chances. In her extensive ethnographic study with families from

different socioeconomic (and ethnic) backgrounds, Lareau observed systematic differences among children of poor/working and middle-class background in regards to numerous aspects of their daily lives. She organized the observed differences into three domains: the organization of families' daily life (e.g. types of after-school activities in which children engage), language practices between children and adults, and families' relationships with institutions.

One of the patterns Lareau observed in poor and working class families was the sense of powerlessness and frustration expressed in relation to institutions and figures of power, with school being the most salient institution in the study. Factors that may contribute to lower academic achievement among children from poor and working families are the mistrust they feel toward the institution, disconnect from the rules of the institution, and the feeling that they are unable to voice needs to, and demand changes and adjustments from, the institution (Lareau, 1987; 2003).

Lareau's findings regarding the relationship that poor and working class families have with institutions are, to some extent, equivocal. On the one hand, Lareau's and her colleagues' research (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Lareau, 2003) suggests that poor and working class parents have more confidence in the school staff in comparison to middle-class parents. They are deferential and trusting when it comes to educators' professional expertise; they seek guidance and often fear doing "the wrong thing" in school related matters. However, poor and working class parents see teachers as far less trustworthy, fair, and well-intentioned when it comes to disciplining children and handling interpersonal issues. This lack of trust may transfer to their children, affecting children's expectations from the educators. Therefore, it is hard to make assumptions regarding the sense of trust in school authority among less privileged youth.

When it comes to the youth from more privileged backgrounds, they impart more trust in teacher and school principal or counselor, and have higher expectations from them (or are at least more likely to voice these expectations) in comparison to the adolescents from less privileged positions in society (Lareau, 2003). Middle-class children learn to complain, argue, confront, and demand adjustments to their individual needs and preferences from teachers, counselors, coaches, doctors, and other adults/authority figures with whom they interact, while children from underprivileged backgrounds usually remain silent and can often resort to more or less "subversive" measures of coping with problems encountered at institutions. Lareau's work has shown that middle-class children in general feel more comfortable among adults and various authority figures, are better at leaving a good first impression, and come off as more assertive and confident. These social skills are developed through extensive and egalitarian relationships with adults/authority figures.

Using Bourdieu's framework (1986, 1987), which defines *cultural capital* as non-economic cultural assets, competencies, and skills (e.g. high levels of education) that can be used for social mobility, Lareau argued that these socioeconomically different ways of growing up come with differing repertoires of skills that individuals inherit that can then be translated into different forms of value as they move through various institutions in the future. Social position determines the learning and practicing of appropriate competences, therefore increasing individual children's chances of being positioned higher in the socioeconomic ladder (Bourdieu, 1990; Lareau, 2003). Having good interpersonal skills is a desirable characteristic in both personal and professional realms. Children from different socioeconomic backgrounds may be differently equipped regarding interpersonal skills, and many other skills that make up the important kit of resources capable of generating "profits" and allowing for social mobility

(Bourdieu, 1986). Middle-class children, who eventually grow into adults with middle-class background, in general feel more comfortable among adults and various authority figures; are better at leaving a good first impression; come off as more assertive and confident, and so on, all of which can increase their chances of being obtaining a higher position on the socioeconomic ladder (Lareau). These various attributes are clearly important parts of young people's social skills repertoire that have the prospective power to perpetuate the privileges of those youth who already benefit from them and disadvantage those who are already in an underprivileged position.

In this dissertation, I focus on a particular aspect of the interpersonal skills repertoire: adolescents' skill to take positions of different social actors, adequately construct (not necessarily consciously and intentionally) their respective wants, intentions, and cognitions, and adjust the way they communicate to different others. This competence of "[b]eing able to vary knowledge and experiences via the use of different expressive media" (Daiute, 2016, p. 146) was theorized and coined by Colette Daiute as *relational complexity*. Relational complexity is a context-dependent extension of perspective taking, as it regards context as the constitutive aspect of the *skill*, or better to say *performance*, rather than the background, or setting in which the skill is being expressed. A theory-based designed created for this study allows participants to occupy different positions around the issue of unfairness, namely, the positions of the instigator and victim of unfairness, and invites them to address and narrate for different audiences – implicit/unspecified audience, a friend, and an authority figure. This socio-cognitive skill of being flexible and adjustable while relating to diverse others is of particular importance for young people growing up in culturally hyper-diverse environments such as New York City. Building from the research described in this section, and bearing in mind the importance of the

perspective-shifting skill and its eventual cultural capital potential, I wanted to use narrative to explore eventual differences among youth from different socioeconomic backgrounds in regards to this important sociolinguistic skill of adjusting communicative style (and much more than that) to different others. Both the concept of relational complexity and the theory-based design will be the subject of extensive discussions in later sections of the dissertation. Before that happens, I want to discuss some of the theoretical and methodological challenges that the current inquiry aims to address.

**Challenges with Theories and Methods**

**Studying Urban Youth: Who Are the Youth**

Y*outh* may be one of the most contested terms in the social sciences. There are diverse definitions of youth distinguished by theoretical perspectives proposing multiple biological, sociological, and psychological criteria for transitioning from youth to adulthood However, the fact that the departments in charge of youth policies in a large majority of North American and European institutions are usually joined with social welfare bureaus (Council of Europe, 2016) reveals some fundamental notions about youth shared across these international contexts. This positioning of youth as a vulnerable group that should be taken care of is one of the implications of separating the individual from the social. I will elaborate further on this notion and then propose an alternative approach that accounts for the relational and interdependent nature of individuals and society.

Contributing to the perception of youth as vulnerable are the persistent – timeless and universal – expectations that adolescence is a time when young people are working on figuring out who they are by trying on different identities. As some authors point out (Wyn & White, 1997), the problem with this notion of adolescence – "finding one's self"– is the assumption that a "pre-social" self exists within the individual and needs to be discovered and developed. The individual is seen as separate from society and independent from social relations and circumstances. Consequently, transitioning from adolescence to adulthood entails moving from a state of dependency to one of independence and autonomy; reaching adulthood means separating one's self from one's family in a physical, financial, and emotional sense (Dimitriadis, 2008). However, this is a rather privileged notion of adolescent development that does not map easily onto the experiences and histories of many disenfranchised youths. As Dimitriadis (2008) points out, we should work against "notions of youth that reify its assumed 'whiteness' and 'middle-class' status…without reifying a competing 'minority' or 'working-class' version" (p. 15).

Another implication of a static and individualistic approach to studying *youth* is the nature attributed to the phenomena we purport to study. Do we want to learn about a particular *skill* and its current "level of development," or are we curious about **how** something develops, and how its *performance* depends on the context (social, cultural and historical)? The current inquiry assumes a theoretical shift from static and categorical approaches to one that grasps social relations and dynamic processes. The way in which my research deals with this tension between the universality of youth and the highly specific, differentiated and socially divided nature of youth is by devising a sociocultural theory-based method that accounts for the fundamentally social and relational nature of young people's (socio-cognitive) development.

**How Do We Study Urban Youth's Sense-making about Fairness?**

Youth's experiences around fairness as well as the potential impact that socioeconomic background has on their understanding of people's motives and intentions can be studied in ways that incorporate very different theoretical and ontological premises. Most of the previous research on youth's (socio-)cognitive development used structuralist and individualistic theoretical approaches. These approaches are concerned with the *developmental level* of a *skill* that is being studied, placed *inside* of a person. My concern for these types of approaches to studying youth is to a lesser extent of theoretical and methodological nature, and to a larger degree of a political one. Locating issues inside the person removes the responsibility that broader social structure can have for developmental outcomes. As *skills, traits*, and other "essences" may imply permanence, it can be argued that essentialist thinking tends toward political conservatism and therefore opposes social change.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that significant research regarding the issue of fairness has come out from this individualist tradition in studying child and youth development, which can to some extent inform the current inquiry. Perceptions of fairness and assessment of its wrongfulness have usually been studied in the context where racial (Crystal, Killen, & Ruck, 2008; Killen, Clark Kelly, Richardson, Crystal, & Ruck, 2010), gender (Brown & Bigler, 2004), sexual orientation (Horn, 2007, 2008), and disability based exclusions have taken place. These studies pointed that those who have experienced unjust treatment may (or may not) be more likely to perceive unfairness committed to others (Ripski & Gregory, 2009; Shapiro & Kirkman, 2001). Further, they showed that youth coming from ethnic minorities are experiencing discrimination and prejudiced and unfair treatment significantly more often than cultural majority youth (Schulz, Williams, Israel, Becker, Parker, James, & Jackson, 2000), making them

more prone to read injustice in the ambiguous social situation since people tend to see things that they expect to see (Snyder & Swann, 1978). Repeated experiences of unfair treatment sensitize individuals who have been targets of unfairness to expect rejection in new situations where unfair treatment is plausible (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002; Pinel, 1999).

These studies also indicated that youth's belief in the fairness of people and institutions that are relevant in their lives are correlated with various aspects of their wellbeing. Youth's sense of fairness in how other people, especially authority figures, treat them is correlated with academic achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Goddard, Salloum & Berebitsky, 2009; Lareau, 2006); violent behavior at school (Ochoa, Lopez & Emler, 2007); stress coping strategies (Furnham, 2003; Oppenheimer, 2006); development of morality; sense of justice (Lerner, 2004; Smetana, 1999); and civic engagement (Sullivan & Transue, 1999; Levinson, 2010). Thus, youth whose social environments are "toxic" and characterized by injustice and lack of reciprocity on the part of caregivers (authorities) will develop beliefs that life is based on power and domination rather than caring or forgiveness (Crystal et al., 2010).

The above-mentioned studies point at patterns and correlations without providing emic explanations (from the perspective of the subject) of how these relationships come to be – *how* they develop, and *how* these beliefs and attitudes are contingent on relational dynamics and sociocultural and historical circumstances. Individualistic, structuralist approaches to studying development aim to understand the level (or a stage of development) of a studied skill, producing incomplete answers about human development. These answers are particularly inadequate when development takes place in a hyper-diversified environment such as New York City. The young people engaged in the current study, especially those from less affluent areas of the city, navigate

through numerous, diverse and even contrasting environments on a daily basis. They may live in impoverished areas and participate in work of local youth organizations, but go to schools outside of their neighborhoods, sometimes even to private schools which are a long commute and symbolic worlds away from their community.

For these reasons, we must develop research methods that attempt to tap <u>not</u> into universal and static characteristics, but into varied and context-dependent performances. These methods should be based on the premise that what drives and explains development are interpersonal interactions in shared context-embedded activities rather than biological (genetic) or intrinsic personality factors. Our cognition is not disembodied. Rather, it is part of a whole person who develops in a contextually rich and socially infused environment (e.g. Nelson, 1985). Therefore, the context should not be regarded as separate or external to the person; rather, as the "psychological externalized or materialized" (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto & Norasakkunkit, 1997). Our psychological functions are not static; they vary with time and space (Shweder, 2003), and psychological inquiry should attempt to study them *in the process* of changing them (Vygotsky, 1997). The current inquiry aligns with approaches in which the focus is shifted from young people themselves to the way they negotiate, contest, and collude in social processes.

My goal is to devise a study design that would tap into the interdependence of the individual with the social, the material, and the historical; to design a study that allows insights into how the social world enters and constitutes the psychological world of an individual. These ideas are at the core of sociocultural approaches in psychology, which will be more extensively discussed in the following (Theoretical Grounding) chapter. Following one of Katherine Nelson's (1998) central claims that the primary cognitive task of the human child is to make

sense of their situated place in the world in order to take a skillful part in their activities, I use narrative as an excellent tool for looking into youth's sense-making about important relational dynamics that they may be encountering daily.

Thus, the way I study young people's understanding of fairness is by exploring how they make sense about interpersonal dynamics as they occupy positions of different stakeholders in situations revolving around the issues of unfairness and exclusion. I invited adolescents from different neighborhoods of New York City to narrate about personal and fictional experiences of unfairness, by engaging with a hypothetical vignette created for the purpose of the current study. The design provided multiple opportunities for narration, allowing insight into multiple relational dynamics. Instead of asking participants directly about the concepts of interest, engagement with a cultural tool of the vignette allowed creation of meaning in context. Adolescents had to alternatively take positions of the self, the possible perpetrator, and the victim of exclusion. Inviting participants to take multiple perspectives allowed a dynamic and relational study of their sense of fairness, and development of complex, sometimes even contradictory meanings in context.

Inviting participants to narrate from different positions and for different audiences, grants access to their socio-cognitive skill of *relational complexity* (Daiute, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2016). As defined by Colette Daiute, *relational complexity* is the skill to adjust one's communications, including written texts, to audiences (implicit and explicit) and contexts (the specific circumstances present and invoked in the relevant environment). This skill is of particular importance for young people growing up in the contemporary New York City context. Besides cultural hyper-diversity, technology and increasingly more diverse media of communication impose additional challenges in regards to adjusting our communicative skills and the ways we

relate to others via different channels, engaging with different discourses (Chayko, 2007; Lucić, 2016). The research design developed for this study involved multiple narrating activities, employing different genres, inviting young people to shift perspectives and engage with diverse audiences. This feature allowed me insight into within-person diversity, that is, young people's socio-cognitive capacity to regulate their thoughts, feelings, projections, and interpretations dependent on the perspective they take. I will address this higher mental function of relational complexity further in the following section.

Following Lev Vygotsky's tradition, while conducting research we should create conditions that allow us to construct the objects of investigation in the process of studying and changing them (Vygotsky, 1997). Thus, I study how adolescents make sense about fairness as they are shifting the perspective they take, addressing different others, using different genres of communication. I used different narrative activities as cultural tools that allowed me to look at participants' sense-making not "as it is" – still and in a social vacuum – but as what it becomes by interacting with different contexts, by aiding, amplifying, and altogether co-creating their sense-making processes. We can grasp the essence and understand the development of psychological phenomena only through actively changing and constructing them (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 1997). By intervening we get to tap into the historicalness of the particular psychological systems we study (Scribner, 1985).

Therefore, this study was designed following the principle that narrating is a dynamic relational activity; that people use narrating to interact with *others* (actually present or implied), *their environments*, and *themselves*, in diverse *ways* (Daiute, 2014). In order to account for this life-like diversity in narrating, I involved participants in multiple narrating activities, employing diverse narrative genres, created for different purposes and directed toward different audiences.

This approach allowed insights into multiple perspectives within the issue of unfairness. Engaging participants in multiple narrating practices helps researchers understand the participants' range of experiences around the question of interest, and can help participants gain new insights into their own experience. Because I consider narrating metaphorically as well as literally, the design accommodates multiple discursive expressions (personal account, email to friend, letter to school official), as these cross-genre enactments are amenable to narrative analyses. I will discuss this approach further in Chapter II.

**The Relational Complexity Skill in a Hyper-Diversified Era**

We, as humans, have always been changing individuals in a changing world, mutually adjusting to and transforming one another. The contemporary changes we are experiencing may be more dynamic and widespread than ever before. Everyday life is becoming increasingly diversified on numerous levels: there is greater global mobility, both in terms of immigration and short-term traveling; gravitation towards urban areas; expansion in the media of communication; and growing demands in terms of how we should communicate via these different channels, as we interact and communicate with diverse others.

The majority of people, in particular young people, living in industrialized Western societies today must negotiate a *heterogeneous and fragmented society* (Rappoport, Baumgarden, & Boone, 1999), and this challenge is even greater for minority and immigrant youth (Aveling & Gillespie, 2008). Ethnic minority and immigrant youth are simultaneously socialized into the culture of their ethnic communities, their parents' culture, and the dominant host culture. Therefore, it is worth exploring how the socio-cognitive skill of relational complexity plays out among youth from different cultural backgrounds. The participant recruiting criterion in this study was not ethnic background or immigration status; however, it

must be acknowledged that socioeconomic background is inextricably connected with racial/ethnic background and immigration status, especially in urban areas of the U.S.

The diversification of daily life requires flexibility in adjusting the way we relate to different others across multiple media and genres of communication. This skill is somewhat similar to perspective-taking, with one important difference being the role of context – the context (who they are addressing, how, how they view the relationship with their addressees in terms of the power dynamics) is regarded as a constitutive part of the "skill," and not just the setting in which the skill is enacted. Perspective-taking is defined as the ability to recognize, articulate, and coordinate the internal states of others, which increases over the course of development (Marsh, Serafica, & Barenboim, 1980). Thus, relational complexity can be defined as a context-dependent extension of perspective-taking.

Back in 1932, Jean Piaget marked the ability to shift perspectives as a major developmental breakthrough in cognitive functioning. In today's world, this ability to read properly the relevant features of a social situation (who is the interlocutor, what is the goal of the social transaction, how do we position ourselves in relation to him/her, what do we want from the transaction, etc.) and adjust the way we communicate in order to optimize the interpersonal transaction is of increasing importance. It makes us skillful participants in various sociocultural practices, with diverse others and in diverse contexts. Having good interpersonal skills is a desirable characteristic in one's personal life, but it is also a very important asset in the professional realm.

It should not be assumed that all children and adolescents go through certain progressive stages when it comes to development of the relational complexity skill, and eventually reach the point when their skill is actualized to its maximum. I want to demonstrate that this skill is very

context-dependent—or better to say context-defined—and that there are various features of the discursive context which can impede or advance the skill. I wanted to see how this skill is played out among the youth coming from different socioeconomic positions, and how the appropriation of the positions of different stakeholders influences their narrating about power and injustice.

Building from the aforementioned research, and bearing in mind the importance of the relational complexity skill and its eventual cultural capital potential, I wanted to use narrative to explore eventual differences among youth from different socioeconomic backgrounds in regards to this key sociolinguistic skill of adjusting communicative style to different positions and addressees. Given the theoretical and empirical research demonstrating that various important sociocultural competences are not equally distributed in this society (Bourdieu, 1986, 1987, 1990; Heath, 1983, 1993, 2004; Lareau, 1987, 2003), it could be hypothesized that youth from underserved backgrounds could be less flexible in effectively adjusting communication style to diverse others and diverse context. There are several rather dated studies (Labov, 1970; Bernstein, 1962) that looked at youth's sociolinguistic skill of adjusting their "speech style" to various social situations and different interlocutors with whom they interact. Bernstein (1962) found that middle class youth (12 and 15-year olds) expressed greater tendency to "code-switch" in comparison to poor/working class youth.

On the other hand, due to their particular positions in society which require them to navigate on a daily basis through environments characterized by diverse or even incompatible cultural values and practices (Bell, 1994; Chavajay & Rogoff, 2002; Crago, Annahatak, & Ningiuruvik, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Heath, 1983; Labov, 1972; Lee, 2005), the underprivileged youth may be more skillful at what the previous studies described as a competence of adjusting their *speech style* or *code switching*. There are few recent studies that

indicate that this may actually be the case – that minority (Daiute, Buteau, & Rawlins, 2001) and immigrant youth (Lucić, 2013) may be more versed in shifting perspectives and adjusting the way they relate to others than their cultural majority counterparts. The current inquiry continues this context-dependent exploration of relational complexity, focusing on youth from divergent socioeconomic backgrounds. I use narrative to explore linguistic enactments of this dialogical skill of imagining and embodying the thoughts, feelings, intentions, and values of another person.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL GROUNDING

**Sociocultural Origin of Human Behavior**

This dissertation is grounded in a sociocultural approach based on Lev Vygotsky's cultural-historical premise that being a person is fundamentally a social transaction – that human nature is not fixed but arises out of changing social conditions that it in turn produces. I use a sociocultural approach to study how psychological processes may be, explicitly and implicitly, shaped by the contexts or cultural systems that people inhabit, comprised of institutions, practices, artifacts, experiences and representations (Cole, 2003; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; 1983). Thus, what is of interest in sociocultural approach, and in this dissertation, is exploring the ways in which people's psychological processes are mediated by the "meaning-saturated repositories" (Bourdieu, 1990) of the psychological activity of those who preceded us. The aim of this dissertation is to examine how diverse social and economic locations that urban adolescents occupy shape their experiences and inform the sense they make about fairness and truthfulness of people.

A sociocultural approach strives to account for the impact that social, cultural, political, and economic structures have on who we are and how we come to be as individuals (and cultural species); it explores how human behavior is socially and culturally constituted (Cole, 2006; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; 1983). People exist in communities and in relationships, and they are constantly attuned to the feelings, thoughts, and actions of others. People's actions and the ways of being depend upon, reflect, foster, and institutionalize sociocultural affordances and

influences. In Markus's and Hamedani's (2007) view, "as people actively construct their worlds, they are [being] made up of, or 'constituted by,' relations with other people and by the ideas, practices, products, and institutions that are prevalent in their social contexts" (p. 4).

Sociocultural analysis involves two levels of inquiry - the *conceptual* (symbolic) and the *material* – with the recognition that the conceptual is also material in nature. The conceptual level of analysis involves the meanings people construct about the world around them (expressed through ideas, representations, values, etc.), whereas the material level includes sociostructural aspects of the context - cultural products, interpersonal interactions, institutional practices and systems, and person-situation contingencies (Markus & Hamedani, 2007). Later I will discuss how narrative, which will be used as the data collection/production and analysis approach, embodies this unity of the material and the conceptual. As Daiute argues (2014), meaning *is* material "because narratives are symbolic systems inextricably linked to persons, contexts, culture, and circumstances of their histories and expressive moments" (p. 23).

While studying young people's relationship with peers (and authority), and their sense-making about fairness, we cannot explore all the factors (e.g. individual histories, family dynamics, school environment, neighborhood, cultural values, historical, political and economic circumstances) contributing to these phenomena of interest, which a comprehensive sociocultural analysis would encompass. It would hardly be feasible to conduct an inquiry of this scope, which involves a plethora of interconnected factors. A psychological inquiry can focus on exploring **how** psychological processes may be, explicitly and implicitly, shaped by the contexts, worlds, or cultural systems that people inhabit.

Thus, at the core of a sociocultural approach are the ideas of the interdependence of the individual with the social, the material, and the historical, and the emphasis on people's

meaning-making (and meaning-sharing) capacities. Narrative scholars often use the terms *sense-making* and *meaning-making* interchangeably (Bhatia, 2011; Daiute, 2011; 2014) to refer to the process of using narratives and narrating to interact with life and self, to figure out what is going on in the environment, and to determine where and how one fits. There can hardly be a better avenue for looking into people's meaning-making processes than looking at language people use − looking at the ways in which people make and use stories to interpret the world (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Bruner, 1990; Lawler, 2002; Riessman, 1993). In Gergen's (2001) perspective, "language is the child not of the mind but of cultural processes" (p. 806). One's narratives are not outward expressions of an "inner mirror of the mind" (p. 806). Rather, narratives are social products created by people in the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations. Therefore, people do not construct narratives "at will" (Ewick & Silbey, 1995), that is, the narratives we create are not personal constructions independent from the context in which we are embedded. Rather, narratives are interactive spaces of connection between the individual and the social, produced by individuals in the ongoing dialogue with broader societal stories (Daiute, 2014; McNay, 2000).

Vygotsky thought that the child was inherently social, and that his or her development cannot be analyzed outside the context of *social practice*. Hence, that is how human beings come about − by entering the flow of social-cultural practice. However, research and theory in social cognition are still driven by an overwhelmingly individualistic orientation that overlooks that the contents of cognition originate in social life, in human interaction and communication. Unfortunately, the information processing models (e.g. Siegler, 1989) central to social cognition focus on cognitive processes at the expense of content and context. As such, *societal, collective,*

*shared, interactive,* and *symbolic* features of human thought, interaction, and experience are often ignored and forgotten.

Bruner (1990) outlined a vision for cultural psychology in stating that psychology must move away from being preoccupied with "behavior" and shift its focus to how we make meaning of our "actions" as intentional agents located in cultural practices and socially situated settings (p. 19). The current inquiry continues this sociocultural tradition started by Vygotsky of exploring how the social world enters the intrapersonal realm. It examines how the social context may bring about the narratives youth create around the issue of unfairness. I explore the meaning adolescents from differently resourced environments make about a social situation in which unspecified instance(s) of unfairness might have happened. I look into participants' understanding of people's intentions and motives for acting in plausibly unfair ways, as they take perspectives of different stakeholders in the situation. This concept of *addressivity* (Bakhtin, 1986) brings context—those to whom a narrative is directed—directly into the meaning of a narrative text.

The research design as well as the narrative focus and structure of the hypothetical vignette that prompted all four narrating activities in which participants were engaged, play a role in their interpretations. Asking participants to reflect and narrate from diverse positions affects *how* and *what* is shared regarding unfairness, as youth's understanding is likely to differ based on the relational context stated and implied in the prompt. With attention to these various dimensions of unfairness, I will examine what the broader collective stories and values are with which youth dialogue. Exploring diverse adolescents' construals about fairness can inform our understanding about the meaning young people make about the world around them, and the ways they interact with the socioeconomic circumstances in which they live.

**Narrative: A Meeting Point of the Individual and the Social**

*For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future.*

Barbara Hardy, 1977

The research design and analysis of this study are theoretically grounded in sociocultural theory, which, as described earlier, focuses on the interdependent development of individuals and society, as the process of individual development is regarded as inseparable from cultural-historical context (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Engström, 2009; Vygotsky 1978, 1983). Narrative and language, as its main vehicles, are *cultural tools* (Vygotsky, 1978, 1983; Cole, 2003) – embodiments of social activities – that provide a mechanism for analyzing the relationship between individual and sociocultural setting; they have an intermediary position and make it possible for the sociocultural context to enter and negotiate individual mental functioning. I want to investigate the relationship between individuals and the multiple social structures (familial, educational, historical, political, economic circumstances, etc.) in which they are embedded. Therefore, narrative, as a space where the individual and the social connect, makes an excellent tool for the current inquiry.

This theoretical framework is based on a premise that language is not only (or not primarily) referential, instrumental and transactional, but constitutive, interpretive and transformative. Narratives are not just expressions, reports, or personal constructions; rather, they are interactions and co-constructions. In other words, narrative is a socioculturally situated shared activity. Rather than being a window into people's minds and hearts, storytelling is a

cultural tool (like other discourse genres and symbol systems) for managing (mediating) self-society relationships (Daiute, 2013); narrating provides a mechanism for analyzing the relationship between individual and sociocultural setting. As Daiute (2016) summarizes, "When we define language as a cultural tool for doing something in society, rather than as a mere transmitter of information, we support and study the dynamics of social relations and social change" (p. 148).

Narrative is intrinsically social, since it uses the social medium of language; it is produced by social subjects; and it embodies social interactions. Narratives are social products created by people within the context of specific social, historical, and cultural locations (Lawler, 2002), since what people think is profoundly shaped by their material life (Marx, 1976). The narratives produced by individuals would make no sense if they did not involve broader collective stories. Meaning is constructed through interaction with actual or implicit others, in relation to social structures, power relations, and one's own needs and goals (Daiute, 2014).

Another aspect to consider about narratives is that they are interpretive devices through which people analyze and represent themselves and their worlds to themselves and to others (Lawler, 2002; Daiute, 2014). Given that people's behavior depends on the meanings they actively contribute to their experience (Bruner, 1990), inquiry into meaning-making processes can be much more informative than looking at behavior at the descriptive level, without knowing what that behavior means for the individual at the given time and context. What is perceptible is not all there is to say; the interpretive level – how the individuals see and experience the social world – is much more interesting and revealing. As McNay (2000) theorized, "Meaning is not inherent to action but is the product of interpretive strategies amongst which narrative is central" (p. 95).

Narrative research goes beyond the "survey" and experimental research by facing the challenges of indeterminateness and equivocalness and, at the same time, opening the inquiry so it allows learning about "the particular, idiosyncratic, deeply held experiences of being in this world" (Daiute, 2014, p. 10). Narrative analysis offers a systematic study of these personal experiences and meanings. In the following section I address a particular narrative design and analysis strategy I employed in this research study. I purposefully placed this section at the transition from the theoretical to methodological section of the manuscript to illustrate the theoretical groundedness of the method as well as a basic principle I tend to abide by, which is the inadequacy of separating theory from method.

**At the Conjunction of Theory and Method: A Dynamic Narrating
Design Approach**

In this dissertation, I use a *dynamic narrating approach* developed by Colette Daiute (Daiute, 2010a, 2014), which is based on a sociocultural premise of the interdependence of the individual with the social, the material, and the historical, and the emphasis on people's sense-making (and sense-sharing) capacities. As all approaches drawing from a sociocultural framework, dynamic narrating is in essence dialectical in a sense that it does not have to make things "stand still" in order to study them, as is the case in some of the previously mentioned structuralist cognitive approaches to studying youth. Rather, it studies phenomena in movement, historically, as they develop. Therefore, in order to capture the dynamic and historical nature of psychological phenomena, we should design research studies in a way that allows development of *meaning in context*.

Another important premise of this dynamic narrating approach is that the best way of looking into people's sense-making processes is through the ways in which they *make* and *use* stories to interpret the world (Bamberg, 1997; 2011; Daiute, 2014). Further, research activities should resemble some real-life activities in which participants could be involved outside of the research context. Embedding narrative activities in the life-based settings (e.g., peer interactions at school, writing an email to a friend) can be beneficial since narratives elicited in that way can enact "real-life" concerns, pressures, motivation, and goals (Daiute, 2014). Finally, engaging participants in multiple narrating practices should help researchers understand the participants' range of experiences around the question of interest, and could help participants gain new insights about their own experience.

The research study should be designed bearing in mind that narrating is a dynamic

relational activity; that people use narrating to interact with *others* (actually present or implied),

*their environments*, and *themselves*, in diverse *ways* (Daiute, 2014). In order to account for this

life-like diversity in narrating I involved adolescents in multiple narrating activities eliciting

several narrative genres, created for different purposes and directed toward different audiences,

all of which would allow for multiple perspectives on the issues of unfairness, people's

intentions, motivations, and expectations. I invited participants to interpret a social situation,

depicting a realistic and probable interaction between peers and adult authority figures, by

drawing parallels with their personal experience. Further, I invited them to take perspectives of

different stakeholders in a social situation and elaborate the situation from their respective points

of view, bearing in mind their distinct perceptions, emotions, values, motives, and intentions. By

inviting multiple perspectives over the same issue, we open the research for a more complex

understanding of how people make meaning about what is going on around them, how they fit,

and what they would like to change (Daiute & Nelson, 1997).

Since the issues that participants mention in their narratives are likely determined by the

present or implied readers and listeners of the narrative (Bakhtin, 1986; Holquist, 1990), eliciting

narratives from multiple stakeholders' perspectives gives sound to voices that would otherwise

remain silent had we included only one stakeholder's stance (Daiute, 2014). While

narrating/making sense from one perspective (and for one particular audience), certain issues

may be minimized or even silenced due to, for example, power dynamics between the present or

envisioned interlocutors. These same issues may arise while taking another standpoint and

narrating from different person's perspective (Daiute, 2009; Jović, 2014). It is important to note

that the narrators do not employ these narrative moves of foregrounding or downplaying certain

issues intentionally, with awareness. These narrative games we play are learned, socialized ways of organizing our sense-making processes, without narrators being necessarily cognizant of it.

By designing multiple expressive activities and asking participants to provide more than one narrative, and by engaging them in multiple relational stances, we open possibilities by inviting complexity and contradiction in people's narratives (Daiute, 2011). As Daiute (2010) argues, without shifting activities, we should expect to get only "canonical stories" and "frozen narratives." Allowing for complexity and examining how individuals use narrating in relation to multiple contexts is particularly important when taking into account the diversity of the environments through which my study participants navigate on a daily basis.

In summary, this narrative research is designed (and analyzed) guided by four theoretical principles proposed by Daiute (2014): *use, relation, materiality,* and *diversity*. The principle of **use** is centered on the notion that people use narrating to interact with issues around us and in our lives; narratives are cultural tools used to mediate individual and societal interactions. The **relation** principle highlights the dynamic relational nature of storytelling, which implies that in order to grasp what a narrator is doing with a story we need to take into account the *narrator-audience-issue* meaning system. Who is telling the story, to whom, about what, and for what purpose? The **materiality** principle refers to the materiality of the very language, and the affordances of genres of narrating with which we engage. Finally, the **diversity** principle refers to variability across individuals and groups, which is the one usually considered in research. More importantly, in dynamic narrating this principle implies the *within-person diversity* that we can get access to by engaging participants in multiple narrating activities and observing if, and how, their sense-making changes as the narrators' stances and/or audience shift. My research designs, activities, and analyses are based on a synthesis of the above described principles.

**Research Questions**

With the aim of exploring the meaning young people make about fairness, this study employs a theory-based design derived from a *dynamic narrating approach* (Daiute, 2010a; 2010b; 2014). The design allowed participants multiple opportunities to make sense about the issues at stake and occupy positions of multiple stakeholders. This design feature opened four windows for looking into youth's sense-making about people's intentions, motives, and expectations, inviting diversity of perspectives and possibly contradictions, inconsistencies, transgressions, ambivalence, and other sorts of tensions in their narrating.

The main tool for eliciting the narrative data was a vignette participants read, depicting an unspecified and uncertain instance of unfairness, followed by four writing prompts. The focal interpretive dilemma described in the vignette primarily regards the peer-peer and peer-teacher relationships, in the school context, given that it is the most relevant formal institution for the majority of adolescents. Of the four narratives that participants were invited to write in response to the vignette, one addressed their personal experience similar to the one described in the vignette, two narratives were written from the perspectives of an "instigator" and a "left-out" character, respectively, and the fourth narrative took the presumed "victim's" perspective. Besides the four different positions the participants assumed while narrating about unfairness, they also addressed three distinct audiences: the implicit audience, a friend, and a school authority figure. Further discussion about the vignette can be found in the *Method* chapter.

Figure 1 illustrates a dynamic narrating approach used with the aim of understanding how diverse adolescents use narrating to make sense of interpersonal relations as well as people's intentions and motives, which consequently informs their vision of the fairness of the world and the expectations they can have from it.

Figure 1. Dynamic narrating model: Four windows for looking at sense-making about fairness

**(1) Personal perspective:**

How do youth understand the vignette?

→ What is the main <u>conflict</u> they see in the story?

→ Do they see unfairness taking place?

→ How do they position themselves in their personal accounts: as an <u>object</u> or the <u>agent</u> of wrongdoing/misunderstanding?

→ How do they understand different actors' intentions for acting the way they act?

**(2) The "instigator" perspective:**

How do youth understand fairness while taking the perspective of an instigator and a plausible wrongdoer?

→ How well do they relate to this character: e.g. do they distance themselves from this character, or work on humanizing him/her?

Implicit    Friend

**Audience**

Authority
Figure

**(4) "Victim" perspective:**

How do youth understand fairness while taking the perspective of the victim of wrongdoing?

→ How well do they relate to this character?

→ How versed are they at <u>voicing their concerns</u> about being wronged, and demanding reversal of unfairness?

**(3) The perspective of the "uninvolved":**

How do youth understand fairness while taking the perspective of an actor who was left out of the decision making process?

→ How well do they relate to this character?

→ How do they position themselves in the story: as a victim of exclusion, or as something else?

The main questions that this inquiry will address are:

(1) How do individual youth interpret ambiguous social situations where certain forms of

unfairness might have occurred?

What I plan to explore while answering this question is adolescents' experience of

(un)fairness of the situation described in the vignette, through their understanding of different

social actors' thoughts, feelings, and intentions. How do adolescents understand the relational

dynamics operating between the actors in the presented story (vignette): what kind of conflict(s)

do they see playing out in the story, or do they, instead, see a misunderstanding and inconclusiveness? While narrating the personal experience, they see as similar to the one depicted in the vignette, do they position themselves as the *object* or the *instigator* of misunderstanding/exclusion/deception?

> (2) How do youth make meaning about unfairness as they are invited to position themselves and narrate as different stakeholders in the story?

The exploration of this question should offer more complex insights about youth's understanding of the social system of unfairness by looking at the ways in which diverse adolescents' experience of an ambiguous situation changes as they take perspectives of different actors. As they take the perspective of the instigator, for example, how well do they relate to this character: do they distance themselves from the character, or do they humanize him/her? Do they condone or denounce the probable culprit's behavior? How do they relate to the role of the character who was given little agency and who was possibly wronged (excluded)? What is their capacity for relating to and occupying these two opposing positions? What is the position to which diverse adolescents can more easily relate – which one is closer to their experience? Do they offer more elaborate accounts while narrating as a likely culprit, or the victim? It will be interesting to explore how adept diverse youth are at shifting perspectives and relating to rather different, and possibly opposing, standpoints.

> (3) Are there, and what is the nature of, differences among youth from different socioeconomic backgrounds in regards to relational complexity, a sociolinguistic skill of adjusting the communicative approach to different others?

The same social situation described in the vignette may carry very different meaning for adolescents coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds given that different positions in

society provide different affordances in terms of how we perceive the social world around us. Therefore, aside from exploring within-group differences addressed with the previous research question, a line of inquiry explored possible between-group patterns of similarities and differences in sense-making about the vignette. I looked into possible differences among youth from different socioeconomic backgrounds when it comes to adjusting their narrating according to the position they are taking and audience they are addressing.

**CHAPTER III**

**METHOD**

This chapter will address the recruitment and data collection process, materials and procedures used, and data analysis strategies employed to the end of exploring how dissimilar social and material worlds in which adolescents from different backgrounds live inform and shape their sense-making about fairness. I wanted to learn about the ways adolescents *use* narrative to consider fairness in diverse relationships, and the ways in which meaning they make incorporates/reflects social context. In order to do so, I employed a comparative mixed methods design, recruiting youth from poor, working class, and middle/upper class socioeconomic background; and explored the meaning they make about the phenomena of interest by eliciting and analyzing their narratives. The study of these complex relationships requires a dynamic approach that would encompass multiple social-relational dynamics, acknowledging individuals' complexity and sensitivity to others and contexts. Therefore, this called for a design that would allow access to adolescents' multiple lines of meaning they make about intentions of people surrounding them, and to similarities and differences in ways of knowing across individuals and socioeconomic groups.

In dynamic narrating approach, the research activities should resemble real-life activities in which participants might be involved even outside of the research context, and they should allow the expression of multiple stories relevant to the inquiry (Daiute, 2014). If we create a research design that will allow participants to relate with realistic audiences, as opposed to with the interviewer, it will be more likely that they would narrate as they do in real life, outside of

the research context. Further, involving narrating from the perspective of multiple stakeholders would make some voices heard that would otherwise be silenced if we include only one stakeholder's stance (Daiute, 2014). By designing multiple narrating activities and asking participants to provide more than one narrative, and by engaging them in multiple relational stances, we open possibilities by inviting complexity and contradiction in narrative (Daiute, 2011). Allowing for complexity and examining how individuals use narrating in relation to multiple contexts is particularly important when taking into account the diversity of the environments through which youth navigate on a daily basis, and the heterogeneity of their educational contexts, in particular. Diverse narrating activities allow insights into what young people are doing with the narrative, as they engage with different *others* and different *contexts*, with different *purposes*.

## Recruitment and Data Collection

The recruitment process for this study started in May 2015 by reaching out to several community youth organizations located in the Bronx, Queens, and Manhattan, which represent three out of the five boroughs of New York City. I wanted to recruit high-school aged adolescents from socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods. I chose the neighborhoods that I knew well, either by living, working, or volunteering there. I corroborated my experience and my estimates of the socioeconomic position of the neighborhoods by checking the U.S. Census data for the census tracts from which I recruited the youth organizations. My main goal was to recruit youth that live in rather contrasting material and symbolic conditions, which clearly illustrates the growing inequality that the city, and the nation in general, has been experiencing during the past couple of decades.

I was granted access to four youth organizations, three of which are located in the Bronx, and one in Queens. I will not disclose the names of the organizations that I collaborated with since that permission was not part of the approved IRB protocol.[3] Instead, I will refer to the names of the neighborhoods in which they are located. The initial contact with each organization was via email. Upon a positive response from an organization, I paid a visit to introduce myself and meet the staff and the youth. I spent at least two hours at each organization, observing and more or less passively participating in their usual activities. During my second visit to each organization, I would be given time to introduce myself and the study to the prospective participants. They would usually have me come back the following week and conduct the research procedure with the youth who returned signed Parental Permission/Consent Forms.

Table 1 shows the list of the youth organizations (and one private school in Queens) from which the participants were recruited, together with the number of participants recruited and the income data for their respective census tracts. I used the U.S. Census Bureau data (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012) on the median annual income per household for each respective neighborhood.

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[3] The study has been approved by the Graduate School & University Center (CUNY) Institutional Review Board (protocol #676370-2).

Table 1

Participating Organizations and the Income Data for their Respective Census Tracts

| Organization (location) | Income | Number of participants |
|---|---|---|
| South Bronx, Bronx | $20,600 | 9 |
| Kingsbridge, Bronx | $42,353 | 18 |
| Riverdale, Bronx | $94,500 | 18 |
| Long Island City, Queens | $76,576 | 9 |

The recruitment and data collection process lasted from May – December 2015, by which point I did not have a desired number of participants that would represent higher socioeconomic position. I will address this process of "operationalizing" the socioeconomic status in this study in the following section where I talk about research participants. During the period of 6 months I contacted over 25 community youth organizations and private schools on Manhattan that gather youth from more affluent neighborhoods, trying to establish collaboration. In only a few instances, I received a response with a promise that someone would follow up with me, which never happened even after I had sent reminder emails or made phone calls. In most of the cases I received either no response or a variation of the following response: "Historically our school/organization has not allowed people to directly recruit our students/participants for studies."

Besides the enormous frustration resulting from the lack of support necessary to conduct the study (a logistically rather non-demanding and of a very low-risk nature), this long and painful "door-in-the-face" process made me wonder about what we actually know about certain

populations of minors that are kept sheltered from social science research until they reach the age of 18. My study made no inquiry into sensitive and private information, I collected no identifiable data, required very modest time commitment (less than one hour), and its merit was recognized by the competitive funding it received that allowed me to, among other things, compensate research participants with small tokens of gratitude. If it was so hard, that is, impossible, to establish collaboration with sites that gather youth from more privileged backgrounds, I wondered how any sensitive topic such as domestic violence, child abuse, drug use, sexual behavior, corporal punishment, and so on, could be studied with these populations of youth, from their own perspective. These reflections may best be left for some other place; however, I mention them here to provide a justification for the recruitment move I took in order to involve more young people from higher socioeconomic positions.

Six months into the recruitment processes I gathered around 50 participants, 10 of which were from what could be considered higher socioeconomic background. I aimed at recruiting at least 10 more participants from more affluent backgrounds and to that end I filed an amendment to my IRB protocol, which allowed me to put forth an online version of the instrument I used in my study and recruit participants through "snowball" sampling (a sampling method in which current study participants refer prospective participants). In the first step of the snowball sampling, I reached out to couple of my acquaintances of middle class background (based on the neighborhood in which they live, profession, and the private schools their children attend) who have children of high-school age. These participants recruited first then referred their friends who live in the same neighborhood or/and go to the same high-school and were interested in participating in the study. This approach finally brought me to the planned sample size of at least 20 participants per group.

As it will be more clear after the Procedures section, the research procedure and the instructions were simple enough that there were no bases to assume that online participation would affect the produced data in any sense. The only difference that may be significant is that the youth who participated in the online procedure typed their narratives on a computer (or possibly a cell phone), while others did it using paper and pen. It could be assumed that when it comes to high-schoolers today typing may be easier than writing by hand, which could lead to longer narratives produced by participants who completed the online procedure. I looked into this and no mentionable differences were found between the youth from higher socioeconomic background who typed and those who wrote their narratives.

**Participants**

A total of 64 participants were recruited for the study, each of which wrote four narratives (n = 256). The average age of participants was 17.2 years, and the age ranged from 15-18 years. In order to answer one of the main questions guiding this inquiry, which regards the existence and nature of differences in sense-making among adolescents from contrasting socioeconomic backgrounds, I divided participants into three groups, two of which will be the focus of analysis in this dissertation.

While organizing participants into groups that would represent contrasting socioeconomic backgrounds, I did not rely solely on the income of the neighborhood from which I recruited them. I also had participants fill out a short demographic survey, which can be found in Appendix 1. I particularly focused on their answers regarding home location, school, and their parents' educational and professional background. Based on the data collected through the demographic survey, research sites differed in terms of the within-site diversity of the

socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants. When it comes to the South Bronx location, all the young people recruited for the study were from the neighborhood, or from socioeconomically similar neighborhoods in the proximity of the youth center, characterized by a median income ($20,600) below the poverty line; they all went to local public schools; their parents worked blue collar jobs and a high-school diploma or GED was the highest level of education for a majority of them[4]. Given all these indicators, I placed all participants from this locale into a "Lower SES" group.

The situation was also rather simple regarding the participants from a private school in Long Island City, Queens and participants recruited through snowballing. They all lived in neighborhoods where median income is between 2 and 6 times higher than the one in the South Bronx; went to private schools (one participant went to a public, though very competitive and prestigious school – Bard High School Early College); had parents/guardians who completed college or had a graduate degree and had professions more highly valued in financial and social status sense in our society (white-collar jobs, university professors, artists). Therefore, all these participants were placed in what I will refer to in this dissertation as "Higher SES" group. It is important to note that this classification – "lower"/"higher" SES – is relative to my study context, but it could be argued that it matches well what is usually referred to as "poor" or "working class", and "middle class."

A more challenging task was figuring out where participants from the Kingsbridge and Riverdale organizations stood in regards to these socioeconomic indicators. The neighborhood of

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[4] Of nine adolescents recruited from the South Bronx, they reported the level of education of 14 parents/guardians in total (the demographic survey offered to check the level of education of two parents/guardians), which means that some teens reported the level of education (and type of profession) for two parents/guardians, and some only for one. Of the 14 parents for which I have the data on the highest levels of education, six of them nave not completed high-school, five have a high-school diploma or equivalent, and 3 have "some college."

the youth organization from Kingsbridge, Bronx was not as impoverished as the one in South Bronx. However, many adolescents lived in more impoverished neighborhoods and were commuting to Kingsbridge to participate in their youth programs. Thus, in situations when a particular participant lived in a neighborhood with a lower median income, went to a public school also in an impoverished area, and reported either that their parent(s) was unemployed or that they do not have a high-school diploma, I would assign them to the "Lower SES" group. I used the same approach with participants from Riverdale.

The Riverdale site was the most heterogeneous in respect to these socioeconomic and demographic indicators. The median annual income per household for the census tract where the youth organization is located is $94,500. However, only 3 out of 18 participants from this site lived in the neighborhood. The rest of them lived in various neighborhoods in the Bronx. Only one participant went to private school, and only one participant reported to have a parent who is unemployed (this participant also lives in the South Bronx, goes to a local public school, and was assigned to "Lower SES" group). Thus, in cases when it was hard to place participants to either Lower SES or Higher SES group, I assigned them to "Middle SES." There was also a number of participants who did not fill out the demographic survey in its entirety, therefore making it impossible to make a good estimate of their socioeconomic background; using only the information on the locale from which I recruited them would not be enough to make this call. This is how a large portion of participants (n = 24) was placed in the Middle SES group. For some of them this may mean that the socioeconomic affordances in their lives are somewhere between the ones for the teens coming from Higher SES and those from Lower SES, in which case the term *middle SES* makes some sense. For many others, they are placed in that group due to the lack of information. Since there are many unknowns in this group, I left it out of the

analysis for the time being. This "middle" group can surely make a subject of an interesting inquiry in the future.

Thus, of the total sample size of N = 64, this dissertation focuses on 40 participants who were placed in two rather differing groups in socioeconomic, as well as in ethnic sense. Table 2 shows the demographic composition of the sample. The information on ethnicity was elicited by an open-ended question: "What is your ethnic background?" I mostly used the terminology that participants use to describe their background. I use an overarching term "Hispanic" to refer to self-identifications that include: *Latino/a, Dominican, Honduran, Puerto Rican, Guyanese,* and *Salvadorian*.

Table 2

Demographic Composition of the Study Sample

| | Socioeconomic position | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Ethnicity** | **Higher SES** (%) | **Lower SES** (%) | Total |
| Black | 1 (5) | 6 (30) | 7 (17.5) |
| Hispanic | 3 (15) | 11 (55) | 14 (35) |
| White | 14 (70) | 0 (0) | 14 (35) |
| Native American | 0 (0) | 1 (5) | 1 (2.5) |
| Asian | 1 (5) | 0 (0) | 1 (2.5) |
| Middle Eastern | 0 (0) | 1 (5) | 1 (2.5) |
| Unidentified | 1 (5) | 1 (5) | 2 (5) |
| **Total** | **20** (100) | **20** (100) | **40** (100) |

**Materials and Procedures**

In order to allow access to multiple expressions of meaning youth make about fairness and the intentions of people surrounding them, and to similarities and differences in ways of knowing across individuals and socioeconomic groups, I engaged participants in multiple narrating practices – from different perspectives, for different audiences and purposes, using different genres of communication. The first part of the research procedure entailed reading a vignette depicting a situation at school where only subtle indications are given that an unspecified type of exclusion of one of the actors might have happened. After the youth had read the vignette, they were presented with four writing prompts one at a time. The participants were first invited to narrate about a situation where something similar happened to them or to someone they know. Three more research activities followed, two of which entailed writing an email to a friend from the perspectives of an "instigator" (Mo) and a "left-out" ("victim") character (Alex), respectively, recounting to the friend (Sam) what happened at school. The final writing prompt invited the participants to take the presumed "victim's" perspective and write a complaint letter to a school official of their choice. By inviting multiple perspectives over the same issue, we open the research for a more complex understanding of how people make sense of the social world (Daiute, 2014), and welcome the voices that might remain silent in cases we allow narrating from one perspective only. Upon completing the narratives, participants filled out a previously mentioned demographic survey. The total procedure took between 45-60 minutes.

In the following section I will say more about the vignette construction and the pilot study conducted in order to test its comprehensibility, relatability, and in general its capacity to yield interesting narratives from adolescents.

**Vignette**

      **The use of vignettes in qualitative research.** As stated earlier, the first part of the procedure was reading a vignette that was specially created for the purpose of this study. Vignettes are sketches of fictional (or fictionalized) scenarios that can be used as a data collection technique. After having read a vignette, the respondent is invited to imagine, drawing on their own experience, how the central character or the characters will act, or why they acted the way they did. Vignettes act as a stimulus to extended discussion (or narrative writing) of the scenario in question (Bloor & Wood, 2006). The purpose of the vignette method is exploring participants' interpretative processes. In addition, projecting situations onto hypothetical characters and asking participants to put themselves in the protagonist's shoes allows sensitive data to be obtained in an indirect, non-confrontational manner that would not generate distress and discomfort for the participants. Commenting on a story is less invasive than talking directly about personal experience, and participants often view it as less threatening (Barter & Renold, 1999).

      Unlike their more experimental counterparts, the aim of qualitative vignette narrating (or interviewing) is not to arrive at an accurate prediction of a participant's behavior but instead to bring insight into the social components of the participant's interpretative framework and perceptual processes (Jenkins, Bloor, Fischer, Berney, & Neale, 2010). In doing so, the researcher should conceive of participants' responses to vignette stimuli as social actions in their own right.

      Vignettes that enable participants to envision themselves as the protagonist in the situation are likely to yield rich data, which is the reason why the plausibility of a scenario is crucial in the design of vignette stimuli (Jenkins et al., 2010). Scenarios that are viewed by

participants as highly conceivable are more likely to produce rich data on how actors interpret lived-experiences than those which invite astonishment, skepticism, or disbelief. As such, the more plausible the protagonist's situation is in a vignette, the greater the likelihood of participants being able to put themselves in the character's place.

One of the central epistemological questions raised by the use of vignettes in qualitative research is how can a participant's set of responses to a hypothetical scenario be used to aid our understanding of the complex and multi-faceted nature of social phenomena? A key assumption that is frequently made when vignettes are used in social science research is that "narrative representations of emotional events can be treated as functionally comparable to the corresponding real-life encounters" (Parkinson & Manstead, 1993, p. 296). Jenkins et al. (2010) also argued that how participants seek to make sense of vignette situations is not entirely distinct from how they may seek to make sense of everyday lived events. As such, a participant's response to a vignette may well carry some predictive power in respect to how they would behave if they were to be subsequently presented with a similar, "real-life" event. The expectation from the vignette to predict how people would act in "real life" is based on an assumption that has been very much contested in the past several decades, which suggests that attitudes predict our behavior (Spratt, 2001; Rahman, 1996). Regardless of the power of this method to match and predict participants' behavior in the situation outside the research context, participants' responses to vignettes can yield data of interest in their own right as participants engage with the vignettes by putting themselves in the place of the central character in the vignette, and by predicting the behavior of others in the vignette towards the central character (Atkinson and Coffey, 2002; O'Dell, Crafter, de Abreu, & Cline, 2012). My focus is also not on

what participants would actually do in a specific situation but on their subjective perceptions, feelings, and experiences.

I take a dialogical approach to understanding and using vignette methodology, which assumes that there are "multiple ways of representing reality" (Wertsch, 1991), which at the individual level can involve dialogues between the different positions an individual may adopt. It draws on the concept of *dialogicality* (Hermans, 2001, 2002; Wertsch, 1991), which states that research must take into account the multi-voicedness of people's talk, a viewpoint that is usefully applied when discussing vignette characters. Psychological research can find it valuable to identify these multiple voices, and how they dialogue with each other, as an attempt to understand "how and why a particular voice occupies center stage, that is, why it is 'privileged' (Wertsch, 1987) in a particular setting" (O'Dell et al., 2012).

Therefore, rather than embracing a psychodynamic or cognitive interpretation, I take a dialogical perspective to vignette methodology and the data it produces. This perspective regards the narratives people produce not solely based on the content of the words people use, since that would tell only a small part of the story. Narratives as language utterances are not the creation of the self; rather, they relate to opinions and positions given by others in relation to self (Bakhtin, 1986). What I took from this perspective, in terms of informing my thinking about how to construct a vignette, was that I should be less concerned with participants getting enough information from the vignette that would help them make decisions, and more with how I can obtain more information from participants so I can document shifts in the positions discussed in response to the vignette. This section and the section on the theory-based dynamic narrating design provide enough theoretical grounding that should help demonstrate how I translated several theoretical principles into a method we have at hand.

**Hypothetical vignette.** The vignette construction was a long process with several checkpoints along the way. I started the vignette creation process with several important notions in mind, taken from the previously mentioned research on the vignette method. Two important factors of which I was mindful while developing the vignette, for they have a crucial importance for the validity of the instrument, are *plausibility* of the scenario and *relatability* – the ability of participants to envisage themselves as the protagonist(s) in the story. In other words, a vignette had to be meaningful and realistic for participants. Further, I tried addressing several theoretical concerns stemming from the sociocultural approach used in this work. Here are the notes from the early phase of the vignette construction with the issues I wanted to consider while writing a vignette:

*- Study the issue of fairness and expectations from people among urban youth in a symbolic context where these issues matter, and where it is likely that they would be enacted in daily practices (→school).*

*- Study the phenomena in a context involving the key actors in the social interaction that engages the issues of fairness and expectations from others (→peers, teacher, and school official).*

*- Think about broader contexts that would influence youth's narratives about the issues of interest (→unequal distribution of wealth; historical legacy of policies regarding U.S. born and immigrant minorities).*

*- Think about the important vantage points that should be taken into account in order to have more complex understanding of the ways in which the issues at question could be played out in diverse situations (→narrator/author, "culprit," "victim"[5]).*

I wanted to create the vignette in such a way that it would depict, though not fully, a situation that involves some type of unfairness. In addition, the situation should be relatable for all teens, regardless of background. While considering the potential situation, I reached out to a colleague who is a psychologist, psychotherapist, and dramatist, and who has significant experience working for a UNICEF-funded school violence prevention program. He has developed a vast number of vignettes and comics used in the mentioned violence prevention curricula. He offered me a basic plot line bound to incite some misunderstanding and conflict. He proposed to have two or more actors competing for one desired object. One of the actors could pretend to do something seemingly considerate for someone else, while it is, in fact, primarily in their personal interest. That is how a first version of the vignette got created, followed by four writing prompts.

The first revision of the vignette occurred upon having several teenagers I know complete the procedure and give feedback about the story, that is, how comprehensible and relatable it was. I also shared the instrument with several colleagues who contributed small but significant revisions. Once I and a small community of minds around me (to which I am indebted) deemed the vignette ready, I officially piloted the instrument on a sample of 53 high-school students from two urban locales in Serbia in order to determine that the scenario was plausible, comprehensible, and conversational, with multiple ways of interpreting what happens in the

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[5] As it will be clearer from later sections (refer to the Member Checking section), I did not use the positions of the "culprit" and "victim" in absolutely defined terms. Rather, the research design I developed leaves open the enactment of the terms in context by my study participants.

story. The vignette was closely translated to Serbian language, and no "culture appropriate" adjustments were needed. The hypothetical story involving high-school students going on a school trip is as relatable to youth in Serbia as it is to youth in the US. The only difference between the English and Serbian version of the vignette were the characters' names; instead of Alex, Mo and Sam, I chose three gender neutral Serbian names. Additional reasons for conducting a pilot of such a large scope were (i) to work out the analytical strategies that were to be applied to the narrative responses and (ii) to eventually be able to conduct a comparative study between two contexts characterized by very different political and economic histories since World War II.

The vignette depicts a realistic situation at school and involves four actors – three students and a teacher. The focal interpretive dilemma described in the vignette involves the relationship between peers, and peers and the teacher, in the school context, given that it is the most relevant formal institution for the majority of adolescents. All of the actors in the story were non-gendered so as to maximize its relatability.

The vignette reads:

Alex, Sam and Mo are eighth grade classmates at the Capital Avenue High School. They also know each other from a soccer team that Mo's dad coaches. The eighth grade is about to go to a 3-day field trip outside of the city, and the students are very excited waiting for it to finally happen this coming weekend. All the rooms that they'll be staying at are two-bed rooms, so only 2 people can share a room. Everybody is already thinking and talking about who they want to share a room with. Both Alex and Mo would like to be in a room with Sam.

During recess Mo approached a teacher who would be one of the chaperons at the field

trip. Mo had seen Alex talking to the teacher earlier, and now Mo wanted to make sure to

be the one to share a room with Sam. When Mo went to the teacher and expressed the

desire to share a room with Sam, the teacher said that since all three of them – Alex, Sam

and Mo – are close friends, that they should discuss it together. In reply to that, Mo said:

*- I already talked to Alex and Alex is OK with sharing a room with someone else.*

*Besides, Sam snores and Alex has already trouble falling asleep when away from home,*

*and wakes up easily, so it is better for Alex to have someone else for a roommate anyway.*

*– Well*, said the teacher, *if you all agreed on that, then it's fine with me*.

Down the hallway, Mo ran into Alex and said:

*- Hey! I just talked to the teacher, and me and Sam will share a room on the trip*.

The pilot indicated that the hypothetical story was credible and relatable, since all

participants had something to write about when asked to narrate about *something similar that has*

*happened to them or to someone they know*.  The story was also ambiguous enough as to yield a

variety of responses from youth. Some of them saw unfairness and the intention to leave

someone out very clearly. Others thought it was just a misunderstanding and saw nothing

malevolent in anyone's actions. There were also a few romantic souls who saw a love triangle in

the whole situation, and therefore deemed any transgression justifiable and forgivable in the

name of love. Yielding these diverse ways of interpreting the story was one of the main goals of

the vignette design in this study. In order to illustrate the diversity of individual youth's

interpretation of the vignette, and to share at least a small piece of the pilot data, Table 3 presents

two narratives from participants from two cities in Serbia.

Table 3

Examples of Narrative Interpretations of the Vignette – *Personal Story* Activity

|  |
| --- |
| Personal Story |

| | |
| --- | --- |
| Almost identical situation happened at a retreat seminar. Two friends decided to be in the same room, while the third one was forced to plead the personnel of the hotel to let her sleep with them in the same room. The two friends helped a little, but nothing special, other than declaring that they allow her to be with them in the room.<br>In the end the third girl was happy that she won't be sharing a room with a stranger, and the other two friends were happy that they were sort of able to make their friend happy, a friend that they didn't think about in the first place.<br>I'm writing this in third person because this situation brings me pain even today. (Just kidding)<br><div align="center">Nerma6, Novi Pazar</div> | Me and my two friends we organized a trip to go outside of the city with one other guy friend. We were supposed to leave for the trip on Saturday night, me, Denisa, Leila and Leila's guy friend. But that day she never responded to us, cuz she was the one who was supposed to arrange the whole trip. I thought she gave up on the entire thing, until I heard the next morning that she went on the trip alone with her guy friend.<br><div align="right">Ema13, Belgrade</div> |

After reading the vignette, the participants were invited to narrate about a situation where something similar happened to them or to someone they know. This is the only writing prompt that invites participants to write about their personal experience, if they decide to, and this narrating activity is referred to as *Personal Story* throughout this dissertation. All other writing prompts are linked to the hypothetical vignette.

Prompt 1. *Think of a situation when something similar to the situation described in the story happened to you or to someone you know. What happened? How did all involved think and feel about it? Was there anyone to go and talk to about what had happened? How did it all turn out?*

When asked to interpret the vignette actors' motivation, the participants' draw from their history and use the experiences deemed congruent with the situation thus depicted as they construct the meaning about the given prompt (Jenkins et al., 2010). This way, the participants attribute meaning to their past behavior. This is also a less intrusive way of getting access to adolescents' experiences of peer exclusion, as we do not ask youth directly about the instances of unfairness; rather, youth choose which experience to share, and they choose to share either their own or the experience of *someone they know*.

Three other narrative activities followed, in a counterbalanced order. One of these two narrative activities was written from the position of the instigator in the vignette – Mo. In this activity, the participants were invited to recount the story from the perspective of the Mo character, who may have been responsible for manipulation and/or exclusion of the other characters. In order to create an activity that would resemble social interactions in real life, the participants were instructed to write an email to a friend, telling him/her what had happened during the day. I will refer to the corresponding narratives produced in response to this prompt as *Culprit Email*.

Prompt 2. *Imagine now that you're Mo and that you're writing an email to Sam. Sam missed school today and you want to tell him/her all that happened today at school and how you feel about it.*

The third narrative prompt invited participants to position themselves as Alex, the character who was left out of the decision-making process in the story and who was possibly wronged by other the actor(s). These narratives will be called *Victim Email*.[6]

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[6] As I will discuss this shortly, in the Member Checking section of this chapter, I decided to refer to these two narrative activities as *Victim* and *Culprit Email* upon the member checking session I had with research participants.

Prompt 3. *Imagine now that you're Alex and that you're writing an email to Sam. Sam missed*

*school today and you want to tell him/her all that happened today at school and how*

*you feel about it.*

As I mentioned earlier, the prompts 2 and 3 were counterbalanced – half of the

participants were given prompt 2 first, and then prompt 3, and the other half got these two

prompts in the reversed order. No differences were found in terms of the groups who wrote these

two prompts in different order.

The final narrative prompt required yet another perspective shifting, and engaging with a

different genre of communication. What is specific about this last prompt is that, <u>for the first</u>

<u>time, an explicit interpretation is offered</u> that something unfair has actually happened, and that

the "victim" in the story has a reason to complain. The participants were invited to write a

complaint letter to the school principal, positioned as a plausible "victim" of exclusion. I will

refer to these narratives as *Complaint Letter*.

Prompt 4. *Imagine now that you are Alex and that you think that what happened to you that day*

*at school was not fair. You are supposed to write a letter of complaint to the school*

*official (e.g. school principal, counselor, or somebody else) explaining him, or her,*

*what happened that day at school.*

*To help you write this letter, here are some questions that you can think of and write*

*about: What happened? How did all involved think and feel about it? Why do you*

*think that the teacher let Mo share the room with Sam?*

*First, who is the school official to whom you want to write a complaint letter?*

_____ *(Write in the position of that person at*

*school – e.g. school principal, counselor, or somebody else.)*

These four narrative activities are the earlier mentioned four windows for looking at

youth's sense-making about fairness, as they regard the issue from the perspective of different

stakeholders in the situation Inviting multiple voices opens the possibility for more complex

understanding of these multilayered social phenomena; by allowing dissonance and

contradiction, cacophony of this multi-voicedness can be heard.

**Demographic Survey**

Upon completing the narrative activities, the participants were asked to fill out a brief

survey collecting information about their age, ethnic background, their parents' profession and

level of education, etc. The survey can be found in Appendix.

**Member Checking: Making Sense about their Sense-making**

Upon completing the preliminary analysis in late spring 2016, I reached out again to the

youth organizations from which I recruited the study participants to see whether or not they

would be willing to have me come again and share the research findings. Member checks consist

of taking data back to the participants in the study so that they can participate in discussing the

interpretations and implications of the study. I wanted to pay visits before the summer, and

before some of the participants left the youth centers for good (e.g. high-school seniors moving

to college). One organization (from Riverdale) responded to my request and managed to create

time for me to come and talk to one program group. The group consisted of approximately 10

adolescents who participated in my study, and few others who did not. An important caveat is

that only one locale participated in the member checking session, and that not necessarily all

socioeconomic backgrounds were represented. I was given about 35 minutes to present and discuss the results.

The teens shared important insights with me that corroborated or inspired several of my own interpretations of the data. As I mentioned earlier, this member check is the reason why I named the two writing activities *Culprit* and *Victim Email*. These two expressions give rather straightforward interpretation of what the protagonist's positions are in these respective narrative activities, stripping them of the presumption of "innocence" or "victimhood." However, when I asked the group at one point what they thought the roles of these two characters (Mo and Alex) were in the whole situation, they unanimously said that Alex was a *victim* and *innocent,* and that Mo was the culprit,[7] thereby influencing the names of the two writing activities. I will share more of the participants' input during the interpretation of the results.

**Analyses**

As explained earlier, in order to allow complex intrapersonal perspectives on fairness to emerge, the participants were engaged in four narrating activities with different purposes, aimed at different audiences, employing diverse narrative genres. I wanted to see how adolescents' sense-making processes change as they occupy different positions across different narrative contexts. I wanted to look into their capacity to shift perspectives and to appropriate and perform different actor's thoughts, feelings, and motives. Therefore, I employed analytical strategies that would allow me to assess the positioning of individual youth across four different narrative

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[7] While they did use the word "victim," they did not use the word "culprit" or "wrongdoer." *Culprit* is my euphemistic, and academic genre more appropriate version of the word "d-bag" that participants used to characterize Mo's behavior. In addition, they also said that Mo was *sneaky, selfish,* and *determined*.

contexts; how the positions they take relate to other characters in the narratives they create; how they handle tensions between actors; and which characters they focus on by bringing them more to life.

The main analytical strategy I used in this study was psychological state expression analysis that helps us understand the multiple lines of meaning that participants make as they narrate from different actors' positions and appropriate their respective thoughts, feelings, and intentions. This analysis allows us to see how the authors treat different stakeholders in social situations revolving around fairness. As extension of this analysis, I employed the analytical strategy of *character mapping* (Dauite, 2014) with the aim of understanding youth's sense-making across diverse narrative perspectives. This strategy allows us to see how participants may focalize their use of psychological state expressions on one character instead on the other, and how this strategy may shift across the four writing activities. Finally, I analyzed the narratives for the *troubles* and *conflict resolution strategies* offered. I will now describe and illustrate each of these analytical strategies.

**Painting the Landscape of Consciousness: Psychological State Expressions Analysis**

Psychological state expressions are language devices used by the narrator to bring the characters in their stories to life. They help the reader enter the mind and life of the characters in the narrative. By using these expressions, we create characters' consciousness, which is the *magnet for empathy* (Bruner, 1986), helping the reader enter the life and mind of the protagonists. Psychological states are communicated through *affective* and *cognitive expressions*. These expressions usually refer to verbal forms, and occasionally to related nouns and adjectives. The most common cognitive expressions are: *think, know, learn, believe, realize, judge,*

*understand*, etc. Some frequent affective expressions are: *feel, want, like, love, need, cry, upset, hate, comfortable, care*, etc.

Psychological state expressions help create the *landscape of consciousness* of a story, a term coined by Bruner (1986). Bruner argued that story must construct two landscapes simultaneously. One is the *landscape of action*, where the constituents are the arguments of action: agent, intention or goal, situation, and instrument. This landscape is developed by narrators creating a representation of the actual actions of the story protagonists. The other landscape is the *landscape of consciousness*, which depicts what those involved in the action know, think, or feel; it indicates the mode of conscious experience of the world by the protagonists. Narrative thinking relies on both of these narrative modes, as the double landscape of narration needs to be in place in order for us to make and understand stories. In that sense, narrative thinking requires the metarepresentational ability to adopt the meanings attributed to the situation by others in order for the narrator to create a subjective world as seen from the perspective of a protagonist (and this is being enacted in narrative through the use of psychological state expressions).

We use stories to make decisions about how we feel about people, and psychological state expressions analysis can offer insights about how the narrators make meaning about different actors in their narration. The narrators choose whether and how to express characters' psychological states, and these choices indicate how they want the reader/listener to perceive the characters and them, as narrators; the narrators have the power to personify the characters in various ways, by *minimizing, qualifying,* or *humanizing* the character (Daiute, 2014). Characters are, for example, humanized in cases where the narrator attributes them: numerous *psychological states,* allowing them to "speak for themselves"; and *actions*, that is – agency. However,

numerous negative mental states attributed to a character can also serve a purpose of dehumanizing that character. The most straightforward recommendation for how to identify a function of mental state expressions is to pay attention to their effects on us as the reader (Daiute, 2014).

Table 4 provides illustration of how I coded narratives for psychological state expressions, and it also provides an opportunity to see how differentially individual youth may use this psycholinguistic strategy. Affective expressions are marked with red and wave underline, and cognitive expressions are marked with blue and single straight underline. All the names accompanying participants' narratives reported throughout this dissertation are pseudonyms that they chose themselves. The coding reliability check was conducted on a subset of the data representing around 20% of the total data. Inter-rater coding reliability was calculated by using the "percent agreement" (PA) method, calculated by dividing the number of agreements between the two coders (A), by the total number of agreements and disagreements (n). Finally, the resulting fraction converted into a percentage: PA = (A/n) *100. The overall inter-rater agreement (PA=A/n) in this analytic strategy was very high (97%) since it entails a rather straightforward coding strategy. The reliability coder received rather exhaustive lists of cognitive and affective expression. A disagreement could only occur in the rare cases of words that require contextual interpretation, such as the verb to *see* which should be coded as a cognitive expression if it refers to *understand, comprehend, realize* something.

Table 4

Example of Psychological State Expressions Coding

| Culprit Email Narratives | |
|---|---|
| NP 14 | Frieda |
| (11 psych state expressions/100 words) | (7 psych state expressions/100 words) |
| I very much wanted for two of us to share a room, that's why I did something bad. Given that we're friends it would be fair to you to tell you how I fixed for us to be together in a room. First of all, I want you to know that I'm sorry and that I regret. I should've asked you first who you want to share a room with. I lied to professor. I was glad then, when I succeeded to achieve what I wanted, and now I feel bad for it. I hope you will understand me, and I'll accept whatever you decide. I'm gonna tell Alex the same. | Dear Sam, Today I saw Mo talking to one of the teachers who will chaperone is on the trip. In don't know about what though. I was just resent lay speaking with Her too but only about a homework assignment. The next thing I know Alex just tells me that you and Alex are sharing rooms. This really upset yes me since I didn't know how this came about like no one told me anything about it. All I knew is that I wanted to dorm with you. |

From these two examples we can see how the two narrators used this narrative strategy in very different ways. One narrator, NP 14, used more psychological state expressions (adjusted for the narrative length) than the other narrator, Frieda. NP 14 generously attributed psychological states (especially affect) to the character of the culprit, while Frieda used psychological state expressions more scarcely, especially the affective expressions. Qualitative differences in uses of psychological state expressions to narrate across different narrative contexts can reveal dynamic uses of story for social interaction – presenting personae to others and oneself (Daiute, 2014). My goal was to explore how individual youth used this strategy to create and present – bring to life – different characters in the narratives they wrote. How they endow different actors with knowledge, thoughts and feelings? As I will demonstrate later in the results chapters, psychological state analysis of narratives can capture a particular kind of personal meaning, agency, and intention of narrative use (Daiute, 2014).

**Character Mapping**

As Daiute (2014) defines it, "character mapping is a process of examining meaning across diverse narrative perspectives." It involves identifying characters in narratives, the frequency of character mentions and their enactments (psychological states and actions), with the aim of learning about the roles they play in narratives. By asking the questions such as "Who is the focal character?" or "How do different characters express different and related meanings?" (p. 195) we can gain insight into diverse, subtle (and even hidden) strands of meaning conveyed through different characters, that would otherwise remain implicit.

In the context of this dissertation character mapping analysis was an extension of the psychological state analysis. I conducted character mapping analysis by identifying the characters in youth's narratives, frequency of their mention, frequency of use of psychological state expressions and actions associated with each character. In addition to *affective* and *cognitive* expressions, I added *reported speech* expressions (e.g. tell, say, ask, etc.) as another category of psychological state expressions. The main reason why these expressions were not included in the primary psychological state analysis is because these expressions lay somewhere between the *landscape of consciousness* and *landscape of action* (developed by creating a representation of the actual actions of the story protagonists) and my main concern in the previous step of the analysis was to explore the landscape of consciousness, defined as portrayal of characters' thoughts and feelings. Table 5 illustrates character mapping analysis of a narrative elicited in response to the first narrating prompt (*Personal Story*).

Table 5

Example of Character Mapping Coding

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Personal Story Narrative

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**I** once <u>had a</u> similar <u>situation</u> where **we** *had to decide* who to <u>sit</u> with in a classroom. The classrooms where structured in a way where only **two people** <u>can sit</u> in one desk, and **my friend and I** both *wanted* to <u>sit</u> with our friend **Simon**. **Simon** really didn't *want* to *choose* between us so **he** *decided* to *leave the decision* to us. **My friend and I** *decided* to <u>play</u> rock, paper, scissors for it, and **I** ended up <u>winning</u>. However, the next day when **we** <u>showed up</u> to the classroom, **my friend** was <u>sitting</u> right next to **Simon**. When **I** *reminded* **him** that **I** was the one that <u>won</u> the game yesterday, **he** *told* me that **he** <u>came</u> to the classroom first. **I** really *felt betrayed* and *left out* as **they** <u>sat together</u> and *chatted* while **I** had to <u>sit</u> four seats behind **them** all alone.

| **Characters** | *Psychological states (cursive)* | | | Actions (underlined) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **(bold)** | *Cognitive* | *Affective* | *Reported Speech* | |
| 1st person singular (*I*) | decided, reminded | wanted, felt betrayed/left out | | had a situation (experienced), play, ended up winning (won), won, sit [alone] |
| 3rd person singular (*Simo, my friend, he*) | choose, leave the decision (not to decide), decided | (didn't) want | told | sitting, came |
| 1st person plural (*we, my friend and I*) | had to decide, decided | | | sit, showed up, play |
| 3rd person plural (*two people, they, them*) | | wanted | chatted | can sit, sat (together) |

Character mapping requires a very painstaking coding and analysis procedure. It requires a very detailed coding since each character mention should be captured and their respective psychological state expressions and actions. As defined by the virtues of English language, there are six possible "characters" that I coded for: first person plural and singular, second person

plural and singular, and third person plural and singular. Separate codes were created for

psychological state expressions and for actions affiliated with each of the six "persons." I

clustered together under one code psychological state expressions, since there are already plenty

of codes to manage; if I kept the three separate categories (affect, cognition, reported speech) a

total number of codes would be 30 and it is questionable if that differentiation would have

proportional benefits since the number of coded segments in each code category would drop

noticeably. A full list of 18 codes I used is as follows:

- 1st person singular

    - 1st person singular psychological state

    - 1st person singular action

- 2nd person singular

    - 2nd person singular psychological state

    - 2nd person singular action

- 3rd person singular

    - 3rd person singular psychological state

    - 3rd person singular action

- 1st person plural

    - 1st person plural psychological state

    - 1st person plural action

- 2nd person plural

    - 2nd person plural psychological state

    - 2nd person plural action

- 3rd person plural

    - 3rd person plural psychological state

    - 3rd person plural action

The inter-coder agreement when it comes to this coding strategy was 94%. The coding

categories were again unequivocal and the main reason for inter-coder disagreement was due to

one of the coders missing to code an instance that should have been coded. I coded and analyzed

all the data using a qualitative data analysis software, MaxQDA. Figure 2 provides an illustration

of how the coding process looks like in this software. The full list of codes can be seen on the

left-hand side of the image. I also used color coding to make it easier to spot patterns in

adolescents' narratives. For example, I used dark blue for the three codes related to the third

person singular: mention of the character, psychological state expressions, and actions attributed to third person character(s). Using the same principle, I assigned color pink to the first person singular codes, and orange color to the first person plural codes. By eyeballing the two narratives presented in Figure 2, we can notice that the first narrative (*Personal Story*) tends to primarily focus on the 3$^{rd}$ person singular and 1$^{st}$ person plural characters. In comparison, this participant's *Culprit Email* has noticeably higher focus on the first-person characters, both in singular (I) and plural version (we).

Identifying the characters, the frequency of their mention, psychological states and actions attributed to each of them, and the role they play in the narrative plot can offer a broad array of insights. I will analyze which characters are put in focus across four different narrative contexts in this study. Does the focus shift as the narrators move symbolically from the perspective of the instigator to the perspective of the left-out character, for example?  I will look into how much *agency* narrators attribute to diverse characters, operationalized as frequency of attribution of psychological state expressions and actions to different characters.

Figure 2. Sample of qualitative data coding in MaxQDA
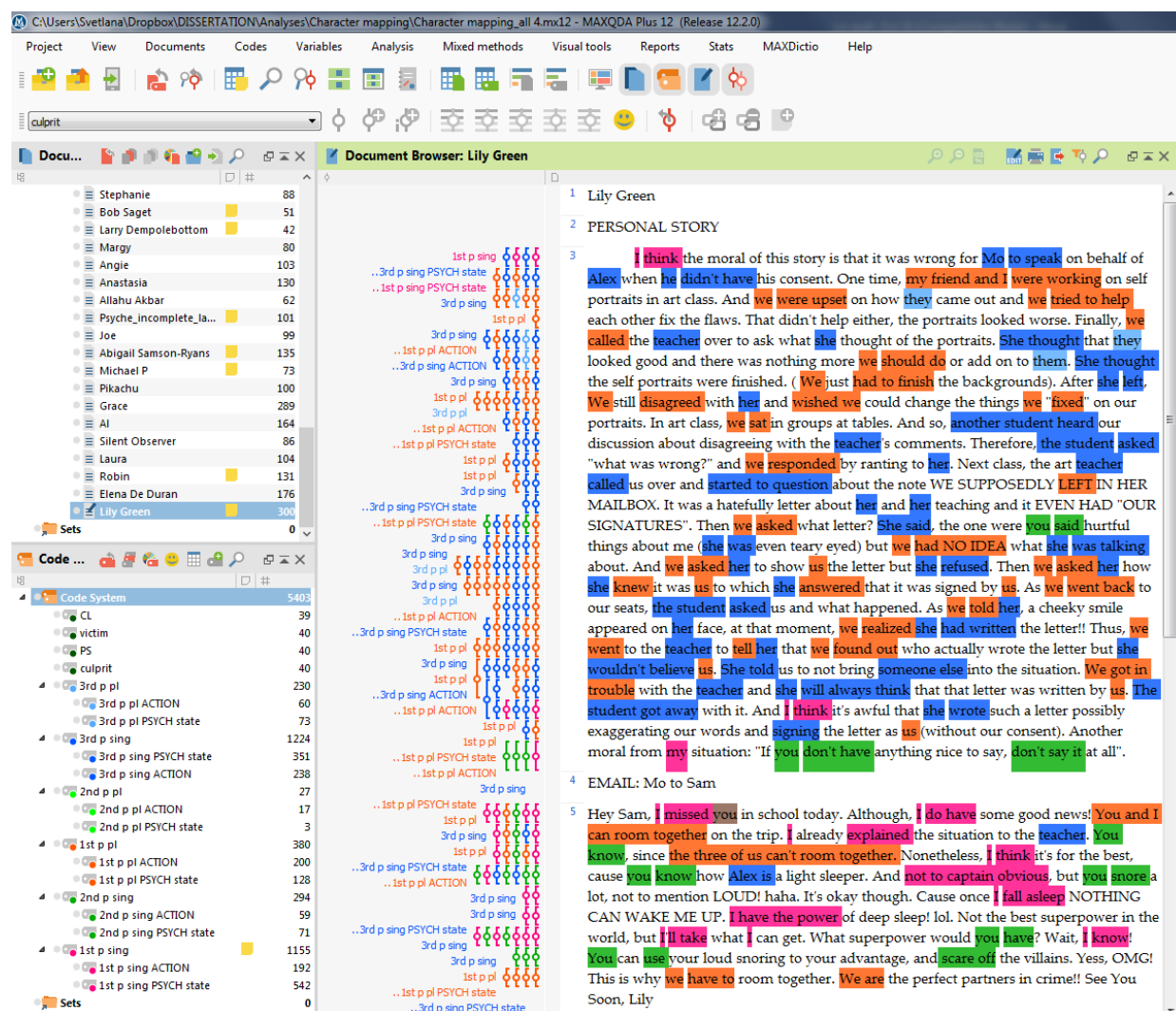


A narrative strategy that can be employed, especially while narrating contentious issues such as experiences of exclusion and unfairness, is the use of the third-person character(s) for the purposes of conveying the affects and thoughts that the narrator cannot or does not want to express from the first-person perspective (Daiute, 2014; Daiute, et al., 2001). This strategy of symbolically distancing oneself from certain experiences and knowledge about unfairness may be differentially used by youth from different socio-economic and cultural positions in society.

It will be interesting to see how participants use the "culprit" and the "victim" narratives to channel different experiences through different characters in their narratives. Individual youth may differ in the way they treat third-person characters, for example. Individuals narrating across diverse contexts could differ in how much agency they attribute to non-*I* story characters. As described earlier, attributing numerous psychological state expressions and actions to a character may imply that the narrator is humanizing the character by bringing him or her to life. On the other hand, including a character into a narrative and depriving it of emotions, thoughts and actions can be indicative of indifference or resentment toward that person. I explored how diverse youth treat different characters in their narratives: what intentions they attribute them, and how differently these narrative strategies are enacted across four narrative contexts - narrative of a personal experience, the "culprit," and two different "victim" narratives.

**Plot Analysis**

*A story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end... but not necessarily in that order.*

Jean-Luc Godard

The stories we tell to make sense about the world around us are not copies of reality; rather, culture deeply shapes how our stories are structured. Personal, cultural and sociopolitical norms inform the way we organize stories (Bakhtin, 1986). From the perspective of developmental psychology, it is one of the important developmental accomplishments learning how to create and share stories in commonly structured ways (Nelson, 1998). This framework for events, structure, or the skeleton of meaning of narrative is referred to as *plot*, and it includes *characters*, a *problem* or initiating action, c*omplicating action, conflict* and *conflict resolution strategies*, and sometimes a *moral* of the story (Bruner, 2002). Plots are learned – socialized –

ways of structuring the story, and structuring our understanding of the world and our own experiences. As Daiute (2014) explains, "plots provide recognizable structures people use to communicate with one another." Plot analysis offers insights about how people connect and make meaning about people, objects, events and actions, and how these processes shift as the (narrating) context changes.

For there to be a story, there must be some interruption in the regular course of affairs. Stories involve the violation of ordinariness and an attempt, through human agency, at its restoration. These ideas about the essential preconditions for and constituents of the story have puzzled philosophers, dramaturges, and psychologist alike. Aristotle talked about it as *peripeteia*, a sudden reversal in circumstances. Kenneth Burke (1969) wrote about "trouble" which drives the drama. Thus, a story always begins with some breach in the expected state of things – something unforeseen must happen. As Bruner (2002) put it, "Something goes awry, otherwise there's nothing to tell about… And finally, there is an outcome, some sort of resolution" (p. 17). Therefore, as much as the *trouble* matters for the story since it puts events in motion, the *resolution* is as important in the process of sense-making through the narratives we create. For this reason, my analysis focused on these two plot elements – *troubles* and *resolutions* (in addition to *characters*). Looking closely at these two plot elements should help us understand how did adolescents read the vignette – what did they think the main trouble is about, and consequently, how it could be resolved. Table 6 provides illustration of a full plot analysis of a narrative elicited in response to the first narrating prompt (*Personal Story*).

Table 6

Plot Elements with Examples

| Personal Story Narrative |
| --- |

I once had a similar situation where we had to decide who to sit with in a classroom. The classrooms were structured in a way where only two people can sit in one desk, and my friend and I both wanted to sit with our friend Simon. Simon really didn't want to choose between us so he decided to leave the decision to us. My friend and I decided to play rock, paper, scissors for it, and I ended up winning. However, the next day when we showed up to the classroom, my friend was sitting right next to Simon. When I reminded him that I was the one that won the game yesterday, he told me that he came to the classroom first. I really felt betrayed and left out as they sat together and chatted while I had to sit four seats behind them all alone.

| Plot element | Narrative excerpt |
| --- | --- |
| Setting | In school one day |
| Characters | First-person narrator; Simon; unnamed friend |
| Initiating action (trouble) | my friend and I both wanted to sit with our friend Simon |
| Complicating action(s) | The classrooms were structured in a way where only two people can sit in one desk |
| High point (climax) | the next day when we showed up to the classroom, my friend was sitting right next to Simon. |
| Resolution strategy(ies) | - My friend and I decided to play rock, paper, scissors for it, and I ended up winning.<br>- When I reminded him that I was the one that won the game yesterday, he told me that he came to the classroom first. |
| Ending | I really felt betrayed and left out as they sat together and chatted while I had to sit four seats behind them all alone. |
| Moral | Not applicable to this narrative |
| Narrator stance/narrator's point | n/a |

My adaptation of plot analysis looked at the characters in the story, the way they were

positioned inside of the narrative, and at how youth articulated the *trouble,* or *initiating action* in

narratives, and the conflict *resolution strategies*. This analytic strategy had to be adjusted to four different narrative genres participants wrote. *Personal Story* narratives could be analyzed for all these plot elements, since they were created more freely, in a way; the writing prompt for this narrating activity was open and inviting participants to narrate about any experience they could think of. On the other hand, other three narrative activities are closely related to the hypothetical vignette, which predefined, to an extent, these narratives' structure. As I will demonstrate later, the analysis of the three fictional narratives were anchored to the hypothetical vignette. The inter-coder agreement when it comes to this coding strategy was 87%.

While focusing on the *Personal Story* narratives, I explored the nature of the problems addressed by diverse adolescents, and the resolution strategies they offered: I wanted to see if the "trouble" that fueled the narratives was usually about experiences of unfairness, or some other problems come out as salient. Identifying plot elements such as *initiating action* (trouble, breach) and what it revolves around, and *resolution,* can offer valuable information about the issues that may not be stated explicitly and detected by a mere content or theme analysis (Daiute, 2014).

Identifying the characters as important plot elements can help explore further the way individual youth read the vignette – How does the author use characters to express meanings differently, or to express different meanings across the narrative? Here I will use what I learn from character mapping, but I will also analyze for how the authors position the characters in their story as they relate to the hypothetical scenario and the situation depicted in it. The main characters in the vignette are the left-out character, the instigator, the desired peer who was not present, and the teacher, who could have an active role or be regarded as a mere bystander. I wanted to see how the actors in participants' narratives map onto this character constellation.

I want to note that all narrative analyses were conducted on "blinded" narratives, so that neither I or the reliability coder would be aware of the socioeconomic background of individual youth, until all narrative analyses were completed. I coded the narratives in an (random) order in which MaxQDA program organized them. This precaution was supposed to attenuate the process of making assumptions about what individual youth should be like. I wanted to generate (through analyses) the qualities of, for example, the sense of entitlement that I may observe in the narratives of youth from higher SES, rather than to assume how entitlement should play out. Finally, all narratives and narrative excerpts included in this dissertation are reported keeping their original wording, spelling and punctuation.

# CHAPTER IV: RESULTS I

## Four Windows into Fairness: An Overview of Four Narrative Contexts

This chapter explores the participants' understanding of fairness, and the ways in which their sense-making shifts as they consider social-relational issues revolving around fairness from a different stakeholder's vantage points. As analyses presented here demonstrate, while some issues may be silenced or minimized in one writing activity, they might be brought to the forefront in another. Youth used narrative strategies differentially across four narrative activities, as they assumed different perspectives and narrated for different audience and with different purposes. This chapter is in a way an exploration of the materiality of these four writing genres – of their respective affordances and limitations. In this sense, each of these genres can be regarded as a distinct cultural tool used to mediate different psychological processes. This chapter develops profiles of each of the writing genres, helping us to understand the distinct sense-making purposes that they served.

The results section of this dissertation is organized around the main research questions aimed at exploring how New York City youth make sense of fairness, how their sense-making changes as they take perspectives of different stakeholders in situations revolving around unfairness, and finally, the eventual differences that may be observed between adolescents coming from distant socioeconomic groups. An overarching goal is the better understanding of how adolescents use narrating to work out social relational dynamics revolving around fairness. As illustrated in Figure 3, the underlining structure of the results section is organized along two axes. The first axis is afforded by the study design which includes four narrating activities,

opening four different windows into adolescents' sense-making about fairness. Each line of

analysis will be presented across all four activities, showing how participants interact with these

different symbolic contexts, as they embody perspectives of different stakeholders. The second

axis is related to the comparisons across two socioeconomic groups, which will be the subject of

Chapter 5.

Figure 3. Visual representation of the results chapters' structure

| | | **First Axis: Four Narrative Contexts** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Personal story | Culprit email | Victim email | Complaint letter |
| **Second Axis: Two Socioeconomic Groups** | Higher SES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Lower SES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

This chapter addresses the following research questions:

1) How do youth interpret social situations revolving around unfairness and exclusion?

This broad question will be answered by exploring how youth understand different social actor's

intentions and motives; the kind of conflict(s) they see playing out in the story, and whether they,

instead, see a misunderstanding or something else. While narrating personal experience, which

they see as similar to the one depicted in the vignette, do they position themselves as the *object*

or the *instigator* of wrongdoing? Most of these questions will be answered through exploring

*Personal Story* narratives, which directly illustrate participants' interpretations of the vignette.

2) How do youth make sense of unfairness when they are invited to position themselves and

narrate as different stakeholders in a situation revolving around unfairness and conflict?

The exploration of this question should offer more complex insights into youth's understanding

of the social system of unfairness, by looking at the ways in which adolescents' experience of

ambiguous and conflicting situations changes as they take perspectives of different stakeholders. When they take the perspective of the instigator of deception and/or unspecified exclusion, for example, how well do they relate to this character? Do they distance themselves from the character, or do they humanize him/her? How do they relate to the role of the character who was given little agency and who was possibly wronged (excluded)?

One way of summarizing this set of questions is stating that I wanted to explore how youth used narrating, and in particular, how they engaged with the study design, which invited multiple narratives, from multiple perspectives, around the same socio-relational problem. I wanted to explore the purpose that each narrative genre serves. Four narrative activities represent four cultural tools that presumably mediate different psychological processes. This chapter explores the narrative work participants did across these four narrative contexts. Different narrative genres may allow authors to engage with and express different concerns, desires, struggles, wishes, and anything else that we may be working through while making sense via narrative. In that sense, this chapter is an exploration of the materiality of genres: their affordances and limitations.

I will first present the findings for the psychological state expression analysis across all four narrative contexts, followed by the sections on the character mapping, and the plot analysis results.

**The Use of Psychological State Expressions**

> Now, what do the words of this language *signify*?
> –What is supposed to shew what they signify, if not the kind of use they have?
> Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953)

As stated earlier, the purpose of this work is to help describe adolescents' understanding of the social system of unfairness, which always involves multiple actors with multiple perspectives, intentions, expectations, and motives. Individual youth may differ in their capacity to relate to different stakeholders in a situation revolving around unfairness and possible exclusion. The study design allowed insight into participants' sense-making as they occupy positions of different actors, reimagining the same situation multiple times through the "consciousness" of these different stakeholders. The authors build this landscape of consciousness by endowing the characters with mental life. Is it easier to imbue the narrative characters with thoughts and feelings when youth are positioned as a victim of exclusion, or a culprit; or is it perhaps the easiest when they are the protagonist, recounting their actual experiences? These are the questions I aimed to answer through the analysis whose results are presented in this section.

With the aim of learning about the narrator's stance toward different characters in their stories, I utilized the analytic strategy of identifying the psychological state expressions attributed to the characters in the participants' narratives. Psychological state expressions, such as to *love, hate, consider, understand, want, cry*, and so on, serve to bring characters to life. They help the narrators personify their protagonists and other characters through thoughts and feelings attributed to them. Affiliating numerous psychological state expressions with a character,

humanizes that character, in a sense, depicting them with intention and self-determination. An important finding of this study is that youth demonstrated systematically varied use of psychological state expressions across the four narrative context. As they shifted from one perspective, from one narrative context to another, participants adjusted the use of this narrative strategy of changing the landscape of consciousness of the narrative so it corresponds better to the vantage point from which it is being constructed. Additionally, the two narrative activities written from the perspective of the victim of exclusion were more conducive to the use of mental state expressions in comparison to the personal stories and narratives created from the culprit's perspective.

The results of the overall use of psychological state expressions across four narrating activities can be found in Table 7. The prevalence of these utterances is expressed with *word intervals*. If the word interval is 36, for example, it means that, on average, one in 36 words is a psychological state expression. It may be helpful noting that when it comes to the word interval, lower numbers imply higher incidence of particular utterances. Even though counterintuitive at first glance, this measure is convenient since it accounts for differential average length of narratives written, for example, in response to four writing prompts. Word interval is calculated by taking the total word count for a narrative category and dividing it by the total count of a particular utterance. If we take the example of the prevalence of cognitive expressions in the *Complaint Letter* genre, we arrive at the number 32 (word interval) by dividing a total word count for this narrating activity – 5545 – by the count of occurrences of cognitive expressions, which was 173. This is how we arrive to the word interval measures reported in Table 7.

Table 7

Prevalence of Psychological State Expressions Across Four Narrative Activities

| | Narrative Context | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Psychological state expression** | Personal story | Culprit email | Victim email | Complaint letter | All four narratives |
| Cognition | 43 | 49 | 32 | 33 | 39 |
| Affect | 50 | 42 | 38 | 40 | 43 |
| Average | 47 | 46 | 35 | 36 | 41 |

For their easier accessibility, the results from Table 7 are presented in a graph that can be found in Figure 4. The unit is again word interval and the scale on the *y*-axis is reversed so the graph would read in an intuitive way, where higher points indicate higher incidence of the measured expressions.

Figure 4. Prevalence of psychological state expressions across four narrative activities
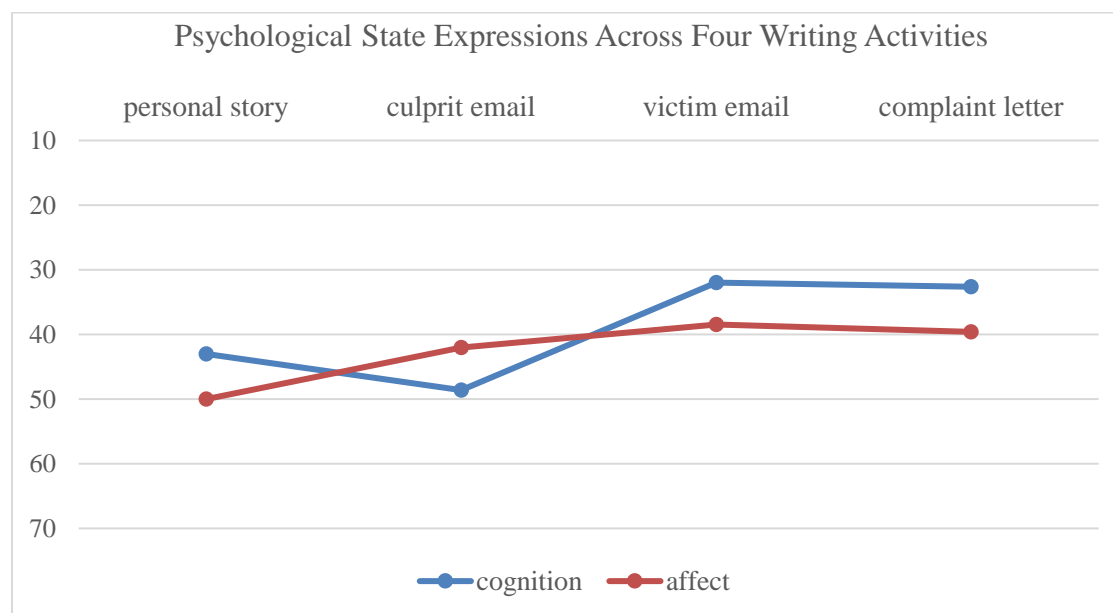
A difference in participants' use of psychological state expressions across four narrative activities is a major finding of this study. The two narratives written from the victim's perspective – an email to a friend (word interval=35) and a complaint letter to a school official (36) – are pointedly more imbued with psychological language than the personal narrative (47) and the narrative from the culprit's perspective (46). Examples of a victim and culprit email narratives are provided, with coded segments, so that the reader can get a feel of narratives that are differently laden with psychological state expressions. Both narratives are written to Sam, the "desired" peer – the first one from the perspective of Alex, the excluded character in the story ("victim"), and the second one from the perspective of Mo, the plausible culprit in the hypothetical vignette.

Example 1: Alex to Sam (victim perspective), by Abigail Samson-Ryans

> Hey, Sam, while you were out at school today I saw Mo speaking to one of the chaperones and I went to talk to her after he finished. I <u>had wanted</u> us to bunk together and I'd <u>wanted</u> to speak to her to <u>make sure</u> we could. But when I spoke to her she said that Mo had gone behind our backs and <u>lied</u> to her saying that he'd talked to us and we all <u>agreed</u> that you two could bunk together. I still <u>want</u> to bunk with you and I <u>wanted</u> us to talk to her together so that we could <u>make sure</u> that he doesn't get what he <u>wants</u> just by cheating. -Alex

Example 2: Mo to Sam (culprit perspective) by Lily Green

> Hey Sam, I <u>missed</u> you in school today. Although, I do have some good news! You and I can room together on the trip. I already <u>explained</u> the situation to the teacher. You <u>know</u>, since the three of us can't room together. Nonetheless, I <u>think</u> it's for the best, cause you <u>know</u> how Alex is a light sleeper. And not to captain obvious, but you snore a lot, not to mention LOUD! haha. It's okay though. Cause once I fall asleep NOTHING CAN WAKE ME UP. I have the power of deep sleep! lol. Not the best superpower in the world, but I'll take what I can get. What superpower would you have? Wait, I <u>know</u>! You can use your loud snoring to your advantage, and scare off the villains. Yess, OMG! This is why we have to room together. We are the perfect partners in crime!! See You Soon, Lily

The two narrators are doing very different narrative work in these two instances. Abigail is drawing the reader's attention to how much she, as the protagonist, wanted to room with Sam. Most of the psychological state expressions are affiliated with the *I* character, inviting the reader to empathize with the protagonist. On the other hand, the protagonist in Lily's narrative expresses no such plea. She seems to have gotten what she wanted and she joyfully and carelessly moves away from the whole room sharing situation, toward a playful conversation with her friend. This indicates that assuming the role of the victim of wrongdoing and embodying their feelings, thoughts, intentions and expectations requires more intense mental work – enacted in language – than taking the perspective of the wrongdoer. Another indication that this may be the case is the higher (the highest!) use of cognitive expressions in the two victim genres. In my previous work (Jović, 2014), I demonstrated that when there is a need for more intense mental work around issues, to figure out what is happening, narrating becomes more "cognitive." After all, narrative can be regarded as a problem-solving and conflict resolving tool (Ochs, Smith, & Taylor, 1989; others), and the employed analyses provide a systematic way of seeing how this narrative function gets enacted in language.

The *Personal Story* and *Culprit Email* are the genres least imbued with mental language. The narrative move of depriving a character of mental state utterances could be understood as an expression of the narrator dehumanizing the character he or she is writing about. This interpretation of the culprit being the least humanized character could apply to the finding of the *Culprit Email* genre showing the lowest use of mental language. However, this interpretation is less plausible when it comes to explaining why *Personal Story*, where the protagonist is the narrative author him- or herself, also showed very low use of language referring to someone's psychological world. Additionally, *Personal Story* is the genre with the lowest use of affective

expressions, in particular. The use of language referring to emotions is rather even across the genres (*Culprit Email*: 42; *Victim Email*: 38; *Complaint Letter*: 40), except in the case of *Personal Story* where there was one affective expression every 50 words.

Several narrative studies have demonstrated that fictional narrating yields stories that are more complex and interesting from the narrative analysis perspective (Daiute, 2010a; Daiute, Buteau, & Rawlins, 2001; Jović, 2014; Peterson & McCabe, 1983), than autobiographical stories. In autobiographical accounts the narrator is usually the obvious protagonist, and therefore, rather exposed in their own story. There is no distancing from one's own experiences, which makes this narrating position vulnerable and susceptible to reader's or listener's scrutiny. Fictional genres provide this distance from one's own involvements, allowing us to more safely express feelings, intentions, desires, and so on, especially the ones that do not conform to societal norms and expectations (Daiute et al, 2001).

Participants expressed rather varied use of psychological state expressions across the four narrative activities. While *Personal Story* and *Culprit Email* were genres less conducive to endowing characters with psychological life, two narrative activities written from the perspective of the object of exclusion were used as opportunities to express characters' thoughts and feelings more intensely. This analysis offers one layer of understanding of how adolescents engaged with each of the four writing prompts, which will be expanded with the character mapping analysis presented in the following section. This entire chapter is committed to building profiles of each of the writing genres used in this study, and understanding their affordances and limitations, for that matter. These profile summaries will be presented at the end of the current chapter, following the presentation of all narrative strategies applied in the analysis of the data.

**Character Mapping Across Four Narrative Contexts**

In this section I present results for the character mapping analysis performed on all four narrative genres. This analysis expands the psychological state expression analysis by taking a closer look at how these expressions are focalized around particular characters in participants' narratives. In addition to looking at characters' thoughts and feelings, character mapping accounts for the expressions referring to the *landscape of action*: what the characters are saying and doing. Doing this can help reveal the diverse lines of meaning expressed through different characters. I was particularly curious to see how participants would use the "culprit" and the "victim" narratives to channel different experiences through different characters in their narratives. Attributing mental state expressions and actions to narrative characters serves to bring characters to life and give them self-determination. Let us look at how participants employed this narrative strategy across four narrative activities, as they appropriated different perspectives.

The first step of the character mapping analysis is reviewing the character mentions. Looking at all four writing activities together, the most frequently used characters are the first (38%) and third person singular (38%). As shown in Table 8, *Personal Story* demonstrates the highest use of the third person characters: 57% of all character mentions are 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular and plural. Another trend that can be observed is of victim genres (*Victim Email* and *Complaint Letter*) being more focused on the first person singular than *Culprit Email* or even less so *Personal Story*. Let us see how psychological states and actions used in narratives map onto this character mention pattern before we move onto possible interpretation.

Table 8

Occurrence of Character Mentions across Four Narrative Contexts

| | Narrative Context | | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | *Personal Story* | | *Culprit Email* | | *Victim Email* | | *Complaint Letter* | | Total | |
| **Person/ Character** | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| 1st p. sing. | 214 | <u>26</u> | 135 | 29 | 181 | 35 | 225 | 38 | 755 | 38 |
| 1st p. pl. | 127 | <u>16</u> | 75 | 16 | 55 | 11 | 62 | 11 | 319 | 11 |
| 2nd p. sing. | 5 | 1 | 83 | 18 | 72 | 14 | 25 | 4 | 185 | 4 |
| 2nd p. pl. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 19 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 20 | 0 |
| 3rd p. sing. | 362 | <u>45</u> | 159 | 35 | 180 | 35 | 222 | 38 | 923 | 38 |
| 3rd p. pl. | 101 | <u>12</u> | 6 | 1 | 13 | 3 | 54 | 9 | 174 | 9 |
| Total | 809 | 100 | 458 | 100 | 520 | 100 | 589 | 100 | 2376 | 100 |

As explained in the *Data Analysis* section, character mapping entails coding each character mentioned in the narrative (for every time it is mentioned), and coding all psychological state expressions and actions attributed to each character so that all their thoughts, feelings, speech and physical actions are captured. The full report with occurrences of all the characters' psychological state expressions and actions can be found in Table 9. The trend observed in the character mentions of the 3rd person characters having the highest mention in *Personal Story* (Table 8) corresponds to the trend of the 3rd person characters being attributed the highest proportion of psychological states + actions in *Personal Story* than in any other narrative activity (Table 9). When it comes to the *Personal Story*, over a half (52%) of all psychological states and actions are affiliated with the 3rd person characters. In contrast, in the other three

narrative activities, a vast majority of mental states and action expressions is attributed to the 1$^{st}$ person characters.

Table 9

Character Mapping across Four Narrative Contexts

| | Narrative Context | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Personal Story* | | *Culprit Email* | | *Victim Email* | | *Complaint Letter* | |
| **CODE** | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| 1st p sing. PSYCH states | 103 | <u>17</u> | 119 | 32 | 130 | 31 | 164 | 34 |
| 1st p sing. ACTION | 57 | 10 | 37 | 10 | 47 | 11 | 42 | 9 |
| 1st p pl. PSYCH states | 55 | 9 | 16 | 4 | 32 | 8 | 25 | 5 |
| 1st p pl. ACTION | 65 | 11 | 53 | 14 | 33 | 8 | 40 | 8 |
| 2nd p sing. PSYCH states | 2 | 0 | 20 | 5 | 27 | 6 | 14 | 3 |
| 2nd p sing. ACTION | 2 | 0 | 29 | 8 | 18 | 4 | 5 | 1 |
| 2nd p pl. PSYCH states | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 2nd p pl. ACTION | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 3rd p sing. PSYCH states | 135 | <u>23</u> | 47 | 13 | 70 | 17 | 91 | 19 |
| 3rd p sing. ACTION | 102 | 17 | 41 | 11 | 36 | 9 | 57 | 12 |
| 3rd p pl. PSYCH states | 42 | <u>7</u> | 5 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 18 | 4 |
| 3rd p pl. ACTION | 29 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 21 | 4 |
| Total | 592 | 100 | 370 | 100 | 421 | 100 | 478 | 100 |

Presented below (Table 10) is a selected and summarized table combining Tables 8 and 9, which should facilitate the detection of this trend and another one observed through character mapping analysis on the entire sample. Psychological states and actions are combined, which together compose an "agency index," or "life index" of sorts, showing how much agency was attributed to each character in this sense. For the purpose of this summary, I also looked together at characters expressed in singular and plural, and I only focused on the 1st and 3rd person characters. The use of the 2nd persons was confined mostly to two email genres addressed to a friend, as can be observed in Table 9. It is a bit surprising that its use was so low even in *Complaint Letter*, given that that genre, just like the email genre, has an explicitly stated audience – a single person who should be addressed. While it was easier for youth to address their peer directly, it was presumably more difficult to address an authority figure in such a way. Rather, they focused heavily on the 3rd person in their complaint letters.

Table 10

Summary and Selection of Character Mapping Findings

| | Narrative Context | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Personal Story* | *Culprit Email* | *Victim Email* | *Complaint Letter* |
| | Character mentions (%) | | | |
| 1st person (sing. + pl.) | 42 | 45 | 46 | 49 |
| 3rd person (sing. + pl.) | 57 | 36 | 38 | 47 |
| | Psychological State Expressions + Actions (%) | | | |
| 1st person (sing. + pl.) | 48 | 60 | 57 | 57 |
| 3rd person (sing. + pl.) | 52 | 26 | 28 | 39 |

As shown in Table 10, *Personal Story* is the only genre where both the mention of the 3rd person characters (57%) and the attribution of agency, or "life," to these characters (52%) is higher than the mentions (42%) and agency (48%) of the 1st person characters. In other words, while writing the narratives drawn from personal, autobiographical experience, the participants focused on actors other than themselves, more than they did in any other narrative activity. While these autobiographical narratives were longer and more elaborate than other writing activities in terms of setting up the scene, providing context, and developing characters, they provided less space for working out intra- and interpersonal dramas. The fictional genres, especially *Victim* and *Culprit Email*, were relieved of the burden of portraying one's own life and one's own struggles, frustrations, weaknesses, desires, etc. This is why the 1st person characters across these two narrative contexts were attributed twice as many psychological state expressions and actions than the 3rd person characters. In these two writing activities, the *I* perspective carries much more meaning than it did in the *Personal Story*.

The final set of findings regards the last writing activity – *Complaint Letter*. Even though the frequency of mention of the 1st person characters (49%) was as high as the mention of the 3rd person characters (47%), the authors endowed the former with a proportionately much higher number of psychological state expressions and actions (57%) than the latter (39%), as apparent from Table 10. What this means is that 3rd person characters had more mental state expressions and actions affiliated with them. This narrative activity, in a way, puts narrators in the most vulnerable position since its narrative prompt explicitly invites participants to take the position as the victim in the described situation ("Imagine now that you are Alex and that you think that what happened to you that day at school was not fair…"). For this reason, we may expect the *I* character to be the one most brought to life and humanized through the use of psychological state

expressions and actions, which we now know was not the case. Third person characters were the ones most endowed with "life" and I set to find out for which purpose the authors attributed these actors with mental life and action: did they do so in order to (de)humanize, minimize, or qualify them in some other way. What I found out, while looking at narratives through this lens, is that since they were invited to complain to a school official, many participants focused extensively on what others did in the described situation and how they wronged them. The following two, rather short, narratives illustrate well what was going on in the narratives of this genre. Third person characters and their affiliated thoughts, feelings, and actions are highlighted with blue, while the first person is marked with pink (1st p. sing.) and red (1st p. pl.).

Example 1: Dear Principal

> What Mo did in school was unfair. He told the teacher lies about me and Sam so that we won't be able to sleep together in on the trip. What Mo did wasn't right. I don't think Mo should go on the trip and that he should be suspended.

Example 2: Principal

> I feel what was done to me was wrong and consequence should be put on the person who was up to this. Its not fair because somebody lied to get what they want. I feel that person should not be able to do any more activities in school until they show maturity and change.

Both narratives are dominated by 3rd person characters – Mo and Sam – but not with the aim of humanizing them and inviting the reader to relate to and empathize with them. Rather, they are brought to life by depicting what they (or only Mo) did, and how it was wrong. Without this thorough character mapping analysis, we would not be able to say which purpose of the

three identified by Daiute (2014) – *humanizing, minimizing* or *qualifying* the character – the use of psychological state expression served. I will leave this conversation for the time being, until we return to it in the next chapter where I will consider between-group differences regarding the use of character mapping, as well as the other narrative strategies discussed in this chapter. The next chapter highlights how authors from different socioeconomic backgrounds have different strategies for distributing meanings across characters, and across narrative genres.

**Narrating Trouble and Resolution**

This section most closely answers one of the main research questions, which is how the participants understood the vignette. How do individual youth interpret ambiguous social situations where certain forms of unfairness might have occurred? What I will explore while answering this question is adolescents' understanding of the relational dynamics operating between the actors in the presented vignette: what kind of a conflict(s) they see playing out in the story, or whether they, instead, see a misunderstanding and inconclusiveness? While narrating the personal experience that they see as similar to the one depicted in the vignette, do they position themselves as the object or the instigator of misunderstanding/exclusion/deception? Therefore, the results I present in this section are based on the analysis of the first writing activity – *Personal Story* – prompted by reading the hypothetical vignette.

A minimal way of defining a narrative, as proposed by Bruner (2002), is having a disruption in the expected flow of things – so there is something to tell about – and having an outcome, "some sort of resolution" (p. 17). The results presented in this section are the product of the analysis that focused on these two plot elements – *trouble* and *resolution* (in addition to *characters*). Additionally, I focused on the characters in participants' narratives, and how they are positioned in relation to the actors from the vignette that prompted all narrative writings. The main characters in the vignette are the left-out character, the instigator, the desired peer, and the teacher, who could have an active role or be regarded as a mere bystander. I wanted to see if the "trouble" that fueled the narratives and set the events in motion was about experiences of unfairness, and of which sort, and I also wanted to see with which vignette actor's position the participants identified most.

I will focus first on the analysis of trouble and resolutions in *Personal Story*, followed by the analysis of the protagonist positions – how did the authors position as narrators in their stories. In this section I report the findings at the level of the sample, and in the next chapter we will explore the differences in ways youth coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds interpreted the vignette, and how they engaged with the four writing activities.

**What's the Trouble?**

The analysis of *Personal Story* was most instrumental in answering the main research question of how the participants interpret the vignette. The instruction that prompted *Personal Story* narratives (refer to the *Vignette* section) invited participants to narrate about a personal experience that they deem similar to the situation described in the vignette, and through these narratives we get to understand how youth interpret the vignette and social relational dynamics taking place in it.

First, I wanted to answer the question about what type of personal experiences participants see as similar to what is depicted in the vignette; what they think had happened in the vignette – whether this story is about lying, exclusion, or just bad communication, to name only few possibilities. Participants wrote their responses to the first writing prompt thinking about a similar situation from their life where a *trouble* (Bruner, 2002) of sorts occurred – an *initiating action* (Daiute, 2011, 2014) – where someone got lied to, excluded, or multiple parties wanted the same desired outcome. Table 11 presents all the initiating actions identified in

adolescents' narratives that propelled their stories, along with short descriptions and narrative excerpts that embed segments coded with a particular initiating action.[8]

Table 11

Initiating Actions in the Personal Story Genre

| Initiating Action | Description | Example (narrative excerpts) | Freq. (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Desired & Scarce Resource | two (or more) parties wanting the same outcome which only one can have | Both my friends and I made plans to go at to a movie. Since there was three of us as well as me and my friend Tony both wanted to sit in the middle seat and we could not agree. | 11 (31) |
| Exclusion | someone is left out/excluded | I have two girl best friends but one of them is kinda annoying and she could be really slow at times so it gets really bad at times and I get frustrated so my other girls friend and I always lie to her and not invite her places. | 10 (28) |
| Lying & Deception | someone does something deceitful/selfish to get what they want, lying/deceiving to get what you want | A situation that happened similar to the story was when my sister told my dad something that my mom said but it was a lie just like in the story. | 9 (25) |
| Unintentional Exclusion | excluding someone unintentionally | I arrived at school and tried to find my friends so we can see who was going to sit next to me. By the time I got to school, all my friend had already found their partners for the bus drive, leaving me alone. | 5 (14) |
| Deprived of Agency[9] | being selected without any say/deprived of agency | She ended up choosing me, but I didn't get any say in the matter and had planned on sitting with my friend Laura. I remember feeling honored that she had picked me out of all of the students, but I was also frustrated that I didn't have any say in what was to happen | 1 (3) |

Thus, the main "troubles" that drove participants' narratives inspired by the vignette involved dishonesty, exclusion, and competition for scarce resources. The trouble category I named *desired & scarce resource* applies to narratives in which the main problem was that two

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[8] An important note that applies to this table and all the others in this section, and in the corresponding *trouble and resolution* section of Chapter 5, is that the number of coded segments can be lower or higher (although seldom) than the number of participants since not all narratives could sometimes be coded for a particular coding category, or more than one code from the same coding category could sometimes be applied to the same narrative segment.

[9] There was only one instance of this problem category. I could not subsume this code into any other since it is quite *sui generis*.

peers had the same "object of desire," which often was someone's friendship or attention, or, just like in the vignette, wanting to share a room (or a seat on the bus) with someone popular. Another two prominent problems that determined the center of adolescents' accounts were someone *lying and using deception* to get what they wanted, and someone getting *excluded* from a peer activity. It is happenings of these sorts that set youth's narratives in motion. Let us see next how participants' narratives about personal experiences resolved.

**What are the Resolution Strategies?**

Just as there must be some disruption in the normal and expected flow of things in order to have a *story*, there also must be some resolution involved. Resolution often refers to a concrete resolution of the trouble that led to a conflict in the story – the actors tried talking things out, or they had a physical altercation, or they altogether gave up on trying to resolve the conflict. However, resolution can be understood in a less concrete sense, as a general resolution to the story – what the participants do to put an end to the story. The list of *conflict resolution* codes I created includes both "concrete" conflict resolution strategies (e.g. *talking out, peacemaker introduced*) and outcomes of the conflict situation, or a resolution to the story. In that sense, it could be stated that some participants focused on the strategies to resolve conflicts, and the others on the outcomes and consequences. Nonetheless, I think there is enough coherence between these different codes so they can stand united and help us learn more about how adolescents use narrative to resolve conflicts. A full list of codes with descriptions and examples can be found in Table 12.

Table 12

Conflict Resolution Strategies and Outcomes Identified in the Personal Story Genre

| Conflict/Narrative Resolution | Description | Example (narrative excerpts) | Freq. (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Conflict sustains | The conflict is not resolved; there was an attempt at resolution but it failed | I just grew apart from her and we lost our friendship. About a year later, we talked more and now we are friendly towards each other but still not friends. | 9 (23) |
| Instigator got their way | The outcome is in perpetrator's favor and they get away with their dishonest behavior | I'm forced to lie. It does work out because she never finds out anyways. | 9 (23) |
| Talking out | Protagonists resolve conflict through conversation with a peer | So after long discussions about it we finally came to a conclusion about who sleeps with who. | 8 (21) |
| Acquiescence | The excluded actor accepts the situation without doing much to change the outcome in their favor | I would usually get upset and then get over it but I don't' think anyone else really cares. There really wasn't anyone to talk to. Now it's fine because I have grown to live with being picked last. | 5 (13) |
| Peacemaker introduced | Someone else (adult) solves the problem | I remember we did go to the school counselor together. | 4 (10) |
| Overcoming | The wronged character overcomes the situation | At the end of the day we all were still friends and despite not sitting next to Kim our relationship was still there. I was grateful it happened because it created pros and cons that made me worship my friendship much more | 3 (8) |
| Got busted | The perpetrator gets caught in their wrongdoing | Later on of course, my sister found out. I got in trouble with my mother and my sister got very mad. My mother and sister were saying that I was greedy, selfish, etc | 1 (3) |

The main conflict or story resolution strategies used among participants were: *conflict sustains*, where there is no resolution or the attempts at resolution have failed; *got their way*, in the case where the focus is on a perpetrator getting away with the wrongdoing they committed; and finally, *talking out*, a strategy that implies constructive problem solution with a positive outcome. When these findings are revisited in the next chapter that addresses the between-group differences, it will be demonstrated how participants from different socioeconomic backgrounds expressed different patterns in the use of these resolution strategies.

**Position of the Narrator**

  The final narrative element I looked at, which was meant to help understand how the participants interpreted the vignette, was the way the authors positioned themselves in their stories about personal experiences. So, *Personal Stories* were created as accounts similar to what was described in the hypothetical vignette. The characters involved in the vignette are: a plausible wrongdoer, a peer who was excluded, a popular peer who was not part of the decision-making process, and a person of power who might have had some role in the wrongdoing. I wanted to see if participants produced their personal stories from one of these positions prescribed by the vignette, or whether they chose to narrate from some other standpoint. Looking into this can help us gain better understanding of who is telling the story and for what purpose.

  I assumed that in the accounts they create, the individual youth would occupy one of the positions included in the vignette, with the exception of the power figure (the teacher in the vignette). In addition to this exception, I predicted that in some narratives the authors would occupy the position of a bystander since the writing activity prompt invited them to write about *a situation when something similar… has happened to them <u>or to someone they know</u>*. Besides the positions that I predicted the participants would assume in their accounts, there were several more and they are all shown in Table 13, with their corresponding descriptions and examples.

Table 13

Narrator Positions Identified in the Personal Story Genre

| Position of the narrator | Description | **Example** (narrative excerpts) | Freq. (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Bystander/ Narrator** | The narrator recounts someone else's experience or the narrator is a character in the story, but is not involved in major problems or conflicts | Ex. 1: I'm friends with two girls who don't like each other, so it's impossible to have them in one same room without one killing the other.<br><br>Ex. 2: A friend of mine was on a trip with her class to Florida. | 12 (31) |
| **"I" left out** | The narrator is positioned as the excluded character | This situation has happened to me to a degree. In my case it was a carnival ride, and the because the other person was more outgoing and demanding I was left as the third wheel. I felt isolated secluded from everyone else, as if I would always be the one left out for someone else who was more outspoken. | 10 (26) |
| **"I" desired** | The narrator is positioned as the popular person for whose attention and company the other characters are fighting | Something similar that has happen to me was when my friends Carlos and Angel both were arguing over who gets to come over to my house because my family was planning to go to a water park. | 8 (21) |
| **"I" perpetrator** | The narrator is positioned as the wrongdoer in the story | I get spoiled by my grandmother so I told her my curfew was a later time then usual. She was gullible and I was slick so I went to the party and my dad never knew. | 5 (13) |
| **Unintentional instigator** | The narrator is responsible for someone else being left out in some way, but without being (overtly) dishonest | I really wanted my girlfriend to be my partner, so against the wishes of her friends I told my teacher to be partnered with my girlfriend. Her friends were not excited about this, and were reluctant to speak to me afterwards. | 4 (10) |

The position most often occupied by participants is the one of the *bystander/narrator* (31%) in the narrative. In most cases that were coded as this narrative position, the participant occupies a position of someone who is part of the story and has a relationship with other characters, but has no role in the story plot. In these cases, the author is an observer recounting events that they witnessed. In very few cases (7%), the authors took the position of a neutral narrator who had no connection to the story plot. Another common position participants occupied is one of the *left-out* (26%) character, which indicated that the character they most

identified with in the vignette was Alex, the peer who was left out of the room arrangement. In these narratives, adolescents recounted experiences of being excluded by their peers. Along with identifying with the excluded character, participants were also likely to identify with the popular and desired peer (21%) in the vignette. The least popular position to identify with was the one of the perpetrator of the wrongdoing. Only 13% of the participants positioned themselves as the instigator in the story, doing something wrong like lying or excluding someone. Interestingly, there was a number of narratives (10%) in which the participants were positioned as, what I named, *unintentional instigator*. In these cases, the authors assumed the position of an instigator in the story, who initiates action and acts in their own interest in order to get what they want, but without being overtly deceitful. This strategy was only present in the narratives of adolescents from higher SES, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Chapter Summary and Discussion**

This results chapter was organized around the main research questions aiming to explore how New York City youth make sense about fairness, and how their sense-making changes as they take perspectives of different stakeholders in situations revolving around unfairness. With the aim of capturing the dynamic and historical nature of psychological phenomena, I designed a study in a way that would allow development of *meaning in context*. In order to do that, I created four different contexts requiring youth to adjust, shift or altogether change their sense-making processes. Adolescents were involved in multiple narrating activities eliciting several narrative genres, created for different purposes and directed toward different audiences, which invited multiple perspectives on the issue of unfairness. They were invited to take perspectives of different stakeholders in a social situation, and elaborate the situation from their respective points of view, bearing in mind their distinct perceptions, emotions, values, motives and intentions.

The purpose of the analyses presented in this chapter was to demonstrate how participants' narrating strategies changed as they shifted perspectives moving through four narrating activities. The aim was to explore how youth used narrating, and in particular, how they engaged with the study design that invited multiple accounts, from multiple voices, around the same socio-relational problem. This chapter was in a way an exploration of the purpose that each narrative genre serves. Each of them is a distinct cultural tool used to mediate different psychological processes. A genre that might have propelled the youth to express certain concerns, desires, and strivings, might have restrained them from working out and expressing some other psychological processes. I conclude this chapter with this final overview of the results and what they may tell us about the materiality of the genres – about their affordances and limitations.

**Genres as Cultural Tools Providing Different Degrees of Mediation**

The autobiographical narratives written in response to the first writing prompt, inviting participants to reflect on a personal experience similar to the situation depicted in the vignette, were the longest ones in this research study (116 words on average). However, while these autobiographical narratives were longer and more elaborate than other writing activities in terms of providing the context, setting up the scene, and developing characters, they provided less space to work out intra- and interpersonal dramas. Of the four narrative activities in this study, this one, where the protagonist is in most cases the narrative author, was the one least infused with psychological language. The authors focused more on depicting the *landscape of action* by creating a representation of the actual actions of the story protagonists – portraying what the characters are saying and doing, while the *landscape of consciousness* was less vividly portrayed.

Psychological state expressions help create the *landscape of consciousness* of a story, which depicts what those involved in the action know, think, or feel. Of the four narrative activities, this one showed the lowest use of these expressions, referring to someone's psychological world, and of affective expressions in particular. What this means is that while narrating about personal experiences, the language participants used was the least emotional. Looking more closely at the way participants distributed these expressions across characters involved in their stories, it can be observed that *Personal Story* demonstrated the highest use of the third person characters (57% of all character mentions were $3^{rd}$ person singular and plural). Third person characters had the highest mention, but they were also attributed the highest proportion of psychological states and actions in *Personal Story* than in any other narrative activity. In other words, while writing the narratives drawn from autobiographical experience,

the participants focused on actors other than themselves, more than they did in any other narrative activity.

If different genres are regarded as cultural tools that provide mediation – freeing from the immediacy of one's own experiences, then autobiographic and fictional genres can be thought of as providing different "degrees of mediation." While the author is the expected and obvious protagonist in personal narratives, fictional genres provide more extended mediation, that is, distancing from the immediate constraints of our history and nature. While personal narratives make us more exposed to our readers and listeners, fictional narratives provide a "buffer" through features such as a prescribed format, assumed vantage point, explicit audience to address, concrete purpose to achieve, medium to use, etc. The results of the analyses conducted on the different narrative activities support these theoretical assumptions.

Culprit and victim emails were designed in such a way as to allow insights into one and same (or not?) situation, from two opposing and mutually exclusive vantage points. Everything was held the same across these two writing prompts, with the exception of the protagonist whose position participants had to occupy while addressing a friend and recounting events depicted in the vignette. The average length of these two groups of narratives was approximately the same, with the victim narratives being slightly longer on average (64 words) than the culprit emails (58 words). Even though these two activities produced structurally similar narratives, the purpose and the main concerns addressed in these different relational contexts were rather different.

While *Culprit Email*, together with *Personal Story*, was the genre least laden with psychological language, *Victim Email* showed the highest prevalence of these expressions. However, *Culprit Email* was the only genre within which there was a higher use of affective than cognitive expressions. The 1st person characters across *Victim* and *Culprit Emails*, were

attributed twice as many psychological state expressions and actions than the 3rd person characters. In these two writing activities, the *I* perspective could carry much more meaning than it did in the *Personal Story*, since these fictional genres were relieved of the burden of portraying one's own life and one's own struggles, frustrations, weaknesses, or desires.

While *Personal Story* and *Culprit Email* were genres less conducive to bestowing characters with mental life, two narrative activities written from the perspective of the object of exclusion were used as opportunities to express characters' thoughts and feelings more intensely. The two narratives written from the victim's perspective – an email to a friend and a complaint letter to a school official – were the genres most laden with psychological language. Furthermore, these two victim genres (*Victim Email* and *Complaint Letter*) showed higher focalization of psychological expressions on the *I* character than *Culprit Email* and *Personal Story*. The reason why this may be the case is because assuming the role of a victim of wrongdoing and embodying their thoughts, feelings, intentions and expectations requires more intense mental work – enacted in language – than taking the perspective of a wrongdoer. The victim accounts also demonstrated the highest use of cognitive expressions, which has been shown in previous research to serve as important sense-making aid. Narrating becomes more "cognitive" when there is a need for more intense mental work around issues, to figure out what is happening (Jović, 2014).

*Complaint Letter* was particular in that, after *Personal Story*, it had the second highest focus on third person characters – approximately half of all character mentions were first person characters, and a half were third person characters. However, third person characters were attributed disproportionately more psychological state and action expressions. This narrative activity puts narrators in the most vulnerable position, positioning them explicitly as someone

who was done injustice. For that reason, it could be expected for the *I* character to be the one most brought to life and humanized through the use of psychological state expressions and actions, which was not the case. Third person characters were the ones most endowed with "life," but not for reason of humanizing this character. A meticulous character mapping analysis allowed us to see that the reason authors brought these non-*I* characters to life was to depict what the culprit did, and how it was wrong. Thus, bringing to life a third person character actually played a role in humanizing the *I*-character, helping the reader relate and empathize with him or her.

<div align="center">***</div>

Very often we need this distance from our personal experience in order to work out some important mental struggles and dilemmas, and fictional writing can serve as a perfect tool for doing that. In personal, that is, autobiographical accounts, the author is the protagonist, and therefore directly associated with and possibly scrutinized by the reader for their actions, thoughts and feelings conveyed in the story. Fictional narratives allow the author to be less exposed, and removed from their own experiences. Fictional genres of narration are in this sense cultural tools that mediate our sense-making processes; the distance they provide from the immediacy of our experiences allows us to more comfortably work into the story more intense and complex psychosocial dynamics. Personal Story in this study was, therefore, used as an opportunity to recount happenings and focus on what Bruner calls *landscape of action* (1986), developed by depicting the actual actions of the story characters, while the other three, fictional narrative genres served as the sites more conducive to consideration of various intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics.

## CHAPTER V: RESULTS II

## Two Socioeconomic Groups: Between Group Differences

In the previous chapter I explored how youth made sense of situations revolving around unfairness, and how they did it while occupying perspectives of different stakeholders, addressing different audiences.  Participants varied the use of narrative strategies as they shifted perspectives and navigated through different narrative contexts. Participants did different narrative work engaging with four writing prompts, which allowed us insight into multiple layers of their sense-making about fairness, and what it means from the perspectives of actors who were dealt different hands. This chapter addresses the final research question aimed at exploring the differences in sense-making processes between two groups of participants. The chapter structure will mirror the one from Chapter 4, where I first present the results for the psychological state expression analysis, followed by character mapping, and the analysis of trouble and resolutions.

**Between-Group Differences in the Use of Psychological State
Expressions**

While youth from more privileged background showed little variation in their use of

psychological expressions across four narrating activities, adolescents from lower SES

demonstrated more flexible use of this sociolinguistic strategy, adjusting the way they

communicate to the perspectives they take and different others they address.

Table 14 and Figure 5 present the use of psychological state expressions among youth

coming from more privileged socioeconomic background. As described previously, the measure

used to express the frequency of use of particular expressions is *word interval*, which is the ratio

of the total number of words in narratives to the number of occurrences of cognitive/affective

expressions. The lower the value of the word interval, the higher the number of a particular

expression per word. The word interval unit of measure gives information about per how many

words a cognitive or affective expression can be found. Thus, this is a measure that accounts for

the narrative length, which may differ broadly across narrative genres or groups of participants.

Table 14

Use of Psychological State Expressions among Participants from Higher SES

|  | **Narrative Context** | | | | |
| **Psychological state expression** | Personal story | Culprit email | Victim email | Complaint letter | All four narratives |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cognition | 44 | 43 | 33 | 33 | 38 |
| Affect | 54 | 43 | 34 | 39 | 43 |
| Average | 49 | 43 | 33 | 36 | 40 |

What can be noticed first, especially while looking at the graph, is that the results for the

participants coming from more affluent socioeconomic positions resemble the results reported

for the entire sample. As on the level of the entire sample, there is a higher incidence of

psychological state expressions in the narratives from the victim's perspective. In addition,

adolescents from higher socioeconomic positions exhibit a balanced use of cognitive and

affective expressions in the *Culprit* and *Victim Email* narrative contexts; there is virtually no

difference in the ratio of words expressing thoughts and feelings. As it will be presented shortly,

the situation was quite the opposite when it comes to youth from underserved backgrounds.

Participants from higher SES varied the use of cognitive vs. affective expressions only in

*Complaint Letter* and *Personal Story*, in particular. Both of these narrative activities were

characterized by higher use of cognitive than affective expressions. In *Personal Story* narratives,

a cognitive expression appeared every 44 words, while affective expressions appeared once in 54

words on average. This narrative activity is also characterized by the lowest incidence of

psychological expressions. This finding is in alignment with the findings discussed in Chapter 4,

of personal stories being, in a sense, least personal accounts, when compared to other, fictional genres. It is more challenging narrating about personal experiences of being an object or an instigator of unfairness, which is why narrators may self-monitor more intensely and engage less in what the actors in the situation were thinking and feeling. These autobiographic accounts were more focused on elaborating the events – what happened, when, how, who was involved, etc. – than on the mental world of the characters involved.

Figure 5. Use of psychological state expressions among participants from higher SES
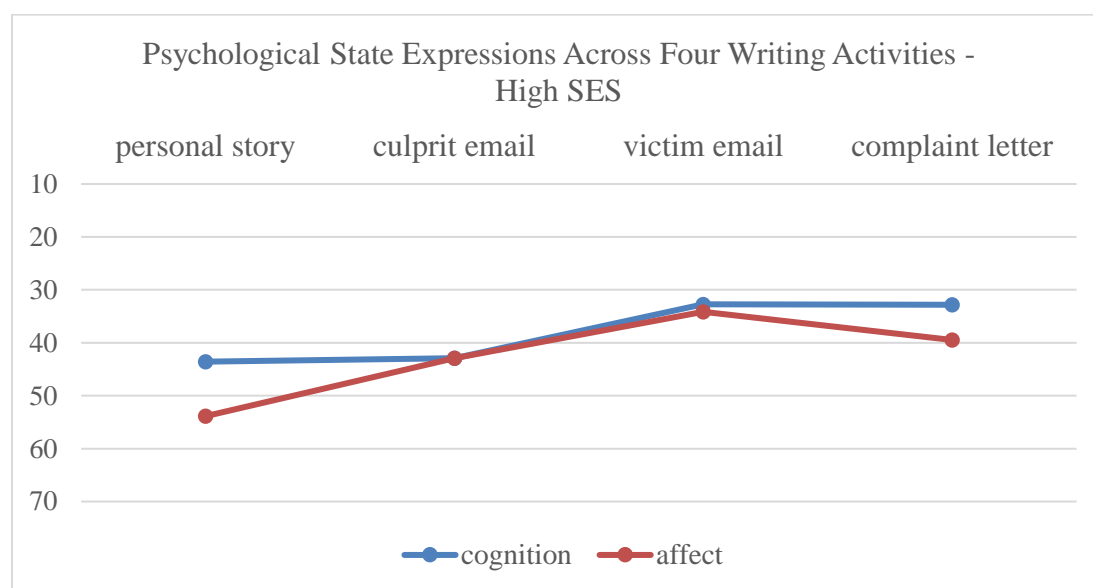


The results for the participants coming from the Bronx, presented in Table 15, show very different patterns of use of this psycholinguistic strategy. What is seemingly similar between these teens and their more affluent counterparts is the pattern of higher use of mental state expressions in the two victim narratives. Nonetheless, this pattern holds only when we look at the average use of cognitive and affective expressions together. Once regarded separately, it becomes evident that participants used these two types of mental language utterances in a very distinct way. While the participants from more affluent neighborhoods used these two types of

expressions in rather even proportions across all narratives except the personal story, the adolescents from the less affluent backgrounds demonstrated very differential use of these two types of expressions across all narrative contexts (except the mentioned personal story genre). In other words, the teenagers from lower socioeconomic positions showed significantly differential use of cognitive vs. affective utterances across the three, non-autobiographical narrative contexts. Let us focus more closely on these findings also presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Use of psychological state expressions among participants from lower SES
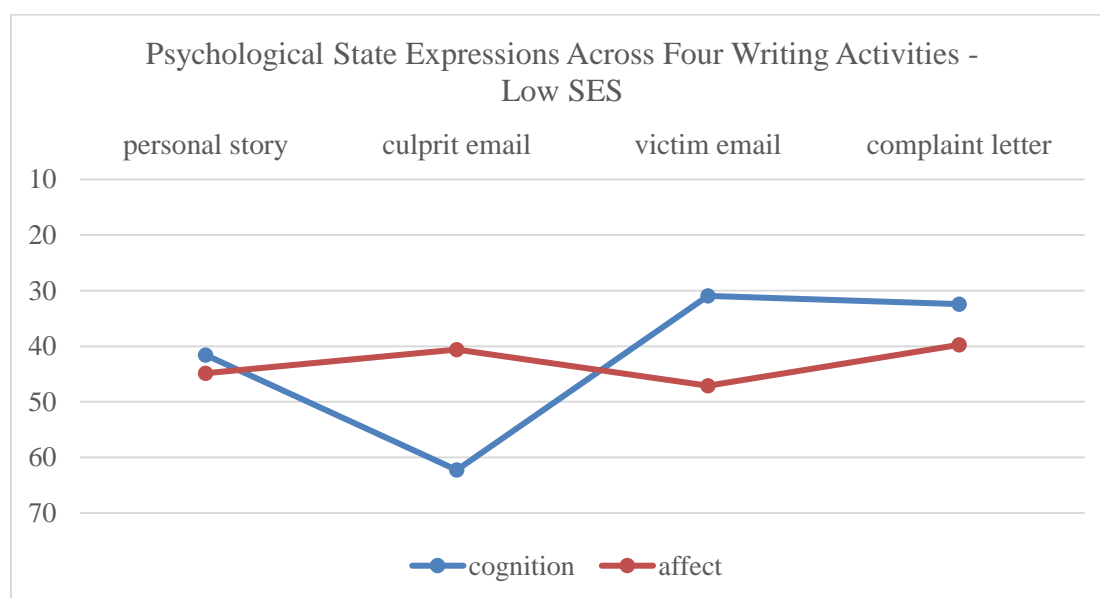


While *Personal Story* was the genre least laden with psychological state expressions among participants from higher SES, for adolescents from less privileged background it was the *Culprit Email* narrative. In culprit emails a word expressing thoughts and emotions appeared once every 51 words. Thus, of all other positions participants occupied while narrating, this was the least humanized one, at least for the youth coming from lower SES. Based on the character mapping analysis, it can be observed that a large majority of the psychological state expressions in this narrative genre was affiliated with the *I* position – the instigator. In addition to mental

language being sparse in this narrative activity, it was also drastically more affective (41) than

cognitive (62). Rereading all culprit emails of participants from lower SES, looking for an

explanation for culprit's stories being more emotional than cognitive, a very prominent pattern

emerged.

Seventy-five percent of participants from lower SES used *Culprit Email* with a purpose

of conveying the good news to their friend, Sam, who missed school on the day of the events

described in the vignette. The culprit serves as the bearer of good news, sharing them in an

enthusiastic way with their friend. The following example written by Amy provides illustration.

So today was so wack because you weren't there bro, but <u>guess</u> what!! We rooming

together ☺ I talked to the teacher and he said yes. It's gonna be lit bro we gonna have so

much fun. I <u>can't wait</u>. <u>Hope</u> to <u>see</u> you at school tomorrow.

Amy is excited about the positive outcome of her efforts to room with Sam. She omits all

other details but the fact that teacher said yes to her and Sam rooming together, and that that

news is very exciting. There is no explaining or justifying what she has done, or the mention of

the left-out character (Alex). This approach that teens from underserved backgrounds took in

writing the culprit narratives will be elaborated further in the *Trouble and Resolution Strategies*

section of this chapter when I discuss how participants from different backgrounds approached

this narrative genre in this regard.

Table 15

Use of Psychological State Expressions among Participants from Lower SES

| | **Narrative Context** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Psychological state expression** | Personal story | Culprit email | Victim email | Complaint letter | All four narratives |
| Cognition | 42 | 62 | 31 | 32 | 42 |
| Affect | 45 | 41 | 47 | 40 | 43 |
| Average | 43 | 51 | 39 | 36 | 43 |

An interesting finding is that the variation in the use of affective expressions across four narrative contexts was evidently lower than the corresponding variation in the use of cognitive expressions. While for the adolescents from higher SES *Victim Email* was the most affective genre, for participants from lower SES that was the least affective narrative. Nonetheless, *Complaint Letter*, which is also an account from victim's perspective, was the narrative most laden with affect (40), together with *Culprit Email* (41). It seems like once explicitly invited to position as victim and complain about the experienced wrongdoing, the youth from lower SES felt more free to infuse their narrating with psychological state expressions and attribute the victim with more affect than they did in the *Victim Email* genre. Another interesting finding regarding the two victim genres is that both of these narratives showed outstandingly high use of cognitive words – there was one cognitive expression per 31 words in *Victim Email*, and one in 32 in *Complain Letter*. This indicates that whenever the teens from lower SES are positioned as someone who is an object of some sort of injustice, their narrating becomes far more cognitive.

They use cognitive expressions to make sense of the intense and complex relational dynamics they are working out while narrating.

When it comes to the use of cognitive expressions by youth from lower SES, the variation across narrative activities was rather drastic. As stated earlier, in cases of the two victim narrative activities, the use of cognitive expressions supersedes the use of the affective ones. However, if the focus is placed only on the two *email to a friend* narrative activities – one from the culprit's, the other from the victim's perspective – a drastic difference in the pattern of use of cognitive expressions can be observed. When they positioned as the culprit, adolescents from more disadvantaged backgrounds used significantly more affective (1 in 41 words) than cognitive utterances (1 in 62 words). This pattern is reversed in their narratives from the victim's perspective where 1 in 47 words is an affective and 1 in 31 a cognitive expression. Simply put, the language of the culprit is more affective and language of the victim more cognitive, indicating that the authors were doing a very different narrative work with these two writing activities.

In order to contextualize this conversation and see how dissimilar prevalence of cognitive vs. affective utterances plays out in participants' narrating, in Table 16 I provide examples from two participants, from two study locales, and their narrative responses to both *Culprit* and *Victim Email*. Coded cognitive expressions are highlighted in blue and underlined with wave line, and the affective ones are marked with red color and single underline. These four narratives almost perfectly represent the frequency and pattern of use of psychological words, except from Elisabeth's culprit email which should show higher use of affective in comparison to cognitive expressions in order to reflect their average incidence in narratives of participants from lower

SES. Let us return to the question of why are the culprit emails of adolescents from lower SES more affective and their victim emails drastically more cognitive.

I illustrated earlier that culprit's narratives were laden with affect since the work the authors mostly did is to convey the good news and their content with the outcome that turned out in their favor. On the other hand, while positioned as the victim, the authors used that narrating opportunity to figure out what has happened to them. They extensively used cognitive expressions trying to make sense of the intense and complex relational dynamics they are working out while narrating. Both cognitive and affective utterances serve the purpose of bringing characters to life, humanizing them, but based on the differently patterned use of each of them observed in this and in previous research studies (Daiute, Eisenberg, Vasconcellos, 2015; Daiute, Todorova & Kovacs-Cerović, 2015; Daiute, 2010; 2014; Daiute et al., 2001; Jović, 2014; Kreniske, 2016; Lucić, 2013), it can be stated with confidence that they are doing distinctive narrative work. More precisely, adolescents from underserved backgrounds used these narrative strategies in systematically varied ways, which will be elaborated further in the discussion section at the end of this chapter.

Table 16

Psychological State Expressions in Victim vs. Culprit Narratives among Participants from Different SES

| Abigail Samson-Ryans, Higher SES | Elisabeth, Lower SES |
|---|---|
| **Narrative from Mo's (culprit) perspective** | |
| Hey, Sam, today in school I went and talked to one of the chaperones so that we could bunk together. She said it was fine if we did and I just <u>wanted</u> you to know the resolution. See you tomorrow, Mo | Hay Sam, so I talked to the teacher today and <u>asked</u> to be roomed with you. I talked to Alex and he seemed fine with it so she <u>agreed</u>. Plus Alex has been telling me he can't sleep well so it might be best if he went with someone else since they don't <u>bother</u> him. I talked to the teacher and got you as my roommate fairly so Alex shouldn't have any reason to be <u>mad</u>. |
| **Narratives from Alex's (victim) perspective** | |
| Hey, Sam, while you were out at school today I <u>saw</u> Mo speaking to one of the chaperones and I went to talk to her after he finished. I <u>had</u> <u>wanted</u> us to bunk together and I'd <u>wanted</u> to speak to her to <u>make sure</u> we could. But when I spoke to her she said that Mo had gone behind our backs and <u>lied</u> to her saying that he'd talked to us and we all <u>agreed</u> that you two could bunk together. I still <u>want</u> to bunk with you and I <u>wanted</u> us to talk to her together so that we could <u>make sure</u> that he doesn't get what he <u>wants</u> just by cheating. -Alex | Hi Sam, since you weren't in school today I <u>thought</u> I should tell you that you and Mo are going to be sharing a room on the trip. Mo had talked to the teacher and I <u>guess</u> she said you two will room together. This suck since I really <u>wanted</u> to room with you. I don't really <u>want</u> to be with someone I <u>don't know</u> but I <u>guess</u> I'm going to <u>have to</u>. I got there first, so I did get the chance to tell the teacher I <u>was</u> <u>interested</u> in rooming with you. But I <u>guess</u> my say wasn't taken into consideration. Anyway <u>the decision has been made</u> so I'll just see you in school. |

**Between-Group Differences in Character Mapping**

This section presents differences in how adolescents from different socioeconomic backgrounds expressed meaning across diverse narrative perspectives. A character mapping analysis, where I identified all characters included in adolescents' narratives and all psychological states and actions affiliated with them, provided insights into the way participants made sense about unfairness and exclusion through different characters included in their narratives. As narrators, different characters in our narratives to convey different strands of meaning. In Chapter 4 I discussed adolescents' varied use of this narrative strategy across four narrative contexts. Here, I explore between-group differences in using the characters and bringing them to life by infusing them with mental and physical action.

I present first the first step of character mapping analysis where I look into the frequency of mention of each character. The results of character mentions, presented in Table 17, provide only slight tendencies. *Personal Story* demonstrates the highest use of third person characters, especially in cases of adolescents from lower SES. As a matter of fact, participants from lower SES showed higher use of third person characters across all four narrative contexts, while youth from higher SES expressed higher use of the first-person characters across all genres. Another tendency in the results is that when adolescents from higher SES positioned as the victim, especially in *Complaint Letter*, they expressed higher use of the 1$^{st}$ person plural in comparison to participants from lower SES (14 vs. 7%). That could be taken as an indicator of more privileged adolescents distancing from the experiences of the excluded one. "We" (vs. "I") has a protective function in making the exclusion experience more easily bearable since it becomes shared with someone else.

Table 17

Occurrence of Character Mentions across Two Socioeconomic Groups

| Person/ Character | Narrative Context | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Personal Story* | | *Culprit Email* | | *Victim Email* | | *Complaint Letter* | |
| | Lower SES | Higher SES | Lower SES | Higher SES | Lower SES | Higher SES | Lower SES | Higher SES |
| 1st p sing. | 25 | 27 | 27 | 31 | 33 | 36 | 41 | 35 |
| 1st p pl. | 13 | 18 | 16 | 17 | 8 | 12 | 7 | 14 |
| 2nd p sing. | 1 | 1 | 19 | 18 | 18 | 11 | 4 | 5 |
| 2nd p pl. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 3rd p sing. | 47 | 42 | 36 | 34 | 34 | 35 | 40 | 36 |
| 3rd p pl. | 13 | 12 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 10 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Adding the next level of analysis – affiliating the character mentions with their corresponding psychological and physical actions – reveals more convincing patterns. Table 18 shows full character mapping of all four narrative contexts, across two socioeconomic groups. Before I address the findings in more detail, I will provide few examples that should help us contextualize the results presented in this section. I report three narratives (*Culprit Email*) with their original (color) coding imported from MaxQDA. Each narrative is coded for all character mentions and for their corresponding psychological state expressions and actions. The first-person character mentions and their psychological state expressions and actions are marked with pink (1st p. sing.) and red (1st p. pl.); the second person characters are marked with green; and the

third person characters and their thoughts, feelings, and actions are marked with turquoise (3rd p. sing.) and teal (3rd p. pl.).

The examples illustrate some of the strategies participants could take in distributing psychological and physical action across characters they included in their narratives. While Elizabeth (Example 1) extensively uses the perspectives of third person characters (of Alex, most of all) to examine meaning, the focus of Michael P's narrative (Example 2) is on the first person plural. The "we" in Michael P's narrative shifts from the unspecified plural, to referring to the narrator (Mo) and Alex, and finally to referring to all three friends together. It seems like the narrative author is using the first person plural to symbolically distance himself from the decisions and actions of the probable instigator whose position he assumes in this narrative activity. Yet another strategy in the character use can be observed in Example 3 where the author distributes action more evenly across multiple characters involved in her narrative.

Example 1: Hay Sam, so I talked to the teacher today and asked to be roomed with you. I talked to Alex and he seemed fine with it so she agreed. Plus Alex has been telling me he can't sleep well so it might be best if he went with someone else since they don't bother him. I talked to the teacher and got you as my roommate fairly so Alex shouldn't have any reason to be mad. (Elizabeth, Lower SES)

Example 2: Dear Sam, today in school we had a sticky situation. We couldn't decide who was sleeping with who on the field trip. Me and Alex had a confrontation about it and we couldn't figure it out so we asked a teacher. And we will figure it out when we get there. (Michael P., Higher SES)

Example 3: Dear Sam, So today we found out that there can only be one person per room for the trip. Then I saw Alex talking to the teacher so I needed to also to make sure we could be together. When I told her, she said we all should talk it out! Which would never work because both me and Alex want to room with you and we both can't. So then I told the teacher that you snore and that Alex doesn't want to be with you anyways and she has trouble falling asleep! Hahahha I know thats such a lie but its the only way I will get to be with you! And it totally worked, the teacher said its fine. When I saw Alex I told her that me and you will share a room. So don't tell her anything I told you because she would get so mad! Anyways, I am so happy we are together I just hope Alex doesn't find out. (Grace, Higher SES)

Referring back to Table 18, the trend can be observed of *Personal Story* showing the highest focus on the third person characters. However, this trend is more emphasized in the group of participants from lower SES. If the focus is put only on the 1st p. and 3rd p. characters and the psychological state expressions attributed to them, it can be observed that participants from lower SES assigned 17% (11+6) of these expressions to the 1st persons, while teens from higher SES attributed 32% (20+12) of all psychological states to 1st persons. On the other hand, 35% (27+8) of all psychological language used in lower SES was assigned to 3rd persons, while that number was 24 % (18+6) in higher SES. If we add together all expressions referring to thoughts, feelings, speech and physical acts of characters (what I referred to earlier as the character "life index" or "agency index"), we see that in lower SES 36% of all these expressions were affiliated with 1st p., and 59% with 3rd p. characters. In higher SES this proportion was 54% (1st p.) vs. 44% (3rd p.).

Table 18

Character Mapping across Two Socioeconomic groups

| | Narrative Context | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Personal Story* | | *Culprit Email* | | *Victim Email* | | *Complaint Letter* | |
| **Code** | Lower SES | Higher SES | Lower SES | Higher SES | Lower SES | Higher SES | Lower SES | Higher SES |
| 1st p sing. PSYCH states | <u>11</u> | <u>20</u> | 34 | 31 | 30 | 32 | 33 | 35 |
| 1st p sing. ACTION | 8 | 11 | 9 | 11 | 9 | 12 | 13 | 5 |
| 1st p pl. PSYCH states | 6 | 12 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 3 | 7 |
| 1st p pl. ACTION | 11 | 11 | 17 | 13 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 10 |
| 2nd p sing. PSYCH states | 0 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 8 | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| 2nd p sing. ACTION | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| 2nd p pl. PSYCH states | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2nd p pl. ACTION | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 3rd p sing. PSYCH states | <u>27</u> | <u>18</u> | 12 | 13 | 17 | 17 | 18 | 20 |
| 3rd p sing. ACTION | 18 | 16 | 13 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 15 | 9 |
| 3rd p pl. PSYCH states | 8 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 4 |
| 3rd p pl. ACTION | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Another trend is that when positioned as victim (writing to a friend), participants from lower SES demonstrated more even distribution of psychological states and actions across all

characters. Adolescents from higher SES attributed 62% of psychological states and actions to the first-person characters (vs. 52% for lower SES). I will present one more line of analysis before I offer a preliminary interpretation of what all this may mean. A thorough  interpretation and discussion is due at the end of this chapter.

The *I* character was the protagonist in all three fictional narratives: *Culprit Email, Victim Email* and *Complaint Letter*. However, that was not necessarily the case in *Personal Stories*. Some youth told stories where some third person characters were the protagonists, and the first-person character (the author) was a secondary, tertiary character, or even just a bystander in the story, based on their importance for the story plot. Thus, with the aim of accounting for this specificity of the personal story genre, I tweaked the character mapping analysis I originally did, which was presented earlier.

In Chapter 4 I discussed how there really is something less "personal" about this personal account in comparison to the fictional genres. Here, while comparing the narratives of adolescents from different socioeconomic backgrounds, the same tendency can be observed of personal stories focusing more on the non-*I* characters, with that being particularly the case when it comes to youth from lower SES. I wanted to see if this tendency remains once I account for the prominence of individual characters in the story. I did this by coding for the characters based on their importance for the story plot, instead of coding for grammatical persons in narrative. Thus, an alternative character mention analysis I conducted included the following codes: protagonist, second, third, fourth and fifth character (based on their importance in the story), and bystander. Here is an example of how a narrative in which the *I*-character was not the protagonist was coded:

This situation reminds me of one of my friend's named Alexa, when she went to a over night college trip. Alexa and her other two friends had to rent a room for themselves in the hotel to sleep for two days. Alexa wanted to share a room with Larrisa however, she talks in her sleep which scares Alexa and wakes her up so she decided to share the room with Samantha. Alexa told the Chaperon and said that she oky with it as long as we all are happy. Alexa and Samantha all felt happy however Larrisa was a little sad but she understood why.

The protagonist in this story is Alexa, and the author, the 1st person singular, is only a bystander in the story. The second most important character in the story is Larrisa, the third character is Samantha, the chaperon is the fourth character, and "we all" is the fifth most important actor in the story. All personal story narratives were coded using this principle and the results of the character mention analysis can be found in Table 19.

Results of the character mapping analysis indicate the same trend observed while coding for grammatical persons, but more convincingly. Of all character mentions in participants' personal stories, youth from lower SES referred to the protagonist in 38% of the cases, while in accounts of youth from higher SES 56% of all character mentions referred to the protagonist. Looking at this one and at other three narrative contexts, it becomes apparent that youth from more affluent background always seem to relate more intensely to the protagonist in the story. Youth from lower SES, however, distributed the character use (and the use of psychological state and action expressions) more evenly across all actors they involved in their narratives.

Table 19

Occurrence of Character Mentions in Personal Story: Protagonist Analysis

| | Socioeconomic Group | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Lower SES | | Higher SES | | Total Sample | |
| **Character importance** | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| Protagonist | 111 | <u>38</u> | 194 | <u>56</u> | 305 | 48 |
| 2nd character | 67 | 23 | 80 | 23 | 147 | 23 |
| 3rd character | 45 | 15 | 42 | 12 | 87 | 14 |
| 4th character | 40 | 14 | 5 | 1 | 45 | 7 |
| 5th character | 14 | 5 | 17 | 5 | 31 | 5 |
| Bystander | 16 | 5 | 10 | 3 | 26 | 4 |
| Total | 293 | 100 | 348 | 100 | 641 | 100 |

By now we have shown the intricate socio-relational work that adolescents are doing through various characters involved in their narratives. The *I* perspective is surely not the sole carrier of meaning of the narrative. Authors use other characters to symbolically locate and distribute their experience and knowledge, and that way, through their words, thoughts, feelings and actions express multiple lines of meaning about the issue at stake. Youth from underserved backgrounds tend to use these other, non-*I* characters more extensively. This indicates that they may be more sensitive to multiple actors' perspectives, and therefore more likely to take multiple actors' actions, intentions, and needs into account. Alternatively, youth from underserved backgrounds may be, for the reasons I will discuss at the end of the chapter, more prone to

engage a wider social-relational system in the situation where an unfairness and exclusion related issue should be resolved.

**Between-Group Differences in Narrating Trouble and Resolution**

Growing up in dissimilar urban environments provides different affordances in terms of how we perceive the social world around us. For that reason, the same social situation described in the vignette may carry very different meaning for adolescents coming from rather contrasting socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, a line of the current inquiry explored possible between-group patterns of similarities and differences in sense-making about the vignette. In order to answer the questions related to how youth understood the vignette, I focused on the analysis of the first narrating activity – *Personal Story* – which was written as a direct response to reading the vignette. Participants narrated about their personal experiences that they deemed similar to what was described in the vignette. This section will mirror the section on trouble and resolution from Chapter 4, with a focus on the eventual differences between two socioeconomic groups.

**What's the Trouble about across Two Groups?**

First thing I wanted to explore is what type of a "trouble" initiated participants' personal stories; what participants think had happened in the vignette, setting all other events in motions. Do they think the vignette is about lying, exclusion, or something else? This is what I looked at with my "trouble" analysis, and here I expend the results shown in Chapter 4, by adding the results for two groups of participants separately. Table 20 presents incidence of all initiating actions for two groups of participants respectively. For a full description of all initiating actions identified in personal stories, the reader can refer to Table 11 in Chapter 4.

Table 20

Initiating Actions in the Personal Story Genre across Two Socioeconomic Groups

| Initiating actions | Lower SES | | Higher SES | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Coded segments | % | Coded segments | % | Coded segments | % |
| desired & scarce resource | 6 | 32 | 5 | 29 | 11 | 31 |
| exclusion | 6 | 32 | 4 | 24 | 10 | 28 |
| lying & deception | 6 | 32 | 3 | 18 | 9 | 25 |
| unintentional exclusion | 1 | 5 | 4 | 24 | 5 | 14 |
| deprived of agency | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 19 | 100 | 17 | 100 | 36 | 100 |

The most prominent initiation action in the narratives of participants from both socioeconomic groups was a trouble category I named *desired & scarce resource.* It applies to narratives in which the trouble that sets the story in motion is the fact that two peers had the same "object" of desire, which often was someone's friendship or attention, or, just like in the vignette, wanting to share a room (or a seat on the bus) with someone popular. The following narrative excerpt contains what was identified as the *desired & scarce resource* initiating action:

> …In the winter he could bring up one friend with him to hang out for the weekend. It was between me and my friend Pete to go upstate. I really wanted to go upstate because it is relaxing and beautiful... (Allahu Akbar, Higher SES)

When it comes to the use of all other identified initiating actions, we can observe noticeable and in some cases rather drastic differences between adolescents from differing socioeconomic backgrounds. Another prominent action that initiated youth's narratives was someone getting *excluded* from a peer activity. The following excerpt illustrates an instance of this "trouble":

> I have two girl best friends but one of them is kinda annoying and she could be really slow at times so it gets really bad at times and I get frustrated so <u>my other girl friend and I always lie to her and not invite her places</u>… (Stephanie, Higher SES)

*Exclusion* initiated action in 32% and 24% of narratives of youth from lower SES and higher SES respectively. A related trouble identified in a quarter of narratives was when someone used *lying & deception* to get what they wanted.

> The following day however <u>one of them went earlier to tell the teacher to put her name first</u>. When the other friend figured out she was furious that she went behind her back. (Elizabeth, Lower SES)

The previous narrative (excerpt) was coded as the *lying & deception* problem category. Sometimes the narratives coded as exclusion also involved lying and other forms of dishonesty, but what initiated action in the story, what seemed to be the main story engine, was the fact that someone got excluded from a peer activity. *Lying & deception* was present in 32% of narratives of teens from lower SES, and 18% of narratives of their more privileged counterparts. Lastly, an initiating action present in 24% of narratives of participants from higher SES and only in 5% of narratives of youth from lower SES is what I named *unintentional exclusion.* This code was assigned to narratives in which someone was left out but not purposefully, or not involving

necessarily a sort of dishonesty or ill intent like in the segments coded as *exclusion*. Here are two examples of narrative excerpts containing segments coded as *unintentional exclusion*.

Example 1: The day that room assignments were to be handed in to our teacher, <u>I was left out of the room because my friends sat at tables that the teacher collected the assignments from first</u>. (KC Smith, Higher SES)

Example 2: In the first field trip, I arrived at school and tried to find my friends so we can see who was going to sit next to me. <u>By the time I got to school, all my friend had already found their partners for the bus drive, leaving me alone</u>. (Al, Higher SES)

The finding that a quarter of youth from more affluent background saw *unintentional exclusi*on as the main story trigger in 24% of cases (vs. 5% in lower SES group) is rather interesting in the context of two more findings. First, the main "troubles" in the narratives of youth from underserved background besides *desired & scarce resource* (32%)*,* are *exclusion* (32%) and *lying & deception* (32%). Thus, in 64% of cases these adolescents saw the main breach in the regular flow of things in some unfair happening that involved dishonest acts toward someone. In contrast, youth from higher SES used these story triggers in 42% of cases (*exclusion*: 24%; *lying & deception*: 18%). I will hold the interpretation until we see the rest of the results included in this section. I present next how participants' narratives about personal experiences resolved.

**What Are the Resolution Strategies about across Two Groups?**

As I discussed earlier, stories start by some disruption in the regular flow of things. Something unforeseen, a *trouble*, happens giving us a reason to narrate. Many things can happen in between, but there, eventually, must be some resolution in, or to the story. This trouble and resolution are the minimal ways we define a story (Bruner, 1986). In this section I present the results of the resolution strategy analysis, where resolution is understood either as a resolution of the trouble that led to a conflict in the story, or more generally as a resolution to the story – what participants did to close down the story. In the latter sense, there must not be any concrete resolution to the concrete conflicts addressed in the story. A list of all resolution strategies identified in personal stories can be found in Table 12 in Chapter 4. Frequencies of all used conflict and narrative resolution strategies across two groups of participants can be found in Table 21.

We can first notice the difference in the main resolution strategy used by participants coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds. For adolescents from higher SES, the most dominant strategy was what I named *conflict sustains* (27%), which was present in only 18% of narratives of participants from lower SES. This code applies to situations where there were no attempts to solve a conflict central in a particular narrative, or attempts to solve it failed. The following narrative ending illustrates this strategy:

> …I just grew apart from her and we lost our friendship. About a year later, we talked
>
> more and now we are friendly towards each other but still not friends. (Grace, Higher
>
> SES)

On the other hand, the most prominent resolution strategy, that is, outcome, in the narratives of youth from lower SES was that the instigator in the story *got away* (35%) with their wrongdoing,

without any repercussions (e.g. getting punished for the wrong they did). This strategy was

present in only 14% of cases when it comes to the higher SES group.

Another prominent resolution strategy/outcome present in 21% of participants' narratives

was *talking out*, where the involved parties discuss and arrive at a mutually satisfying solution.

This strategy was second most frequent strategy among adolescents from more affluent

backgrounds (23%), and it was present in 18% of coded narratives of youth from lower SES.

Table 21

Prevalence of Conflict Resolution Strategies and Outcomes across the Narratives of Adolescents
from Two Socioeconomic Groups

| | Lower SES | | Higher SES | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Conflict/Narrative Resolution** | Coded segments | % | Coded segments | % | Coded segments | % |
| Conflict sustains | 3 | <u>18</u> | 6 | <u>27</u> | 9 | 23 |
| Got their way | 6 | <u>35</u> | 3 | <u>14</u> | 9 | 23 |
| Talking out | 3 | 18 | 5 | 23 | 8 | 21 |
| Acquiescence | 2 | 12 | 3 | 14 | 5 | 13 |
| Peacemaker introduced | 2 | 12 | 2 | 9 | 4 | 10 |
| Overcoming | 1 | 6 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 8 |
| Got busted | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 17 | 100 | 22 | 100 | 39 | 100 |

An interesting pattern that was observed in the way adolescents from different

socioeconomic backgrounds used narrating to consider conflicts among peers is that youth from

higher SES were more likely to use, in a way, passive strategies, such as *acquiescence* and *sustaining of the conflict*. A crucial characteristic of either of these strategies is that there is absence of any solution. In *conflict sustains* situations the involved parties fail to come to any solution and there is no reconciliation. *Acquiescence* epitomizes a resigned approach to the conflictual situation and failure to stand for oneself, and try to reverse the outcome in one's own favor.

The nature of initiating actions discussed earlier in this and the previous chapter, is surely related to the conflict resolution strategies/outcomes in youth's narratives. If the main conflict arises because of multiple parties want the same thing (*desired & scarce resources*), which was the case in the narratives of youth from affluent background, it explains the finding that the main resolution strategy would be for the stakeholders to either *talk the issue out* and resolve it that way, or that they simply do not (*conflict sustains*). On the other hand, if the main "trouble" triggers are *lying & deception* and *exclusion* (in addition to *desired & scarce resource*), as it is the case among the underserved youth, then it is very telling that the resolution that starkly stood out in their narratives (35%) was that the perpetrator of dishonest acts *got their way* without suffering any consequences, or without the "victim" of their wrongdoing getting any amends.

Adolescents from less privileged backgrounds narrate more openly about situations revolving around the issue of unfairness. They see and write more explicitly about instances of dishonesty and exclusion. In addition, they use the opportunity given by the research procedure to narrate about the likely outcomes of situations when someone lied and excluded someone else, which is that they get away with it without getting punished, and the victim in the situation was left with no reparation. Their peers from more affluent neighborhoods were more likely to choose more "neutral" approach, where the focus is not as much on unfairness and unpunished

wrongdoing; rather, they were more likely than their counterparts from the Bronx to resolve stories by talking things out, or by leaving the conflict unresolved (*conflict sustains* and *acquiescence*). The following and final analysis presented here will offer the last piece in this puzzle complementing well the results shown thus far.

**Position of the Narrator across Two Groups**

   **Personal Story.** The first research question I promised to explore in this dissertation is: How do individual youth understand an ambiguous social situation in which it is uncertain if anything unfair has incurred, and who has caused it? I wanted to see how they understand the relational dynamics operating between the actors in the presented story (vignette): what kind of conflict(s) do they see playing out in the story, or do they, instead, see a misunderstanding and inconclusiveness? This component of the question I addressed with the analyses presented in the previous sections, and in their corresponding sections from Chapter 4. In order to completely answer the main research question, I set to explore another question of a narrower scope, which is: While narrating the personal experience youth see as similar to the one depicted in the vignette, do they position themselves as the *object* or the *instigator* of misunderstanding/exclusion/deception? The goal of this chapter is to answer whether there would be any differences between adolescents from different neighborhoods of New York City in how they choose to position in narratives about conflict and fairness. The results for this between-group analysis of the narrator positions in *Personal Story* are rather interesting and can be found in Table 22.

Table 22

Narrator Positions across the Narratives of Adolescents from Two Socioeconomic Groups

| Position of the narrator | Lower SES | | Higher SES | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Coded segments | % | Coded segments | % | Coded segments | % |
| "I" desired | 5 | 26 | 3 | 15 | 8 | 21 |
| "I" left out | 5 | 26 | 5 | 25 | 10 | 26 |
| "I" perpetrator | 3 | 16 | 2 | 10 | 5 | 13 |
| Unintentional instigator | 0 | 0 | 4 | 20 | 4 | 10 |
| Bystander/ Narrator | 6 | 32 | 6 | 30 | 12 | 31 |
| Total | 19 | 100 | 20 | 100 | 39 | 100 |

The position most often occupied by participants from both socioeconomic groups was the one where the narrator is recounting someone else's experience, or the narrator is a character in the story, but is not involved in major problems or conflicts (*Bystander/ Narrator*). The prominence of this position is understandable given the nature of the prompt that invited youth to narrate about something similar to what was described in the vignette, *that happened to them or to someone they know*. Occupying this position means that these participants chose as the protagonist someone other than the self. Besides this position, the next most frequently occupied position among participants from both groups was the one of the *left-out* character. In other words, a quarter of adolescents recounted experiences when they got excluded by their peers. Participants from more affluent backgrounds stood out when it came to positioning as an instigator in the story who initiates action and gets what he or she wants, but without being

overtly deceitful. I named this position as *unintentional instigator* and the following narrative

excerpt illustrates an instance of this code.

> A few years ago I had a best friend, and we were really close. She didn't have many other
>
> friends, I was her only one. Unlike her, I did have more than just her as my friend. So one
>
> time, we needed to pick partners to go on a trip and I had been asked by my other friend,
>
> so I said yes. When my best friend found out, she was so mad. She was really mad at me
>
> that I wasn't with her… (Grace, Higher SES)

The author did something that led her friend to feel excluded and hurt, but her initial intention

was to partner with another girl. There was no lying, deception or some other form of dishonesty

involved as it was the case when the position was coded as *"I" perpetrator*. Here is again an

excerpt from a narrative I shared earlier where the narrator position was coded as *"I"*

*perpetrator*, which should help us compare these two positions.

> I have two girl best friends but one of them is kinda annoying and she could be really
>
> slow at times so it gets really bad at times and I get frustrated so my other girls friend and
>
> I always lie to her and not invite her places. (Stephanie, Higher SES)

We can observe that authors' intentions in these two situations were rather different which is

why I had to differentiate between these two types of instigators. The *unintentional instigator*

position was occupied by 20% of youth from higher SES, and was not found in the narratives of

youth from lower SES. On some level, the *unintentional instigator* is less dishonest – does not lie

or mislead. Nonetheless, their ways can be interpreted as more insidious because the agency of

the instigator is taken away by not presenting them as responsible for what happens in the rest of

the story. Where narrators position as the *perpetrator*, they take ownership of dishonest deeds

they committed that excluded someone or left them deprived of a desired outcome.

Interestingly, adolescents from more affluent background placed themselves in the position of the *perpetrator* (a deceitful one) in 10% of cases, while teens from underserved backgrounds did it in 16% of cases. A similar but more emphasized incidence pattern can be found regarding the *"I" desired* position: adolescents from more affluent background were less likely to position themselves as the *desired* (popular) character, who is the point of conflict between the other peers, than their less privileged counterparts (26% vs. 15%). We can note that participants from underserved background were more likely to occupy one of the more "active" positions, in a sense. Both the *perpetrator* and the *desired* character own the responsibility for their respective roles – one is admittedly accountable for some wrong doing, and the other is clear about being the apple of discord between two friends. Just like in the case of initiating actions where participants from affluent neighborhoods stood out in the use of *unintentional exclusion,* here as well they are more prone to using strategies that attenuate their responsibility in a situation involving exclusion or someone being deprived of a desired outcome.

<div align="center">***</div>

In the following section I briefly expand the analysis of the protagonist position from *Personal Story* to the other two narrative activities where participants were invited to alternatively position either as the culprit (*Culprit Email*) or the victim (*Complaint Letter*).  This simple analysis illuminates some interesting between-group differences.

**Culprit Perspective**. Upon looking at how participants positioned in their personal stories, and learning that there were two rather different ways in which authors positioned as instigators in their stories – one, more transparent and expressing more ownership over the wrongdoing (*"I" perpetrator*), and the other more "shady," circumventing responsibility

(*unintentional instigator*) – I wanted to see the types of positions occupied when participants were actually invited to take a perspective of a plausible culprit in the vignette. To remind the reader, this narrative activity invited participants to assume the role of the character (Mo) who is very likely responsible for deception and lying with the goal of obtaining something desirable (sharing a room with Sam) at the expense of someone else (Alex) not obtaining the same desired outcome. Here I will explore how the authors performed the role of the culprit – if they used deception, played naïve, or spoke bluntly about what they did.

The way most of the participants positioned as protagonists in *Culprit Email* did indeed match the two types of instigator positions identified in *Personal Story*. The main defining characteristic of the culprit perspective they took was how straightforward the protagonist was about their role in the situation described in the vignette – whether or not they used lying and/or deception while recounting events to their friend. Interestingly, the type of a position that corresponds to *"I" perpetrator* did not involve deception. In instances when protagonists were positioned this way, their narratives either did not contain anything that was way beyond the content of the vignette and had a self-serving function (Example 1), or the protagonist bluntly stated that he or she had used lying and deception to get what they wanted (Example 2). Here are two examples that illustrate different approaches to this non-deceitful and more straightforward instigator position.

Example 1: Guess what!! I talked to the chaperone and you and I will be sharing rooms on the trip. First I saw Mo talking to the chaperone so I knew he had to be up to something so immediately I talked to the chaperone and it was agreed that we should share rooms. (Frieda, Lower SES)

Example 2: Hey Sam I lied to Ms. Beef and said that Alex has sleeping problems and you snore a

        lot. So then she said we can share a room. So me and you are going to have so much

        fun. (Raymond DF, Lower SES)

A large majority (71%) of authors from less affluent neighborhoods positioned the culprit in one of these ways. The alternative perspective that was identified, the one that corresponds to the *unintentional instigator* position, involved either deception, or "bending" the events in the story in such a way so it presents the protagonist (the culprit) in a better light serving a self-preserving and self-benefiting function. The following two narratives illustrate examples where the protagonists were positioned this way.

Example 3: Dear Sam,

        Hope you're feeling okay. School was pretty normal today; nothing major happened.

        You can check the school website for your assignments. <u>I talked to Alex and he said</u>

        <u>he's okay with me and you rooming together</u>! I'm so excited! I hope Alex isn't angry.

        Best, Mo (Joe, Higher SES)

Example 4: Hey Sam, I have important news to tell! So since you weren't here today <u>Alex and I</u>

        <u>had to discuss this between the two of us</u>, and guess what! <u>He willingly let us sleep</u>

        <u>in the same room</u>. I talked to him and told the teacher that everything is fine now.

        Isn't this exciting! Well I just wanted to let you in on the good news. (Robin, Higher

        SES)

The narrative above includes the content that was not present in the hypothetical vignette, which helps present the protagonist (Mo, the "culprit") in a positive light or helps him or her justify their act of leaving Alex out of the room arrangement. Looking at Robin's narrative, we can observe that *Alex and I* [Mo] *had to discuss this between the two of us* never happened in the

actual vignette, neither did *he* [Alex] *willingly let us sleep in the same room.* Adolescents from more affluent neighborhoods positioned in this way in 64% of the cases.

In summary, adolescents living in more privileged socioeconomic circumstances were more likely to have a character of a plausible wrongdoer use deception or play naïve and at the same time more likely to have this character express concern for the feelings of the excluded actor. On the other hand, their less privileged counterparts were more likely to have the protagonist openly talk about what he or she did to get what they wanted, without being too concerned about how they present themselves and how they may come off to the reader of their account. In accord with that, they mostly did not try to express care for the excluded character.

**Victim Perspective: Complaint Letter**. *Complaint Letter* was the only writing activity where the prompt offered a straightforward interpretation of what happened in the situation described in the vignette, and how the excluded character should feel. A portion of the instruction reads: "Imagine now that you are Alex and that you think that what happened to you that day at school was not fair." Until this last writing activity, it was left up to participants to decide how to interpret the vignette and approach the writing prompts. Here they are told that what happened was not fair and they are, in a way, given a permission to complain about it. I wanted to explore how individual youth took this narrating opportunity and how they performed as a victim of the wrongdoing. Again, diverse ways were observed in how participants performed this role.

A list of identified positions with their respective frequencies can be found in Table 23. Two major ways the protagonists positioned were taking a stance of someone who got wronged (61%), where the focus is on other characters' transgressions, and taking a position of someone who got left out (26), where the focus was on the protagonist and how he or she felt and thought

about being excluded. The first example provides illustration of the position that was coded as *wronged*.

Example 1: Dear Principal,

> I don't think it's fair that all three of us that are close friends should be separated. We should be able to share a room. I don't talk to anyone else besides them. I don't think it's fair that they talked about it without me.
> Alex (Michael P., Higher SES)

The author's focus is on what happened, and how it was not fair to the protagonist, and not on his experience of being left out as it is the case in the following example.

Example 2: Hi, this is Alex. I wanted to reach out to you and ask for some assistance. Today my "best friends" turned me down when we had the opportunity to stay all together in a room on the trip. However Mo, one of my "friends" told a teacher that it was fine to sleep in a different room, yet I didn't say that. I would've loved to sleep with them. I find this very unfair and I now feel excluded in this little group we had. I think that Mo had convinced the teacher that we actually talked about this however I didn't give him permission to let me out on this and I am very upset. Is there a way you can talk to him about this? Thank you. (Robin, Higher SES)

A majority of adolescents from higher SES (74%) used the former approach where the focus was on complaining about the wrongdoing. The focus of the victim in their narratives was not on the act of someone doing them wrong and excluding them. Instead, the focus of the victim in privileged adolescents' narratives was on not letting the wrongdoer get away with their behavior – they wanted to out the culprit for their wrongdoing and/or see them punished. Thus,

the way they used this narrating perspective of the victim was not to direct the reader's attention to how they felt as the victim; rather, more often the purpose was to explain the wrongdoing of one of the characters, and to advocate for the situation to be reversed in their own favor. A majority of adolescent from less affluent neighborhoods also used this strategy (47%). However, participants from lower SES also often positioned as the *left-out* character (37%), voicing more explicitly this character's experience of being left out, betrayed or lied to by their peers. The purpose of narrating for the authors who positioned this way in *Complaint Letter* was to appeal to the reader's empathy and help them relate to the victim of exclusion. Participants from more affluent background positioned this way in only 16% of the cases.

Table 23

Narrator Positions across the Narratives of Adolescents from Two Socioeconomic Groups

| Position of the narrator | Lower SES | | Higher SES | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Coded segments | % | Coded segments | % | Coded segments | % |
| Apologetic | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 3 |
| Wronged | 9 | 47 | 14 | 74 | 23 | 61 |
| In the middle | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Left out | 7 | 37 | 3 | 16 | 10 | 26 |
| Problem solver | 3 | 16 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 11 |
| Total | 19 | 100 | 19 | 100 | 38 | 100 |

**Calling out Unfairness**

*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.*

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953)

The analyses and the corresponding results presented in this section were not provisioned in the original analysis plan. The idea to conduct it emerged upon completing qualitative analyses of the culprit and victim email activities. While reading repeatedly narratives of youth from different socioeconomic backgrounds, I noticed something very different in the general tone of their narratives from the victim's and culprit's perspectives respectively. With respect to narrating about unfairness, accounts of underserved adolescents came off as more direct and laden with terminology intended to call out injustice. The results presented here are based on a short phrase- or word-level coding and are corroborated with some higher-level findings already presented.

To test if there truly was a systematic difference in the way diverse youth talked about fairness and exclusion, all four narrating activities were coded for the terms such as *not fair, not ok, behind the back, cheated, bullied, excluded, rejected*, etc. The results are rather dramatic and can be found in Table 24. As with some of the previous analyses, the measure I used is *word interval*[10] since it accounts for differing average narrative lengths across different narrative activities and socioeconomic backgrounds. This is particularly important in the current study given that participants from more affluent backgrounds wrote consistently more across all

---

[10] Word Interval is calculated by dividing the word count by number of occurrences of fairness expressions for a particular narrative context. Higher numbers signify lower incidence of a particular expression.

narrative activities. A major overall finding is that adolescents from underserved background were far more likely to use unfairness related language across all four narrative contexts.

Table 24

Prevalence of Fairness-related Expressions across Four Narrative Activities and Two Socioeconomic Groups

| | Socioeconomic Group | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Narrative Context** | Lower SES (word interval) | Higher SES (word interval) | Total (word interval) |
| Personal Story | 221 | 383 | 293 |
| Culprit Email | 344 | 1607 | 1320 |
| Victim Email | 133 | 286 | 224 |
| Complaint Letter | 50 | 71 | 60 |
| All narratives | 108 | 189 | 150 |

The narrative site providing the best conditions for teens to call out unfairness is the last narrative activity – *Complaint Letter* to a school official. What made participants write more about (un)fairness here is the fact that they were invited to position as the victim in this writing genre, and more importantly, the inherent features of the genre of this writing activity – participants were explicitly invited to complain about something unfair that has happened to the character whose role they had to assume. Teens from underserved neighborhoods were more likely (one unfairness expression per 50 words) to utter terms such as *not fair, rejected, excluded*, than their more privileged counterparts (one (un)fairness expression per 71 words).

The frequency of use of fairness expressions was noticeably lower in *Personal Story* and *Victim Email* genres (and virtually nonexistent in *Culprit Emails*), but the trend observed in the *Complaint Letter* activity sustains – participants from underserved backgrounds call out unfairness far more often than teens from more affluent neighborhoods. If we exclude the *Culprit Emails* from the current discussion since there were barely any fairness expressions used across these narratives, *Personal Story* context stands out as the one least charged with this type of language. Even though this is the only narrative context where participants had opportunity to narrate about their own struggles, frustrations, conflicts, and misunderstandings, the language they used did not embody these experiences. This goes back to the discussion we had in Chapter 4 on the possible reasons why personal accounts tend to be less conducive to working out intra- and interpersonal dynamics. Fictional genres and the distancing they provide from personal experiences give permission to author to decry injustice more freely.

The contrast in calling out unfairness between adolescents from underserved and affluent neighborhoods was particularly salient as they were making sense about fairness from the victim perspective (one unfairness expression per 133 vs. 286 words). Thus, participants from lower socioeconomic positions used more than twice as many fairness expressions than their more privileged counterparts. Let us look at two narratives conveying rather different sentiments, and therefore purporting to achieve different narrating missions.

> Hey, Sam, while you were out at school today I saw Mo speaking to one of the chaperones and I went to talk to her after he finished. I had wanted us to bunk together and I'd wanted to speak to her to make sure we could. But when I spoke to her she said that Mo had gone behind our backs and lied to her saying that he'd talked to us and we all agreed that you two could bunk together. I still want to bunk with you and I wanted us to

> talk to her together so that we could make sure that he doesn't get what he wants just by
>
> cheating. -Alex (Abigail Samson, High SES)

The impression we get about this narrator is that she is in charge of the situation – she clearly

and meticulously explains to her friend what has happened previously, and she does not

reconcile with the status quo. She will do what she can to expose the wrongdoer and reach the

desired outcome. On the other hand, the narrating of the author of the next example seems to

have a different purpose.

> Hey Alex, how are you? I hope you are feeling well, since you don't usually miss school
>
> unless you are sick. Our teachers actually didn't give us homework for once, so we lucked
>
> out.  I heard from Mo that you decided to share a room with him, but <u>I wanted to ask</u>
>
> <u>why</u>? I thought the three of us were going to sit down and talk about it, instead of
>
> deciding right away. <u>It feels kind of unfair</u>, but, I understand if you didn't want to say
>
> anything to me about it either. <u>I guess you just prefer Mo as a friend</u>? Whatever, but yea
>
> see you at school tomorrow. (Michael Hawk, Lower SES)

This excluded protagonist is also more open to narrate about how he feels about having been left

out. He is disclosing his disappointment by asking his friend directly why he did not want to

share room with him. He directly states that *it feels kind of unfair*, and at the end, in a compliant

manner, without offering solutions that may change the current outcome, accepts the outcome as

it is with a questioning statement, *I guess you just prefer Mo as a friend?*

**Chapter Summary and Discussion**

The goal of Chapter 5 was to explore the differences between adolescents growing up in differing socioeconomic conditions in how they engaged with four narrative activities – how they shifted their sense-making processes as they engaged with different socio-relational dynamics. Several important differences were identified demonstrating that our concrete embodiments as members of a specific class, as well as our concrete historical situations inevitably play significant roles in shaping our perspective on the world. Once I weave together different lines of analysis that served to triangulate the results, we get to see that adolescents from different backgrounds do have different worldview over the issues explored in this dissertation.

The psychological state expression analysis showed that participants from two socioeconomic backgrounds had different approaches to endowing the characters in their narratives with mental life. In addition to approaching differently four writing activities, participants also showed different degree of variation in their use of this narrative strategy. One of the important points of divergence between two groups of participants was how they approached the *Victim* and *Culprit Email* narrating activities. First, *Victim Email* was the least affective narrative in lower SES and the most affective one in higher SES group. While adolescents from higher SES used this activity to pour out their emotions to a peer, the participants from less privileged backgrounds felt less enticed to do so. This was one of the results I shared with participants during the member checking session, and here is an answer I got to my question about where these differences may come from, which seemed to reflect well how other teens (from this limited group) were thinking about it:

I was thinking about…class thing. If you live on Upper West Side you probably have

more money cuz it's pricier to live there. Also, I feel like… it's not maybe easier, but you

wouldn't have the same exact things. I think for some people showing emotion can be

taken as a sign of weakness. In the Bronx it's harder to live than Upper West Side.

The finding that the *Complaint Letter* narratives were the most affective ones among

teens from lower SES may seem to contradict the previous finding, but the character mapping

analysis I conducted showed that the affective expressions used in *Complain Letter* were

proportionately more attributed to the third characters than to the *I*-character. The function of the

use of psychological language in *Complaint Letter* was to depict the (wrongful) actions of the

instigators in the story. The strategy less privileged teens used when positioned as the victim of

exclusion was not primarily to appeal to emotions and have the reader empathize with them in

this way. Rather, whenever the teens from lower SES were positioned as someone who is being

an object of injustice, their narrating became far more cognitive. They used more cognitive

language in attempt to figure out what is going on in the situation and if they have understood

everything right.

While adolescents from higher SES showed an even use of cognitive and affective

expressions within both *Victim* and *Culprit Email*, contrastingly, teens from lower SES showed

great variation in the use of this narrative strategy. As I already reviewed, when positioned as

victim, narratives of adolescents from lower SES were noticeably more cognitive than affective,

while the trend was reversed in their *Culprit Email*. These narratives were the most affective, and

least cognitive of all narratives among participants from this group. In a majority of cases, the

culprit was not bestowed with affect with the purpose of humanizing the character and inviting

the reader to empathize with them. Instead, the purpose of it was to express the culprit's

excitement about the positive outcome that was in their favor. As one of the participants observed while looking at the culprit narratives I shared during member checking, "Mo [culprit] seems straightforward and happy."

An important overarching finding from the character mapping analysis is that adolescents from more privileged backgrounds were consistently more focused on the *I*-character and/or the protagonist in the story. Their less privileged counterparts distributed mental life and action more evenly among different characters in the story, focusing more on the non-*I* characters. The experiences that people narrate about are not direct expressions of the self and our personal experiences. Therefore, "speaking through other characters" may be a discursive move that allows distance and gives the narrator the space to figure out the thoughts and feelings that they may not yet be able to understand or ready to articulate and share with others. As Daiute et al. (2015) argue, "At a distance, troublesome or contentious thoughts and feelings may be easier to infuse with intensity, empathy, pride, critique, or some other orientation that seems unwise, immodest, or private at the time of telling" (p. 49).

Authors use other characters to symbolically distribute their experience and knowledge, and youth from underserved backgrounds using the non-*I* characters more extensively and being more likely to take multiple actors' actions, intentions, and needs into account, may indicate that they are more sensitive to multiple actors' perspectives. Alternatively, as Daiute et al. (2001) demonstrated in their study, youth coming from ethnic minority background (which was the case of all youth coming from lower SES) may be more prone to engage a wider social-relational system in the situation where an unfairness and exclusion related issue should be resolved.

Adolescents from lower SES showed higher variation in their use of different narrative strategies across four narrative contexts. They made greater adjustments as they navigated

through four narrative contexts, taking different perspectives and addressing different others. The youth I recruited from impoverished neighborhoods of New York City are more likely to have a richer history of discrimination, stereotyping and exclusion, than their more privileged counterparts (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pinel, 1999; Schulz et al., 2000), making them more likely to have developed the skill of being more in tune with other people's perspectives. Those with a rich history of social relational challenges may have access to multiple, and more sophisticated and articulated narratives of social conflict, including a range of relevant perspective-taking and conflict negotiation systems to address those challenges (Daiute et al., 2001). People sensitive to injustices realize that perspectives of perpetrator and victim differ as an effect of their previous unfavorable experiences, their rights and responsibilities for retribution, their different access to resources in the face of injustice, and their own sense of entitlement (or restraint) to expect and demand mitigation or reversal of injustice. The participants' thoughts voiced during the member checking session (that did not include all participants!) corroborate the interpretations going in this direction.

Researcher: What about the life histories of young people growing up in different neighborhoods may impact how they make sense of what's going on here? [referring to greater flexibility and sensitivity to multiple perspectives expressed by youth from the Bronx]

Participant 1: The difference is in the…the environment that you were brought up in. if you're brought up in a negative versus a more positive environment your problem solving may not be as insightful. You may be closed-minded and you may not think about other people's perspective. You may only be aware of what you're thinking and feeling. You wouldn't be open to what other people think of a situation.

Participant 2: Youth in the Bronx have more flexibility because they have been in both positions [culprit and victim].

Participant 3: There are more diverse people in South Bronx, people of diverse backgrounds so they have different personalities and different perspectives. If you live on Upper West Side, people you see are all the same. They are all concerned with their perfect lives and don't know how other people feel in these situations.

The remark of Participant 3 may be exaggerated in its homogenization of the Other, but it surely bears some truth when it comes to the usual life experiences of many youth growing up in the Bronx. The environments they navigate through on a daily basis may very likely be more diverse in material and symbolic sense, than the ones in the lives of youth living in more affluent neighborhoods. High-school aged adolescents, as it was the case of many youth recruited through this study, may live in very impoverished communities, commute far away to schools in more affluent neighborhoods, and participate in work of community centers that may be in the same or yet another neighborhood. These different environments are likely to impose different, and even contrasting demands in terms of the expected and valued ways of knowing and being in the world. Moving into a new geographic and semantic space and coming in contact with alterity opens up avenues for creating new forms of performances.

Another major finding that can be derived from multiple narrative analyses I applied to youth's narratives regards how participants appropriated the roles of the culprit and victim, and how they narrated about injustice. The analysis of trouble, resolution and narrator position offer multiple converging insights. Youth from underserved neighborhoods narrated more openly about instances of dishonesty and exclusion. While interpreting the vignette, they were more likely to see *exclusion, lying* and *deception* as the main reasons for telling the story, that is, as the

main "troubles" that set events in motion making the story worthy of telling. They are also more likely to position as the perpetrator in their personal stories and to own the role of the agent of exclusion. They use the opportunity given by the research procedure (which they may not get often in "real life") to narrate about the likely outcomes of situations when someone lied and excluded someone else, which is that they *get away with it* without getting punished, and the victim in the situation is left with no amends.

On the other hand, their more privileged counterparts were more prone to playing the middle ground and using strategies that attenuate their responsibility in a situation involving *exclusion* or someone being *deprived of a desired outcome*. They were more likely to see *unintentional exclusion* (as opposed to overt and clear exclusion) as the main "trouble" trigger in the story. They also positioned as the *unintentional instigator* that obtained a desired outcome at the expense of someone else not getting it, without necessarily acknowledging the role they played in the wrongdoing. In addition, they focused less on unfairness and unpunished wrongdoing, and were more likely to resolve their narratives by *talking things out*, or simply by leaving the conflict unresolved. When positioned as a plausible wrongdoer in *Culprit Email*, adolescent living in more privileged socioeconomic circumstances were more likely to use deception or play naïve and at the same time more likely to express concern for the feelings of the excluded actor. When positioned as culprit, youth from lower SES were more likely to directly talk about what they, positioned as the protagonist, did to get what they wanted, without being too concerned about how they present themselves and how they may come off to the reader of their account. They mostly did not try to express care for the excluded character. Therefore, when positioned as the culprit, they deceive less, they own the role they assume, and play along well.

Finally, differences were observed in the way participants from different backgrounds appropriated the role of the victim writing a complaint letter. While more privileged teens were more preoccupied with the fact that they were wronged and that someone should fix the situation and/or punish the wrongdoer(s), their counterparts from less privileged backgrounds were more likely to assume the role of someone who was excluded, and talk explicitly about injustice.

Adolescents from underserved background seem to give more convincing performances of both the subject and object of injustice. Being more sensitive to multiple actors' perspectives, makes these participants better at reading power relations and better at performing it while positioning themselves as different stakeholders. Many feminist scholars (e.g. Narayan, 2002; Warren, 2000) argue that people living under various forms of oppression are more likely to have a critical perspective over their situation. Uma Narayan (2002) uses the term *epistemic advantage* to describe the ways in which women, and other minority groups, are able to have a much clearer understanding of how the power structure works within a given society because they are not members of the dominant group. Narayan defines epistemic advantage as "(the oppressed) having knowledge of the practices of both their own contexts and those of their oppressors" (p. 376). Understanding the practices of the privileged group can be beneficial for the less privileged ones, can increase their chances for the upward social mobility, while there is little incentive for the privileged ones to understand ways of knowing and being of their less affluent counterparts. However, the notion that knowledge is constructed by human subjects who are socially constituted, calls for the answer for how those occupying more privileged social locations can obtain greater understanding and sympathy for those differently located in social sense. I will attempt addressing this one, and several other important questions in the concluding chapter of this work.

**CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This dissertation explored how adolescents' varying sociocultural and material worlds influence their sense-making about fairness and their capacity to relate to different stakeholders in a social situation revolving around injustice. I specifically focused on young people growing up in a hyperdiverse environment such as New York City, which embodies numerous social, economic, political, cultural, and demographic changes characterizing the end of the previous and the beginning of the current millennium. What is also characteristic of contemporary urban contexts in the US are drastic socioeconomic disparities across the communities in which young people grow up. In addition, adolescence is the time when youth show more elaborate understanding of the social structures relevant for their lives. With all that in mind, an important assumption I explored in this dissertation is how these differing histories inform individual sense-making about social and relational issues revolving around injustice.
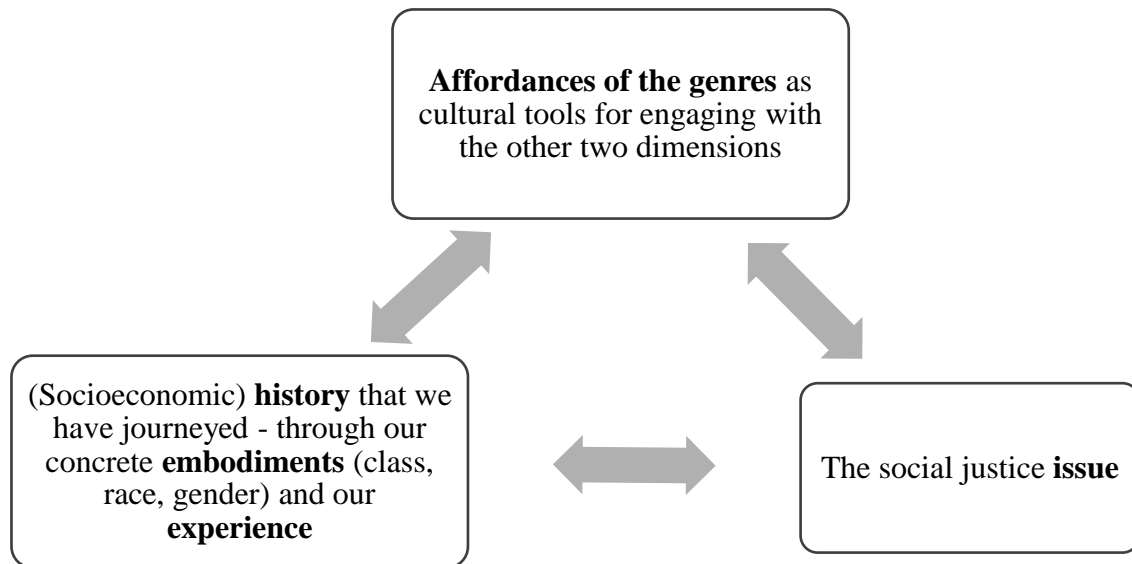
Given that everyday life is becoming increasingly diversified on numerous levels (due to (im)migration, urbanization, technological mediation, etc.), the development of the capacity to flexibly adjust the way people relate to different others, using multiple media of communication, becomes of critical importance. This ability to read properly the relevant features of a social situation and to adjust the way we communicate so we optimize the interpersonal transaction makes us skillful participants in various sociocultural practices. As I argued early on in this work, this capacity for intersubjectivity, or "mind reading" is a precondition for our collective life in culture (Bruner, 2002).

In order to make manifest the skill of relational complexity, I devised a study design that invited participants to engage with multiple narrative contexts, assume perspectives of multiple

social actors (e.g. the self, object and subject of injustice), and enact their respective intentions, wants, and cognitions through various narrative strategies. Allowing for multiple perspectives and voices, and employing multiple narrative analysis strategies, provided richer understanding of multiple layers of meaning youth expressed about fairness through different narrative positions. We saw in Chapter 4 how systematically varied adolescents' narrative strategies were as they navigated through four different narrative activities.

A theoretical contribution of this work lies in deepening our understanding of what it means to regard context as a *constitutive* aspect of psychological functioning, and not as mere setting within which developmental processes take place. Relational complexity, like other higher mental functions is not a skill that is achieved and internalized, reaching its full potential at one point of development. The concept of relational complexity helps illuminate the relational and dynamic nature of psychological functions. In sociocultural psychology cognition is viewed as constituted, in part, by the concrete practical activities in which it is situated and the cultural tools on which it depends. Therefore, in order to understand the contextual and relational nature of this skill, we must consider three relational dimensions constituting it. I present this theoretical model in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Dimensions of relational complexity

```
                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │  Affordances of the genres as │
                    │  cultural tools for engaging with │
                    │  the other two dimensions     │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
                        ↗                   ↘
┌──────────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ (Socioeconomic) history that we │  ←→  │                          │
│ have journeyed - through our │        │  The social justice issue │
│ concrete embodiments (class, │        │                          │
│ race, gender) and our        │        └──────────────────────────┘
│      experience              │
└──────────────────────────┘
```

Thus, the enactments of relational complexity depend on the particular social justice *issue* we decide to look at; the results of this study might have been rather different had I included some other issue and not a low-stakes exclusion issue among peers. Further, in order to understand adolescents' reasoning about social conflict and gain deeper insights about developmental diversity, we should explore contextual factors because the nature of stakes and strategies of conflicts differ dramatically across socioeconomic and cultural groups. As I argued earlier, and as this empirical work corroborates, our concrete *embodiments* as members of a specific class, race and gender, as well as our concrete *historical situations* play important roles in shaping our perspective on the world. Finally, what shapes the process and enactments of our sense-making is the *medium* – the genre – we use to engage with the other two dimensions. Once we take into account these three dimensions, it is impossible thinking of relational complexity in terms of how developed it is or who has this skill developed to a higher degree. The answer to these questions will be contingent on what the issue at stake is, what are the positionalities and

histories of people we involve in research, and what is the cultural tool that mediates these relational dimensions.

Further, in this dissertation I have demonstrated how systematic and rigorous narrative research can show in detail and depth how meanings mediate the micro-social processes involved in everyday social life. The findings, triangulated through three different narrative strategies, point harmoniously at differences in sense-making processes among adolescents from socioeconomically contrasting backgrounds. Youth from less privileged backgrounds showed greater flexibility in adjusting their experience, knowledge and communicative styles to different others they addressed throughout the research procedure. They showed greater sensibility for different actors' perspectives, and seemed to be more skillful at relating to, and performing as, both the object and subject of injustice. These young people narrated more directly about injustice, naming names. We could say that they were altogether better at reading power, and consequently at performing it, while positioned as different stakeholders in a situation revolving around unfairness. This brings me to propose an alternative way of describing relational flexibility – as a capacity to read different kinds of power.

As presented in Chapter 5, youth from underserved backgrounds are more attuned to other people's perspectives. These young people are more likely to have a richer history of discrimination and exclusion, than their peers growing up in more affluent neighborhoods. Their more affluent counterparts often have better access to the "cultural tools" (e.g. high-quality schools, availability and proximity of numerous extracurricular, artistic, and athletic contents and activities) that mediate appropriation of a society's cultural heritage, and lead to a more privileged positioning in the social field. Youth with a history of social relational challenges are

more likely to have access to more elaborate perspective-taking and conflict negotiation systems (Daiute et al., 2001).

Diversity is crucial for the development of relational complexity. Interacting with diverse others, through diverse activities, in diverse context and using diverse media of communication is more likely to enhance this skill than interacting with the familiar and predictable. Youth from underserved backgrounds may navigate geographically and symbolically more diverse spaces than their more privileged counterparts, which could impose higher demands to adjust one's ways of being and communicating. The system of formal education, for example, privileges culturally dominant ways of knowing and doing, and promotes values and practices that may be incompatible with underserved youth's ways of knowing and being in the world (Bell, 1994; Chavajay & Rogoff, 2002; Crago, Annahatak, & Ningiuruvik, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Heath, 1983; Labov, 1972; Lee, 2005). As some of the third wave feminist scholars argued (Narayan, 2002; Warren, 2000), people coming from backgrounds that carry lesser power in society are more likely to have a critical perspective over situations involving power issues, and have clearer understanding of how power dynamics operate. The predecessor of this concept of *epistemic advantage* (Narayan, 2002) can be found in Du Bois' (1903) notion of *second sight*, or *double-consciousness*. Double-consciousness entails the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, and always being measured by someone else's standards.

There is, surely, a great virtue in this relational capacity. Perspective-taking has been found to be a successful strategy for debiasing social thought (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). It produces positive consequences – from shifting attributions, to sympathy, to providing help to those in need – by increasing the overlap between the self and the target of perspective-taking (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997; Davis, Conklin, Smith, & Luce, 1996; Regan

& Totten, 1975). Less privileged groups gain epistemic advantages by inhabiting a larger number of and mutually more differing contexts. Occupying these divergent contexts can lead to young people inhabiting mutually incompatible frameworks that provide differing perspectives on social reality. Thus, a great benefit of straddling a multiplicity of contexts one navigates through is in having access to greater critical conceptual space. However, the disadvantages that people who occupy and navigate multiple more or less compatible contexts may experience is that they may not have any space where one is at home. We all can relate to the feeling that there are spaces/communities where we feel "at home," where we are to a large extent like everybody else. In these spaces, there are many shared practices and a great deal of shared meaning. The ever-present need to adjust one's own ways of being can deprive us of the sense of comfort in being "ourselves" without being hypervigilant about one's own and other people's behaviors.

In order to even out the "adjustment work" that different groups are doing, we must ask ourselves, as educators, researchers and practitioners, how those who occupy more privileged social locations can obtain greater understanding and sympathy for those differently located in social sense. Interventions such as this dynamic narrating study are, however minor, a way to promote the skill of relational complexity. Formal (schools) and non-formal (after-school youth programs) educational settings could work on diversifying youth's daily activities and interpersonal interactions. Activities that could promote relational complexity would engage young people in interactions with diverse situations and diverse others, mediated by diverse cultural tools (e.g. discursive genres and technological media). Given the hyper-diversification of urban youth's environments in demographic, socioeconomic, cultural and technological sense, promoting the skill of flexibility to adjust one's ways of being is of the utmost importance.

Given their history and specific locations within society, in this study, adolescents from poor and working class backgrounds showed greater capacity to read, interpret and embody perspectives of different actors. This is an important higher psychological function that can make these teens more relatable and empathetic interlocutors, which is surely a great social skill to possess as a human being. However, as Uma Narayan (2002) warns, "the thesis that oppression may bestow an epistemic advantage should not tempt us in the directions of idealizing or romanticizing oppression and blind us to its real material and psychic deprivations" (p. 340). In other words, contemporary reconstructions of Du Bois's ideas should not forget that *second-sight*, though beneficial, comes from very unromantic circumstances of struggle and oppression. Therefore, we should be careful not to glorify the oppression that may accompany the positing of epistemic advantage to marginalized groups (Warren, 2000).

It is interesting to bear these considerations in mind while reflecting on the words of a famous American sociologist, Everett V. Stonequist (1935):

[W]e find today many individuals growing up in a more complex and less harmonious cultural situation [...] The individual who grows up in such a situation is likely to find himself faced, perhaps unexpectedly, with problems, conflicts, and decisions peculiar to the melting-pot. This is true particularly of those who are expected to do most of the melting, that is, those who belong to a minority group, or to a group which has an inferior status in the land. The more powerful or dominant group does not expect to adjust itself to the others; it is the subordinate group which is expected to do the adjusting, conforming, and assimilating – or remain apart (p. 2).

It is rather bleak to think about how long ago it was when these ideas were articulated, and how little has changed in this regard in the past 80 years.

Diversity and interacting with various others has its uncountable benefits for human development and social progress, in general. It is the stuff of growth. However, diversity requires ongoing and sometimes intense socioemotional and cognitive work that should be more evenly distributed across different groups and positions. Otherwise, we will hardly ever substantially revise the European worldview as the reference point for normalcy and success, and expand the range of permissible disagreements and deviation in values, attitudes, norms, beliefs, and sentiments that define and support the extant inequitable distribution of goods.

## Study limitations and avenues for future research

What I see as the largest limitation of the current study, and also the most important direction for future research, is that it considers class without taking into account race and ethnicity. Even though some previous (qualitative and "thick descriptive") work showed that when it comes to human outcomes, the effects of class overpower the effects of race, I think that differentiating the effects of one from the other can bring important insights about this intersection. In the context of New York City, it is highly likely that recruiting participants from the most impoverished neighborhoods will result in a sample of participants who are exclusively of an ethnic minority background. In that sense, talking about "poor" or "working class" would be just another way of saying "of color" or of minority or immigrant background. On the other hand, more affluent neighborhoods would demonstrate more variability in racial and ethnic sense, complicating issues even further.

In order to try disambiguating effects of race and class, a study would need to involve a rather large sample providing enough participants in each major racial/ethnic group. However, it is hard imagining a qualitative inquiry such as the one I conducted here, with multiple lines of

narrative analysis, that would involve a large sample size.  Since generalizability is not the main point of qualitative inquiry, I can see a future inquiry of a similar type focusing on one racial/ethnic group and conducting an in-depth exploration of sense-making processes of adolescents of the same ethnic/racial background, living in different socioeconomic conditions.

The interpretations of the data in this study were strengthened by member checking, or the input I received from participants on their own narratives and the analysis I conducted of their stories. However, not all study participants partook in the member checking session. Despite every effort, I was only granted access to one youth organization (in Riverdale). Due to time restrictions, I was able to present only a small portion of my analyses in order to get youth's input on it. I was also not able to tell if youth from all socioeconomic groups were included in that conversation. When it comes to the sample of participants from that particular research site in Riverdale, three participants were placed in lower SES, two in higher SES, and the rest of them in middle SES group. Stronger representation of participants from all socioeconomic backgrounds was likely to bring multiplicity of perspectives on the study findings and possible interpretations thereof. Nevertheless, the input I received from youth at this organization was invaluable to this study, and an overall strength.

I have previously (in *Methods* chapter) reflected upon multiple obstacles I encountered in the process of recruiting minors for a research study, particularly those from higher SES. After months of reaching out to youth organizations and private schools that could grant access to adolescents from more affluent backgrounds, I did not manage to establish a collaboration with any institution. The answer from the outset was dismissive, stating that they do not allow recruitment of their students/participants for research studies. The whole recruitment process felt more like a search for few good people willing to do me a personal favor, and less like a shared

endeavor that had a greater good as its goal. Reflecting on how to make this process more efficient in the future, the solution may lay in more participatory ways of doing research, whenever appropriate and feasible. In my future research, I will try to establish collaboration with research sites early in the research process. Building stronger relationships with community (youth) organizations could transform the role they play in the research process, where they evolve from being research sites that provide study participants, to being research partners. Deepening organizations' involvement could not only strengthen their sense of ownership and responsibility for the study, but also increase the chance of the practitioners involved in their work understanding better the study implications and applying the research findings in their own practice. Depending on the research topic, the study findings may be applied to organizations' methodological approach, curricular development, or, simply, to the way they relate to and engage with young people.

Appendix

Demographic Survey

- ❖ How old are you? _____
- ❖ What is your gender? _____
- ❖ For how long have you been involved with [Youth Organization] _____
- ❖ In which neighborhood do you live? _____
- ❖ What is your current educational or employment status?

    ____ I'm a high-school student. ⇨ In which grade are you? _____
    　　　　　　　　　　　　　 ⇨ What is the school you're going to? _____
    ____ I quit high-school.
    ____ I'm a college student.
    ____ I'm employed.
    ____ I'm unemployed.
- ❖ What is your ethnic background? _____
- ❖ Were you born in the US? (CIRCLE ONE)

    　　　　YES　　　　　　NO

    　　　　If NO, where were you born? _____

    　　　　How old were you when you moved to the US? _____
- ❖ Check the option that best applies to you: ____ English is my native language

    　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　____ English is my second language

    　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　____ English is my third language
- ❖ What do your parents/guardians do for living? _____

    _____

- ❖ What is the highest level of education completed by your parent(s) or guardian(s)?

Parent/guardian 1:
____ Did Not Complete High School
____ High School/GED　　　　　　　　　　Parent/guardian 2:
____ Some College　　　　　　　　　　　____ Did Not Complete High School
____ Bachelor's Degree　　　　　　　　　____ High School/GED
____ Master's Degree　　　　　　　　　　____ Some College
____ Advanced Graduate work or Ph.D.　　____ Bachelor's Degree
____ Not Sure　　　　　　　　　　　　　____ Master's Degree
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　____ Advanced Graduate work or Ph.D.
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　____ Not Sure

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