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Going along with trans, queer, and genderqueer youth: City movements and “worlding” knowledges

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in  Curriculum Studies

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the everyday experiences of trans, queer, and genderqueer (TQG) youth in New York City. As research with TQG youth often focuses on spectacular or remarkable moments in their lives—that is the moments, whether positive or negative, that easily catch one’s attention—this study examines the moments in youths’ lives that do not always stand out, that are often overlooked, and are sometimes considered unworthy of being researched. Such a focus on the everyday, routine, and pedestrian experiences in TQG youths’ lives works to better understand how youth are coming to know themselves in relationship to the social worlds around them. Since this study understands knowledge about what and who “youth” are to be something that is always on the move, mobile methods are utilized to assist in examining how youth are producing knowledge about society and how society is producing knowledge about youth. The study engaged eleven (11) TQG youth in a series of “go-alongs”—mobile ethnographic interviews where participants moved and talked with the researcher as they went about their everyday routines. The go-alongs took place on sidewalks, public parks, libraries, public transit, and in various businesses. Some were transitory (moving between youths’ homes, schools, or works), some were activity based (running a specific errand), and others were stationary (passing time in public parks or libraries). The go-alongs allowed critical analytical attention to be paid to the ways TQG youth expressed knowledge about themselves and the social worlds through which the moved. This study suggests how more expansive ways of approaching, viewing, readings, and understanding TQG youth are needed in order to better appreciate that “youth” as a social category is not evenly applied to all social subjects of a similar age group. Rather, through paying close attention to what youth said, what they did, and
how they reacted to the worlds around them during the go-alongs, this study highlights how TQG demonstrate a variety of important understandings about how they take up space in, make homes out of, and finds way to thrive in the various social worlds they occupy.
Lay Summary

This study examines the experiences of 11 trans, queer, and genderqueer youth (TQG) in New York City by focusing on the moments in their everyday routines that seem commonplace, routine, and ordinary. By focusing on such moments, this dissertation seeks to understand how seemingly small and insignificant times, interactions, and experiences contribute to the production of who, what, and where TQG youth are commonly assumed to be. Through a series of mobile interviews (called “go-alongs”) participants in this study moved and talked with the researcher as they went out about their everyday routines. These interviews were analyzed not just for what the youth said, but how they moved through and interacted with the places visited during the go-alongs. Such experiences offer new avenues for qualitative research to understand how TQG youth experience society and how they understand their place(s) within it.
Preface

All research contributions here in are my own, including: the identification and design of the research project, performance of all parts of the research, and analysis and writing of the research data.

The research conducted in support of this dissertation was approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (UBC BREB Number H15-01505).

This dissertation contains content that had been submitted for publication and is in the process of review and revision. A part of Chapter 3 is in press in a Special Issue of *Equity & Excellence in Education* under the title “Under the trees at Lincoln Center: Queer and trans youth coming together in the city.” Another part of Chapter 3 along with a part of Chapter 4 has been invited to an edited volume, *Black queerness: In and out of schools*, under the title “To/from Grandmother’s house we go: Two afternoons walking with a Black genderqueer youth.”
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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents:

To Baubie, who asked as me as a child if I wanted to grow up to be a doctor—I told her I did not, but that I wanted to marry one—it looks like that seed you planted finally came to bloom.

To Zadie, who we lost while I wrote this dissertation, whose discerning mind greatly influenced how I think about and perceive the world.

And to Grandma and Grandpa, who we lost a long time ago but who always took such good care of the people they loved—an ethos I believe is demonstrated in the care taken in thinking and writing about the young people presented herein.
Chapter 1: Introductions and departures: Leaving (assumptions about) “youth” behind

(Photograph 1: Last stop: Coney Island)
Envision you are standing on a New York City subway platform. There are scores of people buzzing around you on a narrow strip of concrete between two sets of train tracks. Waiting for the train to arrive you feel fairly confident, based on your quick study of the subway map before descending underground, that you are waiting in front of the correct train platform. Looking around, you note how the station seems to be nearing its human capacity, though a semi-steady flow of bodies streams down the stairs from the sidewalk a few stories above your head. Each new body on the platform forces a ripple through the crowd, pressing the frames of fellow transit riders more tightly together. Though you have removed your headphones, you are still oblivious to the prerecorded announcements droning throughout the station because the muffled speakers make the messaging almost indecipherable. Even better speakers, however, would not counter the blaring music of the subway barker on the other side of the platform, whose impromptu concert you can hear but not see. Just then, you start to sense a dramatic shift in the airflow around you, signaling a train is pulling into the station. The gust of wind triggers the mass of bodies to start to drift towards one of the platform’s edges, as the train makes its entrance out of the tunnel and into the station.

As the train slows to a stop, a row of people forms between you and the track, preventing the ability to see which train has just arrived. Careening your neck between the figures ahead of you, you strain to catch a glimpse of the train’s signage as the doors open. The flow of bodies into the awaiting car gives you no chance but to follow the torrent, even though it is unclear if this train is going to take you where you need to go. You think to push back, to free yourself from the human river forming around you, but there is still a chance this might in fact be the train for which you are waiting. The last thing you want to do is mistakenly miss the train you
need, lest you have to wait who knows how long for the next one. Shrugging off your desire to resist, you let yourself move into this unknown subway car, unsure where it might be taking you.

Like this subway car, which might take you in any one of a multitude of unknown directions, what you are about to read might not be presented in a form that you are expecting from a dissertation. Before beginning to read, the preceding subway scene offers an analogy for what is ahead for the reader—a way of orienting the reader to that which awaits you in the pages that follow. While there is no way to predetermine how you will read this work, certain signposts are offered here as a way to invite readers into this dissertation’s form. This work invites you to step into a subway car, which perhaps looks like one you recognize, one you may or not may not have taken before, or one that, based on your studious examination of the subway system map, is the one you think you need to take to get where you want to go.

Regardless of the reasoning, you as a rider are forced to adapt and find new ways to get betwixt and between when the subway takes you along a route that you were not expecting. Along the way, you may get frustrated. You may get a little scared, and you may well want to curse the MTA (the Metropolitan Transit Authority, the NYC transit system’s organizing body that runs the subway, buses, and inter-borough ferries) all of which are reasonable responses. In those forced recalculations of your journeys, however, there are things to learn along the way. You may learn that there might be a better way to execute your daily commute. You may bump into an old friend while waiting for the next train or have an encounter with a stranger on a train car that leaves a striking impression on your mind. You might happen upon a soon-to-be new favorite restaurant or café when you are forced to exit the train at a stop you have never been to before, leaving you to learn new
things about a new part of the city and how to get to and away from there.

This dissertation about trans, queer, and genderqueer youth in New York City (NYC) asks the reader to similarly give in to the lack of control one has when venturing into the NYC transit system. The composition of this work serves as an invitation to enter the metaphorical train car, though you may not know in which direction it is headed. The form invites you to trust that subway conductor when they make an announcement that your train is running along the tracks of another line, which may not make sense to you at first because you are quite certain you need to be headed in another direction. You may expect each stop along the way of reading this dissertation to provide you with certain markers expected of an academic contribution, that each section of this body of work you enter will be properly and sufficiently labeled with traditional signposts of theoretical and methodological discourse. The normative expectations undergirding the assumptive need and desiring of these traditional labels supposedly serve as an orientating process that is thought to guide how one comes to know who, what, and where trans, queer, and genderqueer youth are supposed to be. The traditional formatting of a dissertation is thought to be the guide that will outline the stops along the way to your destination, the guide that assures the knowing of what is coming next on your journey of reading such an academic contribution.

This dissertation, however, works toward disrupting such habits of thought, identification, and organization—such assured navigational senses—to invite the reader into a new way to think with (and not just about) the 11 trans, queer, and genderqueer youth who partook in this study. It suggests a queered orientation to the world-making practices and processes of the youth you are soon going to come to know and how, through my being, speaking, and thinking with them as they went about their daily lives, we engaged an ethic of
closeness. An ethic that might inform how we can learn to be better to those with whom we share the world, those with whom we brush shoulders on the sidewalk; those who we are pressed up against in a too-crowded subway car; those whose stories and experiences are unknown to us when they come into our lines of sight and through our trains of thought.

Such proximity, as Sara Ahmed (2006) reminds us, “of how queer engenders moments of contact; how we come into contact with other bodies to support the action of following paths that have not been cleared” (p. 170) and, in the case of reading this dissertation, of paths that do not appear to be clear. It is not intended that the accounts given of the young people provide sanguine, directly articulated representations of their lives or of “what it is like” to be and experience “youth.”

Rather, like this very invitation into this form, the dissertation in of itself is an invitation into a mode of thinking and being that serves as both a pedagogical and methodological practice. It works to stem the tide of humanist, representational methods, which rely on ability for one to point to a certain body and declare, “That is a youth.” Instead, this dissertation opens up the hand attached to the figurative, authoritative pointer finger and directs it “outward to an ordinary world whose forms of living are now being composed and suffered, rather than seeking the closure or clarity of…riding a great rush of signs to a satisfying end” (Stewart, 2007, p. 5). For when the train reaches the next station—even if it is the end of the line—the journey does not stop. Coming to know of and about trans, queer, and genderqueer youth is not a terminal project, but one that only starts to come alive when you finish the very string of words you are reading.

Journeying along through the pages that follow, readers are invited to shrug off anticipatory desires to be assured of what is coming next or how to move directly forward.
Instead, readers are encouraged to reflect upon how, just like the life paths of young people do not develop in the *straight*-forward directions society often expects them to move (Stockton, 2009), the ways in which the life paths of trans, genderqueer, and queer young people in this study come to be known are not processes that are predetermined. Coming to know them will take moving and thinking alongside them in multiple directions and in multiple ways in order to open up whom, what, and where they may become.

*   *   *
The cab catapults up the onramp to the Williamsburg Bridge towards Brooklyn as the rising sun is just beginning to break through the darkness as the sky over New York City starts to tinge purple. On my instruction, the cab is headed to LaGuardia Airport. Despite my own lingering fears that my dissertation research project is not yet finished; this phase of the study is over despite feeling that not enough interviews had been completed, that not enough participants had been recruited, that not enough notes and reflections had been recorded. As the wheels beneath the cab continue their forward rotation, unasked questions come to mind, lines of inquiry that had not been explored during a mountain of conversations with the youth participants in the study. The study is now coming to a close, despite the fear that the research project, which included months of mobile interviews moving and talking with trans, queer, and genderqueer youth as they navigated the streets, sidewalks, and spaces of New York City, had yet to be completed. There is more to learn, hear, and think about, and there was not a sufficient farewell with the participants and the city. Researching in New York about New York itself for the past months has brought such close, intimate connections with the city. Sitting on park benches with youth as they pass endless, languid hours trying to blend into the scenery. Walking alongside youth, noticing how they interact with buildings, passersby, objects, and affects they encounter along the way. Speaking with (and sometimes lingering in silence beside) youth as the city swirls around them, watching youth carve out their own paths through the debris. This whole experience has been one long research event from the moment I landed months ago until this very July morning in the back of a taxi, disappearing the city under the veil of darkness.

Huddled in the back of the cab, a pain emits from the soles of my feet, as they have endured the most wear and tear from months of pounding the pavement, walking up and down streets following participants to and fro across the city; running along the East River as I reflect
about the research process; bounding down subway steps two at a time to catch the train to make it to meet a youth participant on time. This throbbing serves as a reminder of the journeys taken with young people and the time spent being invited to experience the slivers (and sometimes chunks) of their everyday lives they were willing to share. The lasting soreness shooting up from my feet into my legs brings to mind the long walk down Flatbush Avenue with John to their grandmother’s East Flatbush house and the stroll with Yetfounded along 8th Avenue in midtown Manhattan as she popped into one camera store after the next, looking for a particular flash attachment for her new camera. This lasting liminal sensation triggers memories of carrying Warby’s belongings—box by box—out of one of her group homes and into another on the other side of the Bronx and helping Anna cart a load of groceries up 80 blocks from the Trader Joe’s on the Upper West Side to her aunt’s apartment in Harlem. These memories of mobility buzz about, as my knees press up against the divider in the cab so that my feet no longer rest on the floor, hoping the adjustment will offer a bit of relief.

Out of the cab’s right-hand window, the lights on the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges come into view further down the East River. It feels fitting to be escaping under the protection of the night sky just before it gives way to morning. New York may never sleep, as they say, but at this twilight hour this city appears to have dozed off, if only just a bit. The cab speeds down the end of the bridge, as the final support cables fan quickly past the windows on both sides. The urge arises to turn around to get one last glimpse of the city, but I immediately fear that doing so might inspire me to fling open the door and barrel roll out of the cab. Instead, I close my eyes to replay a scene from my last night in New York. A few friends had planned a Christopher Street send-off, a fitting farewell to my study of genderqueer, queer, and trans youth in New York by going back to spaces inhabited with the spirits and souls of trans, genderqueer, and queer
forebears, even as the area continues to be straightened through persistent gentrification (Hanhardt, 2013). En route to meeting my friends, I ran into one of my participants. Catching Anna’s eye through the window of the feminist sex toy store where she works in the Lower East Side, she smiled and waved me inside. The exchange was brief, as she was in between helping various customers eager for advice about the various vibrators and types of lube. I expressed, once more, the deep appreciation for Anna’s sharing of her time and thoughts to the study before darting back on to the sidewalk to continue the westward stroll towards Christopher Street, struggling to grapple with the feelings of apprehension I felt about the conclusion of fieldwork.

In the final weeks of being in New York, the last set of go-alongs—the mobile interviews completed with each participant—had proven to offer very little in terms of a sense of resolution. Foxxy’s last go-along featured a series of tense run-ins with passersby, including being catcalled by construction workers and then being photographed against their will by strangers on the train platform. During these final 90 minutes together, Foxxy offered up a series of intense, personal admissions that we had no time to process before they had to run off to make an appointment, leaving me alone on a TriBeCa sidewalk with a long list of unasked questions, stretching out between us. Brian’s last planned go-along never came to fruition, as we failed to connect at the Metropolitan Museum of Art one June afternoon, each of us showing up at a different time. Connecting via phone later that day while I was in the middle of another go-long nearby at Lincoln Center with Dan and Elliod, it was not clear from Brian’s explanation if our scheduling was off sync or if he was trying to convey with his actions that he did not want to do the last go-along. These seemingly fractured endings serve as firm reminders that the end of the formal research process does not (and could never) correspond to the sense of closure a researcher might hope for as a project reaches its conclusion. Indeed, to assume it could be so centers the
researcher as an omnipotent presence in the field who is able to parse out perfect bits of knowledge/data. In letting go of the desire for a “perfect ending,” I turn to Maggie MacLure’s (2013b) advice to “think of engagements with data, then, as experiments with order and disorder, in which provisional and partial taxonomies are formed, but are always subject to metamorphosis, as new connections spark among words, bodies, objects, and ideas” (p. 229). So-called “endings” become new openings, periods become commas, and youth lives keep spinning after their involvement in the study comes to a close, leaving whatever “conclusions” I might be able to draw about their experiences to be contingent to the times and spaces I was with them.

As the cab races off the Williamsburg Bridge to connect to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, my eyes wince shut at the anticipation of being disconnected from New York, while grappling, nonetheless, with the assumption that this ride to the airport marks the very final moments of this research project. As the cab continues forward, though, seated with my eyes forced shut in the backseat, it is a sense of calm that fills up the space around my body instead of the previously foreseen panic. I hear Scarlet’s trademark laughter in response to one of my corny jokes and start to sense la Princess’s focused determination about carving out both her daily and future movements. These feelings trigger a rethinking of my eminent departure. Remembering Axel’s innovative, social configurations with the important people and figures in his life, I hear Yetfounded’s voice start to pose a new series of questions, which forces a reconciling that this ending I had been dreading might instead be a beginning. While I may be leaving Anna, Axel, Brian, Dan, John, Elliod, Foxxy, la Princess, Scarlet, Warby, and Yetfounded behind, they still have things to say and knowledge to impart. Taking a deep breath, I open my eyes to see the slightest burst of sunrise, peaking up over the horizon.

* * *
Perched on his chair in the middle of the large computer lab, Brian explains, “Yeah, I usually go on the computer, checking my emails. Umm, listening to music on YouTube, watch videos on YouTube.” His voice trails off as his head, adorned with the usual black New York Yankees fitted baseball cap, turns over one shoulder and then the other. His big eyes scan the room as other library patrons type away, biding their time while staring at their respective screens. The terminal to the right of Brian’s is missing a computer, so I am sitting beside him in the chair left behind in the technology-less station. From this intimate vantage point, I notice how Brian’s drawstring backpack hangs on the back of his own chair and two black plastic bags lay on the carousel table next to the computer. One bag contains a bunch of papers, and the other is filled with snacks and a few plastic bottled drinks purchased from the bodega near his group home. Every time I have seen Brian, these bags are always in hand or placed somewhere nearby. His phone is also on the table, positioned directly adjacent to the keyboard. He is set up, his belongings in the places that he wants them, eager to not have to move for a while. Having arrived well before the go-along started, Brian had scoped out his computer and settled in, hoping the rising afternoon temperatures would not drive too many people indoors, interrupting his ability to continuously access a computer. This computer lab is part of Business and Career Library, a branch of the Brooklyn Public Library located just outside of downtown Brooklyn. Earlier, while waiting for Brian in the lobby for 15 minutes before realizing he was already settled in the computer room, it was clear that collections at this library were rather small and most of the foot traffic in and out seemed to be headed directly to the computer lab. Even though Brian’s favorite library is the much higher trafficked Central Branch, housed in an iconic Art

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1As of March 2017, this library branch has closed as the site was been approved for redevelopment for a 36-story mixed-use condominium tower that will include low-income housing units, a Department of Education computer lab, and a new, much larger, library branch for the Brooklyn Heights neighborhood (Frost, 2017).
Deco structure a few miles away in Grand Army Plaza right across from Prospect Park. Brian likes this modest, two-story facility on a rather pedestrian-free street, hidden behind a collection of courthouses and other government buildings.

Library patrons, who are mostly people of color like Brian, occupy the other computer terminals, but there is rarely a line-up of people waiting for an open spot. Brian explains that this is one of his sanctuaries throughout the city, outlining how his routine is well established. He makes breakfast—“eggs and maybe a few strips of bacon”—in the shared kitchen at his group home before setting out by 8am, as required by the house’s rules for residents. After stopping by the bodega to get snacks, he makes his determination on where to spend his day. Explaining the rest of his daily routine, he shares, “I usually go to bed around 11, 12 o’clock at night. Or sometimes I just go to sleep early—it depends. ‘Cause you know I get tired after…my house doesn’t open until 8 o’clock in the evening. So I am usually tired after being outside all day after like 12 hours. You know?” His colloquial “You know?” is an attempt to refer to some collective experience of displacement that is not universal, but is very specific to Brian and many of his homeless and under-housed contemporaries. His transitional status lasts every day between 8am and 8pm, where he both takes shelter in and makes shelter out of the city. Brian’s living situation entails leaving home for the entirety of the day, with no chance of a sick day or a day off to rest his head. Reading Brian’s expressed tiredness not as a casual, Whew, I’m beat! or Today was a lot!, but a result of the toil of having to be constantly on the move, each and every day. To simply frame this knowledge as “survival tactics” downplays Brian’s experiences with systems and institutions governing the city and, moreover, positions Brian’s youthfulness through an “at-risk” lens. Brian’s knowledge about how and when to move through the city and where to find places to pass the time, highlights that cityscapes can be used in many ways. For Brian, this
computer lab terminal is more than just a place to check email or work on an assignment for a class; it is his office of sorts and perhaps even a living room where he can relax.

Brian repeats his room scan from time to time, hoping he does not have to move but seemingly well accustomed to having always be reading to move at a moment’s notice. He is able to access the computers in this library for an unlimited amount of time each day, or at least until there is demand for computers. Brian explains the intricacies of the computerized timer system, demonstrating his knowledge of the rules of the computer lab and his strategic utilization of this space, which stretches said rules just enough that he is not detected as trying to abuse them. He outlines how, if all the computers are in use, the person who has been on the longest will be given a 15-minute warning once a new person signs up at the reception desk. Once the timer reaches zero, however, the patron who has to leave their computer can reenter the queue and wait for another computer to open up. Sure enough, about half an hour after the go-along starts, an alert pops up on Brian’s screen indicating his time is almost up. Before the countdown clock has time to reach zero, he has gathered his array of belongings and moved to the front of the room to reenter his library ID number to the waitlist. Sitting down at table on the side of the room, we continue chatting quietly, as his eyes make frequent glances to the screen in the front of the room that will indicate when there is a computer available for him. After about ten minutes, his number flashes on the screen, indicating which computer is open for his usage. He gets up, without so much of a word to me, and walks right over to the computer to resettle in his new resting spot. Brian places his stuff in almost the same positions they were in the other carousel, logs on to the computer, and opens the same websites he had open before.

There is urgency to Brian’s movements that suggests he is used to always being on the move. It is not so much that he is worried that the computer will not be there if he does not rush,
and more that once he gets there he can relax. Once he sits down and puts his belongings in the right places with his desired websites displayed on the screen in front of him, he seems to relax in the slightest way. His posture settles downwards a fraction of an inch, a movement that would be imperceptible if I was not sitting right at Brian’s side. The ability to put his bags down and take up a bit of extra space offers him a moment of stillness. This moment of sitting down to a computer to use the internet allows him a place to be, where, as long as there not a lineup of people waiting to use a computer, he can relax without interruption; without being told to move along; without having to drag his belongings around; and without having to worry about the elements around him. His discovery of this smaller, less populated library branch to pass time in is a signal of his savvy, a demonstration that he has developed ways to pass the time between appointments and while waiting for the afternoon services to start at Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI), the LGBTQ youth service agency that serves as the home base for this research study and where Brian is an longtime member. Within the behemoth that is New York City, Brian has found ways to carve out this little nook of space while making it appear as if he is just using the library computer for a little while until the timer runs out.

Brian’s hurried pace back to the computer hints perhaps at a reflection of times when he did not know how to access to a space like this library, of the times when he did not have an expansive awareness of how to move through the city without detection or surveillance. While he previously experienced a period of homelessness, Brian refrains from talking about it in any detail, just as he had done during our previous conversations. This absence caused me to surmise, then, that there may have an earlier moment in Brian’s life when he went from being securely housed with family to losing the anchor of home; when he had to figure out how to move through the city in new ways than before; a period in his life before he had learned to maneuver in the
skillful ways he demonstrates today. Unlike other participants, Brian mostly refrains from speaking about his past in any depth. The answers to most questions are only ever one or two sentences, especially if the inquiry broaches any sort of personal or touchy subject, including what led him to be homeless. Watching his incisive, determined movements through the computer lab, I am left wondering if his actions hint at lingering memories of times before he knew about how to navigate the city anew through the lens of a homeless, queer, black young man, of moments when he did not have the tools he has now; when perhaps he did not know which library branches he liked and those he did not; when New York was perhaps big and scary; when not moving quickly might have meant meeting an unfortunate fate; when not moving quick enough might have entailed not getting the last bed at an overnight shelter, missing mealtime at service agency, or not being able to avoid detection from the police. Sitting at this computer terminal seems to give him a sense of normalcy, a moment to let his guard down and release the tension between his shoulders, which always keep his back straight and his neck turning back and forth. Even though Brian is by no means a prolific talker—he is especially mum when it comes to issues about his racial or sexual identities—in this moment of physical closeness, his body speaks for him. From my position one chair over, it is possible to read “these intersections of race, class, and sexual identities, the smallest resistances come from the body – gestures that are only suggested to the ethnographic eye” (Cruz, 2011, p. 556). Without assuming an omnipresent, all-seeing, ethnographic “eye,” such closeness offers clues, however fleeting and open to myriad interpretations, which might compliment or contradict what is or is not said. For in these first moments of sitting down once again at the computer, Brian seems to rest assured he will have some uninterrupted minutes to spread out his belongings and lose himself in a series of
YouTube videos, moments where eyes might turn away from him, where no one, myself included, will ask him any questions.

Brian offers me one of his earbuds and hits play on a clip of an episode of *Love & Hip Hop: Atlanta*. A scene featuring Dee Smith, a Black trans hip hop producer featured on the show, filters through the cord into one ear, and the quiet buzzing of a large industrial fan in the corner of the computer lab flows into the other. For the next five minutes, Brian and I sit in silence, hoping no one else signs up to use the computer.

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Approaching the subway entrance on Delancey Street, I hear a train rumbling belowground through the grate in the sidewalk. Knowing that I am already running late to meet Foxy for a go-along uptown, I pick up my pace as I start down into the station, taking the steps two at a time. Passing the other bodies at this pace, only impressions and flashes of their outfits, faces, and figures remain in my mind the moment after they move out of view. As I reach the bottom, the all too familiar door chime dings its two-note closing signal, and I make a fast cut to my left, throwing myself through the doors right as they slide together behind my shoulder blades. As the train lurches out of the station, I look up and notice, for the first time, the smattering of people around me. There are at least ten people in my immediate vicinity, either seated or standing around the door through which I just made my dramatic entrance. Because of the physical exertion it took to make the train, the past seconds from my perspective had been full of anxiety about missing the train and trying at all costs not to slip while bounding down the stairs. Looking around the car, my head still spinning and my heart still racing in my chest, it is instantly clear other passengers experienced the same span of time differently. Peering down the line of bodies, there seems to be stillness amongst the other passengers—a calm, it appears, that I have interrupted. Most people have their faces down, looking at their phones, books, or newspapers, and some are staring off into the distance looking at nothing in particular.

It hits me in this moment that, just like with any given go-along with any participant, there is more than one narrative to represent this moment on the train. There is no way to compose a story that will accurately account for the perspectives of all who shared an experience—or really, of all who happened to be in proximity during the same moment. Likewise, the narratives of these go-alongs are purposefully meant to feel fragmented to expose how, through the viewings of multiple publics, audiences, and readers, “youth evoke a nomadic
presence cycling through at a fevered-pitch social interactions and performative moments” (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010, p. 115). They are intentionally not chronological—the events described in these pages are not offered in the order that they happened—in hopes of countering the temporal pressures that presupposed youth must move forward and “grow up” at the mandated moments and in specific ways (Gilbert, 2014; Halberstam, 2011; Stockton, 2009). They are meant to start in the middle of a train of thought, between two train stations, or in the middle of any number of social, physical, or psychic transitions in order to animate how one comes upon another person in everyday life. Bumping into someone one the sidewalk is not the beginning of the other person’s story, though they may have just come into your story in that instant. Likewise, the reader of this work is coming to meet the youth in the middle of the youth’s stories, so in “meeting” each youth the reader is encouraged to meet each person in stride—that is, the reader gets to know each youth and their backstory all the while moving forward with the youth as they go about their daily routines. The accounts of the youth in the pages that follow make no attempt for the young people to be introduced as neat, formulaic products, but rather they offer the young people’s stories in ways that reflect how one might encounter these youth if one happened upon them on a New York sidewalk, park bench, subway car, or place of business.

Likewise, each of the other passengers on this train at Delancey Street could offer a different account of what just occurred when I entered the subway car; each other person experienced the moment differently or, put another way, had different experiences during the same span of time. Trying to combine the cumulative experiences of this moment, just like the experiences with the youth during the go-alongs, makes more apparent the inherent representational challenges and, moreover, limitations of common conceptions of
“representation.” In lieu of representing the experience(s) of any single moment during a go-along that contribute to a project of wholeness—of reifying the agentic, knowable humanist subject—new ways of thinking, writing, and talking about experience are necessary. Namely, those that offer fresh perspectives to think through the experience of young being and what it means to experience the category of “youth” itself. Doing so involves utilizing analytical lenses that “see ingenuity instead of ineptness and inability, to see resilience instead of deficit, and to imagine futures with youth from nondominant communities instead of imposing failure” (Gutierrez et al., 2017, p. 30). Moreover, such work creates rooms for styles of inquiry “that strive to animate rather than simply mimic, to rupture rather than merely account, to evoke rather than just report, and to reverberate instead of more modestly resonating” (Vannini, 2015. p. 318).

As the train rumbles onward, away from Delancey Street, the passing lights dotted along the subway tunnel occasionally interrupt the darkness through the train’s windows. My mind is stuck on this minute of time, realizing the responsibility of having to represent the many minutes of time shared with the young people in the study. My readings of the moments during the go-alongs are not meant to be static. If I am going-along with my participants (or right now with my fellow passengers), telling stories of these shared journeys, I must attempt to account for the diverging perspectives of the individuals who experienced them. Each moment should be reviewed and revisited multiple times, each time in new lights, from slightly different angles, or with different emphases, making any one writing of or about said moment inherently outdated as soon as the letters hit the pages (Ellsworth, 2005). In moving past a simple “representation” of these moments, I seek to hold these multiple readings of the same moments together, with all of their potential discrepancies and divergences. Holding these different readings together metaphorically with an open palm rather than a closed fist helps to examine how “multiple and
overlapping forms of time…are frequently in incommensurable tension” (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010, p. 104). These multiple readings are not meant to be flattened into one coherent narrative, but are offered up together in conjunction to explore how they exist simultaneously; how certain sides of the same moment get read and appreciated; and how some get ignored and vanished. Though written as narratives, representation of the go-alongs focuses “less and less on getting the story right, and more and more on how narratives are told and why” (Hendry, 2007, p. 490).

Animating the experiences of the young people in the study through narrativizing the go-alongs allows the reader to attempt to reflect upon how the study and I encounter them. The stories told about the participants should be reflective of the stories they tell me, of how they tell them to me, and of how much they let me in to their lives (or not). Brian, for instance, said very little as I sat beside him in the computer lab; only really answering questions when I asked them and even then only answering them with a few short sentences. In writing his go-along into a narrative then, I honor his reserved nature by filling in the world of the computer lab around him to show how he comes to be seen and constructed in that place. Other participants offer more verbose verbiage about their lives (as you will soon read). This difference does not mean that the latter youth can be represented more fully or more completely, rather that they come to be seen differently through the ways their go-alongs are described and framed.

Walking down a street, the people one passes flow in and out of vision as one notices and does not notice any myriad of characteristics, thereby making a myriad more determinations and assumptions about their bodies, identities, lives, and experiences. These seemingly instant observations are read through one’s perceptions about race, gender, class, sexuality, and so on. With each person one passes, quick estimations are made of who these passersby are, how they might identify, and where they might be going. Likewise, reading these narratives about the
youth on the go-alongs is not meant to provide seamless accounts of their experiences. Rather, they are represented in ways that challenge traditional reading practices in order to counter normative processes of social recognition. They suggest that to encounter the young people through the narratives of the go-alongs involves approaching reading “as an interpretive performance may be a means to untie self-knowledge from itself if the self can be examined as split between recognition and misrecognition” (Britzman, 1995, p. 163). The reading—of text, of bodies, of experience—should be approached as a practice that works to open up, rather than foreclose, possibilities of what the world can come to be.

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Sitting in a Brooklyn coffee shop, my fingers tap absentmindedly along the laptop keyboard in front of me. The last sips of a now-cold Americano linger in a white, ceramic mug to my right on a large wooden communal table. In theory, I am putting the final touches on a manuscript. The edits have been averaging about a paragraph per hour, as I let myself get distracted by one social media platform after the next, as if trying to stretch out this last bit of work before starting the dissertation research in earnest. Part of the reason for the malaise is that after arriving in New York almost three weeks ago, I have yet to start doing fieldwork as it has taken longer than I had expected to meet with the necessary gatekeepers at Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI), the LGBTQ youth service provider located in Manhattan’s Greenwich Village where my study will be based. Being invited to house my project at HMI, where I worked before starting doctoral studies, is an enormous asset to the project. As an internationally-renowned service agency for LGBTQ youth, accessing their space to recruit from within their youth membership is a boon to my research, which will save a great deal of time in trying to find participants for the study while providing a “home-base” as I wander the city with my future-participants.

During the development of the project, my main point of contact had been my former supervisor, the Director of Advocacy and Capacity Building, who helped me secure approval for the study. Now, it is the Director of Programs, who started working at HMI after I left and who is the gatekeeper to begin the process of volunteering during HMI programs before I move on to recruit participants. Due to vacations after the winter holidays, a conference many staff had traveled to in Chicago, and a snowstorm in New York that delayed their return, the planned meeting to (re)introduce myself and the project to staff had been delayed a few times. Obviously anxious to get the project started, keeping in mind how fortunate it is to house the project at HMI easily allows me to forget the minor frustration of being delayed a few days.
While the study has yet to officially start, from the moment of my arrival in New York my researcher brain has been activated. While the streets and sounds are familiar to me as a former resident of the city, there is a notably different feeling now that I have returned for these few months as a researcher. My senses are heightened, and it feels as though I am coming to know this place anew. I have been taking note of every face on the subway, forgoing headphones while walking through the city to take in the sounds of traffic and pedestrians and peering at the seams of buildings to try to decipher clues about their history. In this attempt to research this concept of “youth” in relation to the currents of the city, concurrent attention must be paid to the material, discursive, affective, and psychic lines of division and connection throughout the city. It will not be enough for me to listen to youth as we move on the go-alongs (Kusenbach, 2003). This mobile interview method, where participants will take me along as they move about their daily routines, will allow for the places they inhabit and the ways in which they move to become central foci for analysis and interpretation. This project is founded on analyzing how the youth are coming to say what they say and unpacking assumptions (including my own) about the meaning and intention behind what they express and how it is informed and constructed by their experiences in and with the city. In an attempt to make myself feel that these weeks are not being wasted, I have taken to turning my analytical eye to the city itself in anticipation of starting the same work with youth.

Take my current location, for instance. This very coffee shop, with its trendy décor, above-average priced espresso drinks, and smattering of organic, health-focused food offerings, was the only establishment of its kind that I could find, at least in the half an hour I spent canvassing the streets in the area looking for a place to do work. Reflected in the surrounding buildings is the mixture of West Indian and Black communities, a large Ultra Orthodox Jewish
community, and White gentrifiers in this part of Crown Heights just northeast of Prospect Park. Jamaican food restaurants, hair braiding salons, and historically Black churches line the streets in one direction, and Kosher restaurants and a large Yeshiva school complex line the blocks in the other direction. Based on its fresh-looking interior design, this coffee shop appears to be a recent addition to the neighborhood, and the area’s shifting demographics are made clear by the dominant presence of White 20- and 30-somethings with laptops. The racial makeup in the cafe is echoed by the many buildings and construction sites on the same block, which are in the process of being redeveloped, and the new businesses that are popping up, a notorious sign that people of color are in the process of being driven out of a neighborhood (Trinch & Snajdr, 2017). I do not know the story of all the customers of this café nor their relationship to the neighborhood. All of this is from my own speculation and observations today and based on my interactions with the neighborhood. However admittedly amateurish anthropological my assessment of the coffee shop, this valuation signals how my mind is already observing flows of people, neighborhoods, and senses of how ideas come to be, namely the ideas about constructions of the category of “youth” itself.

A central focus of this dissertation, as with much of my thinking since starting doctoral work, stems from the critique of the assumption that society can point to a certain body and declare, “That is a youth.” The power imbued in this point, in this gesture of identification, appears innocuous; that is, it is not thought to be a determination in and of itself but rather recognition of something that already is, and supposedly invariably so (Pinar, 2009). Youth, as a concept, is widely considered to be part of the cultural landscape (Lesko, 2012), part of the journey of “growing up,” though said growth is never as unidirectional as it is conceived to be (Stockton, 2009). Thinking more broadly beyond youth, Kathleen Stewart (1996) reminds us of
the disciplinary strings holding up the puppet figure of “culture,” within which understandings about “youth” are part: “Across the distance of all such totalizing schemas, culture appears elusive and mysterious and gathers into signs of life grown luminous across a lyrical divide like picturesque scenes at the far end of a cultural landscape” (p. 5). The familiar glow that the concept of youth provides makes it feel like it is being emitted from a nearby source; however, when one goes in search of said place of origination, the glow suddenly escapes one’s grasp.

Joan Scott (2001), in theorizing about historical ramifications of conceptions of identity, explains that “[t]here's an illusory sameness established by referring to a category of person...as if it never changed, as if not the category, but only its historical circumstances varied over time” (p. 285). Applying Scott to the study of young people then, youth may be a familiar concept in the landscape of normative knowledges about young people, but it simultaneously becomes difficult to explain exactly what “youth” is or how this image fits within intersectional systems of knowing and thinking about the world/s they inhabit. The “world” writ large is not perceived, experienced, or constructed by everybody in the same manner or through the same lenses. Maria Lugones (1987), in outlining an intersectional feminist epistemology and ontology, suggests, “[a] ‘world’ need not be a construction of a whole society. It may be a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society. It may be inhabited by just a few people. Some ‘worlds’ are bigger than others” (p. 10). Using this framing to conceptualize this study about assumptions about youth and their positionings within society entails rethinking how the “worlds” they inhabit are constructed.

Youth, as a concept, is weighted down with multifaceted, normative assumptions (Lesko, 2012; Loutzenheiser & Stiegler, 2016). According to Michel Foucault (1977), normalization has been the “perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the
disciplinary institutions… In short, it normalizes” (p. 183, emphasis original). A “norm” is never just one thing and is not the result of a specific apparatus or system. Rather, what is determined to be a norm is the product of a variety of forms of disciplinary knowledge. Jagose (2015) assists in understanding Foucault’s approach to normalization by explaining, “the norm is a technique of power that enables continuous comparison across a statistically distributed scale” (p. 41). There is a great deal of discursive maneuvering that makes any one category, idea, or subject continually intelligible and fights off attempts to disturb said processes. Because social discourse is seemingly omnipresent, norms about youth often evade one’s ability to notice, comprehend, or counter them. For instance, when Jen Gilbert (2014) describes the construction of the figure of “the child” as an “overdetermined figure, indeed a figure of overdetermination” (p. 8), she is referring to the numerous normative knowledges about young bodies, which produce the seemingly natural child-figure, one that remains present, though decreasingly so, as children, especially queer, trans, and genderqueer youth, slide towards the period of adolescence often dubbed as “youth.” Such journeys, however, as Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009) advises, do not always entail movements in the forward-seeming direction that youth are thought to take. A similarly important caveat can be made about race. When Gloria Ladson-Billings (1999) explains “[o]ur notions of race (and its use) are so complex that even when it fails to ‘make sense’ we continue to employ and deploy it” (p. 9), she highlights the idea that despite race’s assumed ubiquity in social thought, speech, and everyday life, our experiences of and with race are anything but static and stable, especially when race is factored into how racialized bodies are allowed or disallowed to remain in relationship to the glow of “youth” (Bernstein, 2011).

There are vast epistemological and ontological differences between Gilbert’s work in psychoanalysis and queer theory and Ladson-Billings’ work in Critical Race Theory in
education. Noting the parallels in their arguments, however, highlights the pervasiveness of dominant ways of knowing and thinking about a variety of social norms, including race, gender, youth, and sexuality, which this project seeks to disturb and disrupt (Loutzenheiser, 2003). Regardless of theoretical paradigm, a great deal of scholarship about youth and education suggests that there is always already something left out through the processes of subjectification in the processes of discerning who and what youth are and can become (Airton, 2013; Gilbert, 2014; Talburt, 2004). Moreover, common notions about race, youth, gender, and sexuality are thought to be an integral part of “what we think we know about youth”—that is, they are an unavoidable part of our lives, even the times and spaces frequently deemed to be quotidian and unremarkable. This makes asking the question, “How did we come to know what we think we know about youth?” ostensibly impossible through dominant frames. However, this project resists this normalizing of norms, so to speak. That is, the investigation centers the overdetermined (using Gilbert’s parlance) constructions that crystallize approaches to thinking about social subjects and examines those moments when society ignores the holes in social and political logics in order to maintain the pristine epistemological and ontological gloss, which norms portend to provide. In addition to Ladson-Billings’ reflections on race above, many concepts essential to the perceived natural order of things are professed to be experienced in ways that would indicate that on some level, society acknowledges the fact that there are problems with said essential concepts (norms) while continuing to rely on them.

Through this inquiry about what the concept of “youth” is and how it has come to be known, critical focus “attend[s] to cultural practices as implicated in complementary and conflicting flows of exercises of power, wherein the imposition of one true meaning of an action is refused for multiplicitous affective attachments” (West, 2014, p. 20). That is, attention
centered on investigating and looking differently at those everyday moments, enveloped in “complementary and conflicting flows” of power, which prioritize singular ways of thinking about and knowing the world at the cost of ignoring the diverse ways in which young people experience their lives. In this climate where queer, genderqueer, and trans youth, especially those of colour, are increasingly being told what, who, and where they need to be, I want to challenge ways of thinking that might better appreciate the host of ways in which youth live their lives and experience the world. Even though going back to Lugones, “there may be ‘worlds’ that construct me in ways that I do not even understand. Or it may be that I understand the construction, but do not hold it of myself. I may not accept it as an account of myself, a construction of myself. And yet, I may be animating such a construction” (1987, p. 10). To do so, then, involves particular, careful attention to what that experience involves, for “[w]hat experience offers is recognition and reconciliation. It is a recognition of a life, of a story as intelligibly human. It is a reconciliation that dreamed of commotion of voices in a room that shelters and maintains that life in its difference, its difficult and irrepressible complexity…” (Holman Jones, 2009, p. 613).

Unpacking said complexity of trans, queer, and genderqueer youth, while the intended goal of this study, is a task that will have to wait for now. As I sit in this Brooklyn café, waiting for the study to (officially) start, my analytical mind has already started to sift through the currents of the city-worlds outside (and inside) these walls.

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Just off of Union Square’s southeastern corner, la Princess waits in a small offshoot of green space, a satellite island of sorts just off the square’s edge. This triangle-shaped mini-park is wedged in between the spot where Union Square East (Union Square’s eastern border and automobile thoroughfare) splits in two and meets the ever-rancorous 14th Street. Guarded by an established yet porous tree line, the mini-park is mostly comprised of a central ring of grass surrounded by a foot-high barrier of iron rings and dotted with a solitary, central tree. Classic New York City wooden and steel park benches circle a gravel path around the grass, each one situated with the central tree as its focal point. Vehicles pass by on all three sides, both on the uptown and downtown portions of Union Square East and along the often-congested 14th Street. Bodies on foot move through the mini-park’s short artery of walkways and around its sidewalk perimeter. The intersections of three subway lines rumble beneath, each bench providing a different view of one of the many entrances to Union Square’s hectic subterranean transit hub. The famous Metronome, a permanent art installation, hangs dauntingly above la Princess’s head on the building across 14th Street. It features a long series of digital numbers counting upwards, an abstract clock keeping time in a way few on the streets below can decipher.

It is a bright June Monday morning. The threat of summer heat permeates the air as it approaches noontime, but it remains comfortable and pleasant as I approach la Princess, sitting on a bench on the southern side of the grass circle. Per usual, she is neatly dressed in black slacks, a simple blouse, and a smart blazer with the cuffs rolled halfway up her forearms. The black sneakers on her feet indicate she’s already done some walking this morning, as does the fact that her trusty tan pumps are tucked inside her black bag. Also packed in the bag are a few snacks, a bottle of water, and her well-thumbed copy of Janet Mock’s *Redefining Realness*, which she keeps on renewing from the library. Silver accessories dot her fingers, neck, and ears; her black
curly hair is pulled up and back in a tidy configured up-do; and spanning her face is a simple but purposeful layer of makeup, perfectly matched to her brown skin. Each aspect of her well-coiffed look denotes an extra few minutes of morning prep time, leaving one to wonder what time la Princess had to get up to achieve this look before leaving her shelter at 8am as she is required to do, seven days a week.

Before the recorder is switched on, la Princess begins to describe her frustrating morning. She had been to a government office to inquire about reinstating her cash assistance benefits, which were on hold because she had been in a court-ordered rehab program the year before. With the amount of red tape she has to go through, la Princess estimates it taking almost two more months to be able to prove that she has been clean and sober for more than the required year. La Princess speaks in an even, yet frustrated tone about having to prove to various agencies both her gender identity and her sobriety, expressing both her discontent with the situation but also her determination to jump the required hurdles. La Princess speaks about the various offices she must visit in the coming weeks with a firm command of the inner workings of the bureaucracies she has to navigate to get the benefits restarted, as well as the concurrent process of recertifying her food stamps, which she remembers, mid-sentence, is also coming down the pike. While there is a slight tone of exasperation in her voice regarding the work ahead of her, her description of the processes indicates a clear understanding of how to navigate them, even while she wishes they could be drastically streamlined. If she did not have to spend all of this time trying to “prove” various facets of her identity to various social service agencies through laborious methods, she would have more time to focus on a variety of aspects of her own personal life progression.
La Princess’s words come out at a rapid pace, each thought connecting to the next, and the next, and the next. She speaks as though she has been asked a series of questions when, in fact, I say very little. From time to time, I offer a clarifying question, but the content of her streams of consciousness is self-produced. It is just before noon when the go-along starts, but by her description of the morning’s happenings she’s already had enough experiences that she could call it a day. Calling it a day, however, is not an option for la Princess. She still has over three hours before she can head to HMI for that evening’s programming and over eight hours until she can check back into her shelter for the night. This park bench is her resting spot for the next while, a waiting room of sorts, for her to decompress her morning and pass the time. Despite the go-alongs’ focus on mobility and activity, sitting next to la Princess on this park bench is a provocation to think about how immobility is part of mobility and how inaction is part of one’s everyday experiences. Stationary go-alongs like this one, as well as la Princess’ others, are forcing a rethinking of what everyday-ness looks like for youth who live in shelters and often have long periods of time to move through the city.

From her perch on the bench, still sitting with her legs crossed and her left arm resting above her bag at her side, la Princess starts to talk about her frustrations with her living situation. The LGBTQ youth shelter where la Princess currently lives is used for various other programs during the day; therefore, she and her fellow residents have to be out daily from 8am until after 8pm. While she praises the program and its management, la Princess speaks about her desire for a place to rest in the middle of the day, about having a place to call her own that she can be in at whatever hour she wants. La Princess is tired of having to get up early to shower, do her hair, shave and make-up her face, and get out the door by 8am. La Princess wishes she had more time to prepare herself to be able to leave the shelter so that she looks the way she wants to look in
order to face the world and to be able to face it for the entirety of the 12 hours a day she has to be out and about. The fact that la Princess has to share facilities with a dozen other young people who are on the same restrictive timeline only makes her time more precious and the necessity of having a precise morning routine that much more important.

While time may be sparse before she leaves her shelter, once la Princess leaves she has nothing but time. While she does her best to fill the hours with appointments in the early hours of the day, often mornings involve a great big hustle to get out the door only to then have to wait around until the library opens or until HMI programs start later in the afternoon. Time, it seems, is rarely on her side. It is always shrinking or swelling in whichever moment la Princess would prefer the opposite. Being homeless, downtime or resting time becomes challenging because it cannot happen out of view, at home, or even in private. For la Princess, the park bench, the subway car, or the computer at the public library become her recharging getaways—during a previous go-along she had mentioned an afternoon of riding the free Staten Island Ferry back and forth, back and forth, just to pass the time one languid afternoon. She longs for chance to just “be,” especially one without—or, at least, with less—surveillance. This go-along, which has not gone anywhere physically beyond the park bench, highlights an important aspect of youth experience. Home, school, and organized after-school activity make up most of the sanctioned arenas, which “youth” are supposed to occupy. That is, the organizing structures and spaces controlling and determining what, who, and where youth are thought to be deem that youth ought to be in certain places at certain times. At night, they are to be at home; during the day in school; and perhaps, in the afternoon or evening at a youth center, church, work, or hanging with friends. What happens, then, when a youth’s relationship to “home” falls apart (Weems, 2010)? Home for la Princess is a tenuous configuration—it is not guaranteed to be there the next day nor is it
always accessible. The things thought to be done “at home” are things she must find time and space to do elsewhere. For youth like la Princess, who lack this firm connection to home, it becomes harder for them to be considered a viable youth subject when it is through one’s home (or one having a permanent, reliable address) that one is able to enroll in school, receive benefits, access a government ID card, and so on. Without a home, it becomes harder for youth to “prove” who they are or where they belong; it becomes harder for them to access schooling or employment; and hard to even exist in public space.

This go-along (along with la Princess’ others, as well as some of the other participants’ experiences) demonstrates her reaction to the lack of control she has over her time and location. While the go-alongs—as a type of mobile qualitative interview based in participants’ everyday movements and journeys (Kusenbach, 2003)—were intended to take place during something that was already happening, the “thing” here that is already “doing” was passing time between these morning appointments and the opening of HMI. She was on the park bench before the go-along and, I suspect, will remain there when it ends, but perhaps the sight of her on the bench talking to me (and the attendant privileges my Whiteness and gender presentation offer) might buy her extra time to stay put without having to worry about surveillance from police, park groundskeepers, or other passersby. The go-along, then, goes along with her in a figurative way that in turn makes an interesting point that an examination of mobility does not always involve physical movement. A study of mobility involves the access to movement, the ability to move, the ways in which bodies and resources are corralled and disseminated (Springgay, 2011; Yi’En, 2013).

Much like her well-groomed appearance, la Princess is keenly aware, as a trans woman of color, of how her body is or is not able to experience the passing of time in various spaces. In a
previous go-along at the library, she kept close tabs on the allotted time her library card gave her on the public access computers. She knew the timer would automatically give her additional time if no one else was waiting for a computer (negotiations of time and space similar to Brian in his chosen computer lab). Additionally, la Princess had acquired a second card from a friend to afford her twice as much computer time per day. In this regard, given that time is something she possesses in excess, she has developed specific coping mechanisms to pass time in ways that tactfully pushed the limits of where and when she is allowed to be, having learned how to maximize her time and efforts. Going-along with la Princess, whether at the computer lab or here on this park bench, involves taking account for how and why she decides to make her moves. Through her physical stillness today on the park bench, it becomes possible to see the motives impacting her decisions to move, whenever it is she decides to go along and away from this spot on the corner of Union Square Park.

As the occasional pedestrian passes along the gravel path in front of her, along with a steadier stream of bodies on the 14th Street sidewalk on the other side of the line of shrubbery behind her, la Princess expresses that she does not have the time to veer off her envisioned course. “I try my best not to have a bad day… I don't have the time, the space, the patience, the benefits. I won’t benefit from having a bad day, at all. Things will crumble down to square one if I have a bad day.” While her day might be full of “free” time, she does not see it as such. La Princess’s intricate detailing of how she has to navigate government agencies, for instance, highlights that her knowledge is out of necessity. Her ability to successfully chart her way through bureaucrats, paperwork, waiting periods, and protocols comes out of not seeing any other way forward. Her history of being homeless, going to rehab, her stint in Rikers, and now her toils at the shelter, indicate that the time for faltering is behind her. As a trans woman of
color, la Princess knows that second or third chances are by no means a guarantee and that any future stumbles could be her last. From the seat on this park bench, she repeats this sentiment over the course of the hour-long conversation: “The situation I am in right now I have no other choice but to be perfect;” “I don’t want to stop what I am working so hard for because I am uncomfortable;” “It’s frustrating because I just want to get it right;” “I don’t know if the next time I pick up a drug, if it is going to the time that I die.” Her words zero in on her specific relationship to her future. As she sees it, the path forward is a narrow one, complete with numerous obstacles. Furthermore, it is a path that can only be navigated with the utmost precision. Such position echoes Jose Esteban Muñoz’s challenge to “feel hope and to feel utopia, which is [a challenge] to approach the queer critiques from a renewed and newly animated sense of the social, carefully cruising for the varied potentialities that may abound” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 18). While la Princess sees the obstacles ahead of her, the obstacles that lay behind her have provided lessons on how to navigate around, through, and with the future ones.

As la Princess expresses these sentiments about her relationship to the future, she makes a hand gesture at one point while referring to a “they.” Having briefly lost connection to her train of thought while writing something in my notebook, I make a mental note to follow-up about whom she meant by “they” in this context. Trying to refocus on what she was saying, I catch a glimpse of a black man over her shoulder, sitting on another park bench across the park. He is wearing grey sweats that appear to be in great need of a wash. His left ankle is so swollen and the skin so chapped he can’t fit his foot into his well-distressed shoe. With his hair matted together in multiple directions, it appears he has neither had a shower nor been indoors in weeks. His head nods back and forth as he drifts in and out of sleep while the sun breaks through the canopy of trees to shine on his face. Moving my eyes to the bench beside his and then further
around the circle, it becomes clear that most of the benches around the ring are occupied by people whose appearances imply they lack access to shower facilities or clean clothes. They might be described as appearing “homeless,” but more specifically, they are people who, it could be assumed, are chronically street-involved, people who actively live on the street. Taking in the specifics of this place to rethink la Princess’s ambiguous gesture to an unnamed “they” explains her laser focus on moving forward without a misstep. The fear heard in her voice as she is on the verge of tears at the thought of her potential future falters is rooted in her daily interaction with people whom she reads as having run out of chances. They represent the future that perhaps she thinks is not out of the realm of possibilities given her previous setbacks. Her fellow bench-mates are both an inspiration to spend her time wisely and a constant reminder that she does not have time to lose. La Princess’s determined comments exemplify how “resistance in tight spaces is about learning the literacy of the street and recouping agency from youth who struggle against the inscriptions of invisibility [and] expendability” (Cruz, 2011, p. 557).

On this sunny June Monday, there is another reminder of the fragility of time. Just over a thousand miles to the south, 49 bodies are in the process of being identified by mournful loved ones. Forty-nine futures have been cut short by a barrage of bullets, sprayed through flashing lights and syncopating beats, with their 49 names newly inked into the annals of queer, trans, and Latinx brethren lost to violence, hate, and bigotry. It took gallons of effort for me to arrive at today’s go-along, and I had not been sure if there was going to be anything to say or if it would be possible for me to make it through without crying. However, la Princess does not mention the shooting in Orlando, which happened only 36 hours earlier. Perhaps, she is similarly numb and does not know what to say or how to express what she was feeling. Perhaps, based on her instant, rapid dictation of her morning’s happenings, her own series of traumas this Monday morning are
enough to force it all from her mind. Furthermore, with her access to Internet largely confined to computer labs at public libraries and HMI, both of which are closed on Sundays, it is not out of the question that between Sunday morning and now she might not have had internet access or the ability to spend hours online, reading the news and processing the tragedy either by herself or with her network of peers. Having the capacity to mourn, at times, can be a privilege. Having the time and space in life to let emotion overtake you without severe consequences is a luxury. Even though as a young Latina transwoman she is demographically similar to the victims of the shooting, the notion that she is mandated to mourn makes a great deal of assumptions about identity, assumptions that since this shooting happened to people demographically similar to her that La Princess necessarily has to be worried that the same could happen to her. It also makes assumptions about the gentrification of access to information and the privileges of being able to feel and/or have emotions. It could also be that her whole hectic morning is a result of the weekend’s tragedy. Perhaps, she woke up this Monday morning determined as ever to get her affairs in order, to ensure that she is doing all she can do to get her life back on track. Perhaps, the added obstacle of now potentially being gunned down in a nightclub only serves to narrow the already slight path she sees forward; just one more obstacle to avoid.

At the end of our hour-long conversation, without a single mention of the shooting, she turns to me and says, “I feel much, much, much better.” “Me, too,” I respond, simply. La Princess remains on the park bench, as I move away from her into the currents of the sidewalk along 14th Street. Looking back, her figure grows smaller, as the distance expands between us. She sits with perfect posture, her physical stillness belying the flurry of thoughts racing through her head, as she plots her next decisive move into the future.

*   *   *

37
Scarlet comes out of the women’s locker room where she has just locked up her bag and leads me past rows of treadmills, workout bikes, and weight machines to the mat-covered stretching area on the other side of the gym. Generic pump-up pop music drones from the industrial speakers in the ceiling above, as a sparse collection of people occupy various pieces of equipment throughout the windowless basement level gym. While this is Scarlet’s first go-along (and only the third one of the study), she and I knew each other when I used to work at HMI so we already have an established rapport prior to her joining the study. As we settle on the mat, she asks if I go to a gym. I confess that I have only been running of late, and she laughs out loud when I joke about being too frugal to get a gym membership during my stint in New York. Her laughter infects me, and I find myself chuckling a bit as I follow her stretching lead, mimicking her body’s movements on the mat. We shift into nonchalantly talking about what she usually does at the gym, and I notice how good the stretching feels after my earlier run over the Williamsburg Bridge. A few minutes later, I find myself on my back next to Scarlet on the mat, as we hold our legs in the air. Pulling our shins into our chests, I notice the conversation has stopped. It strikes me that I should fill the silence with a question, but I come up blank, unable to think of a single thing to ask in this moment as my arms hug tighter around my legs. A tinge of panic creeps up my spine, and I cannot believe only moments into the go-along that I have run out of questions to ask. My mind races as I lay there facing the ceiling, my knees hovering close to my face, still unable to produce a single thing to say to Scarlet. It hits me, as we lay side-by-side in these awkward positions, that I never envisioned doing an interview in this contorted, physical position. Finding myself (quite literally) flat on my back is, for some reason, preventing me from speaking.
What I had not prepared for in planning this study was what doing the research would feel like and how my body would sense the physical actions of the go-alongs. Moving with young people through various places and activities includes placing critical attention on how embodying this process actually *feels* and how the embodied acts of doing the research feel as well. For me, as a cis-man with White skinned privilege and the ways my body is read, such attention must include reflection on how certain systems and networks of power might affect TQG youth of colour in ways that I do not experience myself. In order to navigate interlocking systems encountered by queer, genderqueer, and trans youth of colour, I turn to Brockenbrough’s (2015) advice that extending a “[queer of colour] critique to educational research provides a new opportunity for collective discussions on the affordances and limitations of varied modes of knowledge production for scholarly analyses on [queer, trans, and genderqueer youth] of color” (p. 39). For this project, this includes how I approach the experiences of my participants—who are predominately trans and genderqueer, of color, and homeless or transitionally housed—through lenses that concurrently examine ways youth describe their lives as raced, gendered, sexual, and classed subjects, especially since I occupy multiple positions of privilege. Given the mobile nature of the project—which includes moving with youth through various spaces and, I am learning in this moment on my back with Scarlet, literally and figuratively contorting my body to move alongside them—this consideration is especially important in thinking through how my researcher positionality plays out discursively and materially as we move through various streets and neighborhoods of New York City and robust, diverging groups of people we encounter along the way. How we are encountered as a pair, moving down the sidewalk, sitting on the subway, or laying with our legs up in the air as we stretch at the gym, has to be filtered
through the lenses of the various neighborhoods we pass through, the demographics of those people around us, and the contexts of the activities in which we are engaged.

At times, it could be argued the presence of my (generally) normative, masculine-presenting, White body stands to offer the participants a respite from the surveillance they receive from police, transit workers, store clerks, and passersby; my sitting beside La Princess, Elliod, Dan, or Brian as they pass time on park benches, in computer labs, or at public libraries, offers them an hour or so of time when an official would be less likely to ask them to move along because my body is one that is most often allowed to take up space in public settings without interruption from authorities. Alternatively, however, my presence outside John’s grandmother’s East Flatbush house, a historically Black, middle-class neighborhood in Brooklyn, stands to get John in trouble if we are spotted by their West-Indian grandmother, who might not approve of their 18-year old grandchild walking around with a seemingly random, White man. Additionally, during the go-along with Anna to the adult store to buy new clothes to wear at the club where she dances, there is a chance I could be read as a john, escorting client, or maybe her gay friend, tagging along to give her style advice. The point, however, is not to try to pinpoint exactly how our bodies are read and perceived in tandem, but to account for how place and the people inhabiting and constructing the places the go-alongs pass through affect how participants are able to move with me by their side.

Acknowledging my positionings and reflecting on the attendant privileges of how my presence is read by other passersby while moving alongside the participants involves methods and analysis that are, in of themselves, mobile. Furthermore, in order to better appreciate the complex, intersectional forces (Cohen, 1997) affecting young peoples’ intersectional lives, such analysis does not stop after a single viewing. Recognizing, beyond the difference in identity
between my participants and myself, vast disparities exist between the ways in which we inhabit the world, namely relationships to/with police, public space, the ability to access stores, education and schools, government agencies, medical institutions, et cetera. Such distance between how the world appears to work for someone with my body and privilege and how it operates for others must be taken into account in my research practices. Therefore, I am committed to looking for movement in the times and spaces when the flow of knowledge is thought to have ceased by examining how the normative logics of Whiteness, cisnormativity, and heteronormativity construct knowledge as “a decomposed by-product of something that has already happened to us” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 1). In this study, I move towards taking into account how the asking of questions from my positionality, and within the various social settings we were located, affects how and why the participants say what they say while also accounting for how their movements, silences, and other non-verbal communications express certain types of information about their daily experiences. Placing my body, positionality, and privilege under examination offers a necessary reminder of the ways the constructions of my identities are part of the systems of knowledge production that this project intends to critique and interrupt, especially given the youth in the study and the theories I draw on to do this work.

Given the differential of power dynamics imbued within traditional approaches to researcher/researched relationship, I work to disengage from “the researcher being perceived as a knowing subject, [and instead work] from a relational perspective, [where] the researcher is one who becomes in the process of inquiring alongside another” (O’Donoghue, 2013, p. 403, emphasis added). While the study explores everyday experiences as they happen, I concurrently acknowledge that my presence alongside youth during their daily journeys instantly makes them anything but “everyday.” This conceit, however, does not make this a futile exercise. Rather,
acknowledging the research process as one about social production as much as it is about
discovery (and production) of social worlds, allows for this study to explore what might be
learned about youths’ lives through lenses that appreciate knowledge and knowledge production
about youth bodies and lives as always and already contingent, contextual, and in flux. This shift
from conventional approaches to doing research insists on pushing back against research data as
something to be mined from participants or as something waiting to be valiantly discovered by
researchers. As such, my interest lies in the ways knowledge about young people is on the move,
suggesting then the necessity for my methodology, and also my methods, to be similarly mobile.
Focusing this investigation on the participants’ abilities to be mobile, to move, and to experience
their everyday practices is “an attempt to identify the characteristics of urban space that creates
the fields and vortexes that determine the rhythm and tempo of urban life” (Shortwell & Brown,
2014, p. 4). The goal, however, is not only to listen for and experience the rhythm and tempo but
also to ask what the rhythm and tempo of the everyday does to the experiences of the lives of
trans, queer, and genderqueer youth.

Following this symphonic metaphor, listening for the rhythm and tempo of youths’ lives
involves attending to the harmony, melody, and syncopation of their routines, as well as the
elements that might be deemed offbeat, atonal, and off-key. This moment with Scarlet provokes
a constant thinking and rethinking of what I am seeing and hearing from the young people as we
move together, meaning that I remain interested in moments that perhaps seem like a distraction
from or are in the way of some ‘fact’ or ‘truth’ about youths’ experiences, which instead might
indicate some facet about the way youth are able or unable to move through the world. Given the
intimate nature of the go-alongs, what can be gleaned about youth that self-select into a project
involving me being with them in various places and why others might choose not to take part?
How do the noises of and movements around and through the city during the go-along interrupt or shift the flow or topic of conversation? How are some participants using the research project to their own benefit when they refuse to adhere to the meager requirements I had for the go-alongs? Reflecting upon these quandaries involves multiple listenings from different material and discursive viewpoints. Taking note of when youth seek to cross a street, where in the subway car they choose to sit, and which path they use to get from point to point, are all clues about how they see and interpret the world, which reminds me to let their movements lead and for me to follow suit. I take up the concept of moving alongside, both methodologically and in terms of methods for doing research with youth, to hopefully provoke “new understandings of the ways in which we think, look, listen, perceive and relate to others, and our surroundings, [thereby] facilitating new opportunities for the creation of a new form of political civility through listening, encounter and dialogue” (Ramsden, 2014, p. 226). Moreover, it facilitates new ways to encounter trans, genderqueer, and queer youth, including queer, trans, and genderqueer youth of colour, in the research process.

Additionally, the movements with young people incite interactions with the various facets that comprise the city: people, buildings, vehicles, monuments, businesses, outside spaces, fauna, and countless others. Being mobile in the city, as other parts of the city are mobile around them, permits various perspectives about how the participants encounter and make sense of the worlds around them; moreover, I witness reactions to the youth from other people we pass, which offers me insight into how the world makes sense of the youth themselves. Given that I am especially concerned with the stagnation of the construction of youth subjectivities and the role that research and researchers often play in this erasure of the ebb and flow of meaning-making processes, vital to this study is this methodological frame that simultaneously accounts for the
ways youth navigate through the minefield of knowledge systems, especially those controlling race, gender, sexuality, and economics.

The desire to engage with these everyday moments means that there are material and affective consequences affecting the flow and feeling of the research itself. In this moment on the mat with Scarlet, I realize that I have to release the residual notions of researcher “propriety,” that I have stop worrying about what would make me be perceived as a “good” researcher and allow myself to follow along with the young people on their journey. I realize that I carry with me a lingering fear that something could go wrong on one of these go-alongs, even though I have been given permission by my dissertation committee, the ethics board, HMI, and the young people, to do this study. In order to prevent some unforeseen error, I feel that I have to maintain some undefined level of researcher boundaries and professionalism. Because this is the first study I am completing on my own, I am starting to recognize the (absurd) fear I am carrying with me that this study could come crashing down if I make one misstep. In this moment, however, I recognize the yoke around my neck is self-induced and that I have already proved, many times over, that my commitments and intentions were reciprocal and ethical. While there is always a continual amount of self-reflection one can and should to do check-in along the way, it took me lying here on a mat with my legs above my head to realize I was holding myself back. I had to be able to twist my body, physically and metaphorically, as we move about the city in ways I could not always anticipate beforehand and to recognize that being able to do so would make for more open relationships with the young people.

I let go of the tight squeeze around my legs when I realize that Scarlet has already sat up and is starting to move to another part of the gym. Settling at a chest press machine, Scarlet has taken the lead in the conversation, once more, and, before starting a set, asks me if I think the
boys are cuter in New York or Vancouver. Amused by her grilling of my love life, I confess that I find guys in New York too often to be more coiffed and put together, adding, “…everyone in New York has a look, you know?” Replacing the machine to its resting position, she chimes in, “Yeah, slightly depressed and hungry!” We laugh, again, as we switch spots, and I sit down at the machine. Looking at the weight she used, I first think to leave it be, even though it would not provide me with much of challenge to lift. Feeling emboldened from my horizontal epiphany on the mat, I decide to move the pin down more than a couple levels. Instantly clocking my bravado with the weights, she guffaws, “Oh, okay, now we are just getting disrespectful… you’re gonna be like Popeye doing that!” Not to be outdone, I chide back, “If this is gonna be my one time at the gym in months, I might as well make it worth it!” Engaging my arms, chest, and back muscles, I push the handles forward. A smile crawls across my face as I exhale and look over at Scarlet, who is still chuckling quietly to herself, waiting for me to finish my set so she can have another go.

*    *    *
Anna needs new dancing clothes. Now that she has made a commitment to being an exotic dancer, she figures that she needs to make the investment in a good pair of “stripper heels” and some new outfits. Originally, the plan for her first go-along was to go grocery shopping, but she texted yesterday, saying she wanted to do this instead. I sensed her request as a test-balloon to see how willing I was to witness various parts of her life, especially since I had known Anna from my time at HMI when she was then a 15-year old high school student. That she first floated the grocery story idea in person but then texted later to suggest going to the adult store perhaps hinted that she, now in her early twenties, was trying to carve out an adult relationship with me while shedding the lingering residue of the student-teacher relationship, which that might make a shopping trip to buy thongs and bustiers awkward. Alternatively, her mentioning that the store was at the very last stop on the 5 Train in the Bronx might also be a way of trying to imply that perhaps she just wanted some company for the long journey. Her text gave me an out, a chance to politely decline her invitation. “Would you still like to go? Or do you think something closer to the city is easier for you?” However, it was not clear to me if this was inspired by the fact that she might feel like she was asking me to travel too far or if she was not sure I would want to go shopping with her for dancing clothes. I confirmed my willingness to do whatever she wanted, and we set this time to meet.

Setting off from HMI just after 6pm, Anna, while walking down the Astor Place sidewalk to the subway, mentions that this will be a very long train ride. Then she adds, more personally, “Mentally, it’s a long ride for me. It feels long—if you’re alone.” This nearly instant disclosure potentially clarifies her reasoning for selecting this journey for a go-along. By her admission, this long, solitary train ride usually makes her reflective—“I think about all of my life choices”—as they are some of the only times during her day where she is not “doing” anything. Between her
full course load at her college in Queens (she has just come from her Sign Language Class, which ended an hour earlier); managing two jobs (the club she works at in Queens and her other job at feminist sex store in Lower Manhattan); caring for her younger sister (who lives in the Bronx with her mom); and her own personal and dating life, Anna is frequently on the train, with many of her daily commutes lasting an hour in each direction. The amount of things on her to-do list everyday is one source of stress for her, but the plethora of time she spends on the train going between her home(s), school, and various places of employment showcases the added stressors she faces in order to make it to class, make money, and make a life for herself.

After having taken the 6 Local Train one stop from Astor Place, Anna explains how time is of the essence during her daily routine while waiting for a 5 Express Train on the platform at 14th Street/Union Square. Especially as she invests in her dancing career, Anna feels an increased need to devote time and attention to maintaining her appearance. She mentions needing to focus on diet and exercise. “What you eat can totally alter how you look that night, it’s crazy!” She references the pressure to have her body look “good” now that it is going to be on full display (and that her livelihood depends on customers’ appreciation of her body). Her nails, face, and especially her hair, are other chief concerns. She mentions how the club owner took issue with her hair and explains how she personally feels the stigma around Black women having natural hair, especially in their workplace experiences (Greene, 2011). “I have to always make sure my curl pattern is on point, at the very least. Make sure that the part that is not out is really slick and neat,” she says as she presses one hand down firmly on her hairline and then repeats the smoothing motion backwards along her head to point out where her hair is tightly tied back. Anna’s manual check of her hair seems to be an involuntary physical reaction to her verbal description of her hair care regime. The simple, routine motion is representative of the amount of
time and mental space she devotes to ensure it stays just the way she wants. Her desires for her hair, of course, are braided into social pressures around whitewashed standards of hair and beauty facing women of color. Next, she breathes heavily at the idea of the cost for all of these efforts, adding, “Not to mention I’m about to drop a lot of money on clothes tonight!” Her exclamation is tinged with a bit of guilt for spending so much money at once, while concurrently shaded with enough confidence to reconcile that this purchase will be a wise, business savvy decision. In this moment, she seems to let herself off the hook as she forgoes self-doubt about whether or not all this effort is worth it, thereby leaning into trusting herself that she is doing what she needs to be doing.

Turning at the familiar screech of an approaching train down the tunnel, she looks to see which train is pulling into the station. “We’re about to get on the train...oh no, that's a 6,” she says when it becomes clear the growing noise is coming from the local tracks and not, as she had hoped, the express ones. She quickly looks up at the digital display with train arrival times hanging over the platform and adds with a slight sigh, “Okay, three minutes.” The MTA subway system is grouped by color-coded collections of individual lines. The 4/5/6 Trains, for instance, are all labeled with green circles. For the most part, each color group runs on the same track within Manhattan before the individual lines split into disparate routes in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, or even upper Manhattan. The result is that if one lives or travels within a certain zone of Manhattan, one can usually jump on the first car that comes; however, if one is traveling to the “outer” boroughs, the trains going in those directions are fewer and farther between. In Anna’s case, since her destination is beyond where the 4/5/6 train-lines spilt into various directions after 125th Street—their last joint stop in Manhattan—not every train is headed where she needs to go. The let down of seeing the 6 Train pulling into the station is not just a matter of a few extra
minutes it will take on her journey tonight, but the result of a culmination of living and existing in neighborhoods outside of certain transportation epicenters throughout the city. Anna’s senses of her mobility—her ability to be mobile in and through the city and how she has learned to navigate it—are demonstrated here in this everyday let down of seeing the wrong train come barreling into the station (Doughty & Murray, 2016). While the subway operates 24/7 for those New Yorkers who live in or travel between the farthest reaches of its network, like Anna, the long wait time between trains makes an already-long train ride even longer, speaking to the public transit disparities faced by many communities of color and poor and working-class areas in urban centers in the United States (Pollack, Bluestone, & Billingham, 2010).

Once on a 5 Train, standing among other Upper Manhattan and Bronx dwelling New Yorkers in a nearly full rush hour train, Anna shifts her thoughts back to dancing and its relationship to her future. “I can live off dancing. I can live off dancing… for a little bit. I don’t understand career strippers. Like, they really think they can strip for the rest of their lives.” She is speaking about women in their 30s who, she seems to suggest, have been doing it too long:

At 30 years old, I think it is dangerous to rely on dancing to support your lifestyle… First of all, I feel like it’s my fear at 21. What if you like hurt yourself, god forbid, and then you can’t dance? That’s it! You don’t have a career to fall back on that isn’t physically strenuous. You know, you’re kinda just like plum outta luck! ‘Cause you broke your leg and have to live off the money you hopefully saved up. [Beat] That’s dangerous to me. Thinking back to her initial confession of toll train rides take on her mentally, her musings here seem like more of an internal reflection of what might be coming her way than an external judgment of her more experienced dancing colleagues. While she does not express being
ashamed to be dancing, this admission that there is a time limit to how long such a career choice might be “appropriate” or “safe” reveals her own self-disciplining of her youthful body. Dancing might be an okay career choice for now while she is young; while she is in school; while she has yet to “get old.” It is almost as if her words are an on-the-spot figuring out of how she feels about how long she might be dancing, a rationalizing of her decision to work as a dancer. Her saying these words out loud might be the first time she has allowed herself to fully think through these issues; perhaps, it is the first time she has allowed them to move from the back of her consciousness for a proper evaluation given the time she has as the train creeps slowly uptown.

Over the course of the hour-long train ride, Anna muses over a variety of topics, including: her dating life and how she is done with her pattern of dating older, White, rich men; a tryst she had with her classmate that did not last long because she could tell it was the girl’s first time dating a woman; how she has been popping back and forth between living with both her mom and her aunt; wondering what her father (who lives in Las Vegas and with whom she has not spoken in months) would think about her life; and the deep sense of protection she has over her little sister. The rumble of the train beneath her appears to stir up a long list of half-thoughts, repressed feelings, and lingering quandaries that have been circling around in various parts of her consciousness. Her words showcase a highly reflective mind, well aware of the powerful dynamics she sifts through every day: her ability to navigate racially-fueled romantic desires; a longing for financial independence to end her reliance on adults; and the ability to protect her sister from the ghosts that have afflicted her own life experiences. Hers is a mind that is always

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2 It is because of Anna’s younger sister that she is in the study at all. Anna had not been to HMI for a long time before one day deciding to bring her 15-year-old sister in to become a member. On the day that she did so, I was working the Front Desk, and we were both excited to see each other. Explaining to her what I was doing back at HMI, she expressed interest in being part of the study.
at work, one that is constantly toiling and doing the hard work of paying close attention to the
inner-workings of the worlds around her. Riding the train, however, seems to provide the
moments for it all to come bubbling to the surface.

When I offer a question in the middle of the train ride about her current “dating
philosophy,” she stops her mental gymnastics and looks at me incredulously,
“Philosophy?...What is that? Like what is that? That is such a...What a word to apply that to!
Like what do you really mean?” She laughs off the question, finding it more than a little funny to
apply such a word like philosophy to her and her experiences. However, with very little further
explanation on my part of the intentions behind my inquiry, she goes on to respond to the
question. It is not that she does not know what the word means, but rather that she appears to
find its application to her own life bizarre. This, even after she had spent the better part of an
hour philosophizing about her life in a series of poetic, nuanced, and critical ways;
“philosophizing” is not what she thinks she was doing. Her stated confusion highlights the
luxury of the ability to think beyond the here and now, to spend precious time thinking about
organizing concepts and frameworks when that time could instead be spent ticking off any
multitudes of pressing action items. It also highlights the normatively disciplinary lessons she
picked up along the way as a young woman of color that the thoughts running through her head
might not be worth thinking, much less expressing; that her knowledge will never amount to a
philosophy. Furthermore, perhaps this thinking shows something about youth, along the same
lines with her thinking that dancing is “okay” for now, that it is something her youthful body can
do to earn money and pass the time. When she is asked for her own “philosophy,” her reaction
questions whether such a term is even applicable to her body, given its intersectional
positionings. Since she is still “figuring it all out,” she sees this as part of her journey towards
adulthood, which suggests that her daily experiences do not yet count, that the life she is living right now is not real, or that her experiences as a queer woman of color do not matter beyond her own experience of them. Her denial of her own self-created knowledge systems echo the ways young Black women’s experiences are often disavowed as being important or worthy of examination (Love, 2012). It seems that which is real and valid about Anna’s life is all yet to come, that there is some as of yet unidentified moment when she will become an “adult,” and things will start counting. At that point in the future, her experiences will then be worthy of paying attention to; of being appraised for their greater meanings; of being able to lead to the creation of her own philosophy.

Anna’s dismissal of her connection to knowledge production, of course, might be accredited to her youthful experiences with race, gender, and sexuality and the fact that she sits on the marginalized sides of multiple spectrums of identity. Attention to this moment of Anna’s self-doubt shows “the quotidian realities of [queer of color] lives spotlights the agency of individual and collective actors as they attempt to negotiate and perform identity, belonging, and resistance on self-determined terms” (Brockenbrough, 2015, p. 31). That she admits to being fearful of her long train rides, these long stretches of time when she has nothing to do but think, suggests that thinking is only done in brightly-lighted subway cars, meters underground, when in fact she is thinking and philosophizing the whole day long but her solitary commutes are the only time they are able to break through to the forefront of her thinking. She admits, “I have a lot going on. I feel like I have too much going on. I don’t feel like it is contributing to my future, and that’s why it is just like so stagnating, all of the things I have to focus on.” She is doing all that she can just to stay afloat, and the work and effort she puts in allows her to get from one moment to the next frantic moment; then, the experiences had, information gleaned, and
knowledge developed as a resulted of these moments have little to no cumulative effect. “I’m living the plan that I have right now,” she says, ascribing her experiences a value that portends to expire at the instant they are expressed, even though they have carried her through many challenges thus far.

The shopping trip turns out to be a success. Anna purchases new five-inch black and silver heels, two new thongs, and a matching sheer top. Her clothing haul allows her some momentary satisfaction of having made this necessary occupational investment. Moments after making the purchase, just ahead of the long train ride back into the city, her sister calls her for the second time that evening. In the time it takes to walk the few short, dimly lit blocks back to the train, she learns that their father, from afar, has bought her sister a ticket to the Justin Bieber concert the following evening at Barclay Center. Before ending the phone call, as the train starts to pull away from the terminal station she promises to call her sister back when she gets home. Instantly, Anna has a new long list of questions to sift through during the train ride: How will her 15 year-old sister get to and from her mom’s apartment in the Bronx to downtown Brooklyn for the concert? Why would her dad only buy one ticket in the first place? How will she get to Brooklyn tomorrow night to pick her sister up because surely her mother cannot be counted on to do so? This return train trip back to Manhattan leaves Anna with more time to think, and the relief of the successful shopping trip has already lost its luster just a few moments after swiping her credit card. While the earlier rush hour train up to the Bronx ran express, this train is running local and proceeds to tediously stop at every single station as it carries Anna, her new clothes, and her racing mind back towards Manhattan.

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Chapter 2: Delays from/of meaning: Keeping “youth” on the go

(Photograph 2: Street exposed)
Plugging my earbuds into my ears, I take in a deep breath and fight inertia to force my body into a jogging pace. Less than a block later, I am striding up the pedestrian footbridge over the FDR Expressway to East River Park, which spans Manhattan’s promenading green space along the East River. Under the shadow of the towering Williamsburg Bridge overhead, I turn downtown, starting one of my now-frequent late morning runs along the water. After just a few paces, I pull the sleeves of my shirt over my palms, already regretting my decision to forgo the gloves that I threw onto my desk in the last minute before heading out the door. Adjusting to the temperature, I relax a bit and fall into my pace, trying to avoid the lingering patches of ice from last month’s blizzard. Moments later, as per usual during these long runs, reflections and questions about my research start pouring into my head. On top of the physical exercise, the time and space to clear my head and to focus my thinking is becoming more and more a vital part of running. These runs, similar to the go-alongs, create the conditions where I can see and feel how “[s]pace stretches out and pulls in as an immediate surround, time speeds and slows, simultaneously pausing on a still life and zooming through eras…” (Stewart, 2015, p. 20). The chilly air breezing past my face, the East River flowing to my left, the lingering feeling that I had asked the “wrong” question during a previous go-along, and the sense that the remaining time I have left in New York will not be sufficient to complete the research, are just a few of the streams of thought spinning through my mind as I move down the pavement, stride by stride. In this attempt to study everyday experience of queer, trans, and genderqueer youth, these runs have been providing me with an opportunity to keep my mind and eye open to what “everyday” might, can, and will entail as I move with the participants through their lives.

Often, research focuses on moments in young people’s days that are deemed remarkable, that appear to stand out, and that instantly catch one’s eye. To counter this, I turn look at those
times and spaces that are not so flashy, that do not automatically have sheen on them, which begs to be studied. Settling on an ethnographic lens that centres on the fields of knowledge about queer, genderqueer, and trans youth, this research moves away from an approach to ethnographic inquiry as a study of a specific community, culture, school, or place. By exploring dominant ways of thinking and knowing about queer, genderqueer, and trans youth bodies, which are discursively reproduced by networks of power, the regimes of truth that make the terms queer, trans, genderqueer, and youth, supposedly knowable, preordained categories to begin with, start to unravel. Instead, focus on everyday experiences through close, reflexive analytical inquiry works to “generate understandings of both how people constitute urban environments through embodied and imaginative practices and how researchers become attuned to and constitute ethnographic places” (Pink, 2008, p. 174).

While ethnography as a methodology often imagines “‘culture’ as an object attaching to a homogenous community of (usually non-Western) people with a coherent cosmology, for contemporary anthropologists, ‘culture,’ ‘community,’ and ‘cosmology’ no longer have this solidity” (Valentine, 2007, p. 20). I hesitate to name this project an “ethnography” because of long-contested debates among anthropologists about what encompasses ethnography (Ingold, 2014), which are beyond the scope of this study. However, in shaping a research project around ideas and concepts that lack “solidity,” I pull greatly on the work of ethnographers because of their close analytical study of culture and cultural productions. Stewart’s (1996) methodological concept of “the space on the side of the road” assists in molding what this project will look like and where it will take place. This type of ethnographic work treats culture “as it is seen through its productive forms and means of mediation [where lived experience] grows into a space on the side of the road where stories weighted with sociality take on a life of their own” (p. 210). It does
not reify the limits of youth, subjectivity, or identity, but shifts focus to “study the process by which the human is defined in local practice, how belonging and identity are constructed, how alterity and exclusion are produced, and how these shift in on-going practice” (Brown, 2003, p. 74). Such a framing refocuses analytical inquiry to include the “everyday” times and spaces that are passed by and overlooked when researchers set their sights on something and somewhere in particular. It asks researchers to imagine how “the poetic mediation of meaning in forms could become an end in itself, how an ‘Other’ world could emerge in the forms of locals ways of talkin’ and ways of doin’ people” (Stewart, 1996, p. 29, emphasis original). The “mediation of meaning” has been a central concern of this project, both in how youth are making meaning of their lives and how their own (and society’s) interpretations of their experiences are made into meanings, which influence how youth interact with the world and how the world interacts with youth. That is to say, this project was not intended to be limited to studying the common locations youth bodies are thought to inhabit, but was designed to explore the times and spaces where knowledge about queer, trans, and genderqueer youth is produced; the times and spaces often out of view of or not overtly noticeable by research and researchers where nonetheless knowledge about these youth is being made and unmade.

Running down the East River on this late-winter morning, however, well into the recruitment process and with a few go-alongs behind me, I ponder how the concept of the “everyday” means different things to different people. This concentration is proving challenging during the go-alongs when, for instance, participants share stories that appear very much spectacular and out-of-the-ordinary and, therefore, seemingly not the “everyday” stories the study was designed to examine. Struck by the worry that I am doing the opposite of what I had set out to do, it is possible the study’s focus was being drawn to the big flashy moments in my
participants’ lives that, in theory, were the antithesis of what the study was created to focus its inquiry. Moments that center around, for instance, the death of a parent, being kicked out, sexual abuse, being arrested, and so on, have percolated throughout the go-alongs, and the more they come up, they raise questions about whether or not the study is losing its focus on the “everyday.” These remarkable moments had all come up rather plainly, however. It was not that I had completed in depth life histories with each participant or that there was a predetermined set of research questions aimed at teasing out these intense stories. These topics all came up in the course of seemingly benign conversations, which made me think reflexively to consider if I had unknowingly kept the focus on subjects in contrast to the study’s organizing tenets. I wonder how my position as an adult might induce youth to talk about certain remarkable moments, as many of them are well accustomed to talking about their lives in certain ways with teachers, therapists, caseworkers, and other adults in positions of authority. Regardless of whatever explanation for my intentions I offer, the formula of me as an adult asking questions of them replicates the ways in which they are used to communicating and, therefore, the ways in which knowledge about them is understood and produced by adults. This realization is a reminder to refocus on how interrupting such forms of knowledge production echoes recent calls that education research “remain[ed] embedded and contextualized in participants’ meaningful everyday life activity to capture the fullness of people’s activities, as well as their potential” (Gutierrez et al., 2017, p. 31).

Peering quickly over my left shoulder as I pass under the Manhattan Bridge, I take note that the East River looks to be flowing with me as I run downtown. Looking back a few steps later, I check to see whether I had accurately assessed the direction of the current. I remember, then, that the East River is an estuary that runs in both directions and that its current is ever-
changing. Scanning the dark blue water for a clue to its actual direction in this moment, Warby comes to mind. After completing her first two go-alongs within one week’s time, it was another month before we met to do the third. We had been in touch via text in the interim. Our messages were comprised mainly of me asking if she had time for another go-along, only to have both of us fail to follow through on various attempts to connect until weeks and weeks passed. When we finally met for the third go-along, it came up that she had moved for the second time since joining the study (during her first go-along I helped moved her boxes all the way across the Bronx from one group home to a new one). It strikes me that she has not told me about this second move, as our interim communications seemed to only indicate she was busy with school and work, as usual. I found myself wondering why, in our communication, she had not previously mentioned it or at least offered moving as an excuse as to why she was not able to meet. It seems like such a “big” thing, and I am struck that she did not think to tell me about it. However, in thinking through the conversations we have had about her life history and knowing that she has probably moved over 20 times in her life (in just as many years), it starts to become clear that moving might not be spectacular to her—that moving is part of her “everyday” experience. Packing up her belongings and moving them to a new location is enough of a non-moment for her that she not only neglects to tell me it is happening, but I only realize she has moved again by piecing together the things she mentions during the third go-along. Moving for her, it seems, is something so routine it does not even seem worth telling people about it.

I start to reconcile this upon realizing the definition of “everyday” is never imbued with identical meaning. Instead, “data produces narratives that are personally meaningful constructions of life stories that shape experiences and interpretations of the world, and through which we can trace the embodied and emotional dimensions of everyday mobile practices”
(Doughty & Murray, 2016, p. 311). What is commonplace for one participant is not universal. Moreover, my perceptions of experiences as “everyday” are not necessarily synonymous with what participants deemed or understood to be the casual, routine moments they experience. However, if I am truly seeking a reciprocal, ethical, trusting relationship with participants, then I need to get to know them as well as possible, which includes the ordinary and the spectacular moments. I have to take in, listen to, and think about both the everyday and the sublime not only in order to become familiar with my participants, but also because the two concepts are not independently constituted.

Warby’s actions become clearer when I reflect on how our first conversations involved a lot of listing of “remarkable” moments. Though I knew her very briefly when I worked at HMI, it was in our first conversation during the study where she disclosed a myriad of traumas in her life history: her mother going to prison and eventual suicide; her long history with depression and cutting; being homeless; and more. All of these experiences factor into what it is that Warby considers being everyday; what Warby considers to be normal. My confusion at why she did not tell me she had moved again suggests a self-centeredness of my relationship to her, that she was supposed to tell me about her move, showing how the “inability either to terminate or to ‘make sense’ of…silence also seems to carry consequences for the self-certainty of the onlooker/analyst” (MacLure, Holmes, Jones, & MacRae, 2010, p. 493). It also implies a particular lens to the act of moving, of having to relocate one self as being a note-worthy moment.

In order to analyze the everyday of a youth’s experiences, even the ones that instantly appear to be spectacular must be taken into account; moreover, what comprises the “everyday” cannot be determined just by a single glance (de Certeau, 1984). Rather, being with the young people through the go-alongs provides a sense of what might be “everyday” for them and how
the determination of what makes something commonplace is dependent not only upon each individual youth but also on the time and the place of the research. To do so requires both a mobile methodological framework in order to keep focus and attention nimble and agile enough to take notice of young people’s experiences from various angles, figuratively and literally.

Reaching the Staten Island Ferry Terminal at the bottom of the island, the automated voice on my running app interrupts the music streaming into my ears to tell me I have run 2.5 miles, prompting me to turn around to retrace to my steps along the East River for the second half of my run. Glancing out over the water, now on my right side, as I regain my stride, I swear it seems like the current has also just changed directions and is trying to follow me home. I make a mental note to text Warby about her next go-along and take off running once again along the river.

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Foxxy is sitting just inside the entrance to the college building, where we have met for their four previous go-alongs. Seated at one of the tables, seemingly haphazardly placed along one wall of the spacious lobby, Foxxy is sitting just to the left of the main security checkpoint, where college-aged students of all races and ethnicities present their ID cards to security guards after flowing in from the sidewalk en route to their classes. To Foxxy’s right is a makeshift Starbucks stuck into the corner of the lobby with a constant line of bodies, awaiting a pre- or post-class caffeine boost. Foxxy sits at a table with a woman, their bodies in close enough proximity that I first assume they are acquaintances. It is not until a few minutes into the go-along that it becomes clear that Foxxy is just borrowing this stranger’s cell phone charger. It appears that either the length of the cord prevents Foxxy from moving more than a foot away from the woman, or Foxxy is unable to move any further away because they are intermittently checking their phone as it charges. Sitting with the pair at the table, the woman’s terse body language indicates that perhaps acquiescing to Foxxy’s request is pushing her to the limit of what she is willing to offer a stranger. She seems to be reconsidering whatever social graces compelled her to allow Foxxy to borrow her charger; she darts her eyes in Foxxy’s direction every time they reach for their phone and into what the woman perceives to be her personal space.

This is not the first time I have taken note of Foxxy’s understanding of “personal space” in their movements through the city. During their first go-along, after swiping into a subway station, Foxxy walked directly towards the only wooden subway bench on the platform. The bench had four cordoned-off spaces to sit and was occupied by two women in the first and third spaces, the second woman having placed two large bags next to her on the fourth space. Foxxy elected to sit cramped between the two women and continued to talk to me as I stood in front of them. The women, while not a part of the conversation, could clearly hear everything Foxxy and
I said, which did not appear to phase Foxxy as they did not lower their voice nor veer away from the subject matter we had been discussing before Foxxy made these two women part of the experience by sitting in between them.

While Foxxy’s desire to sit might come out of a physical need to be seated, it is striking (in both the situation on the platform and today at the table) that Foxxy takes up space near strangers (at least women) in ways that slightly push social decorum. At least, Foxxy’s determinations of where to place their body in relation to others is striking to me, as it is much closer than I, as a man, would choose to stand near women in public whom I do not know. It is almost as if Foxxy is trying to blend into other feminine presenting people around her; that is, if Foxxy is close enough to women in public spaces, then Foxxy might get read as being “one of the girls” and avoid being perceived as someone who is performing gender in ways that are too often policed by people Foxxy encounters in their everyday life. Perhaps, too, Foxxy feels safer with feminine presenting people, or in trying to take up space in proximity to female bodies they are attempting to show to these women that Foxxy, themself, is not someone to fear. It might also be a result of the ways Foxxy was socialized as a child as someone who was allowed to take up space in public without thinking about the repercussions. Give that Foxxy is often perceived as doing gender “incorrectly”—that is, someone whose gender presentation and identity make them a constant target of scrutiny by those who Foxxy passes by and takes up space alongside in their everyday movements through the city—the negotiation of where to stand or sit on a subway platform or determination of one’s sense of “personal space” is fraught with gendered expectations and assumptions.

At the table, Foxxy is eating a matzah sandwich with lox and cream cheese, the last of their leftover stash from Passover the month before. Through bites, they mention their recent
efforts to get a legal name change. There is an excitement in their voice about completing this process, that doing so would help them feel more like themself; that changing their name will help alleviate their self-described “gender dysphoria” they have long experienced; that the name will offer even just a nominal relief to the experience of living in-between in this highly gender-binaried world. This leads them to reflect about feeling uncomfortable as a kid, that they knew they liked “girly” things and did not mesh well with the Orthodox Jewish students in their schools, where they felt additionally outcast being of Middle Eastern descent in a community of people who primarily hailed from Eastern Europe. “I went to a school where by 4th grade boys were split from girls, and all day I had to be with boys. And I always felt like not one of the boys. I always knew I was different,” Foxxy explains. Because of the sex-segregated classes at the Yeshiva school they attended, Foxxy found subversive ways to express their gender despite having to wear the mandated “boys” uniform. “I would wear chapstick as a form of lipstick ‘cause I wasn’t allowed to wear lipstick. I would wear clear nail polish, sparkly on my feet and clear on my [finger]nails ‘cause I’m not allowed to wear nail polish… I had to wear this very masculine clothing, and I hated it.” Such actions allowed Foxxy to go through the motions of expressing their gender in affirming ways without receiving the backlash they knew would follow if they wore a painted lip or nail. While these actions did not produce visible results, there seemed to be something about completing these so-called feminine rituals that assisted Foxxy in feeling true to themself and their inner desires. Even when Foxxy could not outwardly express their gender, they coped by developing methods to express themself in ways only they could recognize.

Foxxy mentions having a great affinity for women in the media who express femininity in ways they desired. In particular, they adore Beyoncé’s character in *Austin Powers*:
*Goldmember*, Foxxy Cleopatra, (the obvious inspiration behind their choice of pseudonym) and her signature salutation from the movie—“I’m Foxxy Cleopatra, and I’m a whooooole lot of woman!” They used to repeat this mantra at school in front of the boys in their class, claiming their relationship to womanhood and femininity while wearing a dark men’s suit and *keepah*—a rounded head covering for Jewish men. While this did not endear them to their classmates, such a connection to women in the media and popular culture allowed them a chance to feel feminine and, even if just momentarily, provided relief from feeling that their body was the ultimate hindrance from their desired gender expression. “I always was able to express a lot of my femininity…and feel comfortable with my body when I see certain women that I connect with. Whether it’s through television, media or music, art, or women I am around physically, like my mom. I feel more at peace with my identity.” Foxxy’s body being read a “male” (and their feeling that this reading was inevitable) had always and continues to be a hurdle to feeling comfortable with their gender identity. For Foxxy, the experience of expressing their gender in a self-affirming way is one that they believe will always bring about potentially negative reactions from others: “…there is always an internal conflict that because my body is different, it separates me.” Throughout the previous go-alongs, Foxxy discussed that there were days when this threat was something they knew they had the skills and wherewithal to deal with, yet there were others when they woke up instantly feeling that they did not have it in them to put on make-up or withstand the comments or looks they would get if they left the house wearing a skirt and heels.

It’s really confusing, and it’s a lot of anxiety. Because I wake up, and it changes within minutes of how I feel comfortable… I wasn’t sure if I wanted to be more male, more female. More this, more that…sometimes, I wonder, do I not want to put make-up on
because its, because I’m scared, I’m uncomfortable, or I just don’t want to? I think it’s a mix.

On these more reclusive days, they simultaneously feel that being dissuaded from presenting in a feminine manner is an insult to themselves and the greater community of trans and genderqueer people; they are letting themself and others down when they give into fear.

“No matter what, I feel uncomfortable,” Foxxy explains, the cheery pop music blasting from the Starbucks providing a stark contrast in tone to their lament. There is a great deal that goes into the experience of enacting a presentation that feels in alignment with who one is and how one interprets their “true” self. For Foxxy, their desire of a feminine aesthetic—wearing heels, makeup, skirts—is shuffled through how they anticipate the world might react to their body dressed the way they want to dress. Sometimes, Foxxy determines that presenting their gender in a self-affirming manner supersedes any potential negative experiences that might come their way that day. Other days, the thought of having even one experience where someone throws a nasty look Foxxy’s way because their body does not “look” like one that should be wearing heels is enough to forgo their more feminine clothing for apparel that will let them pass as “boy.” These experiences of being “in-between” have left Foxxy seemingly without much ground on which to stand. Sometimes they feel gender-fluid, that they are neither male nor female. However, sometimes they feel “fully” female. Swallowing the last bites of matzah, Foxxy details the pain this creates in their own mind and the feelings of shame, confusion, and blame that follow as they discipline themselves and their feelings. “I need to stop being the one that is always victimizing myself,” they conclude, though it is not clear they know how to enact such sentiments. Foxxy is by no means alone in feeling burdened by the weight of the social, cultural, and institutional pressures that trans and genderfluid people face (Spade, 2011).
Furthermore, the seemingly irreconcilable tone Foxxy verbalizes speaks to the complicated nature of the ways trans people are able to tell their own stories about their experiences with and journeys through gendered power systems (Aizura, 2012). Foxxy’s stating that they need to stop blaming themselves might then be seen as an acknowledgment that there is no perfect next step, no way to totally escape the pressures of normative, gender systems, and the task may be living and thriving amidst these oppressive forces rather than trying to find a way past or through them.

Describing their experience at a queer men’s group, Foxxy felt the group was too focused on the experiences of cis-men and then further isolated when the group did not understand why Foxxy could not afford the $5 drop-in fee. Then Foxxy expresses not quite meshing in trans-only spaces either because of their perception that such groups are too transition-focused and their own feeling that people who do not see a gender-confirmation surgery in their future, like themself, do not quite fit in. Despite Foxxy’s desire to let go of their tendency to self-discipline—that their daily choices of what to wear is an indication that they are not strong enough or doing “trans” in the proper way—it is clear that the multitude of forces Foxxy faces make the experience of getting out the door in the morning one of great internal strife. For Foxxy, the act of deciding what to wear and how to adorn their body in the morning is an experience in and of itself. It involves an internal check-in to determine how they feel in that moment. Do they want to dress feminine that day? Do they have it in them to withstand any negative feedback they might receive? If yes, they get dressed. If no, they get dressed in their “boy” clothes while feeling like they are letting themselves, and potentially others, down. It is as if they can only ever be too female or not-trans-enough.

In the middle of all this, Foxxy recognizes someone hurrying through the lobby ten feet away. “Hey Professor _____!” they exclaim over my shoulder in the direction of the moving
body. Professor _____, however, apparently does not hear and continues toward the door without looking back to Foxxy. From my perspective, turning to watch the professor stride through the lobby, he seems near enough that he should be able to hear Foxxy’s salutation to him and that he is, perhaps, ignoring Foxxy; however, the echoing noises through the rowdy lobby leave enough of a possibility that Foxxy’s call did not reach his ears. Turning their face back towards my own, Foxxy pushes ahead in their story, determined to move past this moment without letting the awkwardness of the felt snub linger too long. For just a brief moment, as Foxxy stumbles over their words trying to remember what they had been saying before seeing the professor, it is possible to sense how this interaction (or lack thereof) adds to the frustration Foxxy experiences moving through the social world. Part of the gender policing that Foxxy describes is that they are deemed to be too much or illegible; because of their gender, people cannot make sense of Foxxy’s existence. Regardless of the intention behind the professor’s actions—whether Foxxy’s voice fell short of reaching his ear or whether he chose to ignore their greeting—the experience is just one more in a long list of Foxxy’s voice not being heard. With the professor now out the door, Foxxy forging on, seemingly pushing the awkwardness of the moment away. They start to explain their discontent with the part of themselves that feels compelled to transition in order to rectify their gender dysphoria. Foxxy wants to get to a point where they feel totally comfortable in their body as it is, and they are trying to work towards finding that balance. “It’s okay to be certain about being uncertain. Every time I hear that, I’m able to breathe and am able to relax.” Foxxy explains that on the white board in their bedroom is one of their guiding mantras: “I don’t need answers.”

With that, Foxxy unplugs their phone from the borrowed charger, thanks the woman for letting them use it, and we start to move through the lobby towards the door. Once standing,
Foxxy’s outfit comes into full view for the first time. They are wearing a blue kerchief over their short dark hair—their personal homage to Middle Eastern Orthodox Jewish women in their life who don simple pieces of fabric in fidelity to their faith in place of the wigs often worn by Orthodox women in Europe and North America. Scanning down, they sport a vivid purple jean jacket covering a black blouse. Pink polish covers the nails on only their left hand. A shiny silver tiered skirt hugs their hips before ending just above the knee, with each horizontal, sparkling panel glimmering more than the last. Black tights protrude from under the skirt to cover the rest of their legs, and in place of their usual black boots is a pair of show-stopping, multi-colored ankle boots with a solid wooden heel of at least 4-inches. Walking out of the lobby through the small courtyard to the entrance of the subway station, their heels make a significant clank when they meet the concrete, marking their presence with each subsequent step. With the extra inches, they are now taller than me for the first time. This has an instant effect on me, as if I have to adjust what it means for me to walk alongside them. In those first steps through the lobby and out onto the New York City streets, I instantly read their outfit as more “clockable,” as making them more susceptible to surveillance, discipline, or castigation about their gender presentation from the people we were about to meet. My instant reaction is to think about how their added height makes their body even more apparent, a thought that admittedly centers myself and ignores Foxxy’s years of navigating their life through normative gendered expectations and assumption. It was Foxxy, themself, who had been the first participant to articulate that my being with them stood to make their daily movement safer, that they believed my social privilege would have some transitive effect if we moved together through the city. Today, I wonder if Foxxy’s outfit might outweigh my presence and, as a result, these first few steps together feel like the start of a whole new journey with Foxxy. In what is supposed to be our last go-along, a
seeming conclusion to our time together, all of a sudden these multi-colored heels are changing everything. I realize that their added height brings up a lingering notion of researcher-as-protector that I have been carrying with me. Despite my determination to acknowledge and work through my privilege, my own understanding of my White-skinned, masculine-of-center presenting cismale body has led me to cling to the notion, however subconsciously, that I can “protect” my participants. In these first moments up and about with Foxy in their multi-colored heels, I instantly shift from the researcher stance of watching things from the laidback perspective I have settled into as the study progressed to all of a sudden having my shoulders back, eyes and ears open for anything or anyone who might try to come at Foxy. After a few moments, it quickly becomes clear that the heels also have an impact for Foxy themself.

Upon entering the subway station, both the click of the wooden heels and the timbre of Foxy’s voice grows more concentrated, moving down the stairs into the enclosed underground, one step at a time. Swiping their MetroCard at the busy collection of turnstiles, there is a cacophony of beeps sounding as other passengers swipe their own cards on either side of Foxy in quick succession. Making the descent down the final staircase onto the platform level, Foxy is midway through a story about when they bought the shoes at Buffalo Exchange when they pause momentarily mid-sentence to do a quick glance over their shoulder as the voice of the prerecorded subway announcer drones softly in the background. It seems clear they had been sensing some sort of threat from an imperceptible location as they made their way down into the station, that there was something or someone in Foxy’s vicinity that was judging their body. Returning to a forward glance, Foxy starts back with the story, though their speech pattern shifts, slowing in cadence in contrast to their speaking pace moments earlier. Each word spreads out further away from the last, making it hard to see that they are connected into sentences. They
take a few more steps and then cease speaking once again. The confined space of the train platform seems to add to the intensity of attention on their body. There are fewer things to look at, less air to breathe, fewer places for Foxxy to hide. During a powerful, silent moment, their facial expression changes as they look around pointedly and with growing concern, at the other people waiting for the train. Then, Foxxy starts a new train of thought with a much-hushed tone of voice:

    You see just walking down [the stairs of the subway] in the city where there are so many eyes gets me so paranoid, realizing I’m different, internalizing I shouldn’t be dressing this way. I’m never going to be a cis-woman. Who am I kidding? It becomes a panic attack. To just walk, down a block! Especially Grand Central [Station]. I take the 6 Train everyday and you see all the businessmen in their suits and women. And you realize you’re in the middle and you’re confused and you’re like…

Foxxy’s sentence trails off here, as they appear to be unable to complete the thought upon which they have stumbled. Unable to put to words what happens to them when they reach this point of confusion and distress. The “what happens” when they reach this level of fatigue with dealing with reactions to their gender expression is, literally, beyond explanation; beyond expression. Or perhaps, in this moment Foxxy did not want to go to that place to acknowledge their fear. Rather than finish that fretful thought, they wait a beat and continue: “…yeah so, and I was at the sale…” They quickly shift back to the scene at Buffalo Exchange when they purchased the shoes a few weeks earlier.

    Foxxy’s inability to voice that “beyond” moment suggests a queered orientation to living and being. Queer, in this sense, “is being summoned to labor as the moment when bodies, non-normative sexuality/genders, and force materialize the im/possibility of subjectivity” (Stanely,
Foxxy exhibits an ontology that, while maybe not vocalized or fully understood, showcases the fact that there is something too much about their life within the bounds of the ways society is normatively constructed; that reconciliation of Foxxy’s gendered traumas might not be a possible goal. Rather than asking how life might “get better” for Foxxy, the important question becomes, if “we start here with an understanding that escape is not possible and that against the dreams of liberal democracy there may be no outside to violence, how might we also articulate a kind of near life that feels in the hollow space of ontological capture that life might still be lived, otherwise?” (Stanely, 2011, p. 15). Foxxy’s experience of walking into the station and having the sensation that all eyes in the cramped vicinity shifted to their body is not a spectacular moment. This is an all too common one. It is part of their daily routine and seemingly impossible to avoid, so much so that it necessitates the change of subject back to how they bought the shoes and away from what the shoes are doing and the affect they have on their experience of standing on the subway platform.

After shifting back to the story about how they came to own the shoes, the air in the station begins to breeze past our faces with growing speed, signaling the imminent arrival of an approaching train. Foxxy is offered a moment of relief from talking; it becomes impossible to converse over the screeching of the subway as it pulls up the tracks alongside the platform. The train slows to a halt and the doors open, letting out a spurt of cool, air-conditioned air onto our faces. Without speaking, Foxxy steps onto the train, me following suit, and the doors ding closed behind us. The train pulls out the station, and Foxxy meanders through the car searching for an empty seat. I watch them and their multi-colored heels slip through the crowd of passengers.

*   *   *
My phone buzzes in my pocket, and I already know what the text message says before starting to retrieve it. I suspect the message is from a youth—one who I had been trying to recruit to the study—cancelling our meeting just as I am en route to HMI to meet them. Pulling the phone out of my jacket, my suspicions are confirmed. Typing as I continue my stride up the Avenue B sidewalk, I fire off a quick response letting them know I would be happy to reschedule. Now without the urgency of a meeting time, I lessen the speed of my zigzagging through the streets of the East Village and find myself drawn to sit on a sun-soaked park bench while passing through Tompkins Square Park. Opening up my calendar on my phone, I add “CANCELLED” into the entry of today’s supposed-to-be meeting. This is a practice I started a month into the study during a moment of frustration after having a series of back-to-back cancellations and/or no-shows over the span of two days. I wonder how I will look back on all the research events that never panned out in order to reflect on the recruitment process of the study.

Scrolling backwards in the calendar, I take note of all my reminders of the go-alongs that did not happen and the potential participants who expressed interest but never committed to joining the study. The list is quite long with almost as many cancelled events as there have been research events that came to fruition. Ruminating on these meetings that never were, I ponder these cancellations. Some of them were cancellations by participants, asking to reschedule a go-along for a later date. Others were meetings with potentials participants where the youth simply did not show up. Often running into these same youth at HMI in the days after, I am left to determine whether their no-show was the result of a scheduling error or an attempt by the youth to say they were not as interested in taking part in the study as they may have intimated to me in person. In these cases, I leave it up to the youth to bring up the missed meeting. If they do, I suggest scheduling another one. If they do not, I take their silence as an indication of their desire
to not be in the study. This approach is an effort to counteract residual power dynamics I hold as an adult in HMI’s space. Despite my attempts to position myself as different than the staff members at HMI—to demonstrate that I am not someone who has authority over the youth members—my being an adult in the agency’s program space carries along with it inherent influence. As such, when talking to youth about the study in hopes of recruiting them, even if I give them days or weeks between my introductory conversation and then asking them if they would like to participate, it sometimes feels that youth are saying yes out of some sort of obligation of having to acquiesce to a request from an adult or out of being too timid to decline. As I sit here on this park bench, trying to figure out my newly non-scheduled afternoon, I try to force myself to let go of any remaining sense of frustration about the cancellation.

Closing my eyes, I let my head drift upwards to face the sun and start to visualize the study in two parts: the study that is, and the study that could have been. There are some youth for whom the study was intriguing or compelling enough that they consented to take part and followed through on doing go-alongs. They were, and continue to be, willing and able to take part and share their experiences with me. Foxxy was the first participant to signup. Right after the start of recruitment, a few weeks into my volunteer work at HMI, they marched up to me during the nightly dinner service. “Are you the guy doing the study?” After explaining the project to Foxxy (which was one of the first recruitment conversations I had with a young person), they said right away that they wanted to participate even though I tried to insist that they take the night to think about. Scarlet, too, had agreed readily. One Saturday, I went to HMI to help with the weekend programming and walked in to see her with her trademark rosy cheeks, painting at the Art Room table. She had been a member of HMI when I used to work there, but since she had not been in the space since I had arrived to start the study this chance meeting
served as our reunion. When I explained what I was doing back at HMI, she quickly agreed to participate. Both Foxxy and Scarlet have felt comfortable letting me have access to their lives and expressed that they saw their participation as being useful for them, whether it was the security my presence might provide in having someone to ride the train with; a sense that the study was trying to work toward some sort of positive social change; or just having someone to talk with as they went about their day.

There have been some youth, however, for whom the experience of me walking with them was not an experience they were willing to take part in, and they told me so by either listening to my recruitment pitch and politely declining; listening to the speech and then never getting back to me afterwards; or agreeing to meet and then never showing up. Brian, on the other hand, only agreed to participate months after I had first asked him. Brian is also a longtime HMI member. I asked him during my initial phase of recruitment if he wanted to participate. Unlike Scarlet, he told me he would have to think about it and that if he did take part, it was going to be “in a few months” after he finished a course he was taking. His deferment was not surprising, as I knew him to be quite guarded with how much of himself he shares with others, even people he sees everyday at HMI. For the next few months, whenever I saw him at HMI I avoided saying anything about the study, not wanting to pressure him. Towards the end of each encounter, however, just as we were about to say goodbye he would mention that he was still thinking about the study and that he would let me know soon about his decision.

There was one young person who seemed somewhat interested in taking part after we met at HMI and talked about the study a few times. Sometime later, I ran into them on a random sidewalk across town from HMI. I had been making my way to the subway and saw someone panhandling ahead of me near the stairs down into the subway. However, it was not until I was
right next to them that they turned around, and we instantly recognized each other. It was an odd moment, like I had caught them doing something they did not want to be seen doing, at least not by someone associated with HMI. Not wanting to let the awkwardness grow, I said hi and that I hoped to see them at HMI soon.

As my mind meanders through all the ways in which youth said yes or no to taking part in the study, I reflect from my seat on the park bench on how this study is not about everyday experiences of queer, genderqueer, and trans youth, writ large. Rather, it is about the everyday experiences of those youth who choose to take part in this study and thus necessitates consideration of factors that may have led these participants to take part in the study and not others. This study is about those who have been willing to have this experience with me, to navigate the city with me alongside them and the baggage that comes along with my positionality. They decided, albeit each one for their own reasons, that there was something about the potential of this experience. They were taking part in something that felt like it was “making a difference;” wanting companionship on their everyday journeys; desiring to spend time with me; or that I and/or the study represented something they wanted access to or knowledge of. Forcing myself to let go of the sticky remnants of researcher-as-neutral-observer includes acknowledgement of that which brings youth to want to take part in the experience of doing research. To examine the experiences of youth involves analyzing how I approach the concepts of youth and experience.

Bodies of research in youth studies and philosophical theories of experience each deal with the passage of time and the ways in which social subjects are constructed, imagined, remembered, and projected into the future. That is, many canonical writings about the notion of “experience” come from scholars of history (Jay, 2005) who have long explored how the
experiences of social subjects become part of official historical records and how the experiences of some are canonized, celebrated, ignored, forgotten, or cherished based on their positionings within networks of power and oppression (Scott, 1991). Experience, then, must always be considered alongside consideration about the passage of time, a being in relationship to pasts, presents, and futures; it is not only looking at and talking about that which has occurred in times before now but also reflecting on the impact on futurity. The concept of “youth” similarly deals with the process of passing time. While the category of youth itself is not simply an age marker (Lesko & Talburt, 2012), it does centrally deal with the time period between childhood and adulthood, when bodies are not quite young enough to be children and not quite old enough to be adults. It involves evaluating and disciplining bodies against various constructions, which often have less to do with the bodies being labeled as they do with the experiences of those doing the labeling—a way for adults to legitimize their memories of being younger by labeling young people’s experiences as being similar to their own, as being part of a shared experience of “youth” (Gilbert, 2014). This is demonstrated by Scarlet’s desire for an inter-generational connection with me as evidenced by her frequent interrogations of my life accomplishments. In asking me about whether or not I possess a job, career, apartment, and boyfriend, she seems to be comparing which boxes she might be able to check off on her to-do list towards reaching adulthood and that her failure to do so might result in negative consequences (Halberstam, 2011).

Concepts about “youth” deal with sorting those bodies within the knowledge systems controlled by regimes of truth about race, sexuality, age, gender, and so on. As Scott (2001) suggests, identity is “not so much a self-evident fact of history as it [is] evidence—from particular and discrete moments in time—of someone’s, some group’s effort to identify and thereby mobilize a collectivity” (p. 287). Youth, then, is not a benign labeling of a group of
people within a certain shared age range and the experiences people of that age group are assumed to face based on their collective relation to the process of “growing up;” rather, it is a term loaded with cultural and political weight and expectations based on normative ways of thinking and knowing that highlights the various directions growth can travel (Stockton, 2009, 2016).

Adjusting normative, theoretical framings about everyday experiences of trans, queer, and genderqueer youth, then, undertakes the work of thinking through the daily happenings of young people through theoretical approaches of “experience.” Such labor is necessary in order to shed the sticky remnants of humanist conceptions of youth as bodies en route to becoming whole, agentic Selves; as being in a linear, preordained motion from the supposedly natural state of childhood through to the similarly unavoidable state of adulthood (Taylor & Blaise, 2014)—and how, too often, the qualitative research process assists in reifying those conceptions (Loutzenheiser, 2007). Rather, experience is always contextual, fleeting, and a form of knowledge production in itself, thus necessitating a move away from a conceptualization of the moments and happenings of young people’s daily lives as being judged against certain norms associated with social subjects of similar ages or with similar identifications. La Princess’s experience sitting on the bench in Union Square has to be read through the situations she has gone through that led her to be sitting on that bench after her frustrating morning of bureaucratic appointments. A glimpse of her in her smart black blazer and neatly configured up-do might bely that she sleeps every night on a collapsible cot she has to set up before and put away after she sleeps. She is not simply sitting on that park bench because she wants to enjoy a bit of fresh air or as a lunchtime escape from the office; her experience being on the bench is different.
Making this shift involves a change in perspective concerning the ways in which that which is (thought to be) “known” about youth, including how even calling people who fall within a certain age bracket “youth” is a result of the normative knowledges sought to be critiqued by the project. Stewart (2016) assists in such a shift in perspective with her thoughts on “worlding writing,” which suggests acknowledgment of the ways in which representation of experience is not just a description of events, affects, people, and memories, but how the “work of describing becomes an angling in on a worn refrain that has been doing things or on some small shard of sensory impact still partly legible in a body’s quivering and its dissolves. Found objects become not representations but leftovers, atmospheres, forms of light, the curve of an archway hitting a stride in a thought” (p. 95). In this light, identity categories like youth and the rest become important units of analysis not because they offer some sort of truth about human experience of those who are presumed to share similar demographics, but because they are, in fact, always imperfect. In the conversations during the go-alongs, I purposefully avoid asking youth many questions about what they call themselves. At least, not until they mention it themselves and even then, not without also asking what significance the term carries for them in their own lives. While La Princess, Yetfounded, Anna, Warby, and Scarlet all identify as “female,” it means something different to each one through their own relationships to gender. More important to this inquiry is how each one comes to know about themselves through their experiences. Because of the failure of language to “fully” capture experience, there is much to be considered about “youth” and the shortcomings and byproducts produced by constant attempts to congeal and solidify the concept and how it is represented.

This acknowledgment of what happens when it is conceded that words are not enough is of central concern to this study of youth. Gilbert’s (2014) explanation of the image of “the child”
as being “overdetermined” (p. 8) implies that there is too much discursive weight within the constructions of images of young people—that society has burdened youth with expectations they can never succeed in fulfilling. This becomes clear when John tries to implore their math teacher to give them a chance to make up missed work because they are a “good kid” worthy of a passing grade. John’s hailing of themself as both “good” and “kid” is an attempt to show how their body fits into preordained models of what youth are expected to be. In Anna’s train musings about her dating life, she surmises she is getting to be too old to go after older men; now is the time when she should find relationships with a more evenly-distributed power dynamic. Even though her youthful actions are not associated with normative actions of young people, she labels the previous actions of her younger self as being incompatible with her now more aged self. Youth as a concept is not evenly understood or applied, nor are the attendant actions assumed to be “appropriate” for youthful bodies.

Along racial lines, Ladson-Billings (1999) is even more direct with her assessment that while “race” is an all too common part of everyday vernacular its usage continues despite its well-acknowledged failures and shortcomings. That is, the intertwined considerations of ethnicity, skin color, property, nationality, belonging, biology, colonialism, and diaspora that factor into the construction of “race” and racial identities are routinely and lazily forced together in hopes of maintaining a definition of race that, while eternally unclear, nevertheless exists because of the desire to keep the fallacy in place (Castagno, 2014; Harris, 1993; Leonardo, 2002; Tuck & Yang, 2012). The experience of identity must acknowledge this notion that identity is too-limiting a tool to assess human experience. Scarlet and Yetfounded both have familial connections to Latinx communities and possess fair skin, which often leads to them being assumed to be White. Their upbringings, however, have left them with very different
relationships to race and culture. Scarlet grew up in Queens, surrounded by her mother’s extended Ecuadorian family. She currently lives with her Spanish-speaking grandmother—her abuelita—for whom Scarlet often serves as translator and with whom Scarlet avoids talking about her sexuality. Her experiences having grown up knowing herself to be of color and a part of a community of color are in stark contrast to those of Yetfounded. Yetfounded grew up in Colorado and California, away from her mother’s Puerto Rican family. People often assume she is White because she has her stepfather’s Italian last name. Her relationship to being Latinx or trying to claim her Latinx identity is shaped by her experiences that prevented her connection to other Puerto Rican people and/or Puerto Rican culture.

In fact, identity has never “worked” despite a continued reliance on its seemingly unavoidable ubiquity. In thinking historically about the remembering of identity, Booth (1999) suggests that the “emphasis on the present weaving of the past, memory, and political identity is clearly a commodious one for modernity and liberalism, which have difficulty accepting ideas of shame, burden, and fate and the obligations they claim to impose” (p. 257). Modernity’s clinging to identity continues, even though that very intransigence is part of the processes that have continually erased certain lived experiences from being included as part of the set of experiences thought to be “essential” to any given identity group; even when said experiences are experienced by those with a shared identity or those who were assumed to possess the same identity. Even when it might be casually acknowledged that certain normative assumptions about youth do not always hold up when placed under scrutiny, those assumptions often remain in place, unchallenged, continuing the reproduction of the knowledge about youth as ever only being one specific thing. In response to this assumption, this project focuses on examining the concept of “youth” and its attachments with two seemingly incongruous intentions: first, the
project focuses on this stubborn and unwieldy concept of youth while admitting that such a focus on “youth” itself is incomplete and part of the disciplinary systems of knowledge intended to be challenged; and, second, the project approaches “youth” itself not to see what it is but to examine that which gets left behind or left out by the processes of attempting to keep “youth” as being a concept that is singularly defined. Returning to Stewart’s (2016) advice, I join her in asking, “What if, instead, we build concepts that make it possible to venture out into the life from which they emerge? Concepts that are crystallizations filled with the potentiality of dissolution” (p. 96).

This study centers around the experiences of these youth participants—of the one’s who have committed to sharing and having experiences alongside me—as a way to explore how they become youth through the events of their everyday lives and how they simultaneously suspend from and adhere to youthful attachments along the way.

Rather than assessing what happens during youth’s daily lives as aligning with or deviating from social expectations exploration, this study’s attention centers on how their experiences shape and determine those expectations in the first place. By moving with youth and experiencing pieces of their lives with them, it becomes possible to see the meanings they imbue to their surroundings and to their relationship within the world around them. Without suggesting inquiry can be done in a vacuum outside of the influence of normative habits of thought, I seek to shift frames of sensation and estimation, especially of the ways youth make sense of the world and how the world makes sense of youth. The following questions come to mind: How do understandings of social worlds open up when normative techniques of viewing, hearing, reading, and sensing passages of time and movements through space are reconfigured? How can social relations be appraised differently? How can the interaction between subjects and objects be read
in diverging ways that do not necessarily coalesce into firm identity categories or assumed-to-be-
natural classifications?

A buzzing in my pocket interrupts this park bench theorizing. Coming back into
awareness of the surroundings, I notice that the sun is still hiding behind the clouds above.
Pulling out my phone, I see that there is a text from the same would-be participant, saying they
are now able to make it to our just-cancelled meeting after all. I put a mental bookmark in my
thinking about youth and experience, knowing that it will probably shift once again after a few
more go-alongs. I respond to the youth: “Great, see you in a few minutes.” Standing up from the
park bench, I continue walking to HMI, my pace quickening with each step.

*   *   *
Having just bid farewell to Scarlet outside of the gym, I walk eastward along 14th Street and realize I am quite hungry after our workout. I decide to pop into the Pret-a-Manger, a chain restaurant famous for its grab-and-go breakfast and lunch food on 12th Street and Broadway, to get a bite and to try to write down some of the thoughts about the go-along while they are buzzing in my mind. So much happened during the 90-minute workout with Scarlet, but even my excitement about getting all of my thoughts into writing is not enough to ignore the movement of the New Yorkers (and of New York, itself) in my vicinity. A flurry of customers move along the walls lined with coolers of with pre-made sandwiches, salads, and assorted nourishments as I dart in between them to grab various foodstuffs. Most of the tables are populated with people either dressed in business casual presumably on their lunch breaks from their Union Square-adjacent offices or hiply dressed student-aged patrons likely enrolled in the nearby New York University, whose campus is slowly engulfing this entire Greenwich Village neighborhood (Berger, 2012).

I find a small open table in the middle of the café and put down my packaged balsamic chicken and avocado sandwich, a bag of salt and vinegar chips, and a large drip coffee. Sitting down at the table, I open the bag and quickly chow down a few salty chips. I remember Scarlet blushing as she talked about the girl she had met at a speed dating event while we were on the treadmill. After pulling out my Bluetooth keyboard and phone, I open the sandwich package and take a bite while I wait for the two devices to sync together so I can start typing a research note. The moment gives me a second to reflect on Scarlet’s explanation of how she goes to a barber in the Bronx because she does not understand why women have to pay more for haircuts than men. The devices finally connect, and I open up my Notes app on my phone and start typing to ensure I do not forget why the moment about the barber stuck out to me and what it makes me think
about in the context of the things Scarlet expressed about her gender presentation in conversations past. Realizing I need something to prop up my phone so I can see the screen as I type, I pull my copy of Sarah Schulman’s *The Cosmopolitans* (2016) out of my red canvas backpack. Recently stumbling upon the book at the famed Strand Bookstore, located just across the street, was a bit of kismet, as the novel depicts Greenwich Village, the neighborhood where I am currently sitting and where HMI is located, albeit in a very different time. Propping my phone against the book, I start typing about Scarlet but am distracted a moment later by the red leather bookmark jutting out of the book below the first two chapters I had read the night before.

Set in the 1950s, the book’s the main characters, Bette (a White woman who works as a secretary) and Earl (a black gay male actor who works at a meatpacking factory), live just around the corner from the streets that the participants of the study have to take on their journeys to and from HMI. The bohemian setting of the novel depicts an age when this neighborhood was populated by poor and working class people; immigrants and people of color; and artists and artisans. The opening scene depicts Bette watching her neighbors—all of whom she knows by name—move about their days along the sidewalks and streets from her perch in her living room window a few stories above ground. The image of this neighborhood painted by the book is an interesting comparison with modern-day experiences of and on the same streets, namely by youth in this study who only ever pass over them en route to and from HMI. In the book, the buildings on these blocks are occupied by people struggling, living paycheck-to-paycheck, and without exorbitant means. In contrast, today trendy art galleries, bougie coffee shops, and doorman guarded buildings line the very same blocks featured in the novel. Looking down at the receipt from my meal, I notice that I spent nearly $15 on my lunch. Wondering not only what
$15 would have meant to Earl and Bette back in their time, I also wonder how Scarlet might spend the same amount of money today.

I finally force myself to focus and start typing, recalling the various moments of Scarlet and I moving through the gym, taking turns on various weight machines. So much transpired in the hour or so we spent together that I barely finished typing out a sentence before my mind was already racing on to the next. Moments later, when I think my sensors are turned off enough to let my brain and fingers communicate freely without my excitement getting in the way, I spot a pair of patrons at a table across the room and stop typing once again, putting thoughts of Scarlet on the backburner. I read the person at this table closest to me as a queer, White cisman after I take in his Ralph Lauren-esque attire and freshly cut short hair. Coming to these conclusions even though he is seated with his back to me, I realize I have made multiple assumptions about his body and identities even though his face is only visible in the occasional moments when he turns his head over his shoulder. His friend, however, is facing me dead on. In a first scan, I read the Friend as male-bodied after noticing their short, stylish, dark hair (not dissimilar from Ralph Lauren’s) and their broad, bare shoulders. It is the following disconnect I sense between my instant-reading of their body and then processing that their shoulders are not covered by fabric that returns my gaze to their body, even as I tell myself I should not be doing so. Upon second glance, I see they are wearing a white halter-top, exposing all of the olive-toned skin on their shoulders, neck, and arms. Given that Ralph Lauren across from them is wearing a dark, wool pea coat, it appears as though the pair is simultaneously experiencing vastly different weather patterns on their respective sides of the small café table.

The Friend’s face is expertly painted, featuring a muted red lip and a dark, smoky eye. Their silver manicured nails are visible as they clutch their coffee cup on the table with both
hands while speaking in an animated fashion with Ralph Lauren, a smile stretched across their face. The Friend’s dark hair is held back with a wide, black, stretchy headband that, as soon as I see it, brings thoughts of Foxxy to mind. This headband, like the triangular head kerchief Foxxy is always wearing, reads as androgynous. Such ambiguity is something that Foxxy confesses is part of the reason why they always wear one—it's versatility could be read as both masculine and feminine. “I think what I love about [the bandana],” Foxxy had explained before taking a pause and starting to speak with a more direct serious tone, to emphasize importance of what came next, “…is that whenever I am feeling more masculine and male identified I can always roll it up and I can do so many things with it and its easy. I don't have to change my day. I can take off lipstick and feel masculine with it. It’s great no matter the color or the shade.” Such flexibility is important for Foxxy as someone who is often stared at, harassed, and policed by passersby because of their gender presentation. Wearing the bandana allows them to express their gender identity in an affirming way that does not “stand out” as much as when they wear a dress or high heels.

Despite everything inside me telling me to stop gazing at the Friend, I realize the Friend and Foxxy appear to be about the same age. Both possess comparable coloring and complexion and share a similar gender presentation and aesthetic sense. Realizing that they also inhabit the same streets, as HMI is just down the street from this café, I wonder if they have ever waited at the same light together; exited the R train at the nearby 8th Street/NYU Station at the same moment; or passed each other on the sidewalk. Just yesterday, during a go-along with Foxxy that took us through this very neighborhood, they told me a story about the dynamics of recognition, of seeing and interacting with other genderqueer and trans people in their everyday life. Recently, Foxxy attended an art gallery opening in the East Village. Walking through the crowd of art
sophisticates, Foxxy spotted Mx Justin Vivian Bond, a trans singer-performer and a legendary figure in New York’s downtown avant-garde arts and performance scene. While the two did not speak to one another, Foxxy described how they connected eyes with Mx Justin across the bustling room for one powerful moment. In that instant, Foxxy felt Mx Justin convey to them, “I see you. I know you. You’re like me.”

Thinking back to the emotion in Foxxy’s voice as they told me about this chance encounter, I catch myself trying to convey to the Friend a similar message even though I know it is not possible for me, in my body, to do so. Furthermore, I recognize it is likely that my stare has a great potential to be registered in the complete opposite way it was intended; my lingering gaze is just one of many lingering gazes that likely lands on the Friend’s body everyday. Finally forcing myself to look away, I stare back at the flashing cursor on my phone screen, which contains my long-abandoned reflections about Scarlet’s go-along, another participant who experiences policing of her masculine gender expression. When she uses the women’s locker room at the gym, Scarlet explains how other women “take a double look, or if they’re naked they will cover themselves up.” While we were on the treadmill earlier, she professed that it did not bother her much. Her usual response is to stare people down in return, trying to convey a pointed, dismissive message to those who gawk at her: “Bitch, I don’t want you.” Once, while at another gym with her friend who is a transguy, the manager confronted the pair about their usage of the men’s locker room: “[The manager] was like, ‘Oh, I’ve had complaints that there were two women in [the men’s locker room]. And I was like, ‘Okay, and?’ He’s like, ‘Oh it’s making the customers upset.’ I’m like, ‘I am the customer, so what happened?’” While Scarlet’s approach to negative reactions to her gender expression involved a more brazen approach than Foxxy, both
speak to the ways in which being recognized and misrecognized in public affect their daily actions and movements.

While my recognition of the Friend across the café is by no means parallel to the moment of recognition and connection between Foxxy and Mx Justin, I cannot let go of my desire to offer a supportive glance, just in case they happen to lock eyes with me. I selfishly think that I might be able to offer a counterpoint to the bevy of unsupportive looks I assume the Friend receives everyday, knowing that the intention of the look aside, it is often the looking itself that can be damaging to the person receiving the look. I think about the various moments in just two go-alongs with Foxxy where they mentioned people giving them awful looks and the toll they expressed it taking on their everyday life and ability to just exist in public space. I think about this year’s growing list of murdered trans women of color and about those whose deaths have potentially gone unreported. If there is anything I can assume with any amount of certainty about the Friend, it is that they are most surely subject to similar gender policing that has led to Foxxy’s stated insecurity and the untimely, horrific deaths of women who dared to ask the world to respect their right to live. Deep into a spiral of worry, my fingers resting on the keyboard not typing a single letter, Ralph Lauren and the Friend cross in front of my table and back into my line of sight on their way out the door.

The white-halter top worn by the Friend is revealed to be a knee-length sundress with large, graphic, purple flowers painted across the bottom of the garment. Black, cropped tights emerge from below the dress, stopping partway down their shins, and black-heeled ankle boots cover their feet as they move across the wooden flooring. Outside on the sidewalk, I see the pair share a warm hug through the window before Ralph Lauren turns to walk up Broadway towards Union Square. The Friend takes a sip of coffee through a white straw sticking out of the lid,
leaving a kiss of lipstick behind. Starting to walk downtown along the length of the restaurant’s window, the Friend is neither wearing nor carrying a coat, seemingly trying to soak every morsel out of this rare sunny (yet not particularly warm) March afternoon. As they move alone down the sidewalk, their shoulders relaxed and thrown backwards, I notice how alive they look. They are alive, and they are very clearly living. They are walking as if nothing is going to stop them from reaching the next corner, and the next, and the next. This sidewalk is theirs. I watch them take step after vivacious step, wishing Foxxy were here with me.

* * *


Coney Island’s Boardwalk is unseasonably busy on this blustery April afternoon. Arriving early to Yetfounded’s first go-along, I am strolling along the boardwalk to kill the extra time before we meet. The long beach beyond the walk is empty save the gusty winds blowing in off the ocean, making it hard to move down the promenade without zipping up one’s coat for a bit of extra warmth. The lines outside of the famous Nathan’s Hotdogs and other eateries are steady, peopled with crowds of families enjoying New York Public School’s April Break, but they are by no means at their peak-summer lengths. Across from Nathan’s, at one of benches along the boardwalk’s edge, a sleeping woman and child are huddled on a bench facing the water. A horizontal tri-beamed guardrail fence serves as the only protection between the pair and the forceful ocean winds. Seated upright, the hood of the woman’s sweatshirt is pulled tight over her head, and her hands are tucked in its pockets. Her head and torso lean forward into the gale, her body seemingly defiant to the wind. The child wears a sweatshirt, hood also up, with their face pressed into their (presumed-to-be) mother’s stomach, their body facing the back of the bench. Not an inch of the child’s skin is visible, but I realize I have assumed the child to be a girl based on the pink accents on their shoes and sweatshirt. Their joint slumber looks deep, the woman’s awkward body position implying she drifted into this forward leaning posture after a considerable amount of sleep and the fact that they are bundled up suggesting they were preparing for a long, cold nap when they arrived on this bench.

Their slumber looks necessary, like something that was not accidental. The apparent deepness of their sleep makes me wonder if they are homeless. Perhaps, they took one of the multiple subways that terminate at Coney Island and are using this bench to rest, knowing (or hoping) they might blend in with the crowds for a period of time to rest before heading back for a night on the trains after the sun sets. Or perhaps, like Brian or la Princess, they are passing time
before being able to access a shelter to spend the night. They have no bags or other belongings with them, bringing into question the assumption that they lack housing. I think about Brian’s trusty drawstring bag he is never seen without and the various black plastic bags he is always carrying. Having to be out of his group home all day, these bags contain all the things he needs—his phone chargers, papers for school, snacks he buys from the bodega near his house—to spend the day moving about the city. La Princess also has a meticulously packed purse with her every day, one large enough to fit a pair of heels, a book, and folders of paper, but one that does not prove to be too cumbersome to carry all day. The lack of a place to securely store their things as they move about their daily routines affects how they are able to get around the city.

Top 40 pop music blares from Luna Park—Coney Island’s famed amusement park across the street—and the rancorous crowd enjoys their Nathan’s hotdogs on the boardwalk behind them, the intermittent screams of roller coaster riders in the distance do nothing to disturb their rest. A man walks up and wakes the pair just as a text comes through from Yetfounded, saying she will be at the train station in less than five minutes. Moving away from the newly woken pair, it is clear they know this man as he sits down next to them as they rub their eyes and readjust to being awake. However, it is not any clearer as to what led them to arrive at and/or sleep on this bench. I head back towards the station, leaving them to face the wind alone.

Five minutes later, I find Yetfounded waiting outside the Coney Island Subway Station, the end of the line for the D, F, N, and Q Trains. From this station in the farthest reaches of Brooklyn, one can get to Times Square in Manhattan, Yankee Stadium in the Bronx, or Jamaica, Queens, all without having to transfer subway lines. Despite being one of the far reaches of the city’s perimeter, it is quite connected, if still very far away. Yetfounded is en route to work in Manhattan (a nearly 90-minute commute), where she holds a position as a photographer for a
tour operator of “party boats” that sail around the island. Moving into the frenetic terminal, Yetfounded makes her way through the late-afternoon crowds, a mixture of revelers filtering in from their day at Coney Island and locals who live in the series of public housing projects that also make up this Brooklyn neighborhood. Skillfully navigating through the vast station and up a series of staircases to the D Train platform, Yetfounded proceeds onto a parked train, which is waiting its turn to depart. Pointing to an empty pair of seats that emerge perpendicularly from the side of the car, she says, “This is my seat,” with a sense of ownership and assurance that someone can only have if they frequently get on the train at its station of origin. The seats face toward the front of the train and provide a view out of one of the windows along the left side of the car. She credits her Puerto Rican mother, who grew up in the city—“she’s old-school Bronx”—for influencing her preference in train seating. She explains that in her mom’s day one had to be more aware of whom else was on the train with them: “…like now there are advertisements, I guess back in her day they had graffiti [in the subway cars].” She offers no caveat to explain how trains might be dangerous today, easily labeling the past as the place where it was dangerous to ride the subway. Her quick sentence implies a sense of ease and comfort with the transit system, even though she still pays homage to her mother’s train habits, which were developed during a time when one had to remain vigilant for one’s own safety.

While her mom grew up in New York, Yetfounded only moved here four years earlier from Southern California after finishing high school. Her knowledge of the city and her ability to get around is not only quite new but also something she has developed as a young adult. Not having the years of childhood memories and experiences to guide and shape her current navigations through the city means that all she knows about the city and all of her lived experiences with the city are less than five years in the making. Nonetheless, her movements
through the city are still dynamic and well-informed, especially since she now lives in the neighborhood besides Coney Island—in one of the remotest parts of Brooklyn—and spends a great deal of time traversing in between boroughs. Her daily subway ride is at least an hour into Manhattan for work, and it takes her even longer to get to Queens where her girlfriend lives and where she attends college. As the train speeds through Brooklyn, the sun starts its descent over the Manhattan skyline in the distance. Yetfounded explains how she is never shy about asking questions: “If you wanna know more about the world, there is always gonna be something to talk about.” This is an approach she surely brings to her travels throughout her relatively new hometown and how she is learning to navigate it.

Yetfounded’s movements through the city suggest that, while she is eager to know more, her knowledge about how to move through it is still being developed. While Yetfounded certainly knows her way around the city, there is a certain direct linearity to her movements. This is not to say that she lacks an inquisitive or curious nature; in fact, she demonstrates a constant desire to learn. Her knowledge is ever changing, and at any given moment the edges to what Yetfounded knows about the city might be exposed. Nonetheless, she talks about the city and her ability to move through it with great confidence, explaining with detail the routes she takes between home, school, and work. Acknowledging Yetfounded’s knowledge of the city as partial and in the process of becoming, while still appreciating her vast command of the ways she knows to navigate, showcases how any knowing of or about the city is always already incomplete and contextual. Such a conceptualization questions “the implication [in research about youth] that spaces are already made and that the construction of space takes place primarily or most pervasively at the level of the powerful” (Robinson, 2000, p.432, emphasis original), rather than accounting for the ways in which youth are producing their own spatialized
knowledges against the grain of the normativizing forces of the city. Though Yetfounded talks about the city with a certain confidence, New York is in the process of becoming as she speaks about it. Each time the doors slide open at the next stop, passengers flow in and out, shifting New York a bit as the people swirl about before the train grinds forward to the next stop. Such a conceptualization of New York as a place in the making “understands places as themselves mobile, shifting over time and space and through interactions with flows of people, other species, social practices” (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015b, p. 3). Despite attempts to solidify “New York” with a verbal, physical, or linguistic gesture, it remains spinning underfoot and between the bodies of would-be-New Yorkers.

As with other participants who are more recent residents of New York and who are stably housed, Yetfounded’s movements often have endpoints. She is always going to home, school, work, a friend’s house, HMI, and so on. When she departs from one of these locations, she knows how to get to the next one but often only via one specific route. If she is taken from her paths, however, it is not clear whether she could improvise a new one or if she might have to backtrack before being able to move forward. During another go-along, I met Yetfounded in Queens, and we take the 7 Train into Manhattan in order to get to an appointment she has “near 34th Street.” Getting off at the terminal station—the Javitts Center Station on 34th Street and 12th Avenue—she lamented about this recently opened transit hub. Bemoaning the MTA like a seasoned New Yorker, she lamented, “They spent $3 billion on this stop, and no Wi-Fi.” She pulled out her phone once we get above ground to double check the location of the appointment. “It’s near 6th Avenue,” she said confidently before leading us eastward on foot. Six long blocks later, in the midst of the hectic pedestrian traffic of Herald Square, she pulled out her phone again to check the exact address only to realize the office is four blocks further east, just off
Lexington Avenue. By the time we arrived, Yetfounded had led us on foot nearly the entire way across the width of Manhattan when there was another 7 Train station just a few blocks away that would have resulted in a much shorter walk. While geographic efficiency may not have been Yetfounded’s goal—maybe she wanted to take the walk or maybe my own biases about geographic literacies are showing—but given the vastness of New York City’s geography, her movements through the city expose certain aspects about her knowledge of the city.

Other participants, those who have spent their whole lives in New York, have differently nuanced understandings of the city and its layout—though their understandings of and knowledges about New York should not be considered more complete than Yetfounded’s. These life-long New Yorkers, like Foxxy, Scarlet, Anna, Axel, la Princess, or Brian, who, regardless of their housing status, have always lived in the city. They have years of experiences of moving through the city, which culminate in their present day knowledges about how to get around; their experiences with the neighborhoods where they have lived and spent time have impacted their spatial knowledges (Shildrick, 2006). While the participants who are New Yorkers-by-birth do not possess identical geographic literacies, they demonstrate knowledge of the city and its layout beyond the spaces they access in their present day lives, highlighting how knowledges of the city are more than physical or geographic. While “urban dimensions of landscapes and the physical environment are often thought of in the fore as built structures that relate to functionality in modern life, cities are also sites of human experience that comprise social relationships, memories, emotions, and how they are negotiated on an everyday basis” (Low, 2015, p. 296). There are neighborhoods these long-time New York residents used to live in but had have not visited in years; there are areas they actively avoid because they do not want to run into family who live there; and there streets they dream of living on because of memories of walking down
certain blocks during their former commutes to school. However, they all still have holes in the their knowing of New York, neighborhoods they know only by reputation; subway stations or lines they have never used; and places they have yet to discover.

Additionally, the participants who have experiences with homelessness (including those from New York, like Warby, Brian, la Princess, or those, like Elliod and Dan, who have never lived in New York with stable housing) have additional knowledges about how to move through the city. These are movements that, unlike Yetfounded’s, do not always have an ending point that involves the ability to leave the streets. Living on the streets has taught these young people lessons about where and when a person can take up space in a public park or library while avoiding surveillance or being asked to move along by authorities. They showcase the ability and need to move off well-trodden paths to find space for themselves to pass time without disturbance, since they do not have a place where they can go to shut out the world behind them. Examining these movements highlights how “the bodily experiences of homeless street youth…cannot be separate from [how] the political and resistance is measured in the smallest of actions” (Cruz, 2011, p. 556). The variety of spatial knowledges youth possess about the city can be traced back to their individual experiences of moving through and existing within the streets, buildings, people, and spaces that comprise it.

Moreover, youth knowledges highlight how moving through the city can be both circularly and pedagogically informative, “where it is possible to see how young people are active in reproducing structural parameters and also moving outside these parameters to interpret, evaluate and transform their life paths” (Robinson, 2000, p. 432). That is, moving through the city can teach a person about the inter-cultural dynamics of traveling through myriad racial, religious, economic, ethnic, and linguistic enclaves; about who lives in and occupies different
places; and what it is like to experience each neighborhood specifically through an individual’s own positionality. However, as “positionality and subjectivity are not fixed along an axis” (Loutzenheiser, 2007, p. 123), neither are the positionalities and subjectivities of the neighborhoods and communities that youth pass through and occupy. Neither are they as absolute and concrete as they are often assumed to be. Assessing Yetfounded’s perspectives as a young queer woman of mixed racial background, producing knowledge about the city, also highlights the “historic myopia toward reading territories at the scale of the geopolitical replicates masculinist, hetero- normative and colonial perspectives on place-making” (Gieseking, 2016, p. 262). Her movements can also teach an individual about how each neighborhood is accessible to her or not; if a certain area is dangerous or welcoming; if it is a place to seek out or a place to avoid. They also show the dynamic, intersectional constructions of any one neighborhood, block, or street corner and how those constructions shift over time, including from moment to moment or from one person’s viewpoint to another’s. They especially illustrate the ways areas of importance and significance for trans and queer communities of color are often either ignored and avoided by White trans and queer communities or appropriated through gentrification (Gieseking, 2016; Hanhardt, 2013).

In a previous conversation, I asked Yetfounded if there were any neighborhoods in the city she avoided. She mentioned not liking the Bed-Stuy neighborhood of Brooklyn, a historically Black neighborhood that is known for its large presence of queer and trans communities of color that is concurrently an epicenter of White gentrification (Ali, 2014). Her apprehension of the neighborhood is not unique; it matches a commonly evoked, racially fueled stereotype, which is shared with many neighborhoods of color throughout the city. When asked how she, a person with White skin privilege with limited experience of New York, came to know
this neighborhood as unsafe, she explained that she had once attended a queer dance party in Bed-Stuy and, as the party was disbanding, was accidentally stabbed after a fight broke out between two attendees. While her injury was minimal, the lasting effect of having a bad thing happen to her in this place paralleled existing racially fueled assumptions about this place as being “a place where bad things happen.”

How, then, does this experience impact the often racialized and classed assumptions about Bed-Stuy itself? This incident seemingly works to “justify” these pervading assumptions about this place and the ways that so-called “fleeting encounters” in public spaces between various communities lead to the assumptions people have about those deemed to be different than themselves (Peterson, 2016). When Yetfounded has experienced such a place in a way that furthers the way that place has in fact become emplaced to begin with, does her experience make the place or does it further an already existing knowing of said place? Saying she avoids Bed-Stuy might immediately read that as a White-skinned person who is newer to NYC she is relying on pervasive, racialized assumptions about this Black and also rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. That she was in the place attending a queer of color event when this incident happened and now her idea of this place “matches” or runs somewhat parallel to dominant discursive constructions of this neighborhood, shows a more complicated knowledge about this place that is based an a specific lived experience. However, her lived experience, when allowed to connect to and further existing racist-stereotypes of this Black neighborhood as inherently dangerous (and supposedly in “need” of refurbishment and redevelopment for and by White gentrifiers), highlights how the individual’s experience is too-often allowed to be wrapped up as a universal Truth.

The evocation of “Bed-Stuy” as a place with specific attachments results from various reactions, depending on who is referencing the neighborhood and their experiences with it. For
some, it is a beloved neighborhood, whose long-time Black residents and business owners are being priced out of the place they love and have long called home. For others, it is one of the many neighborhoods that exist out in the ‘hinterlands’ of New York, ambiguous places with which their only relationship results from reputation and conversation and not actual physical interaction with the people and the streets that comprise them. Moreover, it is now becoming a neighborhood “on the rise”—an upwardly, financially stable place that White New Yorkers see as an investment, a place they can invest in and help to “develop.” Moreover, the name Bed-Stuy—short for Bedford-Stuyvesant—is a placing of this parcel of land that in of itself traces back to the dueling Dutch and British colonial forces and the erasure of Indigenous people and their cultures from this same land (Tuck, Smith, Guess, Benjamin, & Jones, 2014).

One’s experience in and of a place can be either the things that occurred to them in those times and in those spaces or that which they purport to know about that place because of what they have been told about events over time that have happened there. When one’s experiences gets remembered as unassailable fact—as being representative of a master narrative of what happened in that place—is where it becomes clear that “experience” is always filtered through power and oppression. Moreover, the experiences of different people that happened in similar geographic locations and during the same time period get molded together into one shared “truth” that often excludes memories and experiences of marginalized communities. The result is that a limited set of experiences then comes to represent an unquestionable truth about what it means to be alive during a specific time and in a particular space. With Yetfounded’s experience in Bed-Stuy, it is important to examine her story without then letting it become further fuel for the assumption that Bed-Stuy is inherently and unquestionably dangerous and to keep in mind how place is always contextually constituted (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015a).
Ten minutes into the subway ride, which runs above ground through part of Brooklyn, Manhattan’s giant skyscrapers appear like fingers of a hand, reaching up over the horizon to hail a cab. It is as telling a vista as any showcasing the city’s vastness—that all the land between this train and those far-off buildings is all the same, singular city. Thinking about Yetfounded’s linear movements, like this very subway ride and the long walk across Manhattan, crisscrossing the width and breadth of the city with her makes clear how she has come to know how to navigate its currents. It makes sense that in getting to know how to move around and through the entirety of New York, Yetfounded initially stuck to routes that ran parallel to the subway system or other well-trodden throughways, especially given this view of New York’s enormous reach. Watching this sweeping panorama of this vast city outside the subway window makes me wonder about how Yetfounded came to learn how to move through it. Did she first get to know, perhaps, the space around the places where she lives, works, or goes to school, and then from there expand outwards to make physical connections between those places and then eventually learn more dynamic ways to move betwixt and between—like taking a new subway line or walking down a street she had never traveled along? Yetfounded’s movement “reveals the difficult work of everyday ‘crossing over’ borders to form alternative territories that shift the overlapping norms around race, class, gender and sexuality” (Gieseking, 2016, p. 269). Sitting next to Yetfounded as she stares out the window, appraising the far reaches of the city ahead of her, it is possible to notice that Yetfounded does not speak about the city as if it is that robust. She has just expertly navigated through the Coney Island terminal and has been talking about her route to work very clearly: “We’re gonna take the D all the way to West 4th…and then go up two stops to 23rd [Street] on the C or E.” The New York outside the window may appear expansive, but Yetfounded knows enough about it to make her own way through.
These geographic movements are of course concurrent to the navigation of the people and communities in those places that one travels through and around during their everyday journeys. Inching closer to Manhattan just after the subway enters the underground tunnel halfway through Brooklyn, Yetfounded makes a comment about “Amish people” that comes seemingly from out of nowhere. After a moment of confusion, it becomes clear she was referencing the noticeable presence of Ultra-Orthodox Jewish people that have been sifting on and off the train since the departure from Coney Island. The presence of said communities—known for their all-black clothing, women in straight, coiffed wigs, and men in flat-brimmed hats—is quite visible in many parts of Brooklyn. Yetfounded’s unfamiliarity with said community speaks to the reclusiveness of Orthodox communities within New York City neighborhoods, which often puts them at odds with the other communities they live alongside (especially many communities of color). While their presence is quite obvious across the certain parts of the borough because of their identifying manner of dress, there are few lines of communication outside of the community, making them something of a visible enigma to others with whom they share streets, sidewalks, and subway cars. Even though Yetfounded is aware of their existence, her admission that this community is completely foreign does not set her apart from life-long New Yorkers, many of whom only experience this community in passing as people you might see on the train and walk by in certain neighborhoods in Brooklyn.

Foxxy speaks a great deal about their own experiences of alienation growing up in a similar Orthodox community as a Middle Eastern Jew, as compared to most Orthodox Jews who hail from Eastern Europe. That this sense of isolation and self-segregation runs even within this community contextualizes Yetfounded’s lack of knowledge about this community as just one example of the breadth of cultural navigation that is part of any movement through New York
City. Furthermore, depending on one’s specific movements through the city, said diversity is experienced in different ways through their own personal lenses.

The conversation about Orthodox people in New York leads Yetfounded to reflect on her own cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds: “I honestly feel like I don’t have one because I was not raised in anything. I wasn’t raised in a religion. I wasn't raised knowing my ethnicity, so I have nothing really to feed off of. I don’t even know if I’m Puerto Rican or Italian.” While her mom is Puerto Rican, being raised in in other states left her without a connection to her Puerto Rican roots. Having grown up with her stepfather’s Italian last name and an “ambiguous” complexion further removed her connection to Puerto Rican culture. She was both physically removed and not possessing an appearance that would allow her to be read as a member of any specific group. Yetfounded’s experience with her racial identity shows dominant logics surrounding Whiteness, that it “is not a culture but a social concept” (Leonardo, 2002, p. 32). Despite having familial roots within a racialized community, this did not prevent Yetfounded from being socialized with certain amounts of privilege because she is read as White. In hopes of finding out more about her family history and her own understandings of her racial background, I ask what she knows about her father’s ethnic background (she had previously disclosed she had never met him). The question, however, does not get answered because Yetfounded immediately starts a new topic as soon as the query leaves my lips. She seems to be distracted by the panoramic, close-up view of Manhattan that appears as the train emerges from the underground tunnel and begins to crawl out of the darkness of the underground and over the Manhattan Bridge towards its eponymous borough.

Peering out of the window the unfolding cityscape, that moments ago was miles away, is now close enough to see how the Lower Manhattan towers are all reflected onto one another’s
glass windows, Yetfounded neglects to answer my question about her father. Instead, she pivots to how she recently learned about the *camera obscura* last week in her photography class. She explains the development of old-time video production, where photographers would set up multiple cameras to take successive pictures of a horse as it ran by and then order the photos to create the illusion of movement. Her explanation demonstrates the precious curricular moment when a student voices, for the first time, the knowledge that has recently been imparted upon them. The information transitions from something she is learning to something she is now teaching; the knowledge is becoming part of her own. Her words are clear and concise, if just a bit timid, perhaps not wanting to get it wrong or to ensure she was remembering the new information clearly and correctly. As she speaks about the origin of the moving image, fragments of the city behind her filter into the window between each of the bridge’s support cables as the subway rumbles over the East River. The kaleidoscopic effect makes it seem like New York City is spinning around Yetfounded as she speaks.

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How does one weave together the stories about youth in a city that never stops moving? How does one animate these tales about a world that is always spinning? New York is often framed as being frenetic and too-fast-to-handle, a city where you supposedly do not even have time to sleep. What if this quip is reframed in a way that considers how the experiences of New York perhaps do away with the veneer of stillness that too easily gets placed on lives that are lived elsewhere? Borrowing from Stewart (1996), to “re-present [others’ stories] is to retell them in another context that must itself grow nervous in the wake if its own partial understandings and dense under the weight of its own political unconsciousness” (p. 210). The re-presenting of experiences of and with the youth within the city are to be read with the acknowledgment that it is from multiple perspectives of youth who are coming to be understood through and amidst the currents that make up “the city.”

In places outside “the city”—where it is often assumed that life is stiller, quieter, and more even-keeled—there is the assumption that said sereneness makes life for those who live there easier, better, and more real in some ways (think about the way in which places outside of “the city” are talked about as being part of a more “real” America). In contrast, existence in the city is often described as hectic, distracting, and often, a potential threat to life. The assumed correlation between urban spaces and communities of color lead to the production of narratives about urban crime and their racist undertones, which rely on certain “racial grammars” (Bonilla-Silva, 2012) to position blackness and its attachments as specifically part of the city landscape—one, also, that is supposedly in need of correction. The city and its inherent Otherness—always perceived through normative lenses as incomprehensible, unknown, and a potential source of harm (Valentine, 2013)—is often considered to be too large to know, almost beyond subjectivity.
There is too much in “the city” for it to be known as one thing, even while it is simultaneously used as a straw-figure of sorts to represent society’s woes.

The concept of “the city,” New York being the prime example, provides a compelling case for examining the disjunctures and fissures within how social subjects are represented in qualitative research about TGQ youth. The city’s too-muchness, that there is too much to see and do and smell and learn on any given street, asks us to let go of the desire and need to label the city as a whole, as a unit. This involves conceding that though millions proudly call “New York” their home, such a reference does not involve a cohesive meaning. Foxxy’s New York within the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in the Lower East Side is not the same New York that Scarlet knows, having grown up in a remote part of Queens that is hidden on the official MTA Subway System Map under the map’s key. The meaning imbued in different hailings of “New York”, then, is never representative of a singular concept. Similarly, the same disciplinary forces that seek to dictate how and what youth “should” be are made transparent when it is acknowledged how much of “youths’” lived experiences are pushed aside in the act of calling them youth in the first place. This means that if it is acknowledged that multiple people can claim an understanding of “New York” with their own specific definition of the city and relationship to the space that comprises it, it must also be acknowledged that all subjects saddled with the label of “youth” do not fit identically within its confines. The bodies and experiences of subjects deemed to be youth can never be fully confined by the concept of “youth” (Lesko & Talburt, 2012; Roberts, 2011).

Writing narratives about youth, therefore, entails following the flows of experience as youth move through the city. These narratives then resist the temptation to sew youth subjectivities up as one cohesive narrative construction (Gilbert, 2014; Talburt, 2004). Given the variety of governing forces that create dominant constructions of youth—Whiteness, cis-
heteronormativity, ableism, ageism, settler-colonialism—these narratives evoke a type of representation that works against the tendency to smooth out the edges and forgo the complex experiences of youth subjects in order to make way for “youth” to be continually more and more unknowable. Such work represents “an undoing of populist, neoliberal accounts of youth media ecologies, and their politically ambivalent axiologies; a palimpsest of queer temporalities on which the scraping away of theoretical and narrative layers reveals new meanings and discourses of millennial queer youth” (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010, p. 102). This type of representation is important not just because it aligns with the theoretical framings of this project that interrupt the multiple processes of normalization that youth face in their everyday lives, but because it corresponds to the ways in which youth talk about and live their lives in the course of this study. This means that in the course of any given go-along, youth have expressed their lives and experiences in a variety of ways. At times they were matter of fact, explaining the world around them as knowable and set in stone. Perusing the aisles of the Nintendo Store in Rockefeller Center with Axel, he demonstrates vast knowledge of comic book, anime, manga, videogame, and fantasy characters. Each time we come upon a new display of figures, he greets the toys with a level of emotion one would expect when greeting a loved one. He seems to know these worlds so intimately it is as if the characters could walk off the shelf to join us for the go-along. Foxxy’s specific, direct movements through the city’s transit system speaks to their knowledge of where they feel safe and which places they avoid. Anna’s swift, concise execution of completing her grocery shopping while adhering to her strict dietary requirements is the result of years of struggling through the effects of a diet not supported by her body.

Sometimes in the next go-along, sometimes moments later, or sometimes in the next sentence, youth express doubts about their place in the world, how to move forward or through...
it; they express a feeling of being lost. La Princess opines about the possible question marks in her future, trying to boldly sketch out her pathway forward as if speaking her future out loud is part the process of erasing the figurative question marks ahead of her. Warby speculates about her next move after finding out her group home would be closing soon, trying to hatch out a plan that included moving back into a shelter while she finished her semester before going down to Florida to see family for the summer. Yetfounded talks about wanting to buy a new outfit to wear for an upcoming date with her girlfriend during a walk down 8th Avenue. She mentions wanting to buy some cufflinks, but despite her masculine gender presentation, it quickly becomes clear that she does not know that she needs a French cuff sleeved shirt to go with them. I have been witnessing youth express fear about the dangers they face moving through the world all the while taking step after determined step through the very same world they express fearing.

Their movements and actions demonstrate that their embodied understandings of “safety” are not as cut and dry as normative understandings would imply (Weems, 2010)—that knowing a place to be dangerous does not mean they are able to avoid it. They simultaneously express trepidation about something in the city (or the city itself as a whole) while still moving through the very thing that produces the fear, not knowing when (or if) their actions will add up to their eventual overcoming of said fear. Oppositely, they talk about certain milestones they have accomplished and hurdles they have surpassed in the past tense, thereby placing these events on a timeline of things behind this current moment. Sitting under a collections of trees in a public park, Elliod discusses her ability to keep her family out of her business after they proved to not be supportive of her transition; however, in the times she has to interact with them, she makes sure to entertain no questions that will doubt or invalidate her womanhood. Brian describes the detailed, daily routine he has developed as a result of the hours he has to be out of his group
home, illustrating his ability to move through the city and access spaces that will get him off the streets. These moments showcase the knowledge created by youth, namely illustrating how youth produce strategies to cope with the challenges in their everyday lives. However, their actions or other comments sometimes serve to contradict such pronouncements by indicating said struggles are not just a part of their past but also very much a part of their present and future. Marking a moment of accomplishment or having jumped some figurative or material hurdle does not mean yet another challenge (or the same challenge masked in a new light) awaits them around the corner. This acknowledges how, as social subjects, youth are always in the process of becoming and becoming again.

In highlighting these seeming conundrums, I reveal how experience of the social worlds itself is complex and often more complicated than the ways it can be represented (Gilbert, 2014; MacLure, 2013a). That is, pointing out how youth’s actions might contradict their statements highlights how even self-representation is a difficult and complicated process and practice, regardless of age. Bringing forward such “tensions” works to loosen the grasp that normavitizing forces of power have on subject formation. In thinking about these moments, which do not seem to paint a linear narration of youth’s lives, allows their lives to be considered in ways that do not always measure them against a single “norm” and offers a form of representation of moments that lean into the times and spaces that appear to be contradictory or unfinished. Such a form of bringing youth lives under examination lets a youth’s statements about their own lives be considered to holding but a small slice of truth for that moment rather than holding their words in one moment accountable for their actions, thoughts, and feelings of past, present, and future.

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Chapter 3: Re-routing, re-considering, re-presenting young people

(Photograph 3: Formerly Delancey Street)
Warby unclips the microphone from her lapel and hands it to me. I hit (what I think is) the stop button on the recorder and ask her what she has planned for the rest of the day. Standing up from the Central Park bench we have been sitting on, Warby, while scanning her head around to figure where in the park we have ended up, mentions she will probably head back to her group home in the Bronx to finish her schoolwork. We started this go-along over an hour earlier outside of the building where she works as a nanny on the Upper East Side before walking a few avenues over to the park. As we talked, we meandered through the tree-lined walkways of New York’s iconic park before ending up on this bench just near the Central Park Zoo. Now, seeing a path that leads between two collections of trees to 5th Avenue, Warby indicates she will head that way to catch the 4 Train. We turn in opposite directions—her away from the deceiving stillness of Central Park and towards the city’s hustle and bustle and me towards the heart of the park. The rest of day’s schedule is light, so I set out to enjoy a stroll through the park to collect my thoughts about Warby’s go-along.

A few steps away from the bench, I look down at the recorder and notice it is still recording. I press stop again, assuming that my first attempt at ending the recording must have been unsuccessful. After doing so, the screen flashes a timestamp, indicating the device had just saved a recording that was only two minutes long rather than a file that corresponded to the actual length of time of Warby’s go-along. As the “stop” button is also the “record” button, when I hit it after Warby took off the microphone, I had apparently not stopped but started recording. None of that which we had just talked about had been securely saved in this little black device I now hold in my hands. I spin around to see if I can spot Warby to tell her, as if catching her might mean we could redo the interview, that I could regain some part of what I have just lost. Alas, she has already disappeared into the crowd, leaving me with
neither the “data” from this go-along nor a way to recapture it.

Pulling out my small research notebook, I leaf through my now insufficient notes, the content of which pales in comparison to the bevy of topics we covered and the emotions Warby expressed. Of the few scribbles, I see that I wrote the words “stud” and “femme” with arrows pointing down from them to another word: “STEMME.” Warby had described how she eschewed the binaried presentations that queer women often use to describe themselves. While she wears dresses, makeup, and jewelry, and she presents in ways that she is usually assumed to be the femme in her relationship, she mentioned that, despite her presentation, she identifies more as a stud based on her mannerisms and affect. “Stemme,” for her, is a way to reconcile the two roles and to forge her own position among the gendered expectations in queer female circles. However, upon recalling her commenting about this term, I vacillate between remembering exactly what she said about being “stemme” and how she said it. Did she talk about it in a way that seemed like “stemme” was a term she had longed used to define her own gender expression? Was she matter-of-factly explaining it to me during the go-along? Or was it something she had stumbled onto during a train of thought in the middle of the go-along—a term she coined on the spot? Without the recording to re-listen to in order to get a firmer sense of the words she used to describe it and, perchance, to deduce her intention through the tone of how she sounded saying it, I am left with only my indefinite memory and this three-word diagram in my notebook. Looking over the scant jottings in my notebook, I remember that there had been multiple moments in the preceding hour when, instead of making a written note about something Warby said, I made a mental note to revisit the moment when listening to the taped recording.

Now, without such a recording available to revisit, I replay our conversations,
navigations, and interactions as if such a mental scanning (while all the memories of the go-
along are still “fresh”) would make them firmly imprint on my mind. It is as if I am trying to
make my own mental backup of the go-along to preserve for a later moment when I get to the
“official” data analysis process. The “data” generated from this time with Warby was now
left to memory, to impression, to feeling, to the ways her words, thoughts, actions, and
emotions are now being remembered through my various senses. There is no need to worry
about immediately running to backup the recording of the go-along to my cloud so I can be
sure I will not “lose” it. It is already lost. I am living through the moment that researchers are
taught to fear. Quickly moving through the stages of grief, it hits me that the only option left
is to explore what it is I am left with sans recording, to try and comprehend how “data” (and
its analysis) can now be (re)conceived in the face of this data collection mishap. Such
reconciliation involves letting go of the orientation to data as a tangible object that traditional
research traditions utilize (Jackson, 2013) and to experiment with how “something called
data cannot be separate from me, ‘out there’ for ‘me’ to ‘collect,’ and, with that
astonishment, the entire structure of conventional humanist qualitative inquiry falls apart—its
methods, its process, its research designs, and, of course, its ground, data” (St. Pierre, 2013,
p. 226). With or without a recording to cling to—electronically, metaphorically, or
otherwise—that which might be considered the “data” from this go-along is always going to
be more that which the recorder could have captured.

I continue to clutch the recorder in my hand as I move between the glens of Central
Park, still not really sure where I am headed. As MacLure (2013b) posits about the “wonder”
of data, “we cannot know where wonder resides—not simply ‘in’ the data; but not only ‘in’ us
either” (p. 231). Each step away from the spot where I parted from Warby feels at first like
another foot of distance between the ability to analyze what just transpired and myself because without the recording the go-along feels like it has already left my grasp. No matter how firmly I grip the recorder, the go-along feels as if it is already beyond my ability to understand; however, after taking another few steps I recall Warby’s voice recounting a story she had told me just 20 minutes earlier on the other side of the park about growing up with a foster family of a different race than her. They are Black, and she is Puerto Rican and Dominican on her biological father’s side and Panamanian on her mother’s. Warby said she often felt frustrated as a child when others read her as not belonging to her foster family because of her different skin tone. Remembering how Warby had described her family affirms the fact that even though there exists no recording of this moment to analyze, it can still be analyzed. The ability to revisit this moment through a recorded replaying of Warby’s reflections about the racial dynamics of her adopted family may offer a different way into thinking about her go-along, by listening and re-listening to what she said and how she said it. However, this technical snafu makes such listening impossible while also providing a chance to rethink how to approach analysis of the go-alongs. This moment offers a chance to move away from conceptualizing recording devices as “capturing, preserving, and binding the natural setting of an interview [and] as a tool to reduce bias” (Nordstrom, 2015, p. 390). The recording device is helpful in that it allows the chance to re-hear the audible parts of the go-alongs, or at least the sounds in range of the microphone, towards the goal of exploring the verbal content and tone of the go-alongs.

However, even if Warby’s go-along had been successfully recorded, there are parts of it that would not have been preserved by the device. The facial expressions Warby made as she talked about various topics were not recorded; nor were the ways she moved around and
through the crowds of people we passed during the go-along. In an audio recording, one does not notice how Warby was wearing parts of the same outfit she wore the week before during a previous go-along, where we moved many of her belongings from one group home where she had been living to her new residence at a transitional-living apartment run by another youth-focused housing organization. Noting this wardrobe repetition brought a number of questions to mind: *Was this just her favorite sweater? Was this her only sweater? Had she not yet unpacked from the move, and this was one of the few outfits she had access to? Had one of the boxes she decided to leave behind in the move contained her other sweaters, so this was just the only one she had left?* How to think about what she was wearing today—and what her clothing choices might reveal about her gender identity, housing status, financial stability, and so on—was as much a part of the go-alongs as what Warby said about the topics discussed during them.

This non-recorded go-along with Warby feels like it is both spooling and unspooling around me as I continue to trek through Central Park before finding a way out to the street along Central Park South. Though I continue to keep my fist clenched around the recorder in hand, the *data* from Warby’s go-along continues to escape the futile attempts to grasp it.

* * *
It is a rather slow Friday afternoon at HMI. All of the youth in the space for today’s programming are seconded in closed groups or are devoutly working on their art projects in the Open Art Studio. With the receptionist out sick, I am covering the Front Desk. Finding it to be unusually quiet tonight, I decide to take this rare moment of stillness to do some writing. I pull out my collapsible Bluetooth keyboard from my bag and rest my phone against the receptionist’s computer screen. After it pairs with the keyboard, I start to furtively type while words appear at a rapid pace on my phone’s screen. It is as if I was trying to test the strength of the connectivity of the two devices with my speedy typing. As often happens with my field notes, I start with one thought and let it flow out, trying my best to get out of the way of the information that wants to flow from my brain out of my fingertips.

In this moment, the go-alongs are front and center in my mind. Specifically, now that the study is halfway done, I am plagued with the pesky question, *Are the go-alongs working?* This is a question I know I am not supposed to ask but that lingers nevertheless in the back of my head, refusing to be ignored. This little morsel of thought forms when I let myself stay in reflection mode too long, turning what started as a careful exercise in self-critique to an often paralyzing shadow of self-doubt. I want to figure out the real question at hand, as I know whether or not they are “working” is not a fruitful query. Perhaps, the questions should be one of the following: *What is going on in these go-alongs? What am I going to do with all these recordings and notes and memories?* In this light, perhaps the worry stems from how I will analyze and write about all the experiences produced during the go-alongs given that, if the current pace continues, the project will produce over 50 hours of recordings of the go-alongs. I also realize that this worrisome train of thought is one my supervisor keeps telling me to avoid until fieldwork is complete. Heeding her advice, I take this moment to reflect instead on the original theoretical
and methodological intentions of the go-alongs and why they were selected as a vehicle to experience and represent youths’ lives, a mid-course assessment of sorts, a way to see where the project had wandered in relation to how it had been designed to work.

The go-alongs were specifically devised to take place amidst the currents and forces that shape and reshape youths’ lives. In place of a singular ethnographic “field,” often understood as the site of observations and interviews methods, “go-alongs” (Kusenbach, 2003) were selected as the primary data-collection method for this project in order to “accompany individual informants on their ‘natural’ outings, and—through asking questions, listening and observing—actively explore [the] subjects’ stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment” (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 462). The location and time of each go-along have been determined by the participant, with each of us either communicating in person at HMI or via text message or email to set up the appointments. The go-alongs have happened along sidewalks and through intersections and crosswalks in four of the five NYC boroughs. They have taken place mostly in Manhattan and then roughly an equal number in each of the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. The go-alongs transpire along almost every MTA subway line, including to the terminal stations of many lines in Brooklyn, Upper Manhattan, and the Bronx. They have spanned various neighborhoods from the Upper West Side to the Lower East Side of Manhattan, from East Flatbush, Brooklyn to Parkchester in the Bronx, from Elmhurst, Queens to all the way to the famed Coney Island. They have included spending time in various parks (Central, Tompkins Square, Washington Square, Union Square), a gym, public spaces (Lincoln Center Plaza), three different libraries in two boroughs, and a variety of businesses, including clothing stores, an adult novelty store, a post office, restaurants (a Brooklyn calzone shop, an Arby’s on 14th Street, a café in the West Village), the Nintendo Store in Rockefeller
Plaza, and various comic book stores along Saint Marks Place in the East Village. Some go-alongs were stationary, taking place in spaces where youth pass the time while sitting still in public libraries or parks between the opening hours of their group homes/shelters and youth agencies they access. Others were more activity-based, in places where youth to do a certain activity: clothes shopping, grocery shopping, going to the gym, getting an employment-related drug screening, moving boxes, cancelling a money order, shopping for outfits for an exotic dancing wardrobe, running various errands, or just wandering about town. Additionally, some go-alongs were more transitory in that participants asked me to accompany them as they journeyed between home, school, work, or other activities.

The choice of mobile methods is a purposeful response to calls for a recommitment to the importance of place in qualitative research (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015a), as well as others for “sensuous” analysis of the ways social subjects move through and come to know the world (Edensor, 2010; Low, 2015; Pink, 2007, 2008). It reflects a commitment to account for both the meaning TQG youth imbue into the places that they inhabit and what it feels like for them to be in said places, including ways they express these feelings that may or may not be verbal. Go-alongs have been used by scholars to understand the mobile practices of a variety of groups and communities (Carpiano, 2009; Garcia, Eisenberg, Frerich, Lechner, & Lust, 2012), including some researchers who utilized them within youth populations (Holt, Lee, Millar, & Spence, 2015; Holton & Riley, 2014). This body of work pushes habits of research to both take place in locations of import to participants and focuses on the importance of place itself and how it is constituted through participants’ experiences. Where I extend this method, however, is to move beyond a focus on the verbal aspects of the go-alongs. Throughout much of the go-along literature, there is a focus on the verbal communications between participant and research as
being the sole source of “data” to be analyzed as evidenced in the data analysis sections that describe the interviews being transcribed, coded, and themed. What is lost, then, is the “data” that is not voiced, the silences, the glances, the gestures, the pedestrians braiding through our paths, and the non-verbal noises of the city that are drowned out when analytical lenses focus solely on the words coming from participant’s mouth and not on how what they are saying is a product of the worlds through which the move (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009; Mazzei, 2007; Spyrou, 2011). Such a focus on more “sensuous” analyses of go-alongs is an acknowledged lack in this body of work.³ Go-alongs in this study, then, are understood to offer more than just a different type of verbal conversation; rather, a “key point then is the way that go-alongs in their different forms assist recollection by connecting participants and researchers with the materialities of doing” (Spinney, 2015, p. 236). The go-alongs, as a research event, are both about what was said and what was done/what happened.

A great number of the go-alongs started or ended at HMI, though none of them have been completed in HMI itself. The centrality of HMI cannot be underestimated, both for what it offers to the study and how it serves as a limit for this study’s exploration of youth. Being able to utilize the agency’s space as a home base for the study has been an asset that has made the recruitment process significantly easier than had other methods of finding participants. Furthermore, it has supplemented contact with participants, including being able to schedule go-alongs face-to-face when I run into them at HMI rather than trying to work out timing from afar via various forms of tele- and digital communication. However, that all the participants are members of HMI must be acknowledged as affecting the study as it means that youth who do not know about HMI or chose not to access its services are automatically excluded. Not included in

³ Margarethe Kusenbach, personal communication, September 25, 2016.
this study then, are the experiences of youth who lack a connection to HMI (or a similar agency) whether it is because they do not know about it or because they do not choose to access it (perhaps, they went to one and did not like it; they do not get along with other youth who do access HMI’s programming; or they choose to avoid it for whatever reasons).

Choosing HMI as the study’s home base of sorts was a decision not solely based on my previous relationship with the agency, but a decision also based around concerns in securing ethical approval for the study. Institutional research ethics approvals for studies with young people face far more thorough review because young people are often considered populations that are more vulnerable to harm by researchers or the research process (Wilson & Neville, 2009). My documented connection with HMI was substantiated via a letter of support to the ethics review board in order to demonstrate that my work had the support of a well-respected youth service provider. That HMI continues to be a starting or ending point for a number of the go-alongs speaks both to the significance of social service agencies in the lives of these youth; like a park bench or a library computer terminal, this space offers a place for youth to be and exist and can often be an escape from the currents of the city. Alternatively, that all youth in the study have a connection to HMI must also be considered when analyzing how they move through the city, given that all participants have knowledge of and are able to access this space that provides a large variety of services and often just a place to be. HMI’s location in Greenwich Village, near the ever-expanding New York University (Berger, 2012) is of note, as most of its members—at least those who have housing—hail from neighborhoods that are upwards of an hour away via public transit. While HMI used to be located in the West Village near Christopher Street and the Christopher Street Piers—both important though fluctuating places in queer and trans New York history (Chauncey, 1994; Hanhardt, 2013; Valentine, 2007)—HMI’s current location is in a
neighborhood that none of my participants live in and, furthermore, that they only access to visit HMI. Since many go-alongs started or ended at HMI, it is important to consider how the placement of TQG youth serving agencies within urban centers in North America and, more specifically, in neighborhoods not frequently accessed by youth of color, speaks to the shifting knowledges about which neighborhoods are considered “safe spaces” for TQG youth (Hanhardt, 2013; Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2014) and how their everyday experiences are affected by their journeys to and from HMI itself.

The go-alongs allow both the observations of youths’ everyday moments alongside them (albeit through my own lenses) while being able to discuss, interpret, and analyze them in the moment. This, rather than talking to young people about their everyday experiences in the abstract from an interview location of no importance to them, allows the research to take place in places of significance to the young people’s daily lives. As a type “walking interview” (Evans & Jones, 2011), the go-alongs disrupt, in part, the normative power relationships imbued in traditional, stationary interviews (Jones, Bunce, Evans, Gibbs, & Ricketts Hein, 2008, p. 3), since participants determine where the research takes place, which in turn allows the movements and the locations to determine the conversations. Walking and other forms of being mobile “can be an embodied and sensory way of enacting research” (Truman & Springgay, 2016, p. 259). Moreover, “walking and walker’s bodies bring with them their own politics, cultures, histories, habitual responses and lived experiences that must be taken into account (Macpherson, 2016, p. 426). The go-alongs intend to disrupt the imbalance of power inherent in the researcher/researched relationship by accounting for those responses to and experiences with the city as youth move through, around, and amidst it. A distinction between go-alongs and walking interviews, generally, is that in locating the research where youth spend their days echoes calls to
take seriously and think critically about issues of place in qualitative research (Edensor, 2010; Pink, 2008; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015a). Placing the research within the currents of the participants’ lives forces the researcher to notice how the youth move through the world and how the world moves around them. Moreover, the go-alongs make it possible for both the participants and myself to “unearth mundane details too trivial to think and talk about during more formal research occasions” (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 470). Beyond offering the times and the spaces for me to move alongside youth in new and different ways, the go-alongs create opportunities for both the youth and myself to move alongside and be in distinctively-oriented relations to the everyday aspects of youths’ everyday lives. This allows for observation and examination of the commonplace actions, thoughts, interactions, and moments of everyday life that might not arise if the interview were to take place in a location that held no meaning for the participants. The go-alongs provide times and spaces that prompt different responses from the youth, as well as prompting me to ask different questions and to ask questions differently. Given that the everyday is relational, what is “everyday” to any particular youth is only discernable by knowing about their relationship to systems of power, flows of affect, and how they experience the city-world around them (Low, 2015).

During the go-alongs, I have allowed participants to set the pace, thereby inspiring reflections on how it felt to be with the young people during everyday moments. I pay particular attention to my body’s speed (I am a notoriously fast walker) and positioning as we move about the city; some young people ask that I walk even slower. When we stop at a red light, I ensure that they take the first step when it turns green, and I let them walk through a door or into a subway car first to follow their lead. These are attempts to allow them to set the direction of the movements, recognizing that my body language, concerning when to cross the street or where to
sit on a train, might be different than the participants. Such recognition is to ensure that my body (and my knowledge of how to move through the city) is not leading the way as we walk and talk. Walking with the young people has prompted consideration about how walking itself is normatively considered to be “an unquestioned form of movement through the city, often unnoticed, and not regarded in itself as being a particularly singular or insightful experience” (Wunderlich, 2008, p. 126). Such movements with the young people, as well as the moments where the youth are sitting or standing still, inspire new ways to consider what is commonplace and what might not be. Foxxy’s choice to sit between the two women on the subway platform, for instance, inspires a reflection on how they feel able to take up space while being out in public. The act of sitting (and the decision leading to it) is as much a clue into their everyday life as is Foxxy’s response to the question I had asked moments earlier.

The “everyday” is not an obvious concept but “a focus on the “everyday” socio-spatial aspects of cities directs our attention to the creativity of ordinary urban dwellers and the fragmented spaces that nevertheless constitute urban life” (Yi’En, 2013, p. 212). Throughout the study, the “everyday” has been continually elusive. It is not something, somewhere, or sometime one can necessarily gesture to nor ask a young person about as an abstract concept or in theoretical terms. Rather, it is an examination of the everyday, of the everyday aspects of youths’ lives, where both the youth and I experience the research process differently than in more traditional stationary interviews where what they say, how the move, and the ways in which they are in relation to other people and other things are all informative and worthy of analysis. Such methods maintain a focus on mobility as a “space of enunciation” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 28) or a space where one demonstrates how they exist within and are in relation to networks of power. In this regard, when viewed as types of speech acts and methods of collecting/producing data,
movement and mobility demonstrate ways of communicating relationships with the various social processes in the urban landscape. As such, the go-alongs provide an apposite manner for me to be *moving alongside* youth during this research project in way that allows me to investigate the types of dominant knowledges this study intends to disturb.

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“This bitch is on a budget,” Scarlet exclaims leading the way through the neatly arranged clothing displays at Forever 21 in Union Square. Stopping at a neatly arranged rack of button-up shirts, she adds with a chuckle, “I’m just cheap.” On the mission for some new shirts, she pursues the men’s section on the first floor. “Do you like shopping?” she asks, seemingly in my direction while sifting through the rack in front of her. Then, as if her own question had been directed at herself, she continues, “I hate shopping!” explaining that she usually gets pants from the “big girls section” but likes to buy shirts in the men’s section. Zigzagging through the racks and tables of trendy men’s apparel, she talks over the loud, upbeat music piped in from the overhead speakers. I hold up a t-shirt with an extra-long body for her to see. “I feel like that is low-key a dress. Why is it so low?” she says referring to the bottom hem of the shirt meant to hit the wearer’s legs above the knee. “How about some more flannel?” she asks, holding up a flannel button-up for me to see. A beat passes as she looks at the garment in her hand. “Do I not scream lesbian enough already?” We break into laughter together, and I confess that I had held back from making the same joke. “You made it with your eyes though, Sam! You made it with your eyes,” she scoffs back. She looks over the shirt again before resigning to put it back on the rack. “Alright, I’ll control my lesbian urge,” she remarks wistfully before moving to the next series of garments on a nearby table.

Within the first ten minutes of milling about the merchandise, Scarlet asks twice about how I am doing; first about what I had done that morning and a few minutes later about my week in general. Her inquiries seem sincere, not just a formality or arising from feeling the need to take up space in the conversation. Scarlet asks in an attempt to continue forging a relationship with me. Already, she and I have formed a jovial bond, which traces back to our time at the gym together during Scarlet’s first go-along. The physicality of moving around the gym many weeks
earlier, lying in different positions on the machines, grunting as we lifted weights, and sweating together after running on the treadmill, transformed the experience of doing research for both of us. Perhaps, she decided on the gym go-along to test how serious I was about doing research with her and to see what I would and would not do. Perhaps, she just needed a workout buddy or read my body as one that frequented a gym, supposing I might be able to give her a pointer or two. At the gym, she had inquired into my dating life, wanting a detailed reason as to why I did not have a boyfriend. When I asked her why she wanted to know, she responded after finishing a set, “[You are] a grown ass man. You have a job, you have a place, you have, you know, the means. Why don’t you [have a boyfriend]? I’m not pressing you, I’m just trying to understand.” Indicating in that moment that I appeared to have “it all,” she read me as successful, as having my life together, and as such was perplexed that I would admit to being single. Her view of success—and how, for her, “success” seems to be intertwined with notions of reaching adulthood—is one of a package deal that involves securing work, a place to live, financial stability, and love, and securing them all simultaneously. In her reading of my circumstances, she had difficulty understanding why, if I possessed most of those success-markers, I did not then have the complete set. Her implication here aligns with the notion that Halberstam (2011) calls the “fantasy of future wholeness” (p. 138), the assumption that Scarlet is not yet whole, but someday will grow up to be so.

Her questions reflect her positioning of me as securely “adult” (and as a secure adult) and of her own body as something different, as not yet having reached a sense of terminal adulthood. She views herself as being in the process of finding her path towards those indicators of “success.” Furthermore, her recognition that she has yet to achieve them and, by her admission, that she is not yet sure how to get herself on a path to achieving them, places her in this category
of not-yet-adult. Despite her no longer being a teenager, she has yet to fully realize her status as adult (Roberts, 2011). It is a concession that she does not see herself as an adult, that there is work to do and room for her to grow before she will consider herself a grown-up. Nevertheless, her line of questioning between sets at the gym also revealed an intention in her decision to take part in the research or in wanting to spend time with me. Given her recognition that she needs to accomplish certain tasks before becoming a full adult, when the opportunity presented itself to spend time with someone who she views as adult (and as having some or all of things she desires), she took it. Her questioning of and inquiries about my life is an effort to gain insight into what it takes to be or how to become a “successful” adult.

A few months have passed between that go-along at the gym and this one now at Forever 21. Though we have seen each other multiple times a week in the interim during HMI programs, Scarlet has been spacing out the go-alongs over the course of many weeks. This shopping trip was set up this morning when I awoke to a text from her, asking if we could do a go-along today. The 5:59am time stamp of her request made me wonder if she had been up all night or if perhaps she had been woken up early by her abuelita coming into the living room where Scarlet sleeps on a futon. This living arrangement is a temporary one before she leaves for her AmeriCorps placement out of state in July, a move about which she is both excited and nervous and one she sees as potentially offering a next step to adulthood, a positive advancement in her life development and a sign that her life is making a progressive step forward.

Leaving Forever 21, she leads the way down the block to Burlington Coat Factory. After zooming up the giant series of escalators, we make our way through a series of long racks filled with discounted men’s shirts. Drifting past the rows of clothing at different speeds, we sometimes start speak to one another without realizing the other might be a row or two away. It
feels very easy to be with her, like I am hanging out with a friend. My penchant for shopping
puts me even more at ease, as shopping for and with friends is a regular occurrence in my
everyday life. Quickly though, it becomes clear that *my* everyday (something that is perhaps
“normal” or routine for me) means something very different for Scarlet. Pulling a hanger from
the rack, I hold up a color-blocked button-up shirt for her to see. The two-toned shirt is white on
top and then navy blue from the middle of the chest down. She looks at it for a moment before
giving her evaluation that seems to connect to more than just this one shirt:

*See, it would be great if I didn’t have boobs, right? That would be the ideal life, to be a
flat-chested lesbian. But I have these bajungas on my chest, that if I wear a cut like that…
it’s a wild time…I tried a binder before, and I’ve never felt my insides touching each
other’s organs so much in my life. I could only wear it for a couple hours. So shout out to
all trans people who do it…and those who don’t.*

In referring to the shirt’s color scheme, she gestures the color blocking would hit her right in the
middle of the breasts. She knows her body and how clothes fit on it, and she is especially aware
of how clothes designed for the “male” form fit on her shape. Her desire to be flat chested would
allow the shirt to hang flat on her body rather than have the point where the color changes lay
right over her breasts, making them appear to be even bigger than they are while signaling that
the shirt was not devised to fit over her type of body. Her desire to be a “flat-chested lesbian”
shows her longing for her body to be different without signaling the need to transition genders.
The experimentation with a binder—Scarlet shares she had once borrowed a friend’s—leads to
her conclusion that dealing with her breasts is more desirable than trying to modify her body to
hide them, whether temporarily or permanently. Additionally, she recognizes the hardships
experienced by (while also distinguishing herself from) both transguys who bind and transguys who do not.

Scarlet’s expression of her gender identity can be considered alongside those other markers of how she envisions her future (and hopefully “successful”) adult self, meaning that her womanness is part of how she sees her fully realized self once she crosses the threshold into adulthood. In this moment, her words indicate her identity as lesbian (and woman) despite her wish for more manageable breasts (or perhaps the means to access affordable clothing that would accentuate her body in the way she desires). Despite the expression of her gender and desires for her body, Scarlet makes no indication she wishes to be male or that she believes herself to be trans. Given that her gender expression has veered to be more masculine in the time between when I knew her in high school and now five years later as a participant in this project, I have pondered at various times during the study if she might be leaning towards a transition of whatever sort.

When she had the chance to select her own pseudonym, I wondered if she would take this opportunity for a new form of representation away from her actual name, which is one highly associated with normative cultural representations of womanhood, femininity, and motherhood. At first sight, her selection of “Scarlet” as a pseudonym, however, did not avoid her representation as being caught up with cultural signifiers of woman. Its utterance triggers images; for instance, the consummate Southern belle, Scarlett O’Hara, from Gone with the Wind or exemplification of female immorality in The Scarlet Letter. However, upon further examination, her selection of Scarlet reflects an acute distinction about the confounding she is doing to gender, whether intentionally or not. Regardless of her gender identity, her body is often read as not aligning with gender norms, and she experiences her body in relation to the world in
ways that signify she is transgressive. She is not genderqueer, per se, but she is certainly queering gender, her experiences with bathrooms serving as prime example. She mentioned during the gym go-along that she often stares down women who give her body concerned looks, wondering if she is in the wrong locker room. Alternatively, in relaying the experience where she used the men’s locker room with her transguy friend, it was Scarlet, after all, and not her friend who took the lead in explaining to the manager why he was wrong to confront the pair and question their usage of the men’s locker room. In one scenario, Scarlet is standing up for the fact that gender presentation does not make her less entitled to the women’s room. In an another, she is doing the double-pronged work of being an ally for her trans friend in advocating for his right to use the men’s room while simultaneously challenging the gender-segregation of facilities all together by using the men’s room herself. In a similar manner, her selection of Scarlet suggests a desire to remain in a position that refuses a normative sense of “cohesion” between gender expression, presentation, and identity (Sinclair-Palm, 2016). She can call herself “Scarlet” while embodying a masculine presentation; her yearning for smaller breasts does not make her trans; and she has a response ready to offer to whomever questions her choice to use either restroom.

Most importantly, all of this positioning on her part should not be considered part of a youthful exploration, regardless of whether or not it shifts with the passing of time. Where she is in this moment with her gender identity, expression, and presentation should not become invalid as she “grows up,” regardless of whether or not her presentation or identification changes over time. Her current consideration of how she views her body and identity in relation to the world lands

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4 In turning to Sinclair-Palm’s (2016) work with trans youth about the processes of selecting their own names, I acknowledge that while Scarlet does not identify as trans herself, this work assists in unpacking the multifaceted deliberations that play out in the work youth to do represent themselves to the world around them.
her within organizing schema of gender and sex and should be validated, not questioned as being part of some sort of partial or fleeting stop on her journeys of and through gender.

This reflection about Scarlet is, to be fair, not about Scarlet particularly. The theorizing about youth and their experiences of expressing and embodying gender is important to avoid the supposition that young people are allowed, to an extent, to experiment with identity and presentation, as long as said exploration solidifies once adulthood is reached (Gilbert, 2014). The association of identity formation as an exclusively youthful endeavor implies that a shift in an adult’s gender presentation might indicate that they are not who they were before the shift, that adults should already know who they “are,” a form of discipline that exists even within some frames that are inclusive of queer and trans experiences. This conceit is important to understand Scarlet’s experiences as “real” and “valid,” even as she sorts out what being “adult” might look like. In order to take seriously her experiences one must not speculate where she might be going or where her presentation and expression might be headed and instead appraise what she is doing in that moment. In this light, her multifaceted determinations of how to move through the world as a gendered being—even with the subsequent frustration she experiences, like the trouble finding clothes she likes—show a keen sense of how she has learned to navigate and exist within the world around her.

While waiting in the checkout line at Burlington, with the one shirt she found to buy, Scarlet explains, “I realized a long time ago, if I listen to everything they say, my life would be different—but not for the better.” In this case she is referring to her family (mainly her mother and abuelita), but the lesson has wider ramifications. She is not saying she does not listen to anything her family says because, like pervasive gender norms, it is impossible to live outside of the disciplinary systems that shape the social worlds within which she exists. However, she does
indicate that she does not listen to *everything* they say. She has developed a system for deciding when and how not to abide by her mother and grandmother’s expectations and orders of her, as well as when and how she subverts or adheres to the administration of gender rules from whichever source they come.

Finishing her purchase, she turns to me and says, “I think we should go to the Goodwill.” Punctuating her statement with a smile, as per usual, she adds, “…with my broke ass!” Our subsequent laughter echoes down the escalator as we make our way out to 14th Street.

*   *   *
Still sitting and typing behind HMI’s Front Desk, I look up from my portable keyboard to say hello to a pair of young people, one of whom is Brian. He waves to me, and continues into the Art Room, his nylon drawstring backpack on his back and black plastic bags in his other hand. I smile and return my focus to my hands that have continued typing through the greeting.

By moving through the city alongside youth, it is possible to witness how they move through, against, around, and with these flows of knowledge production: how Brian figures out how to spend his afternoon in the computer lab; how Scarlet figures out which clothes fit her body; how Yetfounded determines her movements with the help of the map on her phone; or how Foxxy decides to take up space near people they interact with on their journey. Attempting to represent the experiences of research subjects in qualitative research is one such of these forces that too often paints a limited or specifically angled image of youth lives. Giving accounts of the go-alongs should work against desires and impulses for them to read as complete and whole stories about youths’ lived experiences or that there can ever be a neutral account of human experience, itself (Butler, 2005). By allowing the youth to choose when and where I have access to their everyday lives embraces the notion that there are numerous perspectives viewing and constructing each participant in any moment and that my entrée into their lives only allows me access to one small portion of it. Beyond my perspective as researcher—as both observer and co-producer of these experiences—in relation to the youth, there are many other perspectives that make the experience of each go-along possible: the perspective of the other people who pass through or by our orbit as we move; the forces and affects of the physical surroundings—natural or human-made—that shape ways youth move, feel, and think during their everyday journeys; the ever-present discursive systems of knowledge that control how people interact with one another while moving through time and space; and the youth’s own perception of themselves in
relation to the world around them. Rather than attempt to narrate these experiences in a single, linear fashion with one singular point of view or perspective, the go-alongs need to be represented in a way that shows how different perspectives flow in and out of focus as the youth and I move through the city.

The experience of doing the go-alongs centers largely on how attention shifts in direction, intensity, quality, and focus as the young people navigate through their daily lives. As we move and talk (or sit and talk), there are myriad external factors that pull the participants’ (and my own) attention: passing cars, fellow passersby, something in a store window, a text message or phone call, a towering building, or the rumbling of a subway train darting into a station while standing shoulder to shoulder on the platform. We can be in the middle of a serious conversation only to turn the corner and have one or both of our attentions pulled away from what we are discussing to something that comes into view or a topic that comes to mind vis-à-vis something that comes into view after said turn around the corner. The boisterous rumbling of a train into a subway station, for instance, is so loud that it shuts down almost all conversations on the platform until the train reaches a complete stop. These breaks in dialogue sometimes result in participants starting a new thread once the noise nulls and sometimes provide them a break to collect their thoughts and continue a previous diatribe or musing on the same topic. The subsequent change of location after we enter the car provides an instant change in setting for the go-along. Passing through the sliding doors of the train invites a new cast of characters into the go-along to interact with, move around, and be in relation to the participants and myself. Listening to the recordings of the go-alongs, it is possible to hear these transitory moments take place, as the conversations stop and start during moments when the participants and I swipe our
Metrocards to enter the subway, cross the street at various intersections, move through a crowded subway to find a seat, or wander through racks or aisles at various retailers.

As we journey together, the go-alongs become an exercise in paying attention to how and why attention is pushed and pulled in various directions. The flows and shifts of my attention are not understood as distracting, however, because their competing holds on my attention (and my ability to think about and analyze the experiences of the participants) is similarly reflected in the young people. The physical scenery of the city simultaneously influences the young people in the study, as do their emotional responses to moving through it. At certain times and in certain spaces, various perspectives rotate to the front of the consciousness of both the young person and myself. At times, they are talking and I am actively listening to what they have to say, analyzing it, taking it in, perhaps forming a follow-up question. At other times, I am not listening to the words coming out of their mouths. Whether something they say sends me spiraling down a different train of thought or I become distracted by something or someone else we pass by, the other forces amidst the city (the very ones I wanted to immerse the study within) become impediments, at times, to my being fully present with and totally attentive to the youth. In calling them impediments, however, I do not mean they become a necessary hurdle to jump in order to more “fully” perceive the youth. Rather, I see them as part of the research event, part of the experience of being with the young people. Just as the flows of the city affect my relationship to the research subjects and process, so do they alter the experiences of the participants.

During the go-alongs, the participants might drift off from answering a question as they come to a street corner and decide which way to turn. Their attentions are pulled by other people we pass and by objects that come into view. Sometimes, they circle back to what we had been talking about after a brief pause; other times they drift to new topics, never to return. Sometimes
the drifting off is a result of the scenery (something catches their eye or requires their attention, perhaps), and other times it is clear that their pivots are an intentional desiring of a change in topics (perhaps, they do not want to answer a question I ask). Through experiencing the go-alongs (that is, by analyzing the experiences produced by the research process), the process of representing them reflects this necessarily tumultuous task of noticing how and why one heeds one’s attention. Contesting to demand my attention are a myriad of factors, including the following: the youth themselves, assessing their appearance, assessing the places we go, who we pass by and interact with, the content of our conversations, the development of the relationship between the participants and myself, analyzing what they say and what it might mean, managing my own emotional reaction to what they say, managing my own ability to concentrate and stay present throughout the entire conversation, or attempting to take mental or written notes on the fly about moments that hit me as important or noteworthy.

Such work is important as it shows how in any one moment one can switch from a descriptive frame (where one is taking in surroundings based and simply assessing what is in front of them) to an analytical one (where one is scrutinizing either the situation in front of them or something pressing on their mind). One’s ability to make sense of themself and their relationship to the world around them is a nimble dance of multiple frames of reference. Trying to collapse them into one cohesive narrative reduces the multiple processes going on in any given moment to one simplified moment that ignores the relational specifics. Representation of the go-alongs then takes this multiplicity into account, even if this entails letting go of the linguistic principals that govern storytelling. In other words, telling the story of the go-alongs involves appreciating the shifting points of view, including the moments where the shifts seem like jumps in time or like parts of two separate stories.
The go-alongs cannot be illustrated as a having a determined beginning or ending; at least, they seek to describe and analyze moments that are flowing before I start observing them and continue on after my attention continues on elsewhere. The go-alongs should not be depicted in ways that allow them to be read with the intention of gaining a complete grasp of the participants featured in each one. Rather, they are seen as a thread through not just the experience itself but of my experience of experiencing the participants’ experience alongside them. Here, I strike a balance between not wanting to center myself in said representation (thereby re-centering the attachments of Whiteness and other privileges that my body carries) while also not wanting to write myself out of the narrative completely (thereby suggesting that research “data” is just something to be collected, that my witnessing said experiences has no impact on their happening). Such a balance, however, is not act that can reach a poetic conclusion. According to Carol Stack, on writing her Whiteness, “[w]e are unconvinced that any attempt at clarifying our positionality does more than situate the perspective from which we believe we are ‘writing culture.’ The goal is to explore and experiment—to learn and write as much about our own understanding of how we locate our voice in our writing as possible” (Stack, 1993, p. 81). Writing about the experiences from the go-alongs and the role my presence played in shaping them is part of the process of unpacking them, of seeing what emerges now as I type in comparison to that which came to mind in the moment. Neither is more “true” or “real,” nor can any representation of the go-alongs paint a whole, unified picture of a young person so that the reader of this account can come to the end of a narrative and think, “Now I understand this young person.” Rather, they are crafted for the reader to better understand the pieces, the flows, and the affects, and the currents that combine to become “an experience.”
My relationship with each young person can also be examined through the ways in which they are represented. Some participants have turned the questions back to me, demanding that I be as open and honest about my life as I am asking them to be about theirs. Scarlet employs this tactic more than anyone else, frequently asking me about my day or why I do not have a boyfriend. She seems to be asking me to be as much a part of these experiences as she is. Some participants direct the entirety of the go-alongs themselves as if they are a monologue. Foxy is invariably mid-sentence before I even turn on the recorder, and the questions I ask are usually only to clarify something they have already said. Some participants, like Brian, only answer questions in short sentences, letting silence grow between questions, demanding that I ask another, or maybe implying that I refrain from this action.

Some young people I know better because we knew each other when I used to work at HMI before graduate school, and others I am only just now getting to know for the first time through their participation in the study. Some seem keen on letting me into their lives, and others seem to hold me at a distance, though they agreed to participate in the study out of a stated desire to help educate others about queer, genderqueer, and trans youth. As such, some youth provide “answers” to questions about how and why they come to make the decisions they make. Whether in the form of verbal answers to my direct questions or because of their openness and candor, I am able to surmise certain aspects about their life through their actions and innuendo because of the relationship we have developed. Other youth keep me at a further distance, forcing me to read and represent our interactions in different ways in order to understand and account for the space between us. As each youth comes to the research project for a different reason, these reasons shape how and what they are willing to share, thus adding to the complexity of the narratives; what they share is not all they have to share, but what they decide to share with me.
So, the accounting of what can be learned from the youth during the go-along must take into consideration that they only share what they share with me and not treat what they share with me as being representative of wholeness or of a complete picture of what youth are all about. While certain snapshots of their lives may be visible through the go-alongs, taking stock of a few images does not mean one has seen the whole album.

My stream of consciousness writing is interrupted by the startling beep of the front door intercom, and I pull my hands from my keyboard for the first time in minutes to buzz in the young person waiting downstairs to enter the building. Just then, the phone rings as two staff members walk in off the elevator and another walks behind the front desk to relieve me, answering the phone for me in the process. A group of youth, finished with their art projects for the evening, comes barreling through the lobby with an explosion of laughter, ready for HMI’s nightly dinner service. Brian trails behind, still carrying his bags, and again waves to me with a bright smile. Hi Sam! I return his salutation with a smile. Just before he rounds the corner out of the lobby, he turns back to me. You know I’m still thinking about your project, but I have a lot going on this month, so maybe we can start it next month? Yeah, I think next month would be good. I didn’t want you to think I’d forgotten. After reiterating I would be happy to have him start whenever he likes, he nods and continues his stride out of the lobby to get his dinner.

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Just a few moments into the go-along, John asks, “Can we walk slower?” Even though I started the go-along with the intention of walking slowly as to let John set the pace, said efforts do not seem to have sufficed. As we continue to move down Church Avenue in Brooklyn, the difference in our walking strides starts to highlight differences between us. It is but one of many divides affecting how John and I are able to experience the scenery passing us by. It is impossible to know how passersby read us walking together—an adult White man and a Black, teenage, gender-fluid person who is often read as, and assumed to be, female. Walking through a predominantly Black and West Indian neighborhood in Central Brooklyn, the active sidewalks are lined with pedestrians, almost all of color, filtering in and out of businesses, as well as the occasional group of young people of color, presumably just leaving one of schools in the surrounding area.

John begins to explain they are on the verge of not passing the classes they need to graduate high school by the end of this term, which is less than a month away. John’s guidance counselor called them last week to explain that John needed to do extra work by the following week to get their grades up in order to pass. John mentions that, after circulating through their teachers, they are not convinced that the teachers are taking the request seriously. Confessing to currently have a 12% in their Math class, John explains that their math teacher only provided one single extra assignment. While math has always been John’s “worst subject ever,” John incredulously outlines their suspicions that the teachers are not doing enough to ensure John will be able to graduate. “It was frustrating when I was like, ‘Are you taking this seriously? Like, is this a joke?...’[The math teacher] kinda had a flippant attitude and I was like, ‘C’mon man, I’m trying to graduate. You know I’m a good kid!’” The hailing of “good kid” connects to John’s awareness that certain constructions of youth are aligned with positive attributes and others with
negative ones (Adams, 1997; Lesko, 2012), that it is beneficial to their wellbeing to be known as a “good kid” or good student. In trying to prove themself to be a worthwhile student, John is working against the normative habits of thought controlled by hetero- and gender-normativity (Stiegler & Sullivan, 2015) and Whiteness (Castagno, 2014), which pathologize certain experiences of queer, trans, and racialized students. John then lets out a long sigh and, after a beat, adds, “I would have felt better if he’d given me a mountain of work.” Having already been accepted to one of the two-year colleges in the City University of New York (CUNY) system for the fall, such a setback would be disappointing for John.

Passing the street where John’s boyfriend lives, John points down the block to gesture towards his apartment complex. Recently, there was a period where John was not allowed to visit him. “His mom saw us cuddling,” John explains. “I like to be very proper…when it comes to being around his mom and being in public, in general, so I didn’t think that the cuddling was a problem. But I guess she saw that, and she was just not comfortable.” John had recently smoothed things over with the mother and was now allowed, once again, to visit the apartment. “He just has to ask [his mother], and she’ll usually say yes, unless I was just over the other day.”

Mentioning how I imagine many young people do not have a place they can hang out with a partner, especially a place where they are free to be affectionate and intimate, John immediately nods their head in affirmation. “Yeah, it sucks! It sucks. It sucks. It sucks. Especially places that are free and cheap. Like you can’t go to the movies all the time because you know in New York it’s like 40 bucks, not including food.”

A few steps later, a McDonald’s across the street prompts John to admit that they wanted a McFlurry but knew their boyfriend would be mad if they did. After asking why, John looked at me with a facial expression that either indicates I had missed something big or that they had
failed to disclose something significant. “Oh…” they exclaimed either with a bit of surprise that I did not know already the answer or, perhaps, a bit apprehensive about having to explain, not sure how I would respond. “Are you aware of BDSM? You’re aware of, like, sometimes if you’re in a consensual BDSM relationship, you get rules and guidelines and stuff. So it’s not heavy BDSM, but if I know if he wouldn’t want me to do something, I don’t do it.”

John goes on to explain the guidelines they have set out for their relationship. While John had experience with BDSM with an ex-girlfriend in Florida, this dynamic is new to their boyfriend and something John has been encouraging him to explore further throughout their six-month long relationship. The tenets they have agreed to focus mainly around John, as the submissive partner, making choices about fitness and diet because their boyfriend requires them to do it—for instance, not giving in to the temptation to get a McFlurry. John explains they are also required to inform their boyfriend if someone else hits on or makes a pass at John. “I don’t call him Master or Sir, but the framework is there,” they explain, implying that while their “Dom/sub” dynamics may not always be visible there is an understanding of the roles they play in the relationship and that they come from a place of respect and trust. Going on, John adds, “And it’s very equal. Like I can’t lie, but he can’t also lie.” John’s boyfriend, according to John, is stronger willed and more able to focus on achieving goals, characteristics that John seems to want to aspire to, and expresses how their BDSM dynamics help them move in that direction.

Through practicing BDSM, John is able to better understand their own self. Participating in these “practices that are not knowledge-focused (although they require knowledge for safety purposes) but relational” (Greteman, 2013, p. 263). John’s engagement in BDSM, then, has educational potential to assist John in better understanding themself and how they relate to others. Through
said experiments in relationship building, John is able to showcase how they produce knowledge based on their experiences.

Walking down a long stretch of Church and then Flatbush Avenues, each block or sometimes every other storefront prompts John to change topic with their attention being drawn here or there by the surroundings. “You know, I never walk—never walk home. Usually, I take the train,” John confesses very matter-of-factly a while later. Having met John almost an hour earlier outside after their psychiatrist appointment at a hospital in Central Brooklyn, this disclosure comes after almost 45 minutes of zigzagging side-by-side down a series of streets en route to their grandmother’s house. While it was John who made the original decision to walk home, this declaration halfway through the go-along acknowledges that this journey breaks the cardinal rule outlined by the research project—the go-alongs are supposed to go-along with something the participant would have already been doing. The project’s focus on the “everyday” makes go-alongs an important method as they purportedly offer access to commonplace events and moments in young people’s lives by allowing myself, as researcher, to “follow informants into their familiar environments and track outings they would go on anyway as closely as possible, for instance with respect to the particular day, the time of the day, and the routes of the regular trip” (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 463). While the go-alongs are an appealing methodology, which aligned with certain theoretical tenants of this project, they are not without their limitations. Namely, this project is designed around the concession that my presence in young people’s everyday movements will, in fact, make them not “everyday” because of whatever specific reverberations my body has on their movements through the spaces they travel.

For instance, my Whiteness and maleness stands to provide a certain amount of “protection” when our bodies travel together through spaces where participants often find
themselves under surveillance by various administrative forces. In one of our first conversations with Foxxy, in the middle of my explanation about potential risks of participating, they bluntly explained how my accompanying them on the subway only stood to make the ride safer in their opinion. That other participants expressed similar sentiments highlights how my body is allowed to move through space in privileged ways and that moving through the city with me might allow participants to siphon off a bit of that experience. Moving around the city with me might prevent a sideways glare or catcall from being directed their way; allow them extra time on a park bench before being asked to move along; or extend them the ability to enter certain businesses without being tailed by an employee. Taking part in this research project about “everyday” experience might counter-intentionally provide participants with a chance to break from, even if just for a moment, the routinized aspects of their daily lives through our movements together.

Oppositely, my Whiteness and privilege has the potential to draw attention to the bodies of youth of color while moving through neighborhoods where my race makes me an outlier. As we are currently heading to John’s house, walking through East Flatbush sidewalks populated almost exclusively by Black and Brown bodies, John tells me, “I’ll definitely take you up to my door, so you can see my house. I think it’s a pretty rad house.” It hits me that this will be one of very few go-alongs completed near participants’ homes or even neighborhoods where they live. It stands to reason that my going-along with youth into communities comprised predominately by people of color could draw unwanted attention to them, which, for trans and genderqueer participants especially, might add to the scrutiny they experience everyday from passersby. In thinking about the many youth who declined to participate in the study after I tried to recruit them, it is impossible to know, for sure, their reasons for not wanting to be involved. However, it must be recognized that participating in the study would involve participants letting me into their
lives in very personal ways. For the youth who declined to be involved, then, I imagine their decisions could be based on not wanting to have someone move with them through the city. There could have seemed to be something too personally infringing about having someone (and, perhaps, something about me, specifically) enter into and be witness to their everyday journeys and experiences. Moreover, for the youth who did elect to participate in inviting me into their everyday lives, there have been multiple examples of how their consenting to participate appeared to be a transactional decision—they wanted or intended to get something out of their participation.

Scarlet and Yetfounded have both asked me numerous questions about my life and experiences and exhibited a sincere desire to hear my opinion about a variety of topics. Their inquiries into my own thinking suggest that they want something out of these go-alongs, that while recognizing they might be the subjects of this research project they also believe they could and should receive something in return for opening up their lives for the sake of research. Moreover, their actions offer me insight into their inquisitive nature and show how they both go about learning how to move through and learn about the worlds around them. For Warby’s third go-along, we had met at a café where I was working before the go-along while waiting for her to get out of work. After about 30 minutes of talking, it hit me that we had not moved from the spot I picked out and that we were breaking the one rule I had for the go-alongs—they have to involve doing something the youth would already be doing without me. Sitting in that café was not part of Warby’s everyday experience. Upon arriving, she mentioned she had never been to the café though she worked around the corner. At one point, she expressed considerable sticker-shock at the price of food on the menu, prompting me to sheepishly crumple up the receipt from my lunch lying on the table between us. When I asked her what she would have done if we had
not planned to meet this afternoon, she explained she would have just taken the train home. As we continued talking, I started to wonder if she was perhaps trying to use the study for her own purposes, as a way to have a break from her everyday routines. While I tried to suggest we move and that she lead me to whatever it was she was going to do next, she seemed very content to remain at the café, which we did, talking for the next 90 minutes. Now, in today’s go-along with John, their decision to walk home from the appointment at the hospital seems to be determined because of my presence. Perhaps it is happenstance, or nice weather, or a desire to clear their head after talking to their psychiatrist that leads them to decide to take this walk home, seemingly for the first time. Or perhaps having a companion for the journey gives them the sense of security that they can walk home and break from their everyday routines to explore their still relatively new neighborhood.

Hearing John talk about what they usually do without me as compared to what they are doing as they move down the street with me provokes reflection on what it is like for them to navigate through public space. Trying to research the everyday then, is ever the moving target when accounting for the impact participation in this study has to participant’s daily routines and actions. Nevertheless, the commitment to focusing on the everyday—and the subsequent choice of the go-alongs as method to maintain this analytical focus—entails attempting to think differently about youths’ movements rather to attempting to uncover their “true” everyday moments. The path John walks along follows the exact bus routes they take between home, school, and the hospital, with John pointing out the stops where they get on and off along the way. While I too lack familiarity with this neighborhood, I notice as we walk that we are not taking the most direct route to John’s house and instead are making a rather arced loop through this part of Brooklyn. We seem to be staying on major streets, which are heavily trafficked with
pedestrians and bus routes and lined with well-patronized stores and restaurants, emphasized by John’s echoing of their grandmother’s warning about certain more dangerous parts of this neighborhood. Along the way, John points out places they know and patronize: their boyfriend’s apartment, their high school, where they catch the bus, the library they like but cannot visit because they have too many overdue fines, the Chinese restaurant they like, the Chinese restaurant they used to like but now like less because they found the other one, and many others. These declarations seem to thread spaces together for John as they point to one after another after another. In telling me about them, the geographic relationship between the various places is coalescing in their mind. Sarah Pink (2007) explains that social subjects “are involved in a continuous process of emplaced engagement with the material, sensory, social and cultural contexts in which we dwell” (p. 62). John’s knowledge about the neighborhood seems to be becoming concrete, or at least firming up a bit, as they speak about their surroundings while in motion themself.

Before turning off the main road and onto a side residential street, John points to where they usually get off the bus to walk the remaining blocks home. “This is an area I know really well,” John explains, a confession which seems to imply they are unfamiliar with the areas we just passed through even though in the past hour John has constantly naming a great number of businesses with which they are familiar as we pass them. Rounding the corner, the dwindling of the traffic noises and hustle and bustle of the sidewalk behind us seems to induce an ounce of relaxation in John’s body, and they let out a few sighs. “We’re about home,” they comment, signaling that the road ahead is a bit more familiar than the road behind. This seems to be the part of their commute they usually walk everyday, the space between where they live and the nearest public transit routes. “I’m very glad I walked. This is very healthy…I should do this
more often,” they reflect. John looks down to answer a text message as we approach a corner. When they start to lean forward without looking as if to move into the crosswalk despite the oncoming traffic, I instantly grab their arm to pull them back. “Sorry,” I say while pointing to the red walk signal across the street to justify my unexpected touch of their body. “No problem. I appreciate it ‘cause I probably would have kept on walking,” John replies with a half chuckle as we wait for the light to change. On the next block, we pass a humble, red-bricked church and come upon an adjacent three-story rectory built of the same brick with a thick growth of ivy swallowing almost the entire corner of the edifice. Struck by the sight, I stop walking and notice how the slight wind in the air creates the illusion that the leaves are actively cascading along the bricks. Noticing I have stopped walking, John stops and follows my eyes upward. “That’s beautiful! I wonder how it’s doing that,” they remark with awe as the two of us take a moment to appreciate the green waterfall of ivy sliding down the side of the building.

*    *    *
In the shadow of Lincoln Center, a collection of white cubed buildings, which house some of New York’s most prized performing arts organizations, Dan and Elliod sit under a canopy of trees just off the side of the Center’s central plaza. Their seemingly vague instructions to meet them “under the trees at Lincoln Center” proves blatantly obvious upon arrival here at one of the city’s most iconic structures as the vivid oasis of greenery stands in stark contrast to the plaza’s monochromatic, concrete-tiled pavement. Approaching the pair as I move through the courtyard, Dan and Elliod recline amidst a smattering of other shade-seekers in two of the black, modern, circular chairs dotted beneath the arbor. Their bodies firmly sunken into their respective chairs, it appears that they have already been here for a while and, likely, have no pressing plans to leave. The shadow of the tree branches overhead provides relief from the ever-warming afternoon sun, a respite especially desired by Dan and Elliod, who will spend the rest of the summer seeking daily refuge from the heat. Dragging an empty chair beside the one’s Dan and Elliod have already claimed, I sit down, forming a mini-triangle between our seated bodies, and start to take stock of this world they have carved out for themselves.

Elliod instantly takes the lead in the conversation and explains that before arriving to this (often visited) spot, they had spent the morning at the LGBTQ homeless youth center where they are both members of said agency’s daytime services drop-in center. Elliod also lives in a transitional apartment administered by this agency, while Dan stays at a shelter run by a different group. Both their housing agencies, however, require them to be out of the living space for 12 hours during the daytime. Speaking rapidly, Elliod tells how she attended the center’s trans group that morning, a group focusing on training young people to be advocates for trans rights that also provides job training for its members. Mentioning she will attend the Trans Day of Action tomorrow with this group, there is more than a bit of pride in her voice when she shares
that she has been asked her to speak on the group’s behalf at tomorrow’s rally. Her posture heightens just a bit as she talks, her body seemingly buoyed by her being selected to represent the group at tomorrow’s event. Hearing about his friend’s plans, Dan breaks into Elliod’s story to ask, “Can I go, too?” His head has rotated in her direction, and his voice has slightly risen in volume, a slight but noticeable departure from his usual flat, metronomic affect. This change in tone signals a concern, registering that this is the first he is hearing about how she has made plans for tomorrow without his knowing. Elliod assures Dan that he is welcome to come. “Yeah, it’s for allies, too so we can go together.” Dan settles back into his chair, relieved to not have to fend for himself during his wandering about tomorrow.

“It’s actually been a really good day,” Elliod continues after a short lull in conversation. She goes on to share how, earlier today, she had been talking to a friend who was disillusioned over the wait for an HIV-test result, growing ever sure it would come back positive. Elliod details how she then stayed by his side for the next while as the friend talked about his worries. She had flagged over a staff member at the center, and together they tried to calm his nerves and assure him that, regardless of the result, he would not be in danger of losing friends or the support he had at the center. “I felt that I could be a resource for them, and it proved to me that I should be the youth advocate, that I’m going to do well,” she says, speaking a bit quicker than before. Seemingly making herself happy by retelling the story, Elliod relays her actions earlier today with a firm sense of accomplishment, excited that she had done well by her friend and eager to share the story to her current audience of two.

Her words trail off into silence as she realizes she has reached the story’s conclusion. Looking over to Dan, she sees that he has relaxed well into his chair, his head leaning back, face
up to the trees, and feet kicked up on another chair. A coy smile appears on Elliod’s face as she turns to me and says,

I know you want to talk about what we usually do here, why this is the spot…[Dan] makes me take pictures of him from all sorts of crazy angles, from over there to in front of that statue to in the trees and by the fountain. He makes me get down and shoot from all sorts of angles.

Speaking in a newly animated manner, she points in all directions, moving her body up and down, mimicking the physical toil Dan puts her through to get that perfect shot. Whether or not she intends to poke a little fun at her companion’s exercises in photographic vanity, her efforts leave him unfazed. I turn to Dan, asking him what he does with the photos. He barely mumbles a demure, “I don’t know…” when Elliod sweeps back in before he can finish. “He takes dozens upon dozens of photos and then maybe uses two or three, edits them together, and puts them on Instagram, updates those Grindr pictures,” she adds with a smirk, offering no indication of remorse about talking for her friend, especially now that he has not moved to interrupt her. Whether or not he likes her sharing this information, his lack of reaction seems to indicate that she is not misinterpreting any of the facts.

A moment of silence passes as the wind sighs through the branches overhead. Elliod continues, this time more reflectively and, perhaps, attempting to assure her friend that she was just giving him a hard time. “I think it’s important for a lot of the LGBT community now, like updating pictures and stuff, because I feel like they kinda have the mentality that you’re selling yourself…you need to have good pictures, you need to be, like, look neat and cute. You’ll be more accepted if you are.” After I prompt him by asking if he agrees with his friend, Dan adds that he likes when people like his posts and comments that he looks handsome but then adds that
he does not feel the need to post all the time, even though Elliod’s description of his photo shoots would make it seem like he does—or perhaps he wants to distinguish that it does not mean that he needs to do so just because he does post a lot. Dan describes having varied online presences, including one that he uses exclusively to communicate with family in his home country. In our previous conversations, Dan detailed his tenuous relationship with his family back home. Beyond his not being out to them, they are not aware of the true reasons he left his home country\textsuperscript{5} to come to the United States, reasons he has also declined to share in any more detail with me besides to say he had gotten mixed up with a nefarious character and decided to leave for the United States rather than risk staying. His experiences of being homeless, then, are both on the residential and national levels. Having migrated to the United States complicates his movements through the streets of New York City without a home, especially as the question of whether or not he will be able to stay lingers ahead of him. The intertwined, iterative nature of place and identity makes one’s sense of belonging dependent on how their body is constructed, as having claim to the lands which they occupy or live (Smith, 1993). Having neither a claim to a physical place to lay his head at night nor a guarantee he will be able to stay in the US constructs Dan in national imaginaries as not belonging to the state and in the daily life of the New York streets as someone who is in the way of other “real” New Yorkers. He may be here (whether that “here” is New York or the US), but it is not entirely clear whether he belongs here or if, given his situation, he will ever be allowed to belong formally to the places where he is trying to make his life. Dan’s predicament shows how “settler markings of citizenship unendingly seek authoritative writing, leveraging binaries of legality and illegality to distort the more sophisticated desire for parsed peoples” (Patel, 2017, p. 67). These are not forces that Dan can

\textsuperscript{5} Country name omitted at Dan’s request.
escape; rather, they help show why his relationship to Elliod is so powerful and necessary. She not only provides him companionship but their union assists in giving him a connection to this place, even against the grain of the forces trying to declare that such a sense of belonging is illegitimate.

Reclining in the shade, Dan’s explanation of his family drifts on. It is hard to follow as he continues to speak his train of thought, as the sentences he is speaking seem to lack punctuation. He is speaking low and quiet, more so than usual, and seems to be sinking farther and farther down into his chair as the time passes. It is not clear whether he is realizing as he is speaking that he’s broached a subject he would rather not talk about, or perhaps he is just extra high from their daily, self-prescribed marijuana. Dan and Elliod explained during the first go-along that their marijuana usage helps combat the anxiety of occupying the streets for hours and hours each day. “When I’m not high, I’m always thinking about problems,” Dan explained, adding that being high allowed him to instead focus on finding ways to solve the problems he faced. Elliod had confessed that being high reduced her anxiety about passing as female while walking through the city. “It makes it easier to walk the streets and not worry.” These previous confessions provide context for Dan’s present, mellow affectation and slurred speech. Elliod’s tendency to talk over, for, and about him seems to be an integral part of their modus operandi; their symbiosis includes her being his mouthpiece and him providing the companionship so she does not have to face the streets, and the everyday transphobia, alone. How they came to be involved in the study echoes this arrangement, as it was Dan who I had recruited to be part of the study. At his first go-along, he showed up with Elliod in tow, and she proceeded to provide most of the commentary during the conversation. Afterwards, she consented to be an official part of the study.
Continuing with the conversation about their social media usage, Elliod takes over for Dan on and explains how she posts much less frequently, at least in contrast to her companion. She expresses that unlike Dan, for her it is very different because of her transitions, both her gender transition and her frequent transition in terms of location. A lot of people in her life—some family members and people from the various places she lived before New York City, including living for various time periods in three different states—are only finding out about her transition through the pictures she posts to social media. Elliod’s comments indicate the intricacies about online social media presentation of youths’ lives, especially the ways in which an online presence broadcasts something different than one is able to present in person. Regardless of how she is feeling about her gender presentation on any given day and how it will affect the interaction she might have with people she interacts with, the images she presents online can be curated in a way where she feels (more of) a sense of control concerning how her gender is read. Furthermore, both Elliod and Dan express struggling with the seeming permanence of online postings, which often flattens and truncates the nonlinear and fluid experiences of their bodies and gendered and sexual identities (Aizura, 2012; MacIntosh & Bryson, 2007). Social media platforms stand to provide opportunities for homeless youth to represent different types of images about their lives than they may be able to represent in offline situations and can provide access to information that aides in their navigation of being in the city without a home (Abramovich & Shelton, 2017; McCready, 2017; Walsh, 2014). On one hand, Dan’s frequent photo shoots (as described by his friend and trusted photographer) speak to a desire, especially as a homeless, immigrant youth, to capture moments that appear carefree, well-manicured, and along the lines of a vision of himself that Dan wants to present. Dan has to be out of his shelter for over 12 hours a day and spends a great deal of his day wandering from place to
place. Regardless of how he feels or how he feels about the way he looks, at 8am every morning his feet have to hit the pavement.

The photo shoots with Elliod seem to be an attempt to catch those moments when Dan feels good and feels like he looks good, using the endless supply of dramatic New York City backgrounds to add extra glamour and edge to the portraits he composes. Through curating his online, photographic presence, he works to create and maintain images of himself that minimize any potential stigma about his present housing situation, the thinking being that the production of such images might serve to shift social gazes away from the circumstances that produce Dan as “homeless” or might shift them in a manner that forces a reexamination of what homelessness is assumed to look like. Borrowing from Irit Rogoff’s (2005) provocation to see attempts at “looking away [to] be understood not necessarily as an act of resistance to, but rather as an alternative form of taking part in culture” (p. 119), Dan’s photographic maneuverings become something other than acts of defiance or attempts to undermine cultural norms. Instead of framing Dan’s actions as bold attempts at survival amidst the cultural landscape, they can be viewed as ways of participating in such environments, denuded of negative assumptions. By compelling social gazes to look away from the burdening normative expectations of what homeless youth are assumed to look like, Dan forwards his own self-produced representation of himself as a social subject.

Interrupting her friend again, Elliod lets it slips that Dan sometimes ditches her for mid-day sexual dalliances. Dan explains that during their days out and about meandering through the city, he will from time to time leave Elliod to meet guys for a quick, mid-afternoon hook-up. The photo shoots, then, become more than just a tool for him to secure sexual gratification when he so desires; they also provide him with the opportunity to go into someone else’s house for a mid-
day hook-up, which allows for a brief (“only 30 minutes!”—more beans spilled by Elliod) reprieve from the elements and their daily wanderings through the city. Having “desirable” images of himself for his profile on hook-up apps like Grindr allows Dan to have interactions with men on the app, which might potentially lead to Dan being invited into their homes. These invitations provide Dan with the chance to literally get off the streets, as well as a reprieve from extreme temperatures or precipitation; a chance to use a non-public restroom or take a shower; or just the opportunity to relax and even get some sleep on a bed that is not the foldable cot he sleeps on every night at the shelter. The photo shoots prove to be a critical feature for Dan’s experiences moving about the city. This photographic maneuvering is a result of Dan’s savvy knowledge of ways to inhabit and move through the city while strategically avoiding gazes that constitute him as homeless. The maneuvering also demonstrates the sophisticated ways queer, genderqueer, and trans youth use visual images (Wargo, 2017) differently than the normative constructions often traditionally associated with “selfies” and youth culture. Through his learning to navigate both public and online spaces, Dan is able to carve out opportunities for himself to assist with his ability to survive and thrive while being transitionally housed.

Pushing her blonde hair back behind her shoulders before adjusting the neck of her white t-shirt, Elliod goes on to speak about the control she presides over her own online images. During her transition, she posted selectively, highlighting the journeys she as a trans persons faces in navigating how her gender presentation is read by the people she interacts with on a daily basis. While she admits to being fortunate in having a certain amount of passing privilege—that she perceives the “feminization” of her face and body through hormone treatments has happened faster than with other transwomen she knows—it does not fully absolve Elliod’s worry about the potential ways her body might be gendered by others. The control of her
image on social media, then, is a tactic to exert some power in how people view her body and
gender. However, because one’s online images can have a wide audience, potentially wider than
the one experiences “in the flesh” on any given day, these images can do the work of telling
stories or revealing information, en masse, that one may not have shared on an individual basis.
Elliod’s presence on the internet “must be acknowledged as a potent archiving resource, even as
it is understood to be transient, ‘non-credible’, ‘unreputable’, ‘unofficial’, ‘disordered’” (Chen,
2010, p. 202). While a manicured profile photo and/or well-edited status update might offer a
more hopeful or positive account that contrasts with how Elliod’s life is playing out in the flesh,
such online activities are still important intentions towards one’s self-representation and
maintenance of social relationships (Lloyd & Finn, 2017). Given Elliod’s geographic distance
from her family, images depicting her increasingly feminine dress and longer and longer hair
over recent years has prompted some concerned messages from loved ones. “I’m [Elliod]. Hi!”
she reports responding back, matter-of-factly, not feeling the need to explain herself, her
reasoning for not alerting them to her transition, or the need to “re-introduce” herself post-
transition to relatives who have not seen her since she has been going by Elliod. Her positioning
of her gender identity interrupts assumptions about the way “coming out” is talked about and
shows how what “coming out” means is different for trans people than how it often gets talked
about in terms of one’s sexuality (Zimman, 2009). She is demanding that her body, her
presentation, and her identity do not need explanation, even to those people who have known her
since before she transitioned. She is saying that her transition did not change her rather, it made
her more of her own self.

Elliod challenges the assumption that because she has not been in touch with nor seen
certain family members during the course of her transition, she is thus required to “catch them up”
in certain regards; she is rebuffing the expectation that she has to explain herself or defend her
gender identity to people from whom she has been physically far away. Despite the geographic
distance, the Internet provides a space for her show her relations that while her female identity
may be “new” to them it is not up to Elliod to explain trans identity to them. For Elliod, the
Internet allows her to make her online “archives usable, not as moribund repositories but as
generative resources for identity” (Chen, 2010, p. 206). Via social media, she is challenging
notions of needing to “out” oneself, of needing to have an explanatory conversation with each
family member and friend about how, why, and when she came to know, understand, and
express her gender identity.

Elliod explains that she likes posting videos better than photos, though she does not
overtly explain why. Perhaps, through video she can present a fuller version of herself and her
transition—photos, one could imagine, cannot capture the aspects of her presentation and
expression without the movement and sound that videos allow. For young trans people,
production of online videos that document one’s transition “can be considered ‘archives’ in a
couple of senses: they serve as collections, centrally accessible, around specific themes of
cultural life; and they serve as specific sites of knowledge production” (Chen, 2010, p. 201). She
makes particular efforts to delineate how, through her social media presence, she does not mind
people knowing about her housing situation, but that through her own management of her online
image she wants to shift others’ ideas about what being homeless looks like. “I like to come at it
from a point of strength. I don’t like to feel that I have to avoid it,” she explains, seated upright
in her chair while Dan has slouched further down in his. If, through Elliod’s online archive, she
can portray that she is working hard and taking care of herself, she can thereby help shift social
assumptions about homeless youth. She can educate people in her social media circles of the
stereotypes surrounding homeless youth as being in need of social handouts or not able to take care of themselves. “I don’t feel like I need to hide it, but I want people to know that I’m not struggling,” she explains. “I’m not being needy.”

Shifting to her usage of online dating and hookup apps, Elliod starts by sharing that she has given up on Tinder, a mobile app open to people of all sexual orientations used for dating and sex, after being kicked off multiple times after she was reported for not being a “real” woman. She makes it clear that this was when she lived in upstate New York; she is seeking to contain the transphobia away from her current more urban environment. While Tinder never replied to her requests to intervene, her discussion of these experiences on social media through the hashtags like #girlslikeus, a campaign started by author and activist Janet Mock (2014) to help connect transwomen through online discussions, helped put her in conversation with others who withstood similar incidents. Her experiences as a transwoman on Grindr, a mobile hookup app used predominately by gay and bi men, were quite different. Having used Grindr since the day she turned 18, the minimum age one has to be to use the app, Elliod has always identified as female in her profiles but never experienced harassment from fellow users or been subject to having her profile reported or flagged like on Tinder. She notes that this includes the time before Grindr included “transgender” as a searchable category through which users could see other profiles of individuals who identified as such, a feature which has provided space for many trans women to access these apps, though not completely without issue (Lloyd & Finn, 2017). On Tinder, an app open to anyone regardless of gender, Elliod was flagged for not being a “woman.” While Tinder has recently announced efforts to make the app more trans-inclusive (L. Stack, 2016), its connection to Facebook—one can only create a Tinder account once they have been “authenticated” through their Facebook profile—adds extra challenges for trans communities.
Facebook has long faced scrutiny for its insistence on policies surrounding “authenticity” and naming, the result being that accounts of trans people who change their profile name often get flagged unless they can prove it has been “officially” changed. This hits trans youth especially hard, given the extra challenges they face navigating the normative systems around securing a legal name change (Spade, 2011). Unlike Grindr, Tinder does not allow users to identify as trans in their demographic profile, forcing users who wish to disclose to mention it elsewhere in the profile (Duguay, 2017). On Grindr, however, anyone with a smartphone can create an account; there is no verification of users’ gender or identity, even though the app bills itself as being for men only. Elliod’s experiences on the app might be optimistically read as hopeful; that the users of the app (who are predominately cis-same-sex attracted men) are welcoming of (or at least not abrasive to) a woman’s presence; that Elliod, as a transwoman, has carved out space within a platform that was intended for queer men speaks to innovative ways she is able to take up space in and be in relation to social worlds around her (Lee, 2016). However, as Elliod further describes her experiences, it is clear that such moves on her part are not without consequences; her attempts to queer space while providing some positive connections with other users of the app simultaneously leads to fetishizing assumptions about Elliod’s body and, ultimately, a denial of her female identity—she is just a “male” body presenting in a way that tickles some users’ fancy. Elliod’s navigations of finding intimate connection online exemplifies how trans “individuals remain vulnerable to exclusion from productive sexual exchange, some have uncovered strategies for appealing to neoliberal sensibilities in ways that further their own sexual desires” (Edelman & Zimman, 2014, p. 687). Despite it being a potential landmine for transphobic encounters, online hookup and dating spaces are still a places trans people occupy and utilize to find connections.
Describing how she has historically been quite popular on the app, Elliod reflects that she is often unable to reply to all the messages she receives on any given day. However, the tone of a great deal of the messages she receives shines light on assumptions some users of the app have about transwomen. In detailing the attention she gets on Grindr, she concludes, “You can tell [the attention] is coming from a fetishized aspect, that it is completely sexual; they don’t have an interest in me intellectually.” Her sense is that they care about what she looks like over what she thinks about herself. She describes how men often message her repeatedly, while others send unsolicited pictures of their penises and then respond in outrage when she does not reply. Some go so far as to accuse her of being bigoted towards an entire racial or age demographic because of her lack of reply to their particular message. From these experiences, Elliod feels disillusioned by the assumption of many men on these apps that all transwomen are “sluts and prostitutes.” Despite such negative experiences, she still reports using the app for networking purposes, highlighting how transwomen navigate online spaces where they face hypersexualization in order to forge other connections that validate and affirm their identities (Lloyd & Finn, 2017). While she admits to having previously used online sites and apps for casual sex and for sex work as a self-identified demi-sexual—someone who needs emotional intimacy before sexual activity or before being able to be sexually aroused—she feels that transwomen face a staggering lack of opportunities sexually and romantically, especially with those who do not assume them to be cis-men’s (often clandestine) sexual objects. Elliod credits her transition, that is specifically, her starting hormone-replacement therapy (HRT), with her coming to know herself as demi-sexual and furthermore, as someone who is worth more than just a quick sexual encounter. “I know how fortunate I am to look so feminine,” Elliod admits, referencing the notion that her “passing
privilege,” her ability to be more easily read as woman as compared to other transwomen, affords her certain benefits that make her experiences not a universal one for all transwomen.

As Elliod continues to reveal more details about her dating history, Dan remains seated beside her in silence, only engaging in the conversation when Elliod or I ask him a direct question. Their dynamic becomes more and more apparent: she does the talking, and he provides the company. It could be that he is having a particularly heavy day, and tomorrow might be her turn to let loose and get extremely high while he stays more alert. Regardless, it is clear that they value the act of being together as they find ways to take up time between the opening and closing hours of the various agencies they visit on any given day. Elliod notes the importance of having Dan in her daily life:

When I’m by myself, I’m a lot more anxious; I’m a lot more antsy. I don’t like having the body language of someone who is timid or nervous because then you are a lot more likely to be victimized or, you know, actually have someone come up and fuck with you because you look like you’re fuckwithable. But when I’m with my friends, I feel a lot more confident, and I feel capable of saying what I want to people who walk by or glance by.

Dan nods slowly from his chair in silent agreement, seemingly evermore content with Elliod being his vocal representative with each passing moment. While their current housing situations have the pair sleeping in different boroughs, over an hour train ride apart, they always find one another. Their daily meet-up spot, either here or at a variety of other places they frequent, is often intuited by their memorizing the schedules of various agencies they access, based on what groups are running or which centers are open on certain days. Not always having cellphone or Wi-Fi access, knowing these routines becomes important to ensure they can connect. This spot
“under the trees at Lincoln Center” is, by their admission, one of their favorites. Well-protected from the elements, away from major streets, and cut off from the sizzling concrete jungle beyond the shade of the trees, Elliod and Dan remain seated side-by-side, treasuring their cool refuge from the heat as the early June sun gets into gear in the sky above.

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Chapter 4: Estimated arrivals, contingent landings: The comings and goings of youth

(Photograph 4: Back from the Bronx)
The crisp night air hits my face as I push open HMI’s front door onto Astor Place. It is a welcome, refreshing sensation after a very long day. The day started with a run over Williamsburg Bridge before dashing up to the Upper East Side for a go-along with Brian at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where we agreed to meet outside of the front entrance at noon. Upon arriving, it became instantly clear we should have selected a more specific meeting spot. There were hundreds of people crisscrossing up and down the famed white marble steps into the museum’s main entrance along 5th Avenue, while many more were seated amidst the flows, eating lunch, taking selfies, or presumably, waiting for their own parties to arrive. Scanning the crowd a few times with no success, I moved inside to find Brian. The vast, ornate, vaulted foyer (aptly called “The Great Hall”) was no less hectic; hundreds of visitors buzzed about with scores of others waiting in line to pay their by-donation admission fee. I texted Brian about my arrival, hoping his phone was on, but after thirty minutes and a handful of unreturned text messages and phone calls later, I found myself a floor above the Great Hall, peering down over the railing in a last ditch effort to spot Brian amongst the throng of bodies. After that, I decided to leave but not before taking a quick loop through the Medieval Art gallery.

Checking the time as I exited the Met via the marble steps, I had about an hour before I was due to meet Elliod and Dan across town “under the trees at Lincoln Center.” Circling back around the museum building, I walked through Central Park to take advantage of the mostly sunny June afternoon. Almost two miles later, I found the pair under the trees just like they said they would be. After our chat, I hopped on the 1 Train at Lincoln Center, transferred to the R Train at 42nd Street/Times Square, and disembarked again at 8th Street/NYU to make it to HMI just after they started programming for the day. Now, a few hours later, I am departing HMI for the night and make the decision to walk all the way home. Moving down Astor Place, I turn right...
on Lafayette to head downtown. It may be a Monday night, but the streets are abuzz with activity. I walk through a crowd of people lining up for *Blue Man Group* and see many others across the street streaming into the Public Theatre to make it to their seats before curtain. I pass the Blick Art Material store on Bond Street, where both Axel and Scarlet have taken me on go-alongs, each telling me about their relationship to art as we wandered through the aisles of sketch pads, paint brushes, and the like. Waiting at a red light at Houston Street, I scroll through the data on my iPhone Health App, which shows my daily walking distance. I have walked over 10 miles today (including my 3-mile run). Scrolling further down, my mind scrambles to tally all the miles walked in the past months since coming to New York to start this study, remembering all of the journeys taken in various parts of the city.

Walking the streets of New York has inspired different modalities for looking at the city and its inhabitants. Walking the streets with Foxxy, la Princess, and John, I sense differently the administration of gender in public space (Spade, 2011). I recall witnessing, for instance, Foxxy receiving pointed questioning glances from a stranger when Foxxy was looking elsewhere. However, I strive to ensure that in noting the aforementioned moment through my own cis lens I do not imbue meaning into such an experience that it centralizes my interpretation over Foxxy’s (Mathers, 2017). Standing in line at Wendy’s with Scarlet, I have nothing to say when she asks me which fast food chain’s French fries I prefer after she lists her preferences of multiple chains in detailed order. I cannot answer her question because I lack experience eating at fast food chains and cannot offer an opinion on the subject, thereby elucidating our varying relationships to food and the means we possess to access it. The experience of waiting in line together as Scarlet and I talk about food and then pull our wallets out to pay for our individual meals provides a sense of what it means for her to spend that money, of how she makes decisions about
her finances. Similarly, during a go-along with Axel, he barters with a St. Mark’s Place vendor over the price of a rainbow bandana he wants to buy for Pride. Though all of Axel’s previous go-alongs have featured visits to stores—the Nintendo Store, various comic book stores, Blick Art Materials—he has never spent any money, always citing that he cannot afford anything. After a few minutes of debate, he slowly passes the vendor $5 (out of the $9 he has to his name at that moment) and walks away proudly with his new purchase—which he has been wearing every time I see him at HMI ever since. These moments provide intimate viewings of embodied interactions between economics and moving through the city, offering me a chance to see/feel/observe what “it feels like” for Scarlet and Axel to make financial decisions; for Foxy, la Princess, and John to encounter the city through their experiences of gender; and how place, culture, and experience factor into the production of these moments and the subsequent ways I, as researcher, can sense (and make sense out of) them (Sunderland, Bristed, Gudes, Boddy, & Da Silva, 2012).

Taking seriously the task of exploring ways in which “truths” about youth are always more complicated and vivid than they are given credit for moves the notions of “experience” away from only representing specific “truths” about the ways human subjects inhabit and move through the world. Attempts to corral and define the world always already fail to capture the scope of human experience; furthermore, even as society corrals and defines, it is also simultaneously known that the scope of human experience cannot fit within said constructed parameters. As Scott (1991) argues, “…it is precisely the questions precluded—questions about discourse, difference, and subjectivity, as well as about what counts as experience and who gets to make that determination—that would enable us to historicize experience, and to reflect critically on the history we write about it, rather than to premise our history on it” (p. 790). The
study of youth is an apt location for such theoretical shifts about experience because the period of adolescence—the experiencing of the time and space between the discursive and material constructions of child and adult—represents one such location in the social landscape where this rupture of that which is assumed to be “true” is evident. In fact, it could even be argued that the construction of this period of “youth” itself is one such declaration that human experience is too dynamic to be classified through socially constituted organizations and classifications. The concept of youth as a whole should be viewed as an admission by social discourse and well-ingrained normative cultural logics that social subjects do not simply transition from child to adult in a single instant. The existence of youth as a social category reveals ontological and epistemological underpinnings, indicating that transitions from childhood to adulthood includes pit stops, detours, and false starts of human experience often erased from explanations of how the world is oft thought to work.

Youth as a discursive organizing tool is an attempt to cover up the murky, unclear qualities of adolescence as social subjects start to shed the attachments of the “ghostly, unreachable fancy” (Stockton, 2009, p. 5) associated with images of “the child.” Youth works to make sense of an ever-varying and contrasting set of experiences of bodies, whose ages make their relationship to childhood of growing suspicion, and their impending relationship to adulthood grow ever closer yet still just out of reach. It is a group of people of whom society is critical and with whom society meets with skepticism and consternation as they complete this task of becoming adult. There remains a concern with adolescents, which has lingered through various historical eras, about whether or not they will be able to fulfill society’s hopes and dreams for a better future. Present day concerns about Millennials parallel those of Generations
X and Y, the Baby Boomers, and other generations when they fell between the same ages (Lesko, 2012).

Of course, attitudes towards youth populations are affected by more than just age. Viewing youth intersectionally makes clear the ways that youth of color, trans and queer youth, immigrant youth, disabled youth, indigenous youth, and lower-income youth are made sense of in public spheres (Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013; Cruz, 2011; Grady, Marquez, & McLaren, 2012; Reck, 2009; Singh, 2012). That is, some youth bodies are allowed to take languid paths towards adulthood based on privileges around Whiteness, cis-heteronormativity, and the like. Elliod gestures to the advantages she has when she rubs her hands along the alabaster skin of her forearms while verbally acknowledging the passing privilege she is afforded. While never mentioning race directly, she seems to be pointing to the awareness that her alignment with certain racialized beauty standards affords her something that not all trans women can access. While youth bodies saddled with marginalized identities are mandated to take a quicker pace towards adulthood or, in some cases, are never quite deemed to be youthful at all. There are constant pressures forcing trans, queer, and genderqueer youth into certain molds and expectations that they behave in particular ways.

Talking to la Princess during a go-along at a Midtown Manhattan library computer lab, she brought up the recent coverage of certain groups protesting Target stores because of the company’s trans-friendly restroom policy. This coverage coincides with a spate of “bathroom bills” percolating across North America, aimed at barring trans people from using gender-affirming restrooms, showing tears in the assumptive fabric of youth as a universally accessible category. The bills, often targeted at schools and towards younger populations, base their arguments around the notion that trans students upset a sacrosanct reality about gender and sex, a
move that stands to endanger the innocence of young people, carte blanche (Stiegler, 2016). In making said arguments the lived experiences of trans and genderqueer young people—the feelings of discomfort with their assigned sex, the harassment by peers, adults, and teachers of the ways they express their gender, the lack of inclusive medical care available to them—are all made invalid (Spade, 2011; West, 2014) in that they are not even considered to be experiences available to be had by young people. Trans, queer, and genderqueer youth are then deemed not worthy of consideration of being labeled “youth,” even though the people experiencing them “fit” into that category, at least in terms of age. This means that even while trans youth are of an age that is deemed in need of adult protection, their deviations from gender and sex norms make them a threat to the ideas about children and youthful bodies proponents of these “bathroom bills” hold dear.

La Princess expresses a critical perspective about supposedly trans-friendly policies around access to bathrooms. “Even though I’m in the community…I think they should very specific…be very like ‘this is what this means’ because I feel like they put a policy out there, and you read it and make your own interpretation of it. You really have to [explain] ‘this is what this means…”’ She argues that enacting a “trans-friendly” bathroom policy does not make her any safer when accessing women’s restrooms. A policy, no matter how finely or inclusively crafted, does not simply erase the long-standing assumptions about gender’s rigid, inflexible binary, especially in a highly gender-segregated place like a women’s restroom. Policy itself will not stop cis-women from guffawing when she walks into the restroom or from yelling at her to leave, which further stresses the importance of her early morning getting ready routine and the extra burden of having to maintain her desired feminine appearance for all the hours she spends wandering the streets of New York. Her experience of not feeling automatically supported by
policies supposedly created to support her highlights how a “problem-solving approach to policy does not interrogate the discursive practices underpinning the policy or the subjectivities of those who are viewed as the problem in need of solution” (Loutzenheiser, 2014, p. 7). Even a policy with “good” intentions is not guaranteed to affect the experiences of the population it aims to serve.

During this very conversation, I see a library patron come out of the women’s restroom. When this person had quickly passed through my peripheral vision a few minutes earlier, I them gendered as male. Seeing the same person again more directly, I notice that they have a modicum of makeup on their face and they are wearing a flowing, ruffled shirt with billowing sleeves that reads as feminine. Losing focus of what La Princess is saying for a moment, it strikes me how my own automatic gendering of this person proves Princess’s point about the fallacy of policies, even though she herself could not see the person leaving the bathroom from her seat. She has just been talking about the fear of being harassed when using the women’s restrooms while in the very same moment, I witness someone using a women’s restroom whom, I can only assume based on my reading of their appearance, does not do so without some sort of push back. La Princess’s comments about restrooms and policy show how there is no talking about this issue “in the abstract” for her; she does not have the luxury to control when these issues are thrust in front of her to deal with. As a young trans woman of color, she is learning and re-learning how to navigate the complex, discursive systems she moves through and around everyday. Moreover, as proven by my unintentional gendering of the library patron, she does not have control over which gazes land upon her body and how they hail her progress towards adulthood.

Young people do not move along the journey towards adulthood at identical paces, in the same manner, or even along the same path. The experiences of growing up, of leaving childhood
and becoming adult, are more complicated than they might seem. As such, an examination of notions of experience alongside theoretical considerations about the concept of youth itself allows for focus on this aforementioned, often glossed over, fissure in social constructions. By attending to an opening up of “experience,” the concept and category of youth can be better appraised for its disjunctures and disjointures rather than continue to attempt to make it appear seamless, whole, and unified. Youth studies as an academic area of study makes central an inquiry into periods when human social subjects transition from child to adult, the times and spaces in human development when bodies shed the sticky labels of childhood, youth, innocence, naiveté, as well as their material and discursive attachments.

The participants in this study, all of who are between 18 and 22 years old, have all expressed that adulthood still seems like a future destination. Considering Scarlet’s aforementioned pillars of adulthood, the seeming rubric she has used to assess my relationship to adulthood, it is telling that few of the participants of the study would pass this litmus test. When we were at the gym together, she had questioned my positioning—“[You are] a grown ass man. You have a job, you have a place, you have, you know, the means. Why don’t you [have a boyfriend]?” Taken at face value, one can assume that her definition of “adult” is someone who has a job, a place to live, a sense of general security, and a partner. Applying this metric to the young people in the study, Yetfounded would come the closest, as she has a job (she works as an event photographer), an apartment she pays for with money from that job (though she wishes she could afford something closer to the city than in far-off Coney Island), she is close to finishing her Associate’s Degree in a field that relates to her current job, and she has a long-term, steady girlfriend. According to Scarlet’s framing, Yetfounded would come pretty close to being considered an “adult.” This claim would be further bolstered by Yetfounded’s sporadic accessing
of HMI’s programs, which seems to involve infrequent drop-ins to talk to veteran staff members who have been her mentors for years or to maybe take in the occasional meal. Her usage seems to be more of the space of HMI and less of the programs. Since she lives in Brooklyn, works in Manhattan, and goes to school in Queens, HMI’s central location (within the scope of the entire city) is an easy spot to hang out between school and work without having to take the hour-long train ride home. She may not need anything from HMI per se, but since she has yet to age out she utilizes it as a place to recharge during her long days.

Yetfounded is the only participant in the study living on their own in a private apartment; all of the others either live with a family member or in a transitional living facility, group home, or shelter. Yetfounded, Warby, and Anna are the only ones who hold jobs (in formalized economies, at least) that are not paid internships through HMI or other youth agencies. Most participants have been relatively stably housed during the study, meaning they had consistent (indoor) places to sleep. The only exceptions were Warby’s moving twice to different group homes (a seeming non-event from her perspective) and Anna’s frequent oscillation between staying with her aunt and staying with her mother. However, almost all the participants have experienced periods of being homeless or transitionally housed at some point in their lives. Even those who have always lived with family—Axel, John, and Foxxy—expressed their queer and trans identities as being major sources of tension with their guardians, which often made their living situations uncomfortable, if not almost unbearable. In terms of education, John and Axel are close to graduating high school and Yetfounded, Warby, Anna, and Foxxy are all enrolled in college or university—all of them in the public CUNY system. Besides Yetfounded, only Warby had a long-term partner, but they broke up during the course of the study. Using Scarlet’s frames of adulthood, though hastily measured here, suggests that the participants in the study fall within
the hazily constructed bounds of “youth.” Though they all are of legal age of adulthood, they have yet to meet the markers that go along with such a designation, at least according to Scarlet’s metric.

Theorists and researchers in youth studies have highlighted how these processes of “growing up” and “becoming adult” are constructed within regimes of truth about age, gender, sex, race, sexuality, class, economics, governmentality, education, citizenship, and science (Lesko, 2012; Lesko & Talburt, 2012; Mayo, 2006; Talburt, 2004). Reading “youth” in this way highlights people whose ages fall within this supposed intermediary group between the sharp confines of childhood and the expansive field of adulthood. This field of study also seeks to explore how this concept of “youth” became and continues to become a concept in social, political, and cultural thought. It questions certain normative timed markers that are thought to indicate when someone is supposed to accomplish a mandated task and furthermore explores the multiple impositions that are levied against someone when they fail to meet expectations. This theorizing takes seriously the charge to disengage from the tendency to coalesce around unitary, cohesive definitions of what, where, and who youth are supposed to be and instead focuses on the ways in which the experiences of social subjects often deemed as “youth” play a role in producing and reproducing normative knowledge about the process of reaching adulthood—or how they are able to chart out a future for themselves in whichever direction. These expectations are commonly and easily pointed to and relied upon, but their origins and existence are too-frequently assumed to be part of a seemingly natural human fabric rather than a guise we have all been asked to wear. Sitting next to Anna on the train, she reconciles the hectic qualities in her life as being part of the struggle she has to endure to achieve a better (adult) future. She reflects on her history of being involved with older men as something she should stop now that she is
getting older. Pushing back on sexual norms around age—that sexual partners should be near the same age—Anna is positioning her youthful sexual and romantic encounter with older men as something she no longer desires or no longer wants to desire.

Some of the youth studies cannon grows out of the work of those concerned with education; scholars explore both the ways in which youth bodies, formal, and informal curricula, and institutions of schooling all interact and intersect while also making inquires into knowledge production, subject formation, and pedagogical quandaries that permeate through aspects of social life beyond just those in schools. Youth studies, especially queer and trans youth studies (Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013; Gilbert, 2014; Loutzenheiser, 2007; McCready, 2010; Talburt, 2004), also intersects with work in queer theory that centers on images of the child and futurity (Airton, 2013; Mayo, 2006). This body of work highlights how Scarlet’s pillars of successful adulthood are not a random assertion on her part but rather the result of lessons learned from moving through the world while trying to assess what it means for her to “grow up.” This work examines how anxieties about gender, sex, and sexuality in the public sphere always lead back to concerns for the figure of The Child. That this exalted imaginary concept intersects with discussion of such topics stands to corrupt not just children themselves, but also to affect their paths forward in ways that might disturb our collective futures. If children are our future, then they must be protected at all costs. These are conversations that may seem like ones covered in years and decades past; however, with the recent rise of “bathroom bills,” the recalcitrance of conservative morays are seen to linger despite the securing of certain identity-based rights (Stiegler, 2016). Such work demands exploration of the ways society is invested in protecting the image of the innocent child—regardless of one’s conservative or liberal socio-political leanings.
This study centralizes “youth” as an experience of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is more than just about an age or period of time; rather, youth is about what it feels like to move through this section of life in all of its myriad manners. This focus on the contours and flows of the movements towards this onerous task of being considered a fully realized citizen assists in highlighting how the journey of “growing up” is shaded by the ways one’s body is read and positioned within social hierarchies and how those hierarchies are shaped and reshaped as successive generations are squished into them. The future of Brian’s afternoon depends on the volume of traffic through the computer lab, affecting his ability to carve out moments of stillness amidst his days spent moving throughout the city. Elliod and Dan rely on each other’s company (and a little medicinal assistance) as they wait out the midday sunshine while using the backdrop of New York City to assist in painting photographic proof of parallel, yet more seamless, lives compared to the ones they are living. La Princess envisions her future in a series of mediated steps that she plots out in her head while waiting for just the right moment to jump off the park bench to execute them. Each of these youth has developed their own, unique method for navigating the city and their own determination of how they fit within its ebbs and flows. While they each might fall under the moniker of “youth,” their diverging and specific experiences suggest that the experience of being youth and what it feels like to move towards adulthood is anything but uniform. Such conceptualization demands that all of the so-called “life stages” be viewed as part of normative knowledge systems. That is, child, youth, and adult all reflect certain regimes of truth about what is deemed appropriate for bodies of different ages, but each individual body’s relationship to said life stages must be textured through the multitude of other filters that affect how bodies are perceived and constituted in the worlds through which they move.
Closing my Health App, I realize that trying to count how many miles I have walked is too much work for my brain after such a long day. Checking the time, I see that even though it has long since been dark out, it is just now approaching 8:30pm. As I continue walking towards home, I think about Dan and Elliod, who I saw some hours ago at Lincoln Center and who are probably just now being let back into their respective housing units after over 12 hours of moving about the city.

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Stepping into the Nintendo Store in Rockefeller Center with Axel, the blaring Mario Brothers videogame soundtrack being funneled through the sound system makes it feel like the threshold between the sidewalk and the store is a portal to another dimension. The music so dominates the space that you think you might need to leap over a piranha plant jutting up from the floor at any minute or look up for a coin block overhead. Not two steps past the door, Axel is in total awe. Though he has been to this store many times, it is as if he is seeing the Holy Grail for the first time. He inhales slowly as his eyes widen, scanning the array of figurines, stuffed dolls, and various video game-related paraphernalia with great enthusiasm. “Oh my god, that’s Zelda’s sword! It’s gorgeous,” he exclaims with bewilderment before turning to the next display. “They have sweaters now. How cool. This is all new!” Moving from display to display as we make our way through the store’s ground level, each new character he sees is met with either an “oooooo” or an “oh my god!” Each new sighting prompts Axel to emit an equal level of excitement.

The displays contain characters from various video game, comic book, and/or television franchises. Approaching each one, Axel is able to identify them by name of the character and by the series they are in. Additionally, he knows each one’s story, in intricate detail. At times, he is moving so fast that it is hard for me to follow him, especially with my limited knowledge of and experience with video games. “You don’t know any of these?” Axel asks me, gesturing his hand over a shelf lined with hundreds of figurines of various characters. “Do I know any of these? I know…” I reply, stalling as my eyes circle the shelves full of characters until I finally recognize one: “…Yoshi.” “That’s a good one,” Axel says, but his body is already in motion over to the next display, clearly yearning for the next set of products. I catch up with Axel as he reaches for a Zelda backpack and takes it off its hook on the wall with a smile. Looking at it in his hands with admiration, he inspects the price tag. “How much is it? …$30…Yeah, I don’t have that
much money,” he says in a matter of fact tone. He is not surprised the item is out of his price range, but a tinge of sadness in his voice signals that even though he knew it was going to be beyond his budget there was a small part of him that had hoped he would be wrong.

After a quick five-minute loop around the ground floor, he suggests we go upstairs. I ask him what is up there and, with a growing smile, he responds simply, “Pokémon,” before starting up the steps. His one word response to my inquiry gives the sense that said single word was enough of a description that I should know what awaited us at the top of the stairs. The videogame-themed music happens to crescendo as Axel leads the way up the stark, white staircase, imbuing our ascent with a bit of dramatic flair. Half of the second floor of the store filled is with similar shelves and displays of more and more characters. The other half is lined with a number of TVs, each with a customer or two playing any number of different video games. There are also two wall-sized screens on opposite walls where a customer can play video games with nearly life-sized images.

Axel starts his exploration of the second floor in the displays. He reaches the Pokémon area and swiftly moves through, remarking with wonder as he sees each of the many characters. Watching him say the name of character after character with a succinct description of their powers and backstories, I ask if he would be able to recognize every character on display in the story. “Yes I would,” he says without hesitation, not looking up from the plush toy in his hand that he is currently inspecting. “You know [what videogame or series] everything is from?” “Yup,” he repeats, before seeing another new character and exclaiming with awe, “Oooh, you gotta be kidding me!” This pattern repeats for the next few minutes Axel sees a new character; he reacts with great emotion; I ask who it is; he explains in great detail who it is and where they

6 This go-along took place about a month before the Pokémon Go app was released and the subsequent craze that followed in the summer of 2016.
are from; he looks at the price of the item (figure, plush toy, garment with character graphics on it, etc.); he laments because it is too expensive; he then moves on to the next item to restart the cycle. While he wanted to come to this store for his go-along because he realized he had not visited in a while, it becomes clear that perhaps his visits are not for shopping purposes.

In just these first ten minutes of walking through the Nintendo Store with Axel, it is becoming clear that he has a particular relationship with the myriad of characters he encounters on the various shelves. His vast knowledge of their stories is only heightened by my even vaster lack of familiarity about anything more specific than Mario, Luigi, Yoshi, and Princess Peach. He seems slightly befuddled when I admit my ignorance of many of the video games and comic book series he treasures, but it is not enough to distract him from the series of joyful reunions he seems to be having each time he spots a new character. I intuit from his elated interactions upon seeing various figurines that they mean something more than just creative escapes; these fictional characters are of as much importance for Axel as are the living people with whom he knows and interacts. Axel’s relationships to these characters and stories compel a conceptualization of the “field site” as being beyond the physical world (Burrell, 2009) to include how these seemingly “virtual” interactions affect Axel’s understanding of himself in relation to the worlds through which he moves. He admits that he has come to know these characters through seeing them in video games and television series, but being able to see these characters in the flesh, being able to hold them and pick them up in his hands, feels like a reunion of sorts. It feels like the act of physical connection to the characters is something he craves and also needs, dispelling the assumed binary between virtual worlds and the “real” one (Shields, 2003).

Axel’s experiences with these characters illustrate diverging ways of thinking about how various bodies experience the social world. Thinking about experience in this way, I turn to
Stacey Holman Jones’ explanation of Joan Scott’s foundational essay on experience (Scott, 1991). Jones explains that Scott “asks us to focus on experience as figure and ground, product and process in the creation, differentiation, and conflicts among/of subjectivities, discourses, and social formations. She asks us to generate new ways of reading—and writing—that aim at the nonfoundational, see experience as event, and offer multiple interpretations.” (Holman Jones, 2009, p. 610). This involves unpacking the desire and tendency to package youth lives into certain assumed-to-be truths about their experiences, including understandings of experiences that may, at the surface, seem problematic. It would be easy through certain lenses to paint Axel’s fawning over videogame characters as juvenile and immature, that as a 19-year-old he “should” be investing his time in other pursuits. However, “easy” senses of experience “constrain, erase, or deem aberrant experience that has within it significant insights into non-imperialistic understanding between people” (Lugones, 1987, p 11). For Axel, as a queer Latinx young man, these characters have provided connections that he has been lacking, given the ways he is disconnected from traditional social networks. His queered orientations to seemingly “fantastical” characters reflect the “anticipatory illumination of certain objects [as] a kind of potentiality that is open, indeterminate, like the affective contours of hope itself” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 7). They have helped Axel help make sense of how he positions himself amidst the normative raced and sexual currents of the world that say he should be otherwise.

Axel’s wandering through the store leaves him in front of the giant screen, watching a human-sized Mario run and jump across the screen as controlled by another young man ten feet away with the controller. As luck would have it, just a few seconds later the young man loses the game and puts down the controller. Spotting his opening, Axel says to me excitedly, “C’mon!” and races across the room. Arriving at the Wii U game console, Axel picks up the controller and
starts a round of the game *Mario Maker*. Less than ten seconds into his turn, he runs Mario off a cliff to the sounds of the recognizable Mario Brother “end of turn” music. He offers me the controller to take a turn, but I tell him to have another go. He starts a new round, but after collecting a few gold coins, Mario meets his demise again just seconds later. I am a little surprised, as given the in depth knowledge he has been exhibiting and his extreme enthusiasm about being here, I figured he must also be really good at playing the videogames himself. Listening to him talk, I have been imaging him in his room growing up, reading the comics, watching the shows on TV, and playing the video games. “Okay, you try,” he says, handing me the controller, telling me which buttons to press for jumping and the other actions without me asking for help. I start my round, and Mario begins running across the screen. After about 30 seconds into my turn, I confess, “I’m really bad at videogames,” even though I have already gone further than both of Axel’s first two attempts combined. My worry that he might be offended by my showing him up is immediately dispelled, however, as I see him standing beside me, staring up at Mario. Axel cheers, “You got this, Sam!” moving his body as if to help move our red-capped hero along telepathically with his motions. A few seconds later, Mario’s life is cut short again, this time at my hands.

Putting down the controller, we walk past a museum-like display case, chronicling the history of the handheld Game Boy console. We point out the versions we each used to have when we were younger—mine was one of the original versions with the two-toned green and black pixelated screen and his the more advanced Game Boy Color. Making our way back down the stairs, Axel is diverted from the exit by a display he had not seen during our first lap. “Oh, I’m amazed they have my favorite character,” a sentiment he has said more than once already today, before picking up another figurine.
A Nintendo Store employee sees Axel holding the figurine with admiration and asks if we need any help. “I’m good,” he replies with a smile before returning the Mad Hatter (as portrayed by Johnny Depp in the live action *Alice in Wonderland* movie) to the shelf and turning to head towards the door. I ask if he’s going to get anything. “No, I don’t have any money. I just came to look.” He goes back to perusing another display. Though he has intimated twice already that he is ready to leave, he seems to be doing everything he can to stay in the store. He explains his family’s thoughts about his relationship to the video game and comic book worlds. “This makes me totally different [from them]. They are all into sports and junk and stuff like that.” He adds that he attributes his love of these characters to the influences of a few friends and especially one of his cousins who first introduced him to these genres. As Axel speaks about his family, we finally make it to the door and pass out onto the sidewalk. There is a bit of a drop in his affect as he starts to talk about his family, the sensation only heightened by the diminishing sounds of bright and peppy video game soundtrack as we move down 48th Street and away from the store. This is a rare moment when the streetscape sounds of New York City seem calm and tranquil in comparison to the frenetic energy of the Nintendo Store.

A few steps later, Axel’s head darts over his shoulder as he gasps, audibly, from out of nowhere. Relaxing a fraction of second later, he explains, “Oh, I thought I saw my mother” and continues walking, realizing he was mistaken. As we walk, I start to think about Axel’s artwork—he being a very skilled drawer. We first met one day at HMI when I was passing through the Art Room and saw him hard at work, drawing one his favorite Pokémon characters. Now, after our Nintendo adventure, it becomes clear that the precision and talent in his artwork parallels how he can express his deep-seated knowledge about these characters through his words or through his hands. I ask about his relationship with his mother and how she views his
love of the creative aspects of the fantasy world, including his own artwork. “[My mom] thinks it's a waste of my talent. And I’m like, ‘Mother, it’s what I love.’ And she just shuts right up.”

We reach the end of the block and wait for the light at 6th Avenue to turn green. Just as Axel seems to adjust to the drop in energy after leaving the Nintendo Store, he starts to reanimate. “There’s an anime store just around the corner. Wanna go?” he asks, though his question mark is really only a formality. I readily agree, and Axel does an about face in the direction of his destination, his excitement leading his body through the crowded sidewalk.

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This jam-packed Queens-bound N Train is sauntering below Midtown when it stops at the Times Square/42nd Street Station. Nearly all the occupants of the train empty out onto the platform only to be replaced by a new crop of commuters. Having tucked myself into the corner near the head of the car, my back is pressed flush against the wall to use as balance as the train rumbles forward towards Astoria. I am forced to use my body weight and core muscles to steady myself as my hands are tightly grasped around my iPhone typing a research note in the Notes App. At this point, so many of my notes have been written in a similar manner: either on the train as I come home from an interview or as I pop into a café or find a quiet corner of HMI to write for a few minutes after finishing a go-along.

I have been keeping field notes as the participants and I have proceeded through the go-alongs noting first what the participant was wearing and then notes to myself about moments that stuck out or ideas, thoughts, quandaries that popped into my head. However, I have written very little during the go-alongs themselves—as evidenced by the un-recorded go-along with Warby in Central Park. For one, during the go-alongs, writing and walking has proved cumbersome. Even during stationary go-alongs or moments of physical stillness during the more mobile ones, trying to write and talk at the same time has proved distracting. During go-alongs, which have involved doing something that involved using one’s hands and arms—clothes shopping, carrying groceries, moving boxes—carrying a notebook and pen was impossible. Moreover, the conversations during the go-alongs have been so casual and intimate that taking constant notes felt invasive and interruptive to the process. I have always carried my notebook with me, but it was often in my jacket pocket, held closed in my hand, or placed beside me on a bench. After each go-along, I have been seeking a spot to write a widespread field note about the event, including where we went and what we did, major moments that stuck out, impressions I was left with, and questions
that lingered. These notes were less concerned with producing a “comprehensive” account of the go-along as they were with noting moments that stuck with me, especially the moments that possibly were not recorded by the recorder, in order to unpack what was sticky about them. Quite often when go-alongs finish, I end up in a neighborhood that I am unfamiliar with and am in need of some combination of a variety of things: something to eat or drink, a phone charger, a bathroom, and a place to write. As a result, almost all of my field notes have been written on my iPhone Notes App, sometimes via a Bluetooth mini-keyboard and sometimes on the phone itself. Sometimes, I have popped into a café or restaurant to type the notes; other times, I found a quiet spot in HMI or a park bench once the winter weather allowed me to be outside without gloves. There was always an element of time that played into my note taking, as I invariably had another interview scheduled, had to get back to volunteer, or was left in a neighborhood so far away I just decided to jump back on the train.

I wonder what this mobile writing does to my field notes as I rush to type them on my phone, just as I am doing now, with the reverberations of the speeding train echoing up my body and down my arms. Currently, I am racing to get this one thought out before I have to get off the train to meet friends for dinner. Not only are my methods mobile, I am realizing, but so are my note taking and my analysis. The result of doing this project in a city on the move is that one always has to keep up. I have to adapt and analyze on the move, my fingers now typing as fast as the gears below me, chugging along the tracks. I might not be “done” with this research note by the time I reach the station, but that is when I have to depart. That is when I have to move on and take on the next challenge. This is similar to the process of “finishing” the research process with each young person. From the outset, I asked participants to commit to at least five go-alongs. Foxxy, as the first participant to enroll in the study, finished their five go-alongs before some had
even done their first. The final go-along, however, was devoid of any feeling of finality or closure.

Foxxy’s final go-along felt like it might as well have been the first because of the way we both (and the people around us) experienced Foxxy with their majestic, colorful heels. By wearing them, it felt like Foxxy and I were figuring out how to move together in a whole new way. Beyond the heels, however, the final go-along with Foxxy was filled with various moments that we had no time to unpack before our time together came to an end. In our last hour together, heading downtown via the M Train, Foxxy gave a homeless man some food and then went to offer him some money but then apologized upon realizing they only had $20 bills. The man walked away a bit upset, saying dejectedly, “I appreciate it, but you only think I’m worth singles?” Moving further down the train, the man threw Foxxy’s food on the floor and voiced some frustration, targeted seemingly at Foxxy though his words were inaudible to Foxxy and me from the other side of the car. Moments later, while transferring to the C Train, Foxxy witnessed someone taking photos of them from down the platform just as we were about to step on the next train. A few minutes after that, while crossing the street in TriBeCa, I thought I saw a group of construction workers making disparaging faces at Foxxy but could not tell for sure as I had to turn away to look forward to make it safely through the crosswalk. This series of events left us on a sidewalk corner, with Foxxy moving to take off the microphone and recorder in order to make it to their appointment on time before we had processed the previous hour together with any sort of depth. Even without these events, there wasn’t time for a “proper” goodbye because there was no way to tie this experience off with a satisfactory conclusion. Such a framing would imply a centrality of my body and the study itself within the youths’ lives; it would suggest that the research was able to capture some predetermined arc of knowledge or growth experienced by
the young person, that it started when they joined the study and finished when the study concluded.

There is no way to conclude a go-along, a field note, or a research project, as a whole, besides the way it happens. Moreover, to think that each event or field note could be wrapped up with a sense of terminality belies young people’s experiences with the social world. Such an assumption centers a savior-like frame of research, wherein the researcher assumes the participants’ lives will complete a perfect arc that coincides with the timespan of the study itself. Rather, where the researcher happens to be when the study ends—literally or figuratively—is the moment when they have to walk away. Such a moment may not include the same type of conclusion with each participant. It may not be pretty or instantly emotional, but sometimes the study just has to conclude. Sometimes one just have to walk away with what is in one’s hands and mind without fully taking stock of that which is being carried.

In addition to the field notes after the go-alongs, I have maintained a series of research notes about topics as they strike me, be it a lingering memory from a go-along or fleeting connective threads that strike me as I move about the city. These research notes have mainly been written as I walk about or ride the subway. In a way, I have been most inspired to analyze the research events as I move about the city. In fact, while I often walk around in my everyday life while listening to podcasts, during this study as I walk around New York on my own time I find myself more and more instead listening to and taking in the city itself. These everyday moments I have had on my own time have contributed to many of my epiphanies or “ah-ha” moments. Notably, most of these moments have come during times when I was not doing research, times when I was “off the clock,” moments when I was en route to meet friends, taking
the late-night F train home to the Lower East Side, sitting on park benches, or running along the East River. This note, itself, is from one of those times.

This note has to end soon because it has to. I am typing the final sentences as the train pulls into the station. I do not have the choice to keep writing; I have to get off the train and also have to look up and stop typing lest I want to run into the other commuters. The timing and spacing of the city shapes my own analysis of the research in ways similar to how I position the youth experiences as being molded and formed by the city around them. These initial forays into analyzing the vast amount of data I have been amassing during my time in New York structures how I will launch into data analysis more officially upon my return to Vancouver to begin the writing process. I am wary of the enormous task of “carrying” the data home with me; the labor of accounting for all that it is I thought collected, observed, and learned during the go-alongs; and how I might go about analyzing in congruence with my theoretical commitments that consider youth’s experiences as constructing the world around them as much as the world around them affects and produces their experiences.

I have no idea what these interviews are going to result in. I know I have something. I know they have been profound and compelling and leave me wanting more. However, I have no idea how they all fit together or compare to one another. All I know is that I need to be open to every possible experience I can have before I leave or at least before I get off this N Train and step out onto the platform.

* * *
Three generations of Black women unload a carful of shopping bags printed with the labels of various merchants. They take turns reaching into the car’s truck or through one of the open doors to grab part of the day’s shopping haul. Carrying whole armloads of food and household goods, the women move in rotation up the short driveway into their modest, crisply painted, two-story home. Their house is one in a row of proudly manicured, self-standing homes along a tree-lined block in East Flatbush, Brooklyn. Half a block down, I stand on the sidewalk, trying to look inconspicuous while waiting for John to emerge from their grandmother’s house. I try, from three or four houses away, to nod hello politely when I catch eyes with one of the women, but it is not clear that she can see my gesture from this distance. Having walked along this street on John’s previous go-along, it stands out that not only is this neighborhood comprised of a majority of Black and Afro-Caribbean residents but the blocks upon blocks of self-standing, single-family homes signal this as a decidedly middle-class enclave (Brown, 2016). As John led the way home a few weeks earlier, they commented how this neighborhood’s racial makeup was drastically different from where they had just moved from in Florida. “I was used to like 98% Caucasian White people,” they explained. “I came here and was so astounded to see all this different type...of diversity. It was crazy!”

I noted on that first go-along how various streets were proudly marked with banners, indicating a number of different neighborhood associations that proclaimed these streets to be of and for the residents. Seeing Black residents attending to their yards or arriving home at various intervals as we walked, there was an instant sense of community and ownership. In contrast to other majority Black neighborhoods throughout the city, where neighborhoods have been claimed by various communities of color by virtue of their long-standing residence, this neighborhood bolsters their claim to this place with residence and property ownership—an
important distinction that counters dominant stereotypes about precarious economic and tenancy situations of many predominately Black and Latinx neighborhoods throughout New York. John had mentioned how their grandfather, a West Indian immigrant who they had never met, built the family house himself and that John’s grandmother had lived in it ever since. Even though John had only lived with their grandma in this house for a short while, they had mentioned knowing a few of the neighbors who were long-time friends of their grandparents.

Now, on my second trip to this neighborhood, I recognize that my Whiteness not only stands out visually but also signals a potential threat to the black ownership of this community.7 Arriving at John’s block at the opposite end of the women unloading the car, it is unclear whether they are walking into John’s house or the one just beyond it. Knowing that John’s grandmother is not keen on her grandchild being out of the house at all (not to mention her disapproval of John’s gender and sexual fluidity), I decide to wait down the block as to not draw attention to my presence. Despite my intention, my lurking down the block is causing its own attention. Regardless of the women, I decide it is best not to wait directly in front of John’s house lest their grandmother take a peek out the window. Five minutes after texting John about my arrival, John comes bounding down the front steps of the house to the sidewalk and turns to walk towards me. Clipping the microphone onto their lapel, John leads us down the sidewalk and away from the women unloading the car in the direction of the bustling Flatbush Avenue. With the neighbor women behind us, it is impossible to gauge their reaction to the sight of a White

7 While researching the neighborhood during data analysis, the third result of a Google search of “East Flatbush” (behind two Wikipedia entries) was an article from the Real Estate section of the New York Times detailing a smiling White family of three who bought in the neighborhood to escape the high cost of living in Manhattan and points further west in Brooklyn, itself. The article contains no mention of the racial, cultural, or ethnic make-up of the community this family moved into (Hunt, 2016).
man walking away with John—whom they probably know as their neighbor’s 18-year-old granddaughter.

We walk down a few blocks, and I check in to confirm that they are going by “John” today—on days when John feels more feminine, they go by a different name and use she/hers pronouns. After John confirms, I tell them that it is going to be the very last go-along of the entire study. Just as they start to apologize that they did not have time to do more go-alongs, John’s phone rings. “Oh, sorry, it’s Grandma.” They pick up the call with a tinge of exasperation upon greeting their guardian who they just bid farewell to moments earlier. “Wha? No, I’m fine,” they retort into their cellphone. Walking in silence as they listen to their grandmother, a car’s tires screech lightly along the pavement as it turns a corner around us while we wait to cross the street.

No, it’s a guy from HMI. He’s doing an essay—[whispering] I already told you about this. He’s doing like a dissertation for college. [Silence as they listen to Grandma] He’s basically just following me and seeing what I do each day…or some days, anyway. [Silence as they listen to Grandma] Well today’s our last day, so... [Silence as they listen to Grandma] I met him outside, so we are on our way to the hospital.

After a few more rounds of questioning, the inquisition seems to be waning as John’s tone shifts to indicate a bit of relief as they offer a few more “yeas” into the telephone before telling their grandma they will see her when they get home. “Sorry,” John says to me. “I guess I was a little too cryptic when I told her there was a guy outside.”

Hearing John’s description of the project—“He’s just following me around”—causes a pang of dread in my chest. On the very last day of my project, whatever sense of comfort or ease I have developed as a researcher, whatever insight I have gained about what it means to move
with these youth from the city, all are cast aside in this moment. John’s description is clarifying in that regardless of whatever reflexive positioning I have done to ensure this project’s ethicality and no matter how many levels of permission I have secured to get this project off the ground (my research committee, the ethics board, HMI’s permission, John’s own consent to participate), at the end of the day I am still a grown, White man following this young gender fluid person of color around the city. To contrast my fear, however, John’s explanation to their grandmother about the study suggests that they do not see any problem with their participation in the study—or with their moving through the city with a man they only know through their participation at HMI. John seems to be stating that as an 18-year old person, they should have the autonomy to do what they want, including the right to tell their grandma they are meeting a man outside of the house. John’s admission after hanging up the phone, however, suggests that perhaps giving their grandmother a bit more contextualization about my presence could have saved them the hassle of dealing with her panicked phone call once John jetted out of the house.

About 15 minutes later, after John and I are just getting into a conversation about the dynamics of their gender identity, Grandma calls again. They pick up and start to answer another series of (grand)parental questions, each response succinct and firm but with just enough of a frustrated tone in John’s voice to ensure their objection to this rapid fire inquiry is audible. After a series of answers, John moves their phone from their face and asks me if I will speak to their grandmother. I offer to do so, asking John quietly what they want me to say in order to appease their grandmother and keep John from getting into trouble. Not comprehending the intention of my hushed question, John relays the question directly into the phone before I can stop them. John lowers the phone again, explaining with a bit of exasperation, “I guess she wants to make sure you’re not a serial killer by talking to her, or something.” Moving past that moment for the sake
of wanting to quickly alleviate grandma’s concerns, I take the phone as I swallow a bit of apprehension. I cover the speaker with my hand and confirm with John that I should use their government name and female pronouns when speaking with their grandma. John quickly confirms that I should do so. Placing the phone to my ear, I greet the grandmother warmly and begin to field another round of questions, often having to repeat myself because we are standing on a very noisy street corner. John stands wincing besides me, feeling more and more embarrassed with each of my responses to their grandma’s questions. In my responses, I try to assure her that I am working with HMI and that my study has the agency’s full backing. While she may not fully comprehend (nor approve of) that HMI serves LGBTQ youth, John’s grandmother knows (and is happy) that John has a job there. I know from previous conversations with John that their grandma has been in communication with John’s HMI supervisor many times, so I make sure to mention to her how that particular HMI staff member knows about this project and of John’s participation in it, hoping it will lead to her feeling comfortable with me by association. This strategy appears to be working, but she then inquires if I have any sisters. I assure her that, as the elder brother to two sisters, I understand her wanting assurance that her grandchild is safe and sound. She seems appeased enough by my answer, and we hang up pleasantly. I hand the phone back to John. As we continue our walk, John apologizes profusely for me having to do this, but my mind has already started to worry about whether their grandmother’s concerns have actually been quelled. My consternation about the conversation with their grandmother makes me more and more tense as we walk and talk about the Brooklyn sidewalk.

Nearly 30 minutes later, we stop into John’s favorite calzone place as they have some time to kill before their psychiatrist’s appointment. The restaurant is near John’s school, so they
visit it frequently and have come to know one of the guys who work there. John orders their calzone right away after walking in, without even having to look at the menu. Sitting down at a table, John pulls out their phone to respond to a text from their boyfriend. I join them a minute later after buying a ginger ale. “I’m a little disappointed. I thought the guy I saw was my guy, but it’s not,” John laments, looking up from their phone to gesture to the person behind the counter who took their order. Looking back to me, John asks if I watch *Game of Thrones*. We chat for a brief moment about our shared appreciation of the show, but it becomes clear that John has yet to see the most recent episode so I promise not to spoil anything. Realizing the time, I tell John that I have to get going to head to HMI. I thank John for taking part in the study, telling them how much it meant for them to be so generous with their time. John apologizes that some of our planned go-alongs never came to fruition. I assure them the time they had to give was appreciated, nevertheless.

John unclips the microphone from their collar and hands the recorder to me. I turn it off and start to pack it into my bag just as John’s calzone arrives at the table. John looks up and smiles. It is “their guy,” who had been out of sight in the kitchen when we first arrived. John thanks him, taking the tray from his hands and placing it on the table. The guy asks if John wants a soda, too. John admits to only having enough money for the calzone. The guy smiles and turns away from the table before returning a moment later with a can of soda and a straw. He places it on their table and winks at John before disappearing once again into the back.

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Later that afternoon, after leaving John at the calzone place, I arrive at HMI on what is my last scheduled day of volunteering. I had set aside time to bid farewell to youth and staff. However, as soon as I step off the elevator into the ever-frenetic lobby, I learn from the receptionist that John’s grandmother has repeatedly called the Front Desk, trying to reach John’s internship supervisor to ask questions about me. As the supervisor is out sick, the calls had been bounced around to a few other staff members. I spend the next few hours talking to staff and sending emails in order to ensure that John’s supervisor and the Program Director know about the situation in case John’s grandmother calls again after I leave HMI. It feels ironic that on this very last day of research I have to spend it clearing up a situation that I feared might happen all along. If this had happened in the first month or two of the study, it would have been one thing. A day meant to be saying goodbye and reflecting on the study’s progression is instead filled with ensuring that all my tracks are covered (namely, ensuring the necessary HMI staff know that John has consented to be in the study in case they face further inquiries from their grandmother as to what John has been doing with me). Once again, all the worries about being a “good” researcher come streaming back, in even though the past months have involved considerable work and reflection on my part to let go of such preoccupations. To think, I arrived at this last go-along with John just a few hours ago, feeling so good about the project; so proud that I was about to successfully complete fieldwork; so impassioned by all my conversations with the participants; and so cocky that everything had gone off without a major hiccup.

Walking out of HMI after programs have finished and the youth have all left for the night, I feel considerably frantic. The smooth last day I envisioned did not come to fruition. Walking into the creaky elevator to leave HMI one last time, I feel unsatisfied to not have had sufficient time to bid farewell to the youth (both those in the study and others HMI members who I had
gotten to know through my volunteer work) nor the time to thank the staff for their assistance with and support of the project over the past few months. Like most of the conversations that have taken place during the go-alongs, a train of thought or an impassioned confession could easily be interrupted by the sound of a passing car, the sight of a far off building, the emergence of a long-repressed emotion, or countless other factors. Like the go-alongs, it was often unknown where the youth would end up by the end of the sessions, emotionally or geographically. The study as a whole, likewise, has left me stranded in the middle of the city that I thought I knew so well. The research project, in all its facets, is left reverberating in, around, and through me. Reverberations of the conversations with youth on park benches and in computer labs, of standing silently next to a youth as the train bursts its way into the station, of the cancelled meetings and the meaningful reunions, of having questions posed to me by participants rather than them answer the ones I posed, of thinking about how to move alongside them as they navigate their everyday lives.

As the elevator descends to street level, a conversation with Scarlet from a few weeks earlier comes to mind. I had been asking her about scheduling our last meeting when I noticed she was wearing the shirt she bought during her previous go-along at Burlington Coat Factory. The simplicity of the monochromatic, button-up shirt draped around her body, offered no indication of the strife that had gone into buying it or her long history of trying to find clothes from the “men’s” section that fit her body. After complimenting her on the new look, she had smiled, as if trying to hide her trademark rosy-red cheeks up underneath her thick-rimmed glasses. Thanks! I got it with my best friend! We laughed, though her statement was both a joke and not so subtle indication that our relationship meant something more to her than the normative, dispassionate researcher-subject relationship might normally allow. She signaled her
awareness of social rules and her skillful tiptoeing around and through them. Her words highlighted her acknowledgment of her body as being a subject in this research project, but that she refused to let the flow of knowledge and information be a one-way street. Our conversation continued in a similar manner when I reminded her that the next go-along would probably be the final one. Oh, you breaking up with me, Sam? she guffawed with a purposeful over-exaggeration, perhaps an attempt to hide her true feelings, that perhaps the experience of the go-alongs had done something to her, taken her somewhere new, someplace she was just realizing as they came to an end. See, why you gotta go and be all dramatic? I retorted, similarly doing the double work of matching her tone to show my willingness to meet her where she was at while also taking an internal stock of how the go-alongs had moved and changed what I thought I knew about youth and what I thought this research project would produce. There is no ending to this research besides the one that presents itself, an ending filled with unanswered questions, canceled go-alongs, concerned grandmothers, and humorous verbal sparring, masking some deeper feelings.

The elevator reaches the ground floor and opens to the brightly colored mural painted onto the foyer walls by HMI members of years past. Leaving the memory of Scarlet’s laughter in the elevator, I take a few short steps through the foyer and push the glass door open onto the Greenwich Village sidewalk. The thoughts and preoccupations about the research project are instantly folded into the thick summer air and the crisscrossing flows of pedestrians. The last lingering worry from the phone call with John’s grandma works its way out my mind and off my shoulders as my body is swept into the sidewalk’s current.

* * *

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There is a flight path into LaGuardia Airport that provides a staggering aerial view of New York City. Looking down out the right side of plane, out of nowhere, the tip of Manhattan appears as the plane starts to trace up the western edge of the island. Racing over the Hudson River at a deceivingly close height, the buildings are in such proximity it is as if they can be picked up by hand and rearranged at whim. The traffic along the West Side Highway is clear to the naked eye, and the bridges along the east side of the island seem inutile from this perspective. It appears as if one could step over the East River to Brooklyn and Queens with little effort. From this window seat, the whole city is within reach; the whole city can be appraised with one scanning glance. It does not look scary or overwhelming or bustling. Rather, it appears calm, organized, and oddly tranquil. Droves of landmarks can be spotted as the plane zooms ahead, including those considered to be parts of “essential” New York—Times Square, Central Park, the Chrysler Building—and those that are essential parts of the city for the young people in the study. There is Union Square, where la Princess reflects about her morning, experiencing slight after transphobic slight at a series of back-to-back appointments at various government agencies. There is Lincoln Center, where Elliod and Dan rest hidden below the trees alongside the Metropolitan Opera building after one of their frequent photo shoots in order to update their Facebook, Instagram, and Grindr profiles in hopes of presenting online images that counter dominant narratives about young people who are trans, queer, homeless, refugee, and so on. Further east, over one of the bridges in a Brooklyn pizza shop, sits John waiting for a calzone to finish baking while sipping a free bottle of Pepsi, a gift from the owner when they admit to not having the $1.50 needed to buy it themself. After running the length of Manhattan, the plane takes a right over the Bronx to turn back towards its landing spot in Queens. With the expanded view provided by the plane’s
starboard-tilted rotation, Warby’s three group homes—where she lived during the study’s six-month span—are somewhere below, spread out over the northern-most borough.

This elevated perspective of New York City, where its overwhelming street-level grandeur can still be felt though in a more contained and muted fashion, makes it seem like getting to know the city is as easy as taking a once-around survey offered by this aeronautical experience. Despite the depreciating elevation, the city is sanitized through the cold, plastic airplane window. The sensory deception of height makes the descent into New York feel like the city is waiting to warmly embrace its entrants with welcome arms. From up here, there are no screeching subway cars that come rumbling into the station to interrupt Foxyy as they are explaining their fears of being in public as a non-binary person. It is not possible to witness the mental turmoil of Anna’s inner-monologue as she sits on one of her hour-long, solitary train rides, wondering if she will be able to make it to class and the grocery store and still have time to help her younger sister with her homework before she heads to make her shift dancing at the club. Also lost from the height are Scarlet’s refusals to let her abuelita buy her dress shirts from the “women’s” section of Banana Republic in Jackson Heights, Queens and Brian’s quiet laughter as he watches clips of Love & Hip Hop: Atlanta in the computer lab at his favorite public library near downtown Brooklyn. Once the plane touches down on the tarmac at LaGuardia, the energetic volume of the city ratchets all the way up as soon as the passengers deplane into the airport’s overcrowded terminal. Filtering down to the invariably lengthy taxi lineups, the pulses of the city are inescapable once foot hits the pavement. The moving pieces of the city, that only moments ago seemed like objects in a doll’s house, are now obstacles and opportunities to move between and around and through and towards.
The process of descent into the city captures the core, methodological frame of this project, a way to rethink common approaches to view and think about young people. The shift from 30,000 feet to street level brings along with it the need for adjustments of perception and sensation, namely assessments that analyze how power is felt and experienced. From on high, the city appears calm and complete; all there is to see in the city can be assessed from this particular perch. However, when the city is up close and personal, any single stretch of sidewalk is abounding with sights, sounds, and smells to take in and process. Each block is as vast and grand as the city as a whole. In the midst of the Concrete Jungle, people bolt past one another before it is possible to fully assess the entirety of each person’s eccentric wardrobe choices before the next person or the next intersection requires their attention. Sidewalks, however, are not always about movement. They are not always transitory spaces, given that many New Yorkers occupy the sidewalk in a semi-permanent fashion while streams of others pass them by as if a sleeping human body were just another part of the fixed scenery. The sidewalk, then, is a back and forth in directing and diverting attentions; in movement and stillness; in going and in staying. Immersing this research study in the city has forced a shifting of the directions by which youths’ movements through the city are viewed and how knowledge about the worlds around them is created. It has forced an inclusion of youths’ moments of stillness, of staying put, of not speaking, of passing time into an interview-based study about youth mobility.

Listening to Foxxy talk about the gender policing they experience while walking through the city takes on new meaning when the very bodies doing the policing are circling around Foxxy’s body as they speak and while I stand beside, both listening to Foxxy and noticing the reactions of passersby to Foxxy’s body and gender presentation. It is not, however, that experiencing this event alongside Foxxy makes it more real because the experience is visible to
the researcher’s eye. Rather, the importance of moving and being with youth during these experiences is it to take into account the parts of these moments that might not be part of how the young people describe them: the quick back and forth scanning that Foxxy’s eyes perform as their body concurrently moves down a sidewalk; the way their head jerks over their shoulder not because of a noise but because of a sensation that someone, somewhere, is staring at them, a feeling I also sense being next to Foxxy as my head makes similar movements in tandem with Foxxy’s. Such a moment involves grappling with ways to describe and represent these moments as “Because I felt it too!” does not suffice as academic explanation of what is happening to youth, nor does it do justice to represent the intricate and sophisticated methods youth have developed in order to navigate intersecting forces through the city. Perhaps, as MacLure (2013) suggests, “We are obliged to acknowledge that data have their ways of making themselves intelligible to us” (p. 660), that certain moments of “data” remain as imprints in our mind rather than words recorded on a tape or an interview transcript. The emotional countertransference I experience in this moment moving alongside Foxxy is neither fact nor proof of any one thing, but being there beside Foxxy in this moment prompts different questions, different avenues of thinking, different ways of understanding how Foxxy and the social worlds around them interact.

The fluctuating perceptions of New York upon arriving into the city from on high, when buildings go from looking small to looking bigger than life, parallel a shift in perception of young people from only ever looking at, being with, and talking to them in a singular manner or with a static framework. From a stratospheric perspective, youth appear as whole, as objects to be read and analyzed by the world around them. It is thought that they can be firmly located as being here or there; that they can be perceived easily as this or that; and that their actions can be decisively labeled as good or bad. However, being on sidewalks, subway platforms, and park
benches beside Foxy and the other youth in this study allows consideration of diverging perspectives of what it means to experience the period of “youth.” Such a positioning allows reflection on how, for example, riding the train for hours each day affects Anna’s ability to talk about her daily routine; how the presence of street-involved New Yorkers sleeping on nearby park benches influences how La Princess mentally sketches out her future steps; how Axel’s relationship with his family affects his ability to make the art he loves; or how the quiet buzzing of the library computer lab provides space for Brian to take a break from ebbs and flows of the city.

The city, in general, provides fecund opportunities for shifting ways of thinking about youth. The placement of youth in the city counters assumptions about youth naivety of social space and about the city as inherently dangerous and unknown, especially to its younger inhabitants. The city is described as a place to go to “lose yourself,” where youth can go to have unadulterated adventures in this city that survives without slumber. It is also thought to be a place where youth can escape to in order to shed former personal baggage and embrace their “true” selves. It is at the same time a place people seek out to safely express and present themselves and, as the United States’ largest urban metropolis, a place often assumed to be full of crime—no matter how much they “sweep up” Times Square. It is concurrently a place that people move away from when they want to have children (see “White Flight”) and home to the over one million children (predominately of color) attending NYC Public Schools. Viewing whether or not New York is “okay” for youth, then, is all about the perspective from which one looks at it—from above or from the ground, from downtown or from uptown—and how one’s own perspective of the city and its inhabitants is based on racialized, gendered, and classed experiences.
These perspectives, moreover, are created over time through the ways one comes to know (about) the city. The speed at which New York is thought to flow—that a “New York Minute” is somehow less than 60 seconds—speaks, at the very least, to the sense that the city’s residents emit ownership of and knowledge about the city that allows to them to navigate it at speeds that do not allow a second-guessing of where they are headed or how they are going to get there. From up high, it is not clear that a minute in New York is purportedly less than a minute elsewhere. On the ground however, there are minutes in New York that move at various speeds, which both uphold and dispel the myth of time moving faster in the Big Apple. New York Minutes could move faster for la Princess as she rides back and forth on the Staten Island Ferry to pass time on the days the social service agencies she frequents are closed, but they could also move more slowly for her in the fleeting time she has to get ready in the morning before having to set off from her shelter each day at 8am sharp. Time is perhaps moving simultaneously in diverging directions for Axel, who is not sure when he will work up the courage to talk to the boy he is crushing on, and for Scarlet, who is counting down the days until she is able to get out of the city to start her AmeriCorps placement.

Such accounts of time, borrowing from Elizabeth Freeman (2010), “elaborate ways of living aslant to dominant forces” (p. xv), ways in which youth experiences are too commonly cast aside as being unimportant but that can be vital indications of the ways in which youth envision their futures and the multi-directional paths they might take to get there (Stockton, 2009). It should not be forgotten that the seemingly calm, static New York that is visible from this landing route into LaGuardia can be experienced on the ground as well. There are pathways through the crowds, hidden corners of parks, and countless places throughout the city—visible or not—that offer moments and spaces of refuge to some. Moreover, there are those for whom
masses of people, boisterous noises, and frenetic public space are types of reflective sanctuaries, used to chart out future pathways through the city. Jam-packed parks on sunny afternoons, overflowing rush hour subway cars, or other easily accessible spaces that are swarming with people can often offer reprise for young people who are under constant surveillance. There are times when it is possible—and arguably a necessary form of survival—to get lost in a crowd where the collective weight of surveillance is dispersed over myriad bodies to avoid it being focused on a single youth whose gender identity, housing situation, HIV status, race, or presentation makes such concentrated attention a source of danger. This purposeful accounting for differences in perspective, even when it explodes the assumption that social subjects—humans, cities, or otherwise—can ever been viewed as “whole” serves as a reminder that perspective is always coming from somewhere, from some specific angle, and through a certain filter. The view of New York City during the descent into LaGuardia is only accessible to those with the means to travel by air, who have the ability to witness, firsthand, the aerial, panoramic view of the city.

This elevated view of New York above harkens back to Michel de Certeau’s (1984) description of Gotham from the 110th floor of one of the fallen towers. The ability to see the “whole” city from up high, of being able to holistically read the city-as-text. When one’s “body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law; nor is it possessed, whether as player or played, by the rumble of so many differences and by the nervousness of New York traffic” (p. 92). Access to this high up vantage point, however, must be taken into account when making determinations about the city—or about the young people within it—and cannot leave behind the identity of who is doing the viewing. The knowledge gained from those who can access said locations to make such determinations—both de Certeau
from the observatory deck of the highest of buildings and myself from a descending airplane—
must be acknowledged to have the benefits of being able to make such a removed, detached
assessment of the city, and in the case of this study, its youthful inhabitants.

Such a determination includes how youth are making sense of the city itself and,
moreover, acknowledging that “the city” always already carries divergent and specific meanings
to each youth, even when they point to the same exact piece of land and say, “This is New York.”
They may be motioning, generally, in the same direction and calling it the same thing, but that
does not mean “New York” holds identical meanings for each person nor were said meanings
constituted in the same manner. Any given street, neighborhood, city, and so on, is rife with
contingent, conflicting histories and knowledges about who each place is for, who has a right to
be there, and who sets the rules that govern the area (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015a). Even when a
place is referred to by the same name by different people, the meanings imbued within said
nomenclature are not identical. Likewise, disciplinary knowledge about what, who, and where
youth are assumed to be is used to point to an idealized image of the youth body (Foucault, 1977;
Lesko, 2012; Stiegler, 2017; Talburt, 2004) and say, “This is what a youth is,” even if it is never
entirely clear in what direction the pointing finger is aimed or to whose body the pointed finger
is connected. Without specific attention paid to the normative power systems behind the pointing
figure and the collective social attention that follows such an act of indication, the label “youth”
often works to erase specific constructions of race, gender, sexuality, nationality, class, and
ability (Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013; Loutzenheiser, 2007; McCready, 2015; Reck, 2009).
Implacing this study about youth within the ebbs and flows of New York City—this naming just
as contingent as all the rest—centralizes the concurrent constructions of and experiences with
place and identity (Malpas, 1999).
This study takes seriously the perspectives that influence, assess, and shape experiences of young people in the city, making specific attempts to determine how said perspectives have led to and continue to promulgate assumptions about which experiences are good or bad, safe or unsafe, for or not for young people. Moreover, young peoples’ views of the city are viewed as leading to the creation of specific understandings of the city. That one’s “30,000 foot view” of the city might have been ascertained from atop a park bench, seated in the back of a subway car, or standing in the middle of a throng of people, waiting on a corner for a walk signal. A person’s “panoramic” understanding of the city does not always mean they have literally seen the city from above or that their journeys have taken them to every last inch of the official city limits. The experiences of young people in and with the city, then, are examined here in order to observe their specificity rather than have them extrapolated in ways that view both youth and the city as static, preordained concepts controlled by the limitations of normative ways of looking at the social world.

While de Certeau (1984) suggests “it is as though the practices of organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness” (p. 93), the methodological positioning of this study does not configure said “blindness” as a something that is missing from the puzzle. Rather, there are always “blind spots” in knowledge about youth and their experiences in the city. This does not mean the inability to purvey the field of knowledge of youth, as a “whole,” is a limitation or an oversight. Instead, I acknowledge that attempts to see youth in their entirety—meaning the assumption that youth can ever be fully “known”—are not only impossible but amount to acts of violence that shave off important parts of youth and their experience in order to make them visible within one (normative) viewing. Recognizing youth and their experiences as moments of potential understanding that resist making them “whole” but instead appraise the specific
currents that made their experience possible leads to knowing about and thinking about youth in ways that resist the disciplinary limitations of youth as a cohesive, unitary concept. Instead, “youth” can be seen as representing multifaceted experiences of age, race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and ability. For the youth in this study, then, their experiences are valuable not to teach what youth are but rather to assist in opening up what youth have the potential to become.
Chapter 5: Conclusion: The next journeys “youth” will/might/can take

(Photograph 5: All aboard!)
This dissertation centers the knowledge produced by trans, queer, and genderqueer youth as they move through knowledge-producing systems, institutions, and structures on their everyday journeys. Additionally, by giving accounts (Butler, 2005) of the go-alongs and of the research process itself, this dissertation, as a knowledge product, is framed as something the reader can go-along with. Rather than presenting the claims, findings, and suppositions of the research project as firm morsels of knowledge, offering an account of them in narrative form allows them to be expressed as knowledges on the move. This includes the unmasking of the knowledge produced through this body of work as being my own knowledge product. The narratives that feature myself walking (or running) through the city are intended to show how the city itself became part of my data analysis process. My own wanderings throughout New York, as the memories and impressions of the go-alongs stewed through my mind, are meant to demonstrate how the claims made in this dissertation are my own. This is potentially off-putting, as it might be argued I am centering my own White, cis male body in this research project about TQG youth of color.

However, keeping my body present in the analysis and representation of the go-along avoids the concealment of the “I” or the voice of the cultural and social critique-making observations (Pinar, 2009). Furthermore, it counters the practice of using “narrators [as] disembodied voices rather than locatable characters” (Eagleton, 2013, p. 81). The narrativizing of my thought processes— that is, the representation of how the ideas, claims, and conclusions presented in this body of work came to be—keep central the fact that this dissertation is a singular knowledge product, replete with my own positional biases and privileges.

Writing the narratives in present tense highlights how knowledge about these young people is coming into being and how it stops and starts, twists and turns along the way. In narrativizing certain moments from the go-along, the hope is not that they be treated as verbatim
representations of what was said, what occurred, and what was felt during these events. Rather, the composition of these narratives echoes the hope that “educational narratives have the audacity to enjoy their own margins” (Britzman & Gilbert, 2004, p. 94) and aligns with this project’s reliance on Stewart’s (1996) methodological framing of “the space on the side of the road.” The narratives do not always follow the routines that common logics controlling viewing and visual culture would have them utilize. They trace moments through different tempos, sometime circling back to reexamine the same moment; sometimes going back even further in time; and other times jumping forward to follow connections or sparks of thought, however fleeting. The narratives forward a framing that wonders what “might it mean to recognize that life is such a complex process that it can never be understood, let alone represented” (Hendry, 2007, p. 491)

What is, hopefully, clear at this juncture is that the dissertation is written as if reading it as one long go-long. Like the go-alongs themselves, reading this dissertation is intended to be an exercise in pulling and pushing one’s attention. The individual narratives are ordered in a way that, like the go-alongs, forces one’s attention to jump, turn, and react to the objects, bodies, affects, and structures encountered along the way. The tempo and tone of the go-alongs could change from one end of the block to the next, upon entering a subway car, or after bumping into someone on the sidewalk. Similarly, I crisscross between stories about different youth that may seem random or without specific intention, or I may finish a narrative at a moment when it may feel like there is more to say about the events that just occurred. This rhetorical decision serves as a way to mimic the strenuous task of trying to pay attention to the youth and their surroundings while completing the go-alongs.

Early in the project, I would complete a go-along feeling awash with regret, that I had not asked enough questions, listened properly, or paid close enough attention to what was
said or what had transpired. It proved to be difficult to feel like my attention could be focused or even held long enough to complete a thought when competing with the myriad of other things coming my way during the go-along. However, releasing the pressure that there was a certain thing to which I was supposed to be fixing my attention proved to be a turning point in this research project, aided by Lather’s (2013) methodological advice that there “is no methodological instrumentality to be unproblematically learned” (p. 635). This letting go of the ever-lingering residuals of a humanistic, qualitative research framework meant forgoing the idea that suggests there is something in particular to be grasped from any given interaction or research event or that each go-along was preloaded with some fragments of truth to uncover and unwrap.

In writing these go-alongs into a dissertation, this realization remained central in the ways that the sections were sutured together. The moments with each young person, as well as those with me alone with my thoughts about the go-alongs, are not meant to be tied up neatly before moving on to the next. Rather, like the go-alongs, the dissertation pokes and prods the reader’s attention before the reader might be finished with a particular moment, interaction, or conversation, or before I am able to narrate the ending of a story or draw a certain conclusion about any given moment. That is not to say that I avoid making claims, offering any firm explanations, or declaring any “findings,” as per the requirements of the dissertation format. Rather, I pulled what I learned from the go-alongs about letting go of the need to appraise the go-alongs with a type of pinpoint vision in favor of one that is more panoramic. Instead of trying to look for one specific thing, the goal became to analyze that which came into view during the go-alongs and how said information came into view. What was to be learned from the go-alongs was not what was “there” in the moment they were happening; rather, it was what the experiences of doing the go-alongs produced and how they might offer different understandings.
of the next moment, and then the moment after that. Advocating for this framework for viewing and taking in the world echoes Muñoz’s (2009) explanation of his approach to understanding queerness as “a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (p. 1). Taking this queer lesson to task, both in thinking about the go-alongs and in writing about them, involves a release of the desire to capture something “in the moment” and instead trust that these experiences are pushing us somewhere—somewhere that is perhaps out of sight or, at least, out of sight through the normative lenses used to view and analyze culture (Rogoff, 2005).

The stories described in these pages attempt to bring the reader along for the journeys that the youth participants invited me to experience by their sides. Rather than present the youth and their experiences as whole, as a type of research end product, the narratives demonstrate how knowledge about these youth—and the youths’ own knowledge about themselves—is always on the move. In seeking different ways to research with nondominant communities, this work “is designed to move beyond traditional questions of representation in education research toward those grounded in imagination” (Gutierrez et al., 2017, p. 31). As a reader, you are invited to meet and come to know these young people as if they were passersby on a busy sidewalk or people you ended up sitting next to on a park bench, subway car, or café table. Purposefully, formal introductions are omitted—that is, youths’ identities and demographics are not presented upfront or in a summative fashion. That is not to say, of course, that they do not matter. Rather, aspects of youths’ identities are revealed through description and explication of their bodies’ actions within and interactions with the worlds through which they move. The reader then comes to know the participants as claiming certain identities in ways that make more transparent the practices and assumptions that label youth as belonging to certain identity groups.

This way of acknowledging facets of TQG youths’ race, gender identity, sexuality,
housing status, and so on, is a reflection of how the hailing of certain bodies (namely people we have just met or are coming to know) as belonging to any number of social identity categories is the result of various and often instantaneous readings, even though one’s identity is often thought to be a foregone conclusion at the moment of introduction. Including participants’ demographics when their names are first mentioned would not work to unpack or critically understand how youth bodies navigate through systems of subjectivity and identification. It means that social categories like “Black,” and “trans,” and even “youth” are preordained and static instead of being socially constructed ideas specific to the times and spaces of their constitution. Inviting a closer reading of the text in this dissertation for clues in the descriptions about the participants’ bodies and experiences provokes readers to consider how identity markers come to be known through an intertwined series of assumptions about one’s body, skin color, manner of dress, hairstyle, appearance, speech, social location, and so on. This works to keep open ideas about how who TQG youth are thought to be and how they are thought about (Loutzenheiser, 2007; Talburt, 2004) and asks that research with youth be similarly open to honor how “complexity, instability, and relationality have been queer practices for a long time, stimulating and responding to generative perversities” (Mayo, 2017, p. 531). Reading this work, then, requires embodying such opening.

When readers of this dissertation first meet La Princess on the park bench in Union Square, it is mentioned how her make-up is perfectly matched to her brown skin rather than just saying, “La Princess is Dominican” or “Black” or “a woman of color.” If her racial identity had been stated parenthetically when her name was first mentioned, then race is centralized as something that is a given; something that is static; something that is a seemingly innocent, apolitical label.
In outlining a stance of “racial performativity,” Muñoz (2006) explains that it is “especially important to consider racial formations through a lens that is not hamstrung by positivism, insofar as the discourse of positivism is at best reductive and unresponsive to the particularities of racial formations” (p. 679). Heeding this advice, the reader is encouraged to witness how La Princess’s understandings about race are assumed based on her appearance and how readings of her appearance are then understood through her interactions with the forces and bodies around her, namely the government assistance offices she visited before the go-along, her reading and re-reading of her coveted copy of Janet Mock’s book, the street-involved people on the nearby benches, and the Pulse nightclub shooting.

Similarly, particular attention is given to the ways that the experiences of trans and genderqueer youth are described. Many of the youth in the study face considerable challenges moving through their daily routines, as their gender expressions and presentations are often policed and scrutinized by people they interact with and encounter. Given that youth frequently talked about experiences of being misgendered, and of being harassed because of their gender expressions and presentations, many of these stories and experiences ended up being included in the narratives about the go-alongs. However, in composing these stories and in representing these gendered experiences, it is important that writing about these youths’ bodies does not further the habits of thought that led to the negative challenges these youth face on a daily basis. This positioning was informed by Nicolazzo’s (2016) theorizing about how representational practices of trans students can often be a “misrepresentation of the ways participants queered notions of fixed, stable, and constant practices of gender” (p. 53). Representing John and their go-alongs were particularly informed by these considerations. John’s gender expression was fluid. Depending on the day, John used different names and pronouns. Sometimes, they used “they,” and other times, “she.” Every time we met, I would check in with John and inquire about which
ones to use that day. During both of the go-alongs John completed during the study, they were using “they” pronouns. Regardless of pronoun usage, however, John usually dressed and presented in a similar manner, meaning there were few visual cues as to how John wanted to represent themself on any given day. In writing about the go-alongs with John, then, I was presented with the challenge of how to represent John in ways that were true to their desires but also represented dynamics of our various social positionings as we walked side-by-side during our time together and how our bodies stood to be read and perceived by passersby, especially if we had been spotted by John’s grandmother.

In John’s case, they often talked about their frustration with other people not understanding their gender identity, about people not listening to their requests to use “they” pronouns. John described how some of these refusals came from those who did not read John’s body to “match” their own visual expectations of what a gender fluid person might look like. Cognizant of this concern, it was prudent to write John’s experiences in a way that readers would get a sense of John in the way that John wanted to be seen. Not including an initial physical description of John from the start allows for a moment where the reader might make some assumptions about what John might look like or might begin to draw a certain mental image of John. “John,” the pseudonym they selected to use during the days they used “they” pronouns, evokes a certain gendered presentation and body, and by setting the scene with John this way the reader might form a certain mental image of John, thereby assuming certain things about John and the ways they experience the world. However, this is not to advocate a description of John that is untruthful or deceptive. Rather, careful attention was taken to explain, after the reader
meets John, that when John and I walked down the street together, our pair of bodies stood out walking through the majority Black neighborhood where John lived given that we were likely read by those around us as an adult, White man and a Black, teenaged, young woman. John’s usual gender presentation—including their clothing and hairstyle—was normally read as female. When we walked side-by-side, especially as John’s go-along took us through the neighborhood where they lived, our bodies stood out as we were in a predominately Black neighborhood and there was the potential that we could run into people whom John knew—namely the women unloading the car next door to John’s grandmother’s house.

Depiction of John, like other trans and genderqueer participants, is structured in ways that attempt to affirm their identities, thus giving them a chance (even if just momentarily) to be represented outside of normative gendering apparatuses of visual culture while also acknowledging the very gendered challenges they expressed facing on a daily basis. In this and other ways, the form of dissertation is different from the standard chapter format in order to animate the lives and experiences of the TQG youth involved in this study to avoid the normative tropes of “youth” produced by humanist-centered qualitative research methodology. It purposefully bends and contorts the formats expected of dissertations and decidedly repurposes certain forms of re-presentation in order to ethically and soundly reflect the lives of the 11 youth who committed to be a part of this study.

These youth agreed to my following them with a microphone clipped to their lapels as they went about their daily lives. Together, we wandered through countless neighborhoods and streets. They answered nearly every question I put in front of them and offered up insights and details into their lives that brushed up some of the deepest and most personal aspects of their lived experience. From these interactions and conversations, I gleaned a deep respect for the modes of operation and navigation they utilized to exist in and take up space in the worlds they
occupy. At times, it seemed like their existence—or the ways they existed within certain normative social parameters and guidelines—challenged accepted ways of thinking, being, and knowing in society. That is, even the simple fact of their presence in certain spaces caused concern, outrage, discomfort, and disdain from other people who saw them, yet the participants continued to live and thrive nonetheless. The youth demonstrated what Greteman (2016) calls “queer thrival,” a telos that “contests, makes strange, and disrupts space and time” (p. 310). What the youth showed me about their lives pushes back against dominant understandings of how TQG youth are thought to be in the world and what their relationship with the world is thought to look like. As such, to take what the participants showed me and then force it into traditional dissertation formatting seemed irreconcilable with the commitment to honor and forward youths’ understandings about their lives. If what they were showing me was how they lived their lives in ways that could not be bounded by the limits set by discursive norms, city laws, social decorum, and cultural expectations of youth bodies, then the ways their lives came to be represented in this dissertation also needed to be similarly unwieldy and provocative.

This queering of the traditional dissertation form approaches knowledge production in a manner that “is less interested in knowing or being right, and more concerned with relating in ways that are less normative, hopefully less violent, perhaps less harmful” (Greteman, 2014, p. 420). This dissertation, then, is considered to be a form of knowledge production based on being together and moving alongside one another. It is a product of the knowledge formulated between the participants, the research process, and myself. What is written in the preceding pages is a result of the moments shared with the participants in this study, not of some preexisting knowledge product about young people that was out in the ether, waiting to be captured by a knowing researcher. This dissertation is not about all TQG youth but about these specific youth, in the very moments described within these pages. While you cannot take these young people and
their experiences with you beyond these pages, I do suggest you take with you the ways they have made you think, see, and imagine the possibilities of what youth might come to be.

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Once again, return to the subway car you imagined yourself being swept into in the opening of this dissertation. Having remained, over the course of these pages, on this figurative, enigmatic train, now the train is slowing down as it pulls into what appears to be its terminus station. Along this ride, the TQG youth in this study have passed in and out of your line of sight, appearing for seconds or moments, revealing themselves in various ways through the descriptions of their experiences during the go-alongs. Each “stop” with a youth along the way of this journey provided something for the reader to consider; invited the reader to see some piece of the youth’s experiences; and provoked the reader to reconsider the reading practices that work to determine who, what, and where “youth” are supposed to be. Each time the train pulled into a new station, the reader was asked to get off the train and try to determine where they had been let off, to make determinations based on the descriptions of the youth and their experiences, surroundings, and movements.

At one stop, time was spent sitting beside la Princess on that park bench in Union Square as she charted out her future movements through transphobic bureaucracies and a lasting state of housing precarity while questions about her futurity swirled around her, questions concerning how and when to take her next life step off of and away from that park bench. In a different momentary stopover, lying side by side at the gym with Scarlet, her invitation to join in for her work-out provoked a rethinking of how to embody the act of doing research with young people. This shift in mindset entailed—physically and psychically—going-along with youth to understand how they were making sense of their journeys towards and against adulthood, in the various ways that “growing up” came to be for them. Other times, the stops included literal visits to transit systems, like walking out of the subway in Chelsea with Yetfounded after taking the train from Coney Island during which her trains of
thought she verbalized about her relationships to and with the city covered even more distance than the hour-long train ride she had just taken. There was the moment while transferring trains with Foxxy when they witnessed someone take a photo of them as if their body was on display at a museum and how it added to the complicated feelings they have about the ways other people react to their body and gender expression in public.

The form this dissertation uses to write these moments—these stops along the way—to animate the experiences produced with the youth in this study is not unlike the process of doing education. That is, if this dissertation is considered as a series of introductions—of how the reader is invited to come to know who the youth in this study are and how they are positioning themselves within the social worlds they occupy—how might this mode of relational meaning making be considered in (more traditional) educational realms? Treating the interactions between the reader and the youth presented in this dissertation reflects the ways people come to interact with curriculum and how pedagogy shapes their ability to see, think, and take in what is intended to be taught. In reading this dissertation, readers are encouraged and provoked to consider how it is the youth described in these pages come to be known in the readers’ minds as they read—how coming to know “youth” is an educative process—while also being asked to not let said knowledge become sediment and to not let the young people harden into crystal clear pictures/objects in their mind’s eye. Considering the youth (and processes of coming to know and un-know them) as the “subject” of the curriculum, this dissertation in its form offers a pedagogical orientation towards how to approach, be with, think about, and re-present the youth’s experiences in the go-alongs.

Engaging in the risky work of learning is not something that can be charted out ahead of time. No amount of curriculum planning or studying of the subway map can predict the
learning that will result from any one lesson or between any two points along one’s journey (Ellsworth, 1997). Such journeys should also work to denude the word “risky” of its impulsively negative or dangerous attachments (Fields, 2008) and instead investigate ways to lean into the moments that seem the most complex, the most irreconcilable, and those where, perhaps, there is the most to be lost. Examining that feeling of loss is the project of unpacking what was thought to be “possessed” in the first place and how interactions with others force moments to un-/re-think, un-/re-focus, un-/re-present, and un-/re-learn. In education, reframing such a “loss” involves moving away from the assumptions that curricula are neutral; that students and children are innocent; and that schools can ever be truly safe spaces. By being in more thoughtful and reflective proximity to one another, shifts can be made to understand coming to learn about one another not as a fixed, singular, and predetermined process but one that is ongoing, malleable, and subject to the times and spaces it occurs.

The act of going-along is an educational practice of reframing the notion that destinations act as terminal endpoints to one’s journeys. Going-along with the youth in this dissertation entails recognizing how the reader meets them (through the descriptions of the experiences offered in these pages) for only a few segments of their journey; the journey taken with them only last the few moments while you were on the same train, on the same park bench, on the same sidewalk. The youth have long moved on since those moments you have read about them, moving and being, transiting and transitioning in unknown directions even in the time since you started reading this sentence. 

Now, as the train reaches what the subway map indicates is the last stop, you find yourself moving towards the door in anticipation of it’s opening. The gears of the car grind slowly to stop the forward motion, just when it appears to have ceased moving, the train
jumps forward one more inch and then another before the stuttering finishes and the brakes
lock into place underfoot. The few remaining passengers have crowded around you, all staring
firmly at the doors as if trying to pry them apart with their collective mental might. The two-
ote chime echoes throughout the car, signaling the door’s imminent opening. When they
finally pull away from their closed position, a gust of cool air sucks into the car, and you step
forward to go along for the next part of your journey.
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