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Abstract
This article examines the diverse ways in which people experience being strangers in public space. Based primarily on the journal entries of teenagers in New York City on their trips, we show the different ways in which riders experience being a rider amid diversity and norm violations. Some teenagers see being a rider as an engaging role, some as a detached role, and others as a precarious role. All the teenagers use folk theories to navigate the social world, but how they use them varies depending on how they experience being a rider. Finally, riding in groups shifts their experiences and interpretations in complex ways that make riding more enjoyable, but filled with additional emotional tensions. Building from previous theories and studies on strangers and public spaces, this article contributes to longstanding debates in sociology over how people interact with others in urban environments.

Keywords
public space, civil inattention, strangers, youth

Classic theorists of the modern city characterized its public spaces by their high levels of anonymity and diversity, where urbanites encounter one another as citizen-strangers (Park et al., 1925; Simmel, 1969 [1903]; Weber, 1986 [1921]; Wirth, 1938). Since these formulations, urban scholars have studied how people behave in public space and the role public space plays in the lives of urbanites. Many studies show how people fear and act cautiously on city streets, especially in low-income minority areas (Anderson, 1990, 1999, 2008; Cahill, 2000; Goffman, 2009;

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Merry, 1981). Anderson (1990) uses the concepts of 'street etiquette' and 'street wisdom' to demonstrate the different ways that people navigate public space and ensure their own personal safety. He argues that people construct perceptions of others as social types and/or conceptions of themselves as 'streetwise' and thereby confident public actors. Both provide people with a sense of security on the dangerous and volatile streets. Building from this work, Cahill (2000) claims that Latino and African-American urban teenagers use 'street literacy' to construct personal rules on how to safely navigate the dangerous public spaces of their neighborhood. These rules largely revolve around minding your own business and avoiding intruding on others' turf.

Other scholars show how urbanites experience public spaces as civil and even beneficial (Jacobs, 1961; Oldenburg, 1989; Duneier, 1992, 1999; Lofland, 1998; Morrill et al., 2005). In her pioneering work on the subject, Jane Jacobs (1961) argues that a chief function of successful sidewalks is their ability to integrate strangers into the social order of the street and ensure their safety. In her work, Lofland (1998) discusses the effects that public spaces have on urbanites. Building from Jacobs, she argues that public realms contain several common utilities that make them valuable for urban life. These include offering a rich environment for learning (particularly for children), providing people with respites and refreshments, and serving as a center of communication (1998: 231–7). And in a shift from his earlier research on poor black neighborhoods, Anderson (2004, 2011) argues that cities contain what he calls 'cosmopolitan canopies' where people (even marginalized African-American youth) from diverse backgrounds can expect and practice civility.

This literature reveals a spectrum of behaviors that reflects whether people experience public spaces as either dangerous or civil. Missing is an analysis of how people actually experience being a stranger in public spaces and how they negotiate their social orders. To fill this gap, we examine how teenagers experience being a rider on the subway and deal with diverse, anonymous others as well as norm violations. We argue that the subway represents a unique public space with a negotiated social order, and that subway riders and teenagers both represent specific kinds of strangers. However, despite sometimes being highly visible in public, teenagers are riders on the subway who must deal with its diversity and negotiated social order in the same manner as other riders.

Strangers in public space

Sociology has a long history of examining interactions between strangers in public space. Among his many social types, Georg Simmel's (1969 [1908]) notion of 'the stranger' has special resonance. For Simmel, strangeness is determined by the amount of closeness and remoteness that people possess vis-à-vis social groups. Strangers are spatially close to others but remain socially distant from them and merely hold general qualities with them in common (e.g. nationality or occupation). For Simmel, being a stranger means occupying or being assigned a place in society's social structure (McLemore, 1970). They are neither newcomers to a

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group nor a wanderer, or someone 'who comes today and goes tomorrow' (Simmel, 1969 [1908]: 143). Most importantly, Simmel describes strangers as being 'objective' in their attitudes towards others, in which 'objectivity ... does not signify mere detachment and nonparticipation, but is a distinct structure composed of remoteness and nearness, indifference and involvement' (p. 145). In other words, strangers are never separate from groups of other strangers but exist in a structured and constantly shifting relationship with them, which defines them as strangers. Simmel applied this same notion of the objective attitude a few years earlier in his classic essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1969 [1903]) to his interpretation of life in the modern city. His famous 'blasé outlook', or the psychic trait of urbanites, refers to an 'indifference toward the distinctions between things' (p. 329) that one encounters in the metropolis.

Goffman's (1963) work focuses less on identifying strangers than on explaining the behavioral patterns that emerge when people gather in public. He uses the concept of 'copresence' to refer to when people are close enough to others to perceive them and sense that they are close enough to be perceived by them (p. 17). Part of copresence in public spaces means acknowledging the presence of others without engaging them in a focused interaction. 'Unfocused' interactions (p. 24) occur when no verbal communication is required, but when people still must communicate with others through their behavior. Much of urban public life, Goffman argues, 'rests on people upholding the tacit working consensus surrounding ordinary social interaction and "normal appearances"' (Morrill et al., 2005: 9), or behavior that people use for their own successful and safe navigation through public spaces (Goffman, 1971: 238–333). Goffman refers to this public social balancing act as 'civil inattention', or when 'one gives to another enough visual notice to demonstrate that one appreciates that the other is present ... while at the next moment withdrawing one's attention from him so as to express that he does not constitute a target of special curiosity or design' (p. 84).

Hirschauer (2005) most directly engages with Goffman's understanding of behavioral patterns among strangers when he examines how 'a practice is needed *to keep up strangeness*' and 'How is civil inattention *accomplished* in practice?' (p. 42; emphases in original) through a discussion of how people act in elevators. If an elevator is a place where 'nothing' happens, Hirschauer questions what has to be done by people to ensure that nothing happens in a setting where the social order is in a constant state of flux (i.e. extended civil inattention with frequent shifts in riders). Through learning the skills and informal rules governing such behavioral phenomena as turn-taking, physical placement and distance, and the careful depositing of glances, elevator riders work to accomplish strangeness and present themselves as strangers among others, thus preserving normal appearances.

The subway as a unique public space

Public spaces in general have certain characteristics in common that distinguish them from private spaces or spaces for communal interaction (Lofland, 1998).

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In the most basic sense, they are spaces that local governments make accessible to all. Hunter (1985) argues that the social orders of public spaces are where people are bonded to one another solely as citizens. Within such spaces, however, private and parochial social worlds may collide, as when different groups occupy the same space. But since public spaces such as the subway do not 'belong' to anyone, all citizens have a legitimate right to occupy them.

The New York City subway features several characteristics that define it as a unique public space. First, the subway has constant flows of diverse and anonymous strangers who must coexist together in a relatively small space for varying lengths of time (Levine et al., 1973; Maines, 1977, 1979). People who choose to take the subway generally have less knowledge of who will be on it than they do when they go to a local commercial establishment (see Anderson, 2004) or particular neighborhood. In examining social interactions in neighborhoods featuring parochial social orders, Kusenbach (2006) shows how the patterned behaviors that neighbors use to interact with each other are often based on their basic familiarity with other people and a desire to do what good neighbors 'should' do for each other. The realities of the subway do not allow for this familiarity to emerge. Even people who live in relatively homogeneous neighborhoods, where the riders in local subway stations are fairly representative of the residential population and may even recognize each other from the local streets, must confront diversity once their train is in motion and traverses the city. Riders expect diversity and transience on the subway, but they cannot predict the exact types of people and behaviors they will see. Unlike neighborhoods, sidewalks, or parks, the subway is also an enclosed space. Riders must therefore deal with diverse, anonymous others within subway cars that are sometimes very crowded and without always offering the immediate option of escape.

In their research on public buses, Connor and Tewksbury (2012) identify two general forms of social control: omnipresent social control in the form of bus drivers, security cameras, and posted notices and warnings, and discretion among the collective of riders to maintain order. Unlike buses, the subway often lacks immediate supervisors. The New York City Transit Authority, a subsidiary of the MTA, runs the subway as a public service. Although at least one MTA official works at every station and two work on every train, they stay in certain areas and therefore have a limited influence on the everyday interactions of the subway. Police officers – the regular New York Police Department as well as its subway-dedicated Transit Bureau – patrol stations and subway cars, but they do so only sporadically. While some platforms and stations have private businesses, such as newsstands, most do not and their workers minimally influence the regulation of the social order of the subway. There are signs prohibiting behavior (e.g. no standing against the doors), but they are regularly violated and very rarely enforced.

With infrequent direct supervision from authorities, riders self-sustain and negotiate the social order by themselves (Tonnelat, 2012). The rider is a public role that consists of a set of contextualized practices. Like people in elevators, subway riders are strangers to one another for lengthier periods of time than when they pass each

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other on the street. Each rider is on display before all others and must demonstrate a 'normal appearance' (Goffman, 1971) of riding so as not to come into contact with, offend, or startle other riders. In maintaining civil inattention towards a large number of people for brief periods, riders are repeatedly letting others know that they will not make them an object of unwanted attention. Subway riders recognize one another and for the most part universally agree to respect each other's boundaries through a degree of avoidance. Just as people engaged in civil inattention do not suspect others, so too do they wish to not be made a target of suspicion. As Goffman states: 'By according civil inattention, the individual implies that he has no reason to suspect the intentions of the others present and no reason to fear the others, be hostile to them, or wish to avoid them' (1963: 84). As Connor and Tewksbury (2012) argue, riders collectively engage in appropriate behavior that encourages conformity.

People may observe others provided they do not disrupt the social order, such as by turning a fellow passenger into a target of special attention or by impinging upon their personal space. But since the subway requires riders to handle a great amount of diverse riders and varying interactions, the limits of impingement are not clear (Levine et al., 1973). Riders learn to be flexible in how they interpret the subway's social norms depending on the situations they encounter (e.g. loosening definitions of personal space while on crowded trains; see Fried and DeFazio, 1974).

Riders, for example, rarely intervene when norm violations occur, a testament to the strength of civil inattention as a defining characteristic of social interaction. The subway thus features an open social order (Goffman, 1963) with few formal rules but many social norms that riders generally agree upon in principle (e.g. respect others' space) and must constantly negotiate through action. Because of this openness, combined with the rapidity of change in ridership and crowded conditions, the subway's social order is in a constant state of crisis, or at risk of experiencing breakdowns through norm violations. With people from diverse backgrounds constantly entering and exiting, sitting and standing, facing one another, and shifting and bracing their bodies as the train moves, they are bound to come into visual or physical contact with others, or encroach upon their personal space. The subway, then, presents people with a unique space for practicing being a stranger in the city.

Teenagers in public space

Teenagers represent a specific type of stranger, particularly on the subway. Valentine (2004) notes the existence of an ambivalent perception of teenagers by adults. On the one hand, teenagers are often perpetrators of disruptive acts. Symes (2007) shows how youth who commute by train form 'micro-communities' in which they defy the adult gaze and act out their youthful identities without concern for other riders. Others document the teenagers' perspective towards adult supervisors in public spaces, such as in shopping malls (Matthews et al., 2000) and in town squares among skateboarders (Borden, 2001). In these cases teenagers often

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complain of adults and authority figures who either deny or restrict them of their right to occupy public space. On the other hand, teenagers are also seen as potential victims of circumstance (McCray and Mora, 2011). Scholars document the relationship between the increase in fear among and exertion of control by parents towards their children in public and the disinvestment in public spaces, such as parks and school playgrounds, that has occurred in cities since the late 1970s (Katz, 2004; Matthews et al., 1999). As a result, teenagers 'often have nowhere to go except public spaces, where they often come into conflict with other groups' (Lieberg, 1995: 720). In other words, along with being seen as rambunctious, teenagers are also sometimes thought of as a vulnerable group that needs to be protected, especially in urban public spaces.

In our fieldwork we observed many occasions when teenagers gathered in groups. Our students told us that it is best for them to meet their friends at the subway before and after school because they often live in different neighborhoods, and we suspect the case is the same for other teenagers in the city. In these situations, teenagers are highly visible, and are making themselves 'a target of special curiosity' (Goffman, 1963: 84) for other riders. However, when they ride alone, teenagers are highly invisible. They ride as others ride and strive not to attract any more unwarranted attention than anyone else. Teenagers are unique in that the additional attention they attract while in groups mostly disappears when they ride alone.[1]

While people must work at being a stranger in public, they do not all experience being a stranger in public the same. Hirschauer's (2005) work focuses on the micro level of public interaction based on behavior that he has observed. Likewise, Symes (2007) relies solely on his observations of youth in public to make claims about student riding dynamics. He also essentializes youth as defiant and rambunctious in the face of adult civility. Furthermore, neither account considers how social identities play a role in how people deal with being a stranger in public. How do teenagers experience being a subway rider? How does location within the social structure (i.e. their own and that of other riders) influence these experiences? To answer these questions we must look beyond the level of observation and try to understand people's perspectives towards being strangers in public.

Research settings, participants and methods

Based on a larger research project,[2] this article's setting is whatever route (walking, bus, and subway) each student regularly takes to and from their school in Queens. We focused on the 7 train, which is a typical subway line that has played an integral role in the ongoing development of the areas it services (Sanjek, 1998). To examine how teenagers experience the subway, we build from other innovative ethnographic studies that have used youth as 'co-researchers' in the data collection process instead of just as participants (Cahill, 2000, 2007; Williams and Kornblum, 1985). We contacted an honors class teacher in a highly diverse charter public school in Queens for immigrant students who have been in the country for

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five years or fewer located near the 7 train. Ten of the 12 high school students we recruited attended this school. We ultimately had four boys – Chinese, Mexican, Bangladeshi, and Colombian – and six girls – Bangladeshi, Haitian, Mauritian, two Chinese, and Argentine – from this school. They each had relatively high proficiency levels (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) in the English language. We also recruited two Colombian girls who attended a different high school (also along the 7 train), came to the United States when they were young, and were connected to our larger project. The 12 students range in age from 15 to 18.[3]

Our research team consisted of five people: two PhD students, one a young female Argentine sociology student and the other a young male Chinese environmental psychology student; a senior, male, New York City-native sociologist; and this article's two authors (both men), a New York City-native sociologist, who was a PhD student at the time, and a French urban sociologist, who was the project's principal investigator.

We wanted the teenagers to 'tell us the code' (Jimerson and Oware, 2006; Wieder, 1974) of the subway and how they experience it in situ through their own account of lived situations. After describing the general project, we gave them journals with log sheets and instructed them to keep a daily report of their trips – indicating the date and departure time, the reason for the trip, if they were with other people or alone, any transfers to buses or other trains, and where and when they exited – and to write an entry in their journals for every trip that they took. The diary method allows participants to document and express their lived experiences in a manner that is less mediated than oral narration (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977). It is also an effective way of making tacit and otherwise untold accounts of social experience (Shuman, 1986) more explicit (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1976).

A trip represented when they left their starting point until they arrived at their destination (usually home and school, but sometimes work and places for leisure). We asked them to be as descriptive as possible about their experiences. We regularly met with them several times a week to read over and discuss their journals. The purpose of the meetings was threefold. First, we wanted to interview each student and learn more about their backgrounds. Second, we wanted to guide the students in their note taking and hone their ethnographic skills by adding as many details to their entries as possible. We explained the importance of social context to them and showed them how to describe a setting. After a few sessions of instruction, the students became more adept at observation and writing. Our discussions then focused more closely on the substance of their entries, which was the third purpose of the meetings. Since it was the students who made the observations, we wanted to understand their own interpretations of their experiences. We read their journals with them, asked them questions about the episodes they documented, and allowed them to explain what they thought about what they saw and did. From the beginning of these sessions we noticed that descriptions of the subway's normative order through depictions, emotional expressions, and moral judgments of events and people pervaded their journals. Our subsequent

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conversations with them often focused on their interpretations of these norms. While we tried not to influence them to focus on any particular aspect of their experiences, we acknowledge that our interest in their observations of social norms may have led them to emphasize such episodes in their entries. However, we based our analysis on their overall experience negotiating the social order and not just norm violations.

Although we see teenagers as a special type of rider because of the attention they attract when riding in groups, we found that their experiences of being a rider are the same as that of adults. Furthermore, although our sample consists of recent immigrants, we find that their experiences would be the same if they were native-born New York City youth. They are young riders and relatively new to the city, but our students have learned the social skills required of riding the subway and they do so adeptly. We discuss the ways in which their youth and social identities factor into their experiences in our analysis.

We overcame problems that afflict small-sample qualitative studies by understanding each diary entry to be a case (Small, 2009: 24). We applied our central research question to every entry in each diary. Each entry provided us with findings and questions that informed us of the next case. We achieved 'saturation', or the point when the cases ceased to provide new information (Small, 2009: 25), as we read and reread each journal and understood the differences between their experiences. The logs indicate that the 12 students documented a total of 245 trips in their journals – an average of 20 trips per student – in a total of 518 pages – an average of approximately 43 pages per student.

We used three additional research methods to supplement the diaries. First, we broke the students up into four small groups for a researcher to lead them on a one-time 'walking interview' (Thibaud, 2001). We used this method to observe the students, to listen to them discuss their surroundings, and to learn their thoughts about the subway, in situ, but within the context of a visible group. Second, we singled out six of the students (four girls, two boys) for more in-depth 'go-alongs' (Kusenbach, 2003) that went beyond the regular interviews we conducted. We chose these particular students because they lived in the two neighborhoods – Jackson Heights and Flushing – on which our larger project focused.[4] Finally, towards the end of the project we gave the students disposable cameras and asked them to take pictures of significant sites on their regular trips. We then had them look at these pictures and describe or narrate what they saw to learn more about how they understood being on the subway (Becker, 1974; Harper, 1987). The photos were another way for the students to communicate to us how they experience the subway (see Auyero and Swistun, 2009).

Journal entries

From analyzing the entries of the students' trips, and accounting for the information we obtained from our supplementary methods, we have several points to make about how people experience being a stranger and navigate the public space of the

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subway with its diversity and norm violations. First, in their journals all the students show that they have learned and agree with the basic subway norm of balancing engagement and avoidance. The students accept that the subway's social order and social functionality is a collaborative endeavor of fellow riders working together by working on being a stranger. They all strive to put on a good performance as a rider (Goffman, 1959) by following this rule and maintaining civil inattention. Ting, a 16-year-old boy, expresses this universal attitude towards the end of his diary, 'Rule #1: you don't step on my turf, I don't step on your turf.' Since they see themselves as adept riders, students feel embarrassed when they unintentionally violate a norm. In doing so they acknowledge the norm's existence and their own mistake in crossing the line. One afternoon, Anais, a 16-year-old girl, is riding on the train with two friends when the following incident occurs:

> Throughout the conversation I look at a publicity board of La Guardia College, which is behind two sitting Asians (boyfriend and girlfriend – kissing). They apparently think I'm looking at them because they give me one of those annoyed looks. For a mere moment, they just look at me and I understand immediately why they're doing so. So I turn to my friends and ignore them [the Asians] throughout the whole trip.
>
> (6/7/06, 4:40 p.m., Flushing-bound 7 train)

Here Anais illustrates that she knows the general rule that it is acceptable to look on the subway, but not to stare. Staring represents a rupture in the subway's social order of civility and an impingement upon another's social boundaries. Even though she did not intend to stare at the couple, she interprets their reaction to her that they thought she did. When we asked Anais about this incident while reading her journal with her, she explained, 'I never stare at people directly. I didn't mean to stare at them, but that's what they thought. I think they were annoyed because they were kissing.' After getting caught unwittingly violating this norm, she reacts upon her embarrassment and tries to repair her standing as a good rider by consciously avoiding the couple for the rest of her trip. And her comment to us indicates that even though they perceived that she stared at them, the supposed violation may not have been pointed out had the couple not been flirting with violating a norm themselves (i.e. public display of affection), which demonstrates her understanding of the social order as negotiated.

But while all the teenagers understand that they must work at being a stranger on the subway by respecting other people's space and expecting that other riders will act as strangers and respect theirs, we found that there is significant variation in terms of how they experience being a rider and how they react to breakdowns in its social order. Below we examine several examples of this variation. We break up our findings into two sections based on a basic riding dynamic that accounts for significant differences in their experiences: whether the teenagers ride alone or in groups, or when they have low and high visibility. We found that students who ride with their friends experience the subway very differently from when they ride alone.

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When they ride alone, we found that some students experience being a rider as an engaging role that can be enjoyable. Other students when riding alone experience being a rider as a detached role and riding as a disengaging experience. They prefer to limit the chance of being made an object of attention or of making others the object of attention by engaging in 'auto-involvements' (Goffman, 1963: 64–78) to ensure their performance. Finally, some students when riding alone experience being a rider as an often stressful, precarious role they must play. They find themselves to be targets of attention because of their own social identity, or they interpret the norm violations of other riders as antagonistic interactions that are based on their own social identity. All students when riding alone invoke forms of 'categoric knowing' (Lofland, 1973) and use their own 'folk theories' (Anderson, 2004) in their observations and interactions with other riders. However, the role that their folk theories play in their experiences varies depending on how they experience being a rider.

Finally, teenagers experience the subway and being a rider differently when they ride in groups of friends. As members of a peer group, who usually share an ethnic background and language, these students collectively relate to the social order of the subway. For some students, particularly those who experience being a rider as a precarious role, the group offers them enough protection to engage with other riders, ignore norm violations, and understand the norms that they otherwise hold as strict rules as more negotiable. In the group they also tend to act out a youthful identity.

Riding alone

Some students are very reflective of themselves and their surroundings while riding, particularly of what it means to be a rider. Nadine is a 16-year-old girl from China. She usually takes the bus a hundred yards from her family home to the Flushing station where she transfers to the 7 train and exits at 33rd street to go to school. She is a discreet but articulate student. Here she describes two experiences on a single ride:

> This woman, probably in her 20s, keeps looking at me. I try to pretend she is not, but I catch her glances when she looked at me. I don't know what she was looking at. She might be looking at my shirt. (I personally think it's cute. It's red, and it has Disney characters.) This guy, about late 20s, was reading a newspaper (*Newsday* I believe). He opened up the newspaper in front of his face. Hmm ... he is looking at the woman sitting across from him. But he is still pretending he is reading his newspaper. I wonder what he is looking at. I found it funny because sometimes people look at you, but pretending they are not. They are looking at you, and you catch them but still don't ask what are you looking at. I think it's the subway['s] unspoken manners.
>
> (6/15/06, 11:57 a.m., 7 train)

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In this episode Nadine demonstrates that she understands and agrees that staring at other people on the train is a norm violation. Riders can look at others, as she is doing (engagement), but staring violates the rule of avoidance. But Nadine does not get upset or say anything when the woman stares at her and breaks civil inattention. In fact, while reflecting on rider behavior she finds it funny to 'catch' people looking at her or other riders and considers herself to possess 'unspoken manners' for not getting upset. Nadine ponders why she is being made an object of attention, and comes up with a possible explanation for why the woman is looking at her (her shirt). Within a negotiated social order and among many norm violations, she experiences being a rider as a role that is engaging and that allows her to reflect on her surroundings.

These students generally see their encounters on the subway as enjoyable experiences. Along with being reflective of the role they are playing, they are also reflective of the folk theories they have about other groups. They tend to use descriptive details to point out riders' differences by race, ethnicity, and social class. Ting is a 16-year-old boy from China. A very bright student, he writes very expressively of people on the subway in his diary. He pays close attention to who is around him, what they look like (e.g. 'high status', 'dressed working-class') and what they are doing, and he often provides his own thoughts and feelings on the situations he encounters. Take the following episode from a morning in his local station:

> There are good things happening in Flushing [station]. This morning a dark, short Native American was playing a musical instrument made of bamboo tubes, from the shortest and increased in length in order. ... His hair is dark and long, very typical of a Native American. He had two speakers set up, large traveling bag open before his feet, and he stood and played that beautiful melody with his flute near the microphone. There was some change in the large open bag before him. There were also some CDs. His mellifluous melody is the closest thing I ever heard to nature. The music has a pristine quality of innocence. This morning was not his first performance. The first time I saw him play about two days ago I had the strong impulse of buying his CD (But I was broke, plus I was hurrying into the station.) If I'm at the entrance to the station the tendency is not just to simply go in, but hurry in no matter how early you are. It is one of the habits of New Yorkers. When you are in the habit of hurrying, somewhere along the line you'll forget why you are hurrying.
>
> (6/14/06, 11:00 a.m., Flushing Station)

Here Ting expresses interest in a different, unique culture that he classifies as 'authentically' representative of Native American music. For Ting, the public space of the subway becomes a stage for a cultural performance (Tanenbaum, 1996). He describes how he breaks from the role of rider and stops to listen. The staged performance allows him to practice a less formal form of civil inattention.

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He can now relax his tendency to avoid others and engage more with the Native American musician and perhaps even elevate the encounter into a focused interaction by buying a CD and having a conversation (or he could simply walk away and go back to avoidance, with no consequences).

Other students, however, focus on their experiences without reflecting on their role as a rider or on other riders. Although they are comfortable riding the train, they do not necessarily enjoy it and often comment on certain aspects of it that bother them. Juan, a friendly 17-year-old student from Mexico, says in his journal: 'I hate the usual kids who always get on the train and start screaming, yapping, and behave like animals, so I sort of wrap myself in a bubble so that I do not have to interact with this noise.'[5] Their entries emphasize how they keep to themselves and work at being a stranger. As Juan implies, these teenagers regularly use specific 'auto-involvements' (Goffman, 1963) to distract themselves and avoid interactions. These include listening to music, closing their eyes (often falling asleep), and reading to disengage from others on the train and ensure a successful performance. Juan describes how he likes to behave on the train:

> I got to the 85th street station, run up the stairs and I am listening to PUNK, 'The Casualties,' their album 'En la linea del frente.' When I'm sad, I like to listen to punk because it makes me feel with power to control my emotions and therefore feel happy. I got into the train and just walk to the opposite door and stared out the window. When I am sad, I feel lonely and looking out the window separates me from the people around me because I do not have to make eye contact with them. If there is any noise, I have to increase the volume, not to hear the noise around me. When I take the E [train], I am thinking about how my high school career went by so fast, just like the train pulls up to a station and leaves it. I stood on the platform waiting for 15 minutes and the heat and humidity makes me dizzy. I stand in the rear of the platform because it is less crowded part of it with no more than 8 people around me, and I already am listening to song number 8 (I increase the volume to try to focus my mind on the music and ignore the heat).
>
> (6/14/06, 11 a.m., J train)

Juan feels that he must use the props of his music player, earphones, and the subway window to control his emotions better and to disengage from the action. While using such tactics he does not pay much attention to other riders, and thinks about other aspects of his life (his upcoming graduation). He has established a routine performance as a rider that allows him to be detached from the setting. Protected by his successful performance as a stranger, he does not concern himself with whether or not he is being made the object of attention by another rider.

Since these students emphasize the experience of being a rider as a detached role, an incident must occur for them to interact with other riders and invoke folk

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theories. When they do so, their reflections tend to be short and less developed. Here Juan describes an encounter that he had while riding:

> My ride from Sutphin to Roosevelt is generally smooth, quiet, and because it is the longest, is the one where I do most of my reading. Right now I am reading an autobiography of a man who was enslaved and brought to America in the 1800s and it has many illustrations and drawings of the period. As I was reading my book (always standing against the door) a black man approached me, begging some coins. He took a look at my book and saw a picture of a slave man being whipped. The man looked into my eyes and gave an expression of disgust as I told him I did not have any money. It is funny how fast people can draw conclusions and beliefs based on the most unimaginable details.
>
> (6/7/06, 8:00 a.m., Queens-bound J train)

Juan, reading while standing in his usual spot (another common behavior for these students), recognizes that the man is upset with him. Creating a potentially tense and awkward public moment, Juan ruminates a bit and finds it funny that the man would jump to a conclusion about him. He implies that the man is upset that he is reading such a book after not giving him any money, but he neither reflects past this nor relates the event to any of his possible identity traits such as race, ethnicity, gender, or age. Juan documents the incident as an interesting encounter, but the experience is casual and similar to others he has.

Finally, some students when riding alone experience being a rider as a precarious performance that is potentially stressful. While they recognize the negotiated nature of the subway's social order and its perpetual state of crisis, these students react strongly to norm violations and almost feel like they are antagonistic towards them, even though they recognize they occur to others all the time. Mehedi is a 17-year-old boy from Bangladesh. He usually takes the bus from his home in Jackson Heights to the 74th street subway station, where he transfers to the 7 train and exits at 33rd street. He is a shy but very responsive and smiling student. He rides the train alone in the mornings and most evenings. Mehedi's journal regularly features discussions of discomfort, and an interpretation of the subway's social norms as rigid rules. Here he reacts to a violation of the 'no pushing' rule:

> I always stand in front of the doors, because I feel good. If I go in the middle of the train it is hard for me to breathe. So I always like to stand in front of the doors of the train. That day, the train was crowded; people were pushing each other to get in. However, there was some problem with two mopes in the train. One was a black guy, the other was an Asian guy. So they start to get a big problem about pushing each other, the black guy telling the Asian guy 'why did you push me?' The Asian guy was like 'I didn't push you.' So after 5 minutes later they stop this fighting. I felt so

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> unhappy that day. People were pushing me and I got so much pissed off. I couldn't talk [at] that time. I felt I wanted to kill everyone. I couldn't wait to get out of the train.
>
> (6/7/06, 8:18 a.m., 7 train)

Mehedi, like many of these students, likes to stay close to the train door. But even in this spot, the nearby argument between 'mopes' threatens his own comfort as he links their behavior to a general breaking of rules (constant pushing) that directly affects him. This episode reveals how little margin for error Mehedi allows when it comes to norm violations. He understands the subway as an environment where riders can easily damage the social order. He feels helpless ('I couldn't talk [at] that time') and lets what is going on around him affect him personally (he is unhappy and 'pissed off').

These students often invoke negative folk theories as explanations for why some people violate norms. Anita and Connie are both 17-year-old Colombian girls who live in Jackson Heights and often ride the train together. They experience the subway in a similar manner, even when they ride separately. Along with its crowdedness, Anita and Connie also regularly complain about the subway's smell, which they claim originates with South Asians on the train. 'The smell was really nasty', says Anita in an entry. 'It was like food. To be specific the smell was like Hindu food with garlic. It was horrible and because of the humidity the smell was intense. I couldn't continue my way on that train.' Connie documents the following episode:

> When we enter the train next to us was seated two women who were Hindu because they had dresses that women Hindus wear. One woman was wearing a yellow dress. Her skin color was brown, her hair was black and very long. The other woman had a pink color dress. They were sitting next to me and they were talking in their language. When Anita and me were next to them and they smelled bad, bad like onions. The smell came from their bodies. So we had to move because the smell was very bad and all people were moving and did facial expressions. When we got out in the station we breathed the good air because the train smelled disagreeable.
>
> (6/21/07, 8:30 a.m., Manhattan-bound E train)

For Connie and Anita, smell violates a norm by not respecting the boundaries of others (or an 'obtrusion', according to Goffman, 1971). Connie does not experience a bad smell as a consequence of crowds in tight spaces. She racializes smell and understands it to be a physical trait of South Asian people. The smell intrudes on the social order of the subway and threatens her already fragile comfort level.

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Riders rarely break civil inattention to engage with others directly. Only one of our students, Anita, describes a confrontation with riders who she perceived were breaking the subway's rules by not respecting her privacy:

> Curiously, I was looking at the advertisement posters when I see a young girl looking at me with attitude and I didn't know why. She was with her friend and I could see how both girls look at me and talk. Really, I was getting mad, because I don't even know them so she don't have the right to look at me like that. So what I did was both girls got off at 74th street and I did something because I was taking the E train. It was 8:40 a.m. and both girls take the same direction as me. When we was waiting for the train I tell them why both was looking at me and if one of them knows me because I want to know what is the problem. The girls got nervous and tell me that they admired my skirt and I start laughing and I leave.
>
> (6/15/06, 8:40 a.m., 7 train)

Anita takes a stare by two young girls personally and gets mad because riders 'don't have the right' to stare at her. Anita is mad enough here to break civil inattention and say something to the young girls directly about their transgression. She makes them 'nervous' because such confrontations are contrary to the norm. Perhaps if the girls were not young and did not get off at the same station as her and wait on the same platform for the same train Anita would not have confronted them. The key is that the only incident we have of such a confrontation came from a student who in general experiences being a rider while riding alone as stressful, and who reacts strongly to norm violations against her.

Riding in groups

Except for four students who always ride the subway by themselves for various reasons (e.g. they do not live near school friends, they go to work right after school), all the others prefer riding in groups because it makes the ride 'less boring' and changes an otherwise uninteresting moment into a more social or 'fun' occasion. The students therefore experience the subway and being a rider differently when they ride with their friends. We found that the most dramatic differences were for those students who experience being a rider as a stressful role and the social order as precarious. When riding with friends, these students experience being a rider as enjoyable, and the subway's social order as negotiated.

Anita, the girl already mentioned for her attitude towards South Asians and her confrontation, illustrates this change as she rides home from school with a friend:

> Today I'm going to take the 7 train in Queens Plaza because I decided to walk with my friend, because the day looks beautiful. I'm still waiting for the 7 local train. During that time I'm playing with a little ball with my friend [and more teenagers begin] to

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> play with us. The police man is around here and he looks like he doesn't like what we are doing ... Finally the train is coming we [are] all going to take because we don't want to get in trouble. We are three girls and four guys. We start playing in the wagon. Actually, we think the people located on the seats up bother them but we didn't pay attention ... Also a little kid came where we are and started to play with us. His mother called him. We all started laughing because he tried to be like us.
>
> (6/12/06, 3:17 p.m., 7 train)

Anita's entry starts off on a much more positive note than her solo ventures as she describes the beautiful day. She is just as aware that other riders are staring at her as she is when she rides alone. But now she neither takes their stares personally, nor racializes the offenses. Instead, she uses the group to help her not 'pay attention'. The dynamic that she and her friend create even attracts other teenagers to join them. Unlike the girls who she confronted for staring, she enjoys this impromptu engagement with strangers in her age group and notices that the adult riders say nothing to her about their behavior. In fact, part of her enjoyment from this activity derives from her observation of the reactions of other riders. Whereas she reacted strongly to the norm violations of others in a previous example, here she plays with them herself. Unlike when she rides with her friend Connie, who shares her feelings towards crowds and South Asians (whether they are alone or together), Anita does not experience other riders as problems. She also identifies and avoids the policeman, a rare authority figure who is a potential threat to the fun they are having. His presence causes them to board the train, where Anita does not mind being the target of others' attention.

But the difference between riding alone and in groups is not so cut and dry. Despite enjoying the experience of riding more when they are in groups, the realities of being a rider as a member of an 'othered' social group often cause mixed feelings and an uncertain experience. The best example of this complicated dynamic is Aysha, a 15-year-old girl from Bangladesh. She is a dark-skinned Muslim and wears a hijab headscarf, sometimes with western clothing such as jeans and a blouse, and sometimes in a more traditional outfit such as an 'Indian dress'. Aysha writes that she is often the target of staring while on the train, which causes her great stress despite her auto-involvements. As she says early on in her journal while setting the scene of her commute: 'Everywhere I look, I see them looking at me, and not only one, all of them! Either sitting down, standing, or talking to someone ... How annoying is that? I'm sure no one wants to be stared at.' Her case of others making her an object of attention based on appearance is the only time in their journals that a student interprets a norm violation against them in ethnic terms. But Aysha experiences the subway much differently when she is with her friends.

On 26 June at 8:30 p.m., Aysha, her sister, and her friend Shirin are coming home from the graduation ceremony of two of their friends. They are all wearing traditional Indian dresses for the occasion. After the ceremony they get on the

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7 train together, but it is late and past the time that their parents allow them to be out alone. While on the platform Shirin realizes that her station is after that of the sisters, so she must ride the train a bit longer after they get off. She asks, 'How am I going to go alone all the way to 82nd St. by myself? Why don't you guys drop me please to at least 61st St. please!!' Aysha and her sister look at each other, and Aysha replies, 'Hmmm, Shirin, I really would, but you know I'm already late, and after going home now I'm going to get a big lecture, and I'm really tired of those big lectures!' Although she recognizes her friends' curfew, Shirin is persistent and asks them a few more times to ride with her. Meanwhile, Aysha notices people staring at them:

> We got people's attention probably because we were all dressed and wearing Indian dresses, but I didn't really care. That happens all the time and because after the entrance everybody was looking normal and never paid attention to us because today was a very hot and exhausted day for everybody.

As we saw, Aysha recognizes that other riders look at her because of her different appearance. Unlike when she travels alone, when traveling with her friends who are wearing similar clothes she does not mind the gaze of other riders because she is used to it and only receives 'normal' looks. She does not take it personally and absolves others from their ethnic-based norm violation (it was a 'hot and exhausted day for everybody').

As the train nears Aysha and her sister's station, however, Shirin holds onto their hands to keep them from getting off. As Aysha writes:

> '[All in Bangla] Please, Shirin, we are already late, please can we leave, let us go' but she wouldn't listen. She nodded her head back and forth and said 'Come on guys, look I'm going to ride alone, and I am wearing this dress, and those perv idiot guys are gonna stare at me, please drop me in 61st street, then you guys can leave.' Since she wasn't letting go of our hands and the door was already closed we decided to drop her off at 61st street.

We do not know how Shirin ordinarily experiences the subway, since Aysha is recounting the incident in her journal. It is very possible that Shirin did not want the sisters to leave her out of fear of riding alone in general or because it is late at night. But Aysha's portrayal suggests that something else may play a role. This time when Shirin asks them to stay with her, she specifically mentions annoying male riders who she fears will stare at her in what she feels is in a perverted manner. The people who were once part of the collective order become threats at the very thought of being left to ride alone. The dynamics of the group protect the students from the glances of other riders, and going from riding in a group to riding alone changes the experience of the stare from 'normal' to perverse. Indeed, as this excerpt demonstrates, Aysha's explanation of why people stare at her is different when she is in a group.

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But the experience of being a rider for Aysha is not always enjoyable when riding with her friends. Sometimes the situation draws her back towards understanding the role as precarious, and the stares of others as antagonistic. Here she describes an embarrassing encounter she has while going home from school with friends on a crowded train in front of people who are already looking at them:

> When Shirin was trying to find a spot to hold on and stand next to us, the two [guys] were just looking at us normally. As she was looking Labonya said [all in Bangla], 'I dare you to sit on the floor in the middle of us,' and Shirin immediately looked at Labonya and really sat down. I was looking at us in shocked embarrassment. I was like, 'Oh my God. Come on, get up!' Hasan was looking at my expression and looking at Shirin too. He didn't know what to say, rather than keep repeating, 'You don't have to sit there, get up!' She just sat there. A guy probably 50 or more years old, wearing a brownish shirt, black hair, and holding a paper, looking at us with an evil eye and his eyebrows squeezed, as my eye caught his eye looking at us, he put his face down and just nodded back and forth. As I looked at him, his expression says 'Lord, help these kids.' We were like the center of attention now, because Hasan and Labonya were laughing at Shirin and telling her sorry and so I was laughing a little bit, but not a lot because I hate annoying people. When I saw the guy looking at me and doing that I shut my mouth and were staring at people as if I were lost. I looked at Shirin, then Hasan the same way and told them to lower their voice, I was hoping my stop would be here any minute!! As usual Labonya never stopped being too hyper and I never stopped getting embarrassed in public.
>
> (6/15/06, 4:30 p.m., 7 train)

This instance and numerous others show how teenage groups carve out their own quasi-private space within the larger space of the subway. By having fun in the group, Aysha recognizes that her friends are breaking the subway's norms. At first she observes that adults are giving them 'normal looks', which is how she describes experiencing being a rider when riding with friends in her journal. But when Labonya violates a subway norm, Aysha immediately feels embarrassment because she fears people will associate her friend's performance as a rider with her own. Embarrassment in this case points to a breach of performance by a participant in specific public settings (Joseph, 1998: 87). For Aysha, who is very careful in her behavior when riding alone so that she does not attract any more unwanted stares than she already does, embarrassment is not a common feeling. She notices the rider staring at them with a look that she feels criticizes their misguided youthfulness. She fears that the adults do not see her as a regular rider, but as a rambunctious kid. But even through the emotional tension, Aysha, who is part of the group of friends, still laughs at Shirin's behavior. While Aysha is a special case because of her appearance, we found that other students also revealed the combination of enjoyment and anxiety that riding in groups caused in them. Riding in a group forces riders to balance its social order with that of the subway (Hunter, 1985).

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By feeling this tension the teenagers demonstrate that they are well aware of the impact that their high visibility has on the train.

Variation in public roles and spaces

If cities are a 'world of strangers' (Lofland, 1973), then knowing how to 'be' a stranger is a fundamental aspect of urban life. Being a stranger entails a set of practices that people use to maintain social distance from others in public spaces. In this article we examined how subway riders deal with a regularly changing group of diverse others and regular norm violations within a confined space for long durations of time. We found a broad range of differences in terms of how people experience this public role, which reveals its variability as well as that of the public space of the subway.

When we first selected teenagers as our participants for this study, we anticipated that their experiences would differ from those of adults. Our thinking revolved around their youth and our own perceptions of teenagers as a rambunctious group with high visibility on the train. Furthermore, since our students were also recent immigrants, we also expected their ethnic backgrounds to influence their experiences. We thought their understanding of the subway's social order and of their interactions with diverse riders would be influenced by their own social identity. Neither of these assumptions proved to be true. Their interpretation of the subway's social order and norms, the experiences they have, and their thoughts on other riders (including other teenagers) are what we would expect adult riders to have. They all understood the subway's most important social rules in the same manner and made observations of others' backgrounds based on their own folk theories. And with one exception (Aysha) they did not understand the violations that others made against them to be based on their ethnicity. Even at young ages and being relatively inexperienced in the city, these students demonstrate strong competence at being a rider. However, as we show, they experience this role in different ways.

While usually not pertinent in their routine interactions, identity factors such as ethnicity, gender, and age play a bigger role in norm violations for the students who experience being a rider as a stressful role. They do so more often than others, except (to a certain extent) when they ride with friends. While they recognize that all riders are collectively negotiating the social order, they still experience stress from their interactions and observations in the context of riding, and a combination of factors such as ethnicity play an important role in these experiences. Indeed, in the national context of a fear of Islam, it may be harder for the female student wearing the headscarf, even if there are other South Asians or Muslims on the train.

Our findings also reveal the ways and conditions under which these perceptions and experiences shift for people within the same public space. Other scholars, such as Anderson (2004, 2011), imply that people must go to different areas in the city to have different experiences of public space, or that certain groups only experience

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public spaces in a certain way (Merry, 1981; Cahill, 2000). The teenaged riders we studied demonstrate that people experience the same spaces in different ways. While they show certain tendencies when playing the role of rider, riding dynamics alter their experiences. As a public space, the subway contains the potential for many types of interactive experiences for a diverse array of groups.

While beyond the scope of this article, we suggest that the different experiences of being a rider and different attitudes towards the subway are linked to the student's level of trust in the social order of public spaces in general, and to the level of confidence they have in their own ability to be a stranger-citizen in the city. In this regard, we speculate that these interpretations could be explained by factors external to the direct experience of the subway, such as personal and family history, ethnicity, gender, or immigration status. Future research should seek to discover the connection between people's experiences in and attitudes towards public spaces and their own social backgrounds. This article also suggests that the dynamics of riding in groups may help riders build up their confidence to be strangers in public. The way they sometimes test social norms while in groups may also be a way for young riders to acquire more confidence in riding the subway and not just an uncontrolled burst of youthful disregard for adults, as common misconceptions of youth imply.

Notes

1. We recognize that even groups of adult riders who are normally invisible can attract the attention of other riders. But given the regularity with which they ride with friends before and/or after school, we feel that teenagers represent a special case.
2. Our larger project examines the social ecology of the subway and its environs within the context of the residential neighborhoods of Jackson Heights and Flushing, both in Queens. We chose these neighborhoods because of the extent of their racial and ethnic diversity and the size and busyness of their local subway stations.
3. The research with the students took place for one month in June 2006. We compensated each of them $200 ($100 at the beginning of the project, $100 at the end) for their work as our 'research assistants'.
4. Since the remaining six students did not live in Jackson Heights or Flushing, we decided not to conduct go-alongs with them.
5. Like other riders, many of the students also indicate that they dislike riding with groups of teenagers.

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Stéphane Tonnelat is a CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) research faculty at the Cirhus research center at NYU. He conducts ethnographic research on various types of urban public spaces in Paris and New York. His main fields of investigation lie in urban interstices (wastelands, empty lots), parks and gardens, subways and ferries where he studies social order, uses and production of space, and social mobilizations around public issues. He has recently published articles in French and in English in *Raisons Pratiques*, *Focaal* and *Métropolitiques*.

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