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Los Angeles

More Than Just the “Loser Cruiser”?:
An Ethnographic Study of the Social Life on Buses

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Urban Planning

by

Camille Nanette Yayoi Fink

2012

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

More Than Just the “Loser Cruiser”?:
An Ethnographic Study of the Social Life on Buses

by

Camille Nanette Yayoi Fink

Doctor of Philosophy in Urban Planning

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Brian D. Taylor, Chair

The literature on travel demographics and mode choice provides information about individuals and their travel patterns at the aggregate level and by using variables such as income, race/ethnicity, gender, and age. These findings provide useful insight into the modes that travelers use and the purpose, duration, and distance of trips. However, we know much less about the ways people experience travel, both physically and emotionally, and the effects these experiential aspects can have on individual travel decisions. This research uses ethnographic fieldwork methods to examine the experience of bus travel, and particularly behaviors, types of interactions, and social expectations on buses.

This study focuses on five bus lines in Los Angeles running along several of the city’s main

thoroughfares as part of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) transit network – three established local (Metro Local) routes and two newer bus rapid transit (BRT or Metro Rapid) lines. The findings suggest that life on buses includes a myriad of complex social and interpersonal interactions. Bus riding involves established norms and rules of behavior around waiting, boarding, riding, and alighting. Behaviors and incidents that occur outside this scope of normalcy are identified and considered disruptions. Regular disruptions to the social order can be characterized in several dimensions: 1) negative and positive disruptions, 2) the impact of disruptions on individuals and groups, 3) their quality as brief or more sustained, 4) routine and more unusual disruptions, and 5) the intimate to stranger relationships among those involved in a disruption.

A comparison of the Local and Rapid lines shows that they differ in terms of the consistency of branding and the physical features and amenities along the routes. This study also introduces the idea of “experiential reliability,” or the consistency of experience. Fewer disruptions occur in the tighter social space of the Rapid buses, while the Local bus experience includes ongoing disruptions to the social order. Lastly, various types of stigma management occur in bus spaces. Riders both respond to and ignore particular stigmatized riders – the outcasts, the disruptors, and the freeloaders. People also manage the modal stigma of buses through such strategies as complaining, commiserating, destigmatizing the bus-riding experience, and reconceptualizing the bus-rider identity.

The dissertation of Camille Nanette Yayoi Fink is approved.

Evelyn A. Blumenberg

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David Snow

Brian D. Taylor, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

For G.C. and C.A.

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Tuesday 9:00 AM

A man standing at the bus stop
reading the newspaper is on fire
Flames are peeking out
from beneath his collar and cuffs
His shoes have begun to melt

The woman next to him
wants to mention it to him
that he is burning
but she is drowning
Water is everywhere
in her mouth and ears
in her eyes
A stream of water runs
steadily from her blouse

Another woman stands at the bus stop
freezing to death
She tries to stand near the man
who is on fire
to try to melt the icicles
that have formed on her eyelashes
and on her nostrils
to stop her teeth long enough
from chattering to say something
to the woman who is drowning
but the woman who is freezing to death
has trouble moving
with blocks of ice on her feet

It takes the three some time
to board the bus
what with the flames
and water and ice
But when they finally climb the stairs
and take their seats
the driver doesn't even notice
that none of them has paid
because he is tortured
by visions and is wondering
if the man who got off at the last stop
was really being mauled to death
by wild dogs.

– Denver Butson, *trptych* (1999)

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1. INTRODUCTION

I saw this in a movie about a bus that had to speed around the city, keeping its speed over fifty, and if its speed dropped, the bus would explode! I think it was called *The Bus That Couldn't Slow Down*.

– Homer Simpson, describing a trick he learned watching *Speed*

Everyone told me to pass on *Speed* because it was a “bus movie.”

– Sandra Bullock

In the early 1980s, urban planners put forth what now seems like a radical perspective on the role of transportation in the pre-automobile society. They argued that modes such as public transit provided spaces where people “were forced to rub shoulders with one another. Certainly, it was irritating, but at least each was aware of the other’s existence. Only very, very few could isolate themselves to such an extent as to utter about the breadless: ‘Let them eat cake’” (Schaeffer and Sclar 1980:5). Cars, on the other hand, allowed individuals to travel within the confines of a much more private space and to avoid people not like them. In this sense, transit is a public space that transports riders from one location to another, but also is a place where riders are exposed to and interact with diverse groups of other people. The automobile has come to dominate travel in the United States, and more people can and do make the choice not to use transit. As a result, much of American society does not participate in this very public and, some would argue, very democratizing space.

Los Angeles is one of the largest and most diverse urban centers in the world, and its public transit system is expansive. The service area of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) covers 1,400 square miles. On an average weekday, the

system has over 2,200 peak-hour buses in service and handles over 1.1 million unlinked passenger trips on buses (American Public Transportation Association 2011b; American Public Transportation Association 2012b).¹ In 2010, Los Angeles ranked number three in terms of total annual unlinked passenger trips (481 million), surpassed only by MTA New York City Transit (NYCT) and the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) (American Public Transportation Association 2011b).^{2,3} Yet, the prevailing narrative is that no one uses transit in Los Angeles and that car culture is what binds its residents together. Rather, this is a false narrative that serves in part to marginalize and to render invisible the large numbers of people who rely and ride on transit every day.

The notion of public spaces as truly “public” has become increasingly problematic as many of the places where large numbers of people come together are commercialized, privatized, or both. Hence, malls and amusement parks are deemed legitimate public spaces, though highly regulated, controlled, and inaccessible to many individuals. Public transit remains one of the few public spaces where admission is low (a \$1.50 fare in Los Angeles) and virtually everyone is permitted entry. In Los Angeles and most other major metropolitan areas, negotiating relationships and interactions in bus space is a daily activity for hundreds of thousands of people, but we – both researchers and the majority of Americans who travel almost exclusively by private vehicle – know so little about this ubiquitous microcosm.

¹ The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) defines *unlinked passenger trips* as “the number of times passengers board public transportation vehicles. Passengers are counted each time they board vehicles no matter how many vehicles they use to travel from their origin to their destination and regardless of whether they pay a fare, use a pass or transfer, ride for free, or pay in some other way” (American Public Transportation Association 2012a).

² NYCT has always been the “250-pound gorilla” of public transit. In 2009, the system had 3.2 billion unlinked passenger trips. CTA followed at 521 million. Hence, Metro is a very large system compared to other systems nationwide with the exception of NYCT.

³ In terms of unlinked passenger trips on buses only, Metro moves up to second place behind NYCT with nearly 386 million trips compared to NYCT’s almost 843 million trips.

I will show that buses are stigmatized and segregated spaces (low-income people and people of color make up a disproportionate percentage of bus ridership in the U.S.), but buses remain public and accessible. The close physical proximity inside a bus among people from diverse social and cultural groups offers a fascinating case study of public space and social order. This research is an attempt to document, categorize, and interpret behavior and interactions on buses – an overlooked, but extremely rich site of public life – and to understand life on buses as both a physical and social phenomenon.

1.1. Why Study Bus Culture?

The last several decades have seen a significant realignment in modes of travel, from public transit to the automobile, driven largely by an increase in the ownership of private vehicles. Meanwhile, the proportion of trips taken via transit is low, at only about 1.9% of all person trips in the United States in 2009, as compared to the 83.4% of trips made by private vehicle (U.S. Department of Transportation 2009).^{4,5} While transit's share of the modal split is low, this proportion has remained relatively constant over the last two decades and, in fact, increased 0.3% between 2001 and 2009.⁶ Changes in levels of transit use, even small percentage increases or decreases, can alter the burdens on public resources and their potential allocations; therefore, the factors influencing people's decisions to travel via one mode or another are an important public policy concern. The travel demographics and mode choice literature tells us about the people traveling in terms of characteristics such as income,

⁴ The National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) defines a *person trip* as "a trip by one person in any mode of transportation. This is the most basic and universal measure of personal travel" (U.S. Department of Transportation 2011).

⁵ Transit trips include trips in the following modal categories: local public bus, commuter bus, commuter train, subway/elevated train, and street car/trolley.

⁶ NHTS results from 1990 to 2009 show small changes in the percentage of person trips made by transit: 1990 NHTS (1.8%), 1995 NHTS (1.8%), 2001 NHTS (1.6%), and 2009 NHTS (1.9%) (Santos et al. 2011).

race/ethnicity, gender, and age. We know which modes of transportation they are using and the purpose of their travel (work versus non-work trips, for example). Data sets such as the National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) tell us the number of trips people make, how long they spend traveling, and the distances and time of day they travel. This wealth of information allows researchers to identify patterns and trends in travel behavior in the past and to use these insights to help planning practitioners and policymakers make more informed decisions about transportation issues.

These data and the findings, however, reflect large-scale, aggregate, quantitative metrics about the characteristics of individuals traveling and the ways in which they conduct their travel. This broad perspective provides a useful portrait of travel patterns, but largely fails to capture the many more nuanced and more difficult-to-quantify details about individual travel decisions and people's perspectives on the costs, benefits, and trade-offs. Transportation scholars have suggested that qualitative research can help fill this void not only by shedding light on what quantitative findings tell us, but also by pointing to new and important travel and transportation topics overlooked due to methodological limitations (Roe 2000; Clifton and Handy 2003).

Quantitative data alone cannot provide an in-depth understanding of transit behavior. Any time spent traveling by bus, from waiting at a stop to alighting at a different location, involves countless micro interactions with other people pursuing similar travel goals. Much of the time, this experience is relatively uneventful for participants, as bus riding has to be routinized in order for such a massive system of activity to function in a meaningful and efficient way. Nevertheless, these many minor interactions reveal much about how people

navigate public spaces more generally. In addition, various disruptions to the social order of bus space can occur, some of which are just minor glitches that are corrected instantaneously and others that can have significant effects, both in the short- and long-term, on the operation of the system and on riders' sense of well-being and comfort. Participant observation provides a means for understanding the social rules of behavior for these various events: the ways they transpire, individuals' responses to such occurrences (or their lack of response), and the consequences to the social order. Ultimately, this insight can help transit agencies better understand the experiences of their riders on buses and can point to ways that social and spatial aspects of transit environments can be altered and improved.

1.2. The Scope and Purpose of This Research

This research seeks to explore and understand bus behavior and culture through ethnographic fieldwork. The focus of this study is five bus routes running through Los Angeles. Fieldnotes gathered as a participant observer provide insight into the behaviors, social norms, and expectations of these mobile public spaces. By examining both bus rapid transit (BRT) lines, known as the Metro Rapid system in Los Angeles, as well as Metro Local bus lines, this research endeavor allows for comparisons across modal types and over different geographic areas. This also provides an understanding of bus life not as a single, homogenous experience, but rather as a discourse of bus lives through which generally consistent human behaviors and interactions alter under particular qualities of space and time.

Because earlier transportation research was largely grounded in principles of engineering, the qualitative research approach taken here seeks to reveal aspects of transit use that are not otherwise captured in the transportation literature. Although focusing on behavior and

interaction, the fieldwork data are also able to reveal details about issues such as comfort, safety, and equity – qualities that are difficult to quantify and must be assessed by different methodologies. The fieldwork research also provides a perspective on the demographics of transit ridership, which helps extend the analysis of the relationship between categorical socioeconomic variables (such as income level or race/ethnicity) and behavior by considering how these identity factors play out in bus space.

1.3. Organization of This Dissertation

This research explores various aspects of the social life on buses, including overviews of behaviors and disruptions, and comparisons between different routes and service types. The presentation of the project and subsequent analysis are organized into the following six chapters:

Chapter 2 provides a review of three literatures relevant to this research: 1) the sociology of public space, 2) travel behavior and demographics, and 3) mobility and travel. While different literatures coming from disparate academic fields and disciplines, the works in these three areas form the foundation of this research. This project seeks to bring qualitative and sociological approaches to understanding public behavior into the field of transportation by examining a particular transportation setting – the bus – that has been the subject of much demographic and mode choice analysis. By also looking at other sources of information – early transport sociology efforts, the emerging mobilities research, and alternative sources of experiential information about transit travel – this review of the literature identifies gaps and the contributions of this project.

Chapter 3 describes the qualitative methodology used in this research (participant

observation) and the specific research sites included in this study. Fieldwork on five different lines – two Metro Rapid lines and three Metro Local routes – provides a basis for comparisons both of geographic location and by service type (Rapid versus Local). This chapter also presents details about Metro’s larger transit network, demographic information about neighborhoods along the various routes, and the characteristics of riders on the different lines. In addition, I present more details about my data collection process and reflect on my role as a researcher relative to these study sites.

Chapter 4 is the first analytical chapter, and it examines the social norms of bus space and the rules and expectations that enable the procedure of bus riding to run smoothly – from queuing and boarding to riding and alighting. This chapter also outlines different disruptions to the social order that occur on buses, the ways these disruptions play out, and the ways in which they affect other people present on buses. Disruptions to the social order can be understood along various dimensions, including: 1) negative to positive, 2) individual to group, 3) brief to sustained, 4) routine to unusual, and 5) intimates to strangers. Disruptions can be discrete events or they can initiate a cascade effect when they occur in sequence.

Chapter 5 is the second analytical chapter and presents a comparative analysis of behavioral and disruption differences by service type and geographic route. Bus spaces are not homogenous in their physical characteristics and amenities – Rapid lines along particular routes can be very different from Local lines along the same routes – and the observed behaviors, social norms, and rider expectations differ in these spaces as well. This chapter also introduces the idea of “experiential reliability,” or the consistency of experience, as a factor that also distinguishes Rapid and Local buses.

Chapter 6 is the final analytical chapter, and it addresses the issue of socio-spatial bus stigma, both of the physical space of the bus and the identity of the bus rider. Much stigma is external to actual bus spaces (examples of negative perceptions and stereotypes of buses and bus riders from popular culture are included throughout this discussion), but people also manage various forms of stigma while present on buses. Particular riders who violate norms of behavior become stigmatized, and drivers and riders respond to and negotiate with these individuals in different ways. The bus also carries a modal stigma where aspects of the service or the experience of travel are inferior to alternate modes such as the automobile. People cope with these modal deficiencies using a range of solitary and interpersonal strategies.

Chapter 7 provides an overview of the findings of this research and relates them back to the various literatures presented earlier. This chapter also reviews the implications of this study and its findings for academic research and for transportation planning and practice.

The social life on buses is a complicated one, often filled with experiential contradictions: it is predictable and unpredictable, full of the routine as well as the remarkable, tolerable (or even enjoyable) as an experience while sometimes extremely challenging, and part of the everyday while so unfamiliar to many people sharing the same urban space. We begin our journey into the complex and interesting world of buses with a review of the literatures about bus travel and travelers and with a positioning of this work in the larger, evolving research landscape.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

He thought he saw a Banker's Clerk
Descending from the 'bus:
He looked again, and found it was
A Hippopotamus.
"If this should stay to dine," he said,
"There won't be much for us!"

– Lewis Carroll, "The Mad Gardener's Song"

Much transportation research has sought to understand the factors influencing people's decisions to travel via one mode or another. A body of literature, overwhelmingly quantitative, describes mode choice and the demographics of travel behavior. This research has described in detail *who* uses *which* modes of transportation, *what* types of trips they are making, *where* they are going, and *when* they are making these trips. Research on the *why* aspects of travel behavior tends to focus on predicting why people choose one travel mode over another, including service factors such as speed, comfort, cost, reliability, and accessibility. These are often quantifiable characteristics that can be used in discrete choice analysis. Little research has sought to explain *how* people travel, particularly the subtle and detailed interactions in micro spaces.

In recent years, a handful of scholars has begun to discuss the merits of qualitative transportation research and the ways in which it both complements and illuminates quantitative findings. Qualitative methods hold great promise in exploring these questions of why people choose particular modes, how travel impacts their lives, and in turn how their lives affect travel decisions. Roe (2000) argues that the dearth of qualitative transportation work reflects a field still strongly grounded in engineering and quantitative thought. Qualitative

research in transportation can provide completely new and critical perspectives – such as feminist interpretations of transportation – and these methods could help us “to elicit and reveal subjectively experienced time-space constraints in everyday urban travel, to delineate those experiences and to learn more about how people construct and live their travel routines in different structural settings” (Roe 2000:106). For example, empirical studies examining women’s experiences on transit show that fear influences their travel patterns. Women choose particular routes, modes, travel times, and transit environments – or they avoid transit altogether – because of perceived safety issues (Atkins 1989; Stanko 1990; Werkele and Whitzman 1995; Ross 2000). Qualitative research could provide further insight into the decision-making processes of women as they navigate the various elements of physical and social environments during travel. In addition, the social life of bus spaces has received relatively little attention in the sociology literature despite having examined the general topic of public space in many other venues.

While the gap in the transportation literature is largely methodological, the relative neglect of qualitative methods means that – in addition to the underlying assumptions about sources of knowledge – the construction of meaning and the identification of themes and patterns are also lacking (Creswell 2003). Much transportation research does not capture the kind of rich, experiential data that can yield findings about the intricacies of bus spaces and the implications for planning practice. This lack of qualitative data then necessarily prohibits the inductive approaches that enable the researcher to consider issues such as meaning, socially constructed understandings and perspectives, values, norms, shared culture, and collective behavior. These elements of transit space and the transit experience are difficult, if not

impossible, to measure meaningfully using quantitative data collection tools only. Thus, qualitative methods can validate quantitative findings and open the door to new, untapped insights.

This research is first and foremost a study of a largely overlooked public space, but in many ways it challenges the prevailing orthodoxy in transportation research methodology. As a study of the relationships between actors, contexts, and social institutions, it uses a conceptual framework rooted in the discipline of sociology, an approach rarely seen in conventional transportation scholarship. Because the research brings sociological theory and methods of inquiry into the arena of transportation research, it spans several bodies of literature from various disciplines. The first, the sociology of public space, falls largely within the discipline of sociology – particularly urban sociology – but also crosses over into areas of urban planning, urban design, and the built environment. The second body of literature, travel demographics and behavior, is based largely in transportation and geography research, and it explores relationships between social and economic characteristics and larger patterns of travel. Mobility and travel, the third body of literature, explores the social and experiential aspects of travel using a variety of approaches and includes works from transport sociology, the emerging interdisciplinary study of mobilities and mobile cultures, and alternative sources in humanities and cultural studies.

2.1. Sociology of Public Space

2.1.1. The Realm of Public Space

Substantive work about social life in the public realm did not occur until the 1960s. Prior to that time, social scientists paid little attention to the happenings in public space, and this

area of human life remained a “regio incognita,” a term Lofland (2007) borrows from cartographers to describe uncharted and unknown territories. This lack of appreciation of the public realm as a locus of social life is reflected both in the attitude that nothing important happens in public spaces, as well as the perspective that anything sociological that might be taking place there is not especially meaningful. In a review especially relevant to this research, Lofland (2007) discusses several reasons that sociologists neglected social interactions in public space in the past. First, she thinks the public realm remained unexplored territory for so long because of a general attitude that the social activity transpiring in this space (acknowledging that there is activity) was not important, relevant, or interesting. While the reasons for such a conclusion are unclear, she suggests that the distinction of George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer between symbolic and non-symbolic interaction relegated to the background what was perceived to be the “immediate and unreflective” non-symbolic interactions of the public realm (Lofland 2007:xvi). Lofland (2007) points to another possible theoretical influence – the idea that the overstimulation of the public realm on people caused them to shut down, and so this behavior was seen as asocial. As a result, certain topics became “real” and privileged, with studies of the public realm excluded from this group (Lofland 2007).

A second factor contributing to the historical disregard of the public realm is that those who “have entered it have done so not because they were interested in the public realm per se but because they have had to cross it, as it were, on their way to another destination” (Lofland 2007:xvii). Thus, scholars examining particular topics not directly related to public space found that they needed to explore and consider issues of public space as part of their research. The danger, Lofland (2007) points out, is that our understanding of public space becomes

fragmentary and decontextualized. A third issue is the fact that other scholars had acknowledged that the public realm has a social aspect, but tended “to dismiss that activity as unimportant, irrelevant, and/or immoral and to dismiss students of that activity as tarred with the same brush” (Lofland 2007:xviii).

These attitudes about the sociology of public space dominated mainstream thinking for many decades and still influence work in the field. Nevertheless, the public realm as a legitimate site of study and inquiry is evident in a diverse and growing body of work about various physical and social locales and communities, including plazas in Costa Rica (Low 2000), a sidewalk in Greenwich Village (Duneier 1999), an urban beach in Southern California (Edgerton 1979), and the neighborhood of Harlem in New York (Jackson 2001). While these studies may vary in terms of site scope, methodologies, and distinctions between the public and more private realms, they do demonstrate a shift toward acknowledging public space as an arena where important and meaningful human interactions take place.

2.1.2. Influential Studies of Public Space

While the sociology of public space has not received, until quite recently, the attention it deserves from scholars, there are notable early exceptions – very influential studies that laid the foundation for future endeavors. Lofland (2007) cites four pioneers in the study of the sociology of public space – Gregory Stone, Jane Jacobs, Erving Goffman, and William H. Whyte – while noting that these researchers did not necessarily consider the focus of their work to be the public realm. Rather, she suggests that three of the four – Stone, Jacobs and Goffman – “were simply ‘passing through’ on their way to someplace else” (Lofland 2007:3). Their works were seminal, however, in establishing public spaces as realms of social life where researchers

could not just observe human behavior, but apply this information to understand more fully the relational interactions among strangers.

According to Lofland (2007), Stone ventured into the public realm because he was interested in urban populations and social integration. Stone's (1954) early study of shoppers in Chicago resulted in a detailed typology of consumers: economic, personalizing, ethical, and apathetic. He also tested a hypothesis that as part of the shopping experience, shoppers create social bonds during what could otherwise be viewed as a purely pragmatic financial exchange. Instead, particular groups of shoppers develop subjective identifications through the "personalization of market relations" (Stone 1954:44). Based on these findings, Stone suggests that sociologists reconsider the importance of interactions in public settings: "That field [urban social psychology] has perhaps been concerned too long with the disintegrative effects or the dysfunctions of urbanism. . . . [Urban] sociologists have failed to explain the obvious fact that people in goodly numbers do manage to live and survive in urban environments and that, among many of them, there is a patent sense of identification with the metropolis" (1954:45).

In the early 1960s, Jacobs (1961) described the successful city as a place of dynamic social interactions and rich diversity, and this was the primary focus of her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. She devotes an entire section of her extraordinarily influential book to the various uses of public spaces – sidewalks and parks in particular. Sidewalks, Jacobs argues, are mere abstractions as physical spaces. The street life of sidewalks, while seemingly chaotic and disorderly, is rather "an intricate ballet in which the individual dancers and ensembles all have distinctive parts which miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole. The ballet of the good city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place, and in any one

place is always replete with new improvisations” (Jacobs 1961:50). In addition, the contribution of sidewalks to social life is complex and multifaceted. Jacobs believes sidewalks bring people from disparate backgrounds in contact with each other and foster a sense of public identity and trust. Because she sees clear links between physical and social space, she proposes a number of design and planning recommendations, such as mixed land uses, small blocks, and developments that encourage concentrations of people.

Goffman, a sociologist, landed in the public realm because of his interest in the “interaction order” that often played out in public spaces. He wrote a series of books exploring the micro interactions that occur in public space (Goffman 1959; Goffman 1963a; Goffman 1971). In these works, he outlines the various rules of engagement and participation, the ways people both maintain boundaries and violate them, and interactions as performances with roles. Lofland describes Goffman’s contribution to the study of social life in the public realm: “Goffman demonstrated eloquently and persuasively that what occurs between two strangers passing on the street is as thoroughly social as what occurs in a conversation between two lovers, that the same concerns for the fragility of selves that is operating among participants in a family gathering is also operating among strangers on an urban beach. In the obviously anonymous and impersonal world of the city, evidence of the ritually sacred interchanges had been unearthed” (Lofland 2007:4).

Whyte (1980; 1988) was interested specifically in the world of public spaces, how people used them, and the elements of physical and social space that facilitated and encouraged active participation. His well-known and rigorous study of plazas in New York City (often using time-lapse photography) discerned particular features that make plazas successful public places;

ample seating, sun exposure, water elements, trees, and food vendors all help to foster lively and engaging plazas. Lofland (2007) notes that one of Whyte's most important contributions is his argument that public spaces are central and essential parts of cities. In his work not only does he identify the elements conducive to good public spaces, but he also champions a number of prescriptive measures to maximize the utility of public spaces and their contribution to the social life of cities.

2.1.3. Realms and Principles of Public Space

In her overview of the public realm literature, Lofland discusses various realms of the city and the characteristics and qualities of interactions that take place specifically in the public realm. She distinguishes between three realms: private (households and personal networks in intimate relationships), parochial (acquaintances and neighbors in communities), and public ("the world of strangers and the 'street'") (2007:10). She emphasizes that these realms are not rooted in physical space, but are social territories where relationships can be fluid and relative (for example, the private space of a home is not a private realm unless people are living there). The public realm is characterized by "the *orderliness*, the *patternedness* with which city denizens seem to conduct even their most fleeting and ostensibly 'trivial' encounters" (Lofland 2007:25). This is in contrast to the regular portrayal of the city as a place of chaos and disorder.

Lofland (2007) draws from the body of public space interaction literature to identify five main principles that guide behavior in the public realm: 1) cooperative motility (the movement of people through space with a minimal number of incidents), 2) civil inattention (the ignoring of others as a form of social politeness), 3) audience role prominence (individuals in the public realm primarily taking on the role of audience to the events happening around them), 4)

restrained helpfulness (mundane requests for help and the restrained help offered, such as “What time is it?”), and 5) civility toward diversity (people responding with civil and decent reactions to diversity). These principles then play out in different ways in the public realm: “Persons draw upon – employ – their knowledge of these principles, as well as their presumptively shared understandings about the meanings of body language, appearances, and space-specific appropriate behaviors and identities to produce” any of a number of outcomes such as territorial defense, sociability, or avoidance (Lofland 2007:34). Subsequent sections of this discussion will use a number of these principles of behavior in public spaces to examine social interaction and norms on buses.

Relationships in the public realm take on different qualities and levels of intimacy. Most interactions between people are fleeting relationships, where individuals generally have brief, often non-verbal exchanges with people who are unknown to them. By contrast, routinized relationships (or secondary relationships) are those that involve categorical identities in interactions in the public realm; these are often based on occupational elements of individuals’ lives, such as bus driver/passenger or grocery store clerk/shopper. Fleeting and routinized relationships “are probably most fruitfully analyzed in terms of the *interactions* they produce. Viewed as *relationships*, they are too brief and/or too standardized to be of any sustained sociological interest” (Lofland 2007:55). Quasi-primary relationships are also generally short-term interactions between strangers or those with categorical knowledge of each other, but these exchanges generate sociality and have an emotional component of some type. While people chatting on the street is an example of a positive interaction of this sort, these relationships can also create negative emotional responses (Lofland 2007). Intimate secondary

relationships are similar to quasi-primary ones in that they are emotionally infused. These interactions occur over much longer periods of time, however, and are usually positive because individuals would be less likely to sustain long-term relationships if experienced as negative.

Lofland (2007) suggests that social scientists should reconsider the focus placed on the primary/secondary relationship dichotomy and particularly the perceived relative value of primary relationships in people's lives. In a collection of studies of public space, Morrill et al. (2005) also challenge this dichotomy and make a similar distinction between fleeting relationships (Lofland's quasi-primary relationships) and anchored relationships (intimate secondary relationships). The studies in their collection span a variety of public social settings, some fixed in physical space and others not, including a university gym, a strip bar, the games of a softball league, and the "hanging out" activities of teenagers (Morrill et al. 2005). Other scholars have examined the importance of these alternative, non-primary relationships prevalent in the public realm. For example, Oldenburg (1999) considers public places that exist beyond the home-work divide, what he terms "third places," such as cafes and neighborhood bars.

2.1.4. Summary

Lofland (2007) describes several early studies of the public realm, but sociologists long ignored its social relevance. In recent years, researchers have explored various types of public spaces, the main principles that order behavior and interactions, and the types of relationships that are fostered in the public realm. The majority of interactions in transit spaces are of the fleeting and routinized variety described by Lofland (2007), with the possibility of quasi-primary relationships as well. Buses, streetcars, and subways are particularized public spaces in that

they are mobile – physically moving through time and space – and at the same time acting as gathering points for constantly fluctuating groups of people. This study of behavior and interactions on buses fills not just a void in the transportation research, but also complements the previous research about the sociology of public space in different venues.

2.2. Travel Behavior and Demographics

The body of research on travel behavior and demographics is extensive. Rather than an exhaustive review of this literature, the following discussion provides a broad overview of key trends and patterns using aggregated demographic socioeconomic categories such as income, race/ethnicity, gender, and age with a focus on the demographics of transit ridership and particular demographic groups – low-income riders, people of color, and immigrants – that are disproportionately represented on transit, and even more so on buses. While much of this literature is descriptive in nature, these trends in travel behavior point to a number of significant policy, planning, and equity implications.

2.2.1. Income and Travel

Income has a significant influence on travel, with higher income travelers making more trips and traveling greater distances. Data from the 2009 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) show that lower income households make considerably fewer trips than higher income households. For example, people in households with annual incomes above \$80,000 make almost 4,800 annual person trips on average while those from households with incomes under \$10,000 make only 2,100 person trips (Santos et al. 2011). In examining 2001 NHTS data, Pucher and Renne (2003) find similar patterns: households with incomes less than \$20,000 make 3.2 trips and travel 17.9 miles per day per person on average, while households with

incomes over \$100,000 make 4.8 trips and travel 26.9 miles. In addition, the average trip length increases as incomes rise; for example, households with incomes under \$20,000 make auto trips averaging 6.7 miles compared to 7.7 miles for households over \$100,000. Just over a quarter of households with incomes less than \$20,000 do not have a car, while over 98% of households in the over-\$100,000 household income category have at least one vehicle (almost 40% have three or more), and these findings are similar to those in past years (Pucher and Renne 2003).

The number of vehicles available in a household bears a significant relationship to mode choice. Households with no cars make 19% of trips on transit; this figure plummets to 2.7% for households with one car and less than 1% for those with two or more vehicles. However, households without cars still make about one-third of trips by private vehicle. Carless households also have a much higher rate of non-motorized mode use (walking and bicycling), accounting for 43.5% of trips, compared to households with cars (for households with one vehicle, non-motorized travel makes up 13.2% of trips; for households with three or more vehicles, this decreases to 7.1%) (Pucher and Renne 2003). When they examine income and mode choice, Pucher and Renne (2003) find low-income households (those with household incomes under \$20,000) make about three-quarters (75.9%) of their trips by car and 4.6% by transit; this demographic also makes 4% of trips by bus (Table 2.1). Transit use declines considerably as household income rises, with higher income households (above \$40,000) making only 0.9% to 1.5% of trips on transit and 0.7% or less of trips by bus.⁷

⁷ Pucher and Renne (2003) aggregate bus and light rail together in a category under "Total Transit," which they note also includes conventional streetcars. However, in their discussion, they refer only to the bus when discussing the "Bus and Light Rail" category.

**Table 2.1: Modal Split by Income Class
(percentage of trips by means of transportation)**

Mode of Transportation	Household Income				
	Less than \$20,000	\$20,000 to \$39,999	\$40,000 to \$74,999	\$75,000 to \$99,999	\$100,000 and over
Total Auto	75.9	87.3	88.1	87.4	86.9
SOV	30.0	37.9	39.2	38.6	37.9
HOV	45.9	49.5	48.9	48.7	49.0
Total Transit	4.6	1.4	1.1	0.9	1.5
Bus and Light Rail	4.0	1.0	0.7	0.5	0.5
Metro/Subway/Heavy Rail	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.7
Commuter Rail	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.3
Other	19.5	11.3	10.8	11.7	11.6
All	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Adapted from Pucher and Renne (2003)

The distribution of riders by mode further highlights the stark differences between low-income and higher income travelers. Table 2.2 shows that riders with household incomes less than \$20,000 make up 37.8% of transit users and almost half (47.1%) of bus riders. However, only 19.7% of metro riders and 6.3% of commuter rail riders are from this lowest income category. By contrast, households with incomes of \$100,000 or higher make up 41.6% of commuter rail riders, 27.2% of metro riders, and only 6.8% of bus riders. These distinct modal trends by income point to a number of policy implications, including transit subsidies to support the travel of low-income riders, distance-based and off-peak fares, affordable housing with good access to transit, and infrastructure investments to support bicycling and walking (Pucher and Renne 2003).

2.2.2. Race, Ethnicity, Immigration and Travel

Pucher and Renne (2003) report differences in travel behavior based on race and

**Table 2.2: Income Distribution of Each Mode’s Users
(percentage composition by income class)**

Mode of Transportation	Household Income					
	Less than \$20,000	\$20,000 to \$39,999	\$40,000 to \$74,999	\$75,000 to \$99,999	\$100,000 and over	All
Total Auto	12.3	25.0	32.5	14.4	15.8	100
SOV	11.2	24.9	33.3	14.7	15.9	100
HOV	13.2	25.0	31.8	14.2	15.8	100
Total Transit	37.8	19.8	21.0	7.4	14.1	100
Bus and Light Rail	47.1	21.4	19.0	5.6	6.8	100
Metro/Subway/Heavy Rail	19.7	18.7	25.2	9.1	27.2	100
Commuter Rail	6.3	7.0	26.1	19.1	41.6	100

Source: Adapted from Pucher and Renne (2003)

ethnicity, but note this is partly a reflection of differences in income among racial and ethnic groups. In general, all racial and ethnic groups use autos for a very high percentage of trips from blacks at 78.9% to whites at 87.6%. Significant differences emerge, however, in transit use among various racial and ethnic groups. Blacks take six times as many transit trips (all modes) as whites (5.3% of trips versus 0.9%), and their use of buses is even higher, at eight times the rate of whites (4.2% of trips versus 0.5%) (Pucher and Renne 2003) (Table 2.3). In general, non-white racial and ethnic groups use transit more, and they make up the majority of transit riders. Blacks and Hispanics together make up 54% of all transit users and 62% of bus riders, but only 35% of metro riders and 29% of commuter rail riders (Pucher and Renne 2003). Because non-whites make up such a large percentage of overall transit ridership, Pucher and Renne (2003) point out that improved service and fare structures – particularly subsidies for buses rather than rail – would particularly benefit these populations.

In considering workers in the United States, Pisarski (2006) notes that immigrants (considered as a demographic category not in relation to race and ethnicity) are a segment of

**Table 2.3: Variation in Modal Choice by Race/Ethnicity
(percentage of trips by means of transportation)**

Mode of Transportation	Race/Ethnicity			
	Black	Asian	White	Hispanic
Total Auto	78.9	82.7	87.6	83.1
SOV	35.7	33.5	40.1	27.5
HOV	43.2	49.3	47.6	55.5
Total Transit	5.3	3.2	0.9	2.4
Bus and Light Rail	4.2	1.8	0.5	2.0
Metro/Subway/Heavy Rail	0.9	1.1	0.3	0.3
Commuter Rail	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.1
Other	26.4	20.5	13.3	19.3
All	100	100	100	100

Source: Adapted from Pucher and Renne (2003)

the population whose demographic impacts have important implications for future travel patterns and behavior. The U.S. population growth rate of 13% between 1990 and 2000 was significantly higher than the predicted growth rate of less than 10%, and this was largely due to immigration; by 2000, the general population already included the number of individuals 16 to 65 years old expected for 2003. These newly arrived immigrants tend to be of working age, join the labor pool quickly, and begin commuting to work (Pisarski 2006). Thus, increases in the immigrant demographic can have a different impact on travel patterns than would just a growth in the native population over time.

One trend that has persisted is the relationship between assimilation and mode use among immigrants (Blumenberg and Shiki 2007). Transit and other non-automobile modes (walking and bicycling) are important for immigrants, particularly recent immigrants. Blumenberg and Shiki (2007) examine the 2006 American Community Survey (ACS) and find that immigrants are 2.8 times more likely to commute by public transit than native-born

commuters; the 2001 NHTS shows a similar rate, with immigrants 2.5 times as likely to use transit. However, there is a mode choice cohort effect as immigrants' use of public transit declines the longer their tenure in the U.S. As they achieve economic means and status, immigrants tend to switch modes and depend more heavily on personal automobiles. The 2006 ACS data show that 14% of recent immigrants (0 to 5 years in the U.S.) commute by transit and this number progressively decreases for immigrants who have been in the U.S. more than 20 years to 8%, which approaches the 4% of native-born commuters who use transit (Blumenberg and Shiki 2007).

The influx of immigrants into the population has had significant impacts on overall travel trends with important implications for future policy. Although transit use rates decrease among more established immigrant populations, this mode remains especially important to immigrants. Improvements in public transit service measures – service frequency, reliability, and hours of service – will help recent immigrants, and possibly encourage more established immigrants to continue using transit. At the same time, car ownership trends among immigrants suggest that a promising strategy would be to promote policies to help them overcome obstacles to car ownership, also discussed by scholars and practitioners in relation to the poor and economic development (for example, see Blumenberg and Waller 2003). In addition, the use of alternative transportation modes by immigrants points to policies that will help facilitate their travel. The addition and improvement of walking and biking facilities that provide safety and accessibility would also benefit immigrant users (Blumenberg and Shiki 2007; Blumenberg 2009; Blumenberg and Smart 2010).

2.2.3. Age and Travel

Pucher and Renne (2003) find that children and the elderly have the lowest mobility rates when considering trips and miles traveled per day. Their analysis of age and travel focuses largely on the elderly population, whose mobility varies considerably with age: travelers 65 to 69 years old make almost twice as many trips and travel almost three times as many miles as those 85 years and older. The elderly continue to use autos as they age; data from the 2001 NHTS show that about 90% of trips by people over 65 are by auto, and the number of trips and mileage of older travelers has also increased (Pucher and Renne 2003). At the same time, transit use by the elderly has decreased, and they use transit less than the rest of the population (1.3% for people 65 and over versus 1.7% for all travelers) (Pucher and Renne 2003). However, the use of different transit modes by the elderly varies. Riders 65 and over make 1.2% of their trips on buses, but only 0.1% on metro and less than 0.1% on commuter rail. These trends suggest “little indication that use of [alternative public transit modes] is large or growing among the elderly” (Rosenbloom 2003:4).

The demographic projections for the elderly population in the U.S. – together with our understanding of their present travel patterns and social needs – suggest that transportation planners should begin planning now to accommodate this growing sector effectively. With more seniors “aging in place” in suburban areas, the elderly will likely become even more dependent on the auto as their primary means of transportation because transit and other alternative modes will be less accessible. Rosenbloom (2003) suggests various policy strategies while urging planners to consider the diversity among this population in terms of demographic characteristics and physical abilities. Physical planning and design should take into

consideration the travel needs of the elderly and strategies to support their current travel behavior and to facilitate their mobility, while also altering their travel behavior in ways that would mitigate the impacts of increased travel. The low rate of use of rail by the elderly may suggest they have difficulty getting to rail stations and using rail infrastructure (walking up stairs and through corridors, for example) (Pucher and Renne 2003). Therefore, transit and other alternative modes of transportation (ride sharing, taxis, dial-a-ride services) should be bolstered to provide older travelers with access to a range of options.

2.2.4. Gender and Travel

In a piece written in the early 1990s, Wachs suggests that the car in American life will continue to perpetuate significant gender differences: “The city was deliberately structured to place men and women in separate spheres, and, as the city adjusts over time to the universal mobility provided by the automobile, it is doing so in a social environment that ensures the continued existence of those separate spheres” (Wachs 1992:87). Wachs (1992) notes the predictions of contemporary travel demographers that the differences in travel patterns between men and women would decrease as women entered the labor force in greater numbers. Recent studies of gender and travel behavior, however, confirm that Wachs was correct in his assertion that the division between men and women would persist. This research shows that, along some measures of travel, men and women are converging, but at a much slower rate than would be expected; along other measures, especially in disaggregate analyses, the gap remains steady (Rosenbloom 2006; Crane 2007).

Crane’s (2007) analysis of American Housing Survey data also finds persistent differences in the travel patterns of men and women. The travel distances of men and women are

converging slowly while their travel times are diverging. Crane (2007) finds in a multivariate analysis that the travel time gap remains even when controlling for income, marital status, age, housing tenure, household structure, and location within the metropolitan area. This difference extends over a twenty-year period (1985-2005), suggesting that the travel behavior of women is not, in fact, becoming more similar to that of men. These findings confirm both Rosenbloom's review of the literature as well as Wachs' much earlier prediction that the travel gap between men and women would remain.

While differences exist between men and women in relation to daily trips and miles traveled, Pucher and Renne (2003) find few mode choice differences. Both men and women make the majority of trips via auto, about 86%. Their use of transit is also similar: men make 1.7% of trips by transit and women make 1.8%. Women are slightly more likely to use buses – 1.3% of their trips are by bus compared to 1.1% for men. One notable difference is the higher rate of carpooling among women (51.5%) compared to men (44.7%). This is likely a reflection of the greater responsibilities on many women to chauffeur children.

2.2.5. Summary

This brief overview of the travel demographics and behavior literature shows in aggregate measures some aspects of the way people travel. Patterns of travel and the forces influencing travel behavior – whether economic, spatial, or social – reflect important aspects of human activity and quality of life, and much of the current travel behavior research shows that these patterns vary systematically by socioeconomic status, particularly for income and race/ethnicity. Although lower income households make the majority of their trips by auto, we know that individuals from these households use transit, and buses especially, at much higher

rates than their higher income counterparts. Similarly, racial and ethnic minorities generally use the auto at high rates comparable to that of whites, but they also use transit at higher rates and make up a larger proportion of overall transit ridership.

Therefore, we know from the transportation demography research that people – in terms of socioeconomic characteristics – are not spread evenly across modes or even among transit modes. The differences in income and race/ethnicity between commuter rail and buses, for example, suggest that these modes are not merely serving different populations, but also that service, cost, and access are related to patterns of use. Buses are clearly spaces of dramatic racial and ethnic diversity, but are also less diverse based on income categories, as most riders using this mode are low-income, and people from higher income households participate in bus spaces at much lower rates. While this largely descriptive research reveals many interesting findings about travelers, it also raises various questions about why the demographics of transit users contrast so sharply from the demographics of travelers in general.

However, what we do know is that the world of transit is distinctly different. This literature documents these variations in travel behavior and modal use as well as the effects of differential access to various modes of travel. Nevertheless, we know surprisingly little about how these differences relate to broader understandings of people’s travel behavior, the culture and experience of using transit, the intricacies of the modal decision-making process, and the impacts of travel on people’s lives. This research seeks to provide insight into these less-explored topics by using alternative methodological approaches to capture experiential data that discern the nuances of mode choice not captured in purely quantitative methods, and that illuminate the significance, if any, of these striking demographic differences.

2.3. Mobility and Travel

2.3.1. Transport Sociology

Yago's (1983) early review of the sociology of transportation literature shows that much of the work at that point was still focused on aggregate, large-scale understandings of the effects of transportation on societal dynamics. Hence, the bulk of the research he discusses looks at the relationships between transportation systems and urban development, economics, and politics; industrial organization; land use; and distributional impacts. While he does discuss transportation and social interaction (the impact of travel time on familial relations, travel-related stress, and travel and behavioral science), he acknowledges that much work at the time remained to be done in the realm of the psychosocial impacts of travel and transportation. In a collection on the subject of transport sociology, de Boer describes the subfield as one where "sociology comes face to face with daily life, with the fact that individuals and groups live in space and time, and not exclusively in social structures" (de Boer 1986:7). The author examines the broad social and environmental impacts of transportation systems, including infrastructure projects such as freeways, and further considers the relationship between people and their physical surroundings in a series of essays on street design and car traffic (de Boer 1986). De Boer argues that transportation sociology at that point in time was not sufficiently developed to support transportation planning, which he thinks "might very well be the most important key to urban and regional planning" (1986:7). Unlike earlier planning and engineering approaches, de Boer sees the potential for transport sociology to contribute to transportation policy and design measures and to practices addressing the political, social, and daily needs of urban residents.

2.3.2. Other Qualitative Transportation Research

While Yago (1983) points to needed research on the relationship between transportation systems and psychological factors such as stress, isolation, and socialization, several studies have in fact used sociological methods to examine travel generally as well as in transit spaces more specifically. Davis et al. (1966) and Davis and Levine (1967) conducted early studies of seating patterns and social interactions on buses. The authors acknowledge that buses are sites of social activity, and factors such as social status and identity (particularly related to race) are relevant to the types of behaviors observed. However, this work reflects both the burgeoning study of public space and the sociopolitical context of the 1960s. One of the assumptions underlying the analyses of that era is that interactions in bus space are characterized by the uniform behavior of riders in a setting with little communication or social structure (Davis and Levine 1967). Buses were likely to be less stigmatized at that time because public transit in urban areas was used by a broader cross-section of the population. At the same time, buses may have also been more socially regulated spaces, with stricter rules and expectations in regard to race, class, and gender.

In another relatively early study of buses, Nash (1975) creates and describes a typology of bus activities and participants – what collectively he termed “a community on wheels.” He discusses the procedure of bus riding and the challenges that arise, including waiting for the bus, hailing the bus, and claiming a seat as well as interactions between different people on the bus (newcomer riders, regular riders, new drivers, old drivers). Levine et al. (1973) examine behavior on subways with a focus on the sociologist Erving Goffman’s idea of “civil inattention.” They also consider the ways in which people violate the expected rules of behavior and hence

the ability of riders to maintain civil inattention. Maines' (1977) social psychology study of the New York subway includes an examination of seating placement, body position, and touching on crowded subway cars, and patterns related to sex and race.

More recent work emerging from the mobilities literature (discussed in more detail below) has, for example, used participant observation to understand the "travel performances" of high school students commuting to school on trains in Sydney, Australia, both the ways in which these teenagers conform to rules as well as transgress and challenge those boundaries (Symes 2007). Other studies have examined performativity – the "making" of a trip by passengers – and notions of travel time related to seemingly mundane journeys on buses and trains in Britain (Watts 2008; Jain 2009; Jain 2011), and the various facets of the train journey for passengers, enthusiasts, and railway workers (Letherby and Reynolds 2005). Studies of the sociology of public space have looked at transit spaces outside of vehicles, such as an urban bus depot (Henderson 1975), and transit drivers' experiences, roles, and relationships to passengers (Slosar 1973; Heath et al. 1999). An early study of airplane passengers identified them as an "encapsulated group" in situations that in some ways resemble the characteristics of total institutions as described by Goffman: "These are collectives of individuals who voluntarily or involuntarily are clustered together in close proximity by ecological constrictions, mechanical boundaries or equipment design, and who share physical but not necessarily social closeness for the purpose of attaining some goal or reaching some destination" (Zurcher 1979:78). Zurcher (1979) considers the ways airplane passengers work to maintain their concept of self and may respond to any challenges; he suggests that different modes of public transit are similar to airplanes because they move groups of travelers through what he terms "people

pipelines.”

The use of qualitative methods and data in transportation research has gradually become more commonplace in recent years and has proven a useful tool to probe the processes behind travel decision-making and changes in behavior (Baslington 2008; Hannes et al. 2008; Papinski et al. 2009; Rocci 2009; Kusumastuti et al. 2010). The most commonly used qualitative data methods – surveys, in-depth interviews, and travel diaries – are employed in quantitative travel data gathering as well. In contrast, ethnography, in which observational data are collected through extended participation in a social setting, has been less widely used in transportation research as a qualitative data collection method. A few studies use analytic frameworks drawn from “critical ethnography” to analyze survey and interview data (Azonobi and Sen 2003; Azonobi and Sen 2004; Reed and Sen 2004), while others collect ethnographic data through participant observation (Valenzuela Jr. et al. 2005; Esbjornsson et al. 2007; Heffner et al. 2007; Voilmy et al. 2008; Mikkelsen and Christensen 2009). However, the number of transportation studies using ethnography remains small.⁸

A related area of inquiry uses qualitative methods to assess people’s perceptions of travel and the ways in which these influence their mode choices. These findings explore the decision-making processes of travelers as they consider the range of options available to them and the costs and benefits associated with various modes. A qualitative study using semi-structured interviews to assess personal attitudes toward transit and cars finds that perceptions about

⁸ This is likely due to several factors, including 1) the large amount of quantitative data available to transportation scholars from a wide variety of governmental sources, 2) an unfamiliarity with qualitative research methods on the part of transportation researchers, 3) an undervaluing of ethnographic data among transportation scholars with engineering and economics backgrounds, and 4) the labor-intensive, time-consuming, and costly requirements of conducting ethnographic fieldwork.

public transit, particularly service levels and reliability, do influence individuals' modal preferences (Beirao and Cabral 2007). Guiver (2007) uses focus group data to examine the discourse around different modes and finds distinct differences in the language that participants use to discuss buses and cars, as well as in their point of relativity as users or non-users. This research indicates that existing perceptions of travel modes strongly influence people's travel behavior decisions. Therefore, strategies to address and alter these perceptions might be central to influencing shifts in modal use. Jensen's (1999) study includes data from a series of in-depth interviews on mobility types (different categories of auto, transit, and bike users) and individuals' attitudes about travel and environmental issues. Semi-structured interviews with car users in Sweden reveal that people's perceptions of the advantages of autos are related to personal and direct experience, while perceptions of the disadvantages are a mix of experience and references to public discourse (Hagman 2003). Garner and Abraham (2007) also use semi-structured interviews to understand people's motives for using cars instead of other modes of transportation.

Guiver (2007) documents people's descriptions of the physical experience of travel on buses versus by car and their perceptions on and off these modes, but little research has sought to understand the travel experience from the perspective of users in real-time: the social, sensory, and emotional things people encounter as they travel and the short- and long-term effects of these on their travel behavior decisions. And, while public transit spaces were the sites of inquiry several decades ago, this work emerged largely from sociology and the study of public space, rather than from transport sociology or transportation and land use planning. This early research examined social relations in transit spaces – the ways in which people interacted

with physical space and with each other, the social roles people took on, and the sense of community (or lack of community) in various transit environments. In recent years, transportation has become even more the focus of research endeavors using sociological lenses and methodological approaches. This work, particularly research in the area of mobilities, involves data, analytical approaches, and theoretical foundations that differ substantially from the traditional empirical transportation research and the earlier era of transportation sociology discussed above. I now turn to a review of this more recent transportation-related literature and suggest that transportation planning research would benefit from a more expansive perspective on the range of factors relevant to the design, operation, and management of transit systems.

2.3.3. Mobilities

The emerging field of mobilities – where travel is understood to be a cultural activity in which people actively engage and is an integral part of their experiential day-to-day lives – can supplement and validate other methods and sources of information about the travel experience. Its practitioners argue that it challenges the ways in which social scientists, transportation planners, and engineers think about travel behavior. The concepts and cultural aspects of mobility expand on Yago’s earlier ideas about transportation sociology.

In a recent review of the literature, Vannini identifies mobile cultures as “the cultural dimensions of the practice and experience of physical movement by way of the use of means of transportation” (2010:111). He distinguishes mobility studies from transportation sociology and geography because these other perspectives “have tended to view daily practices of movement as ‘dead time,’ inconveniences to be minimized, or otherwise culturally neutral experiences

that are both inconsequential and undeserving of analysis in and of themselves. A mobility paradigm, instead, conceptualizes experiences of movement as transformative of both its agents and users, as well as of the spatial, temporal, and socio-political context of which it is part” (Vannini 2010:113). For these scholars, mobility is not merely a means of traveling from an origin to an end destination. Rather, it is the travel experience itself that produces “meaningful places and cultural environments” where the “sociality of travel . . . manifests itself through the formation of mobile subcultures” (Vannini 2010:114). These scholars look at the ways in which individuals understand travel and interact in a variety of different transportation environments and modes: long-distance rail and public transit (Bissell 2009a; Bissell 2009b; Jain 2009; Reynolds and Rose 2009; Wilson 2011), airplanes (van den Scott 2009; Whitelegg 2009), bicycling (McBeth 2009), and yachts and commuter boats (Boshier 2009; Kleinert 2009).

The work in mobilities has been interdisciplinary – with a focus on sociological issues, but spanning a variety of academic fields – and largely qualitative, which Vannini points out is the result of a “cultural and interpretive turn” in sociology and geography (2010:112). For Vannini, this new approach is a significant departure from past research: “This paradigmatic and methodological characteristic also distinguishes the study of mobilities from the sociology of transportation – which is dominated by the application of quantitative research schemes and by a combination of the positivist tradition with a professional, practical, and applied agenda” (2010:112).

Vannini also discusses the experience of travel time as an important facet of mobility studies. Travelers use the time of mobility in different ways and at different points along a travel path, what Jain terms the “‘doing’ of passengering,” where travelers actually create and

transform travel spaces (2009:93). Thus, the experience of travel is shaped by the types and group configurations of travelers, their activities as they travel, and the technologies they use while traveling. Ultimately these cannot be separated from the physical space of travel and travel time as these elements are all intricately connected. For Jain (2009), the transit trip is a “journey narrative” with any of a number of storylines for both individual travelers and bus/train space as a whole, but, as Bissell (2009a) points out, a narrative whose rules and expectations have been established through countless repeat performances.

The mobilities theorists, mainly geographers and sociologists, have sought to reconceptualize travel, mobility, and daily life in important ways. For example, to understand that people are performing as they move through space and time – the use of non-verbal actions, the acting out of identity, and the creation of the travel spaces themselves – challenges the more static, homogenous notion of travel used in traditional transportation research. Mobilities scholarship, however, has tended not to view travel through a critical lens of inequality, privilege, and social status. Notable exceptions are a study of the daily experiences and challenges of very poor and disadvantaged bus and bike travelers in Santiago de Chile (Jiron 2009) and the class, gender, and identity dynamics playing out on Delhi’s Metro (Butcher 2011). In a detailed examination of railways and train travel, Letherby and Reynolds (2009) explore different facets of identity as they relate to passengers, and they acknowledge limitations to the scope of their work: “We have demonstrated . . . that gender and class are integral to any understanding of trains and train travel. What is lacking – both here and elsewhere – is a systematic consideration of the significance of other differences, both the discrete variations in experience and interconnections between differences” (2005:189).

In addition, the mobilities work is generally not applied – as discussed earlier, a factor that distinguishes this work from transportation sociology and a feature that for Vannini (2010) appears to be a positive. However, this is a shortsighted and unnecessarily restrictive dichotomy and assumes that qualitative transportation research cannot be relevant to issues of transportation practice and policy and, in the case of transit, management and operations concerns and decisions. I would argue instead that transportation research would benefit greatly not just from a broader range of methodological approaches and sources of data, but also from examples of the ways in which these very different understandings of travel and mobility are relevant to the issues facing travelers and practitioners in the real world.

2.3.4. Experiential Aspects of Travel

The travel experience – a broader view of travel behavior as a phenomenon to be understood from the perspective of travelers themselves – has been an area of inquiry in academic fields outside of transportation planning, which tend to use different analytical approaches and kinds of data sources. These fields include urban history, performance studies, cultural studies, and film and literature. The ways these data and texts are analyzed and presented is unlike the more measurable and grounded theory approaches used in quantitative transportation research, which is based mostly in economic models of traveler choices and behaviors. For example, the types of source material used no doubt pose challenges, as they must be understood in context – both social and historical – and any examination of fictional accounts would benefit from consideration of the authors’ perspectives, purposes, and biases. They can be difficult data to handle for those not trained in these methodologies. However, such approaches can provide a wealth of information about the travel experience, the ways in

which larger social phenomena play out during travel, and the intimate and often otherwise unarticulated thoughts and feelings of people participating in those spaces and activities (Langan 2001; Freedman 2002; Hutchinson 2003; Halverson 2008).

Historical analyses of transportation show the rich information that can be drawn from narrative sources, even fictionalized ones. Urban historians have examined the history of public transit in the United States, but Hood (1996) points out that these studies have focused largely on the ways in which transit physically reshaped cities and the underlying politics behind these planning decisions. He uses first-hand accounts of travel on public transit in New York City – a site of significant social mixing and contestation of space around race, class, and gender – to conduct a historical analysis of the changing perceptions of public space between 1880 and 1920 (Hood 1996). The technological developments in transit systems led to the construction of both elevated and subway networks, and public perceptions of service quality, safety, rider demographics, and character shifted over time. For example, the opening of the Interborough Rapid Transit Company (IRT) subway in 1904 was greeted with enthusiasm and fascination by first-time riders such as the playwright Elmer Rice: “[He] treasured this trip as the highlight of his boyhood. ‘So this was the subway!’ he exclaimed, remembering how he had pressed his face against the window glass and watched the iron pillars flash by” (Hood 1996:316). Later, however, Hood describes how issues of crowding, safety, and class conflict – particularly related to the poor and homeless – altered public opinion about New York City’s transit system as a place of public interaction.

A historical analysis of changes and developments in public transportation is the focus of another fascinating study of Tokyo during the early 1900s. Freedman (2002) examines the role

of Tokyo's expanding transit network in facilitating travel, but also in increasing interactions between different classes and genders. She uses the short story, "The Girl Fetish," published in 1907, as an example of the ways in which changing gender roles and mores played out on trains. In this case, the new middle-class "salarymen" traveling from the suburbs to Tokyo's city center began lusting after the schoolgirls that appeared on trains when secondary education became more accessible to girls at the beginning of the twentieth century (Freedman 2002). While Freeman discusses "The Girl Fetish" in detail, she also draws from a number of other sources because these societal developments and the new transportation network "were frequently depicted in fiction, journalism, and popular songs. . . . Literature was an effective vehicle to express such historical transformations, and, in their stories, Japanese authors described the thoughts, emotions, and impressions of men and women who rode trains and streetcars, thus providing insight into how individuals experienced urban modernity" (2002:24). Therefore, a short story can provide a source for insight into the developments in the transit system and the social phenomena on its trains, which would be almost impossible to study through other, more rigid measures and operationalized variables.

Several examinations of transit-specific spaces have emerged from cultural and performance studies perspectives, and these works consider transit environments to be contested or appropriated spaces of expression and performativity related to inequality, status, and other social phenomena. For Hutchinson (2000), life on board buses in Los Angeles is representative of the experience and history of African-Americans in the city and the United States, what she terms the "the racial politics of transportation." In understanding the bus as a site of reinforcement of a gender hierarchy, she describes it as a "city of women." However, she

also notes that the bus is the location of many less-valued social identities: “Thus, the bus system – conveyance of the raced body, the transient, the low-income, the immigrant – has metamorphosed from being the model of ‘modern’ transit infrastructure in the 1930s and 1940s, to an emblem of the post-apocalyptic vision of Third World dystopia” (Hutchinson 2000:117).

Fleetwood considers the space of public transit to be an important place of development for larger social relations and phenomena and “a particular site where black youth engage with adults’ fears and with media representations of youth and racialized bodies as threats to social order and safe space. How are adults’ perceptions and black youths’ actions and responses shaped by a social construction of racialized youth as deviant?” (Fleetwood 2004:35). She uses participant observation to understand the ways in which “marks” such as dress and language serve as a means of self-identification for youth of color on transit, but also help the regulators of transit space to identify those perceived to be threats.

Critical studies in literature also provide very different perspectives on the transportation and mobility experience than those found in conventional transportation research. Langan (2001) looks to literature and film to understand the relationship between mobility and disability. In examining the depiction of transit users in the action film *Speed*, she points out that the main characters – played by Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock – are not regular transit users and are therefore unlike the other people on the ill-fated bus: “The film imagines the other bus riders much differently. They are almost entirely low-income people of color, with assorted others whose automobility is disabled by quasi-cognitive impairments: the white woman too nervous to drive the Los Angeles freeways, the white tourist who doesn’t know his

way around” (Langan 2001:462). Disabled people are notably missing from this depiction, and Langan (2001) goes on to make an analogy between the “traveling cripple” from a William Wordsworth poem and that boy’s contemporaries, the transit dependents of the present day.

Halverson (2008) considers John Steinbeck’s book *The Wayward Bus* (1947) and other bus references in popular culture to be representative of racial and class tensions and dynamics. She argues that buses are often settings in literature and film, but have been largely ignored in cultural analysis compared to trains and cars. In addition, the most common depictions of the bus reflect a host of status insecurities: “Buses demand close and prolonged contact with a range of strangers, always an eclectic and often an eccentric group. Their lack of provisions for reserving seats especially lends buses to middle-class nightmare. Whereas trains are made up of cars once divided by race and still divided by class, it has always been hard to construct real boundaries on buses” (Halverson 2008:84).⁹ An all-white group of travelers from different class backgrounds are brought together in *The Wayward Bus* to cross the San Ysidro Valley on a post-World War II jitney trip; Steinbeck contrasts this with the racially and ethnically diverse Greyhound buses. The dialogue and interactions between the travelers on the bus is an example of “exposing the affluent to ‘the real people’: a potentially enlightening but often disquieting experience” and what Halverson argues is often the role of buses in American texts (Halverson 2008:95).

2.3.5. Summary

The literature around mobility comes from varied sources and disciplines. While transport sociology began to address the importance of the social aspects of travel, this area of inquiry

⁹ I interpret this mention of the class divide on trains to be a reference to the different classes of ticketing and seating on a trains (e.g., first and second or first-class and economy).

never fully developed. The mobilities literature has grown considerably in recent years. This body of literature generally is still largely theoretical and much less empirical and applied. The examples of alternative approaches, data sources, and perspectives discussed in this section come from a variety of fields, including urban history, performance studies, cultural studies, and film and literature. The ways these data and texts are analyzed and presented is unlike the more measurable and grounded theory approaches used in quantitative transportation research. However, they do provide a wealth of information about the travel experience, the ways in which larger social phenomena play out during travel, and the perspectives of people present in these spaces and engaging in various travel activities, and so have informed the more empirical approach of this dissertation research.

2.4. Summary

The preceding review included literature from three very different areas of study relevant to this research. The sociology of public space work provides a starting point for this research, as the method and approach are very much grounded in this body of literature. The public space research generally operates at a smaller scale by examining micro and often subtle social dynamics and is well-suited to the space of the bus and other parts of the bus network. This literature identifies patterns and rituals of behavior, but focuses on details that are often difficult, if not impossible, to quantify.

The travel behavior and demographics research provides a detailed picture of travel patterns for different groups of travelers based on socioeconomic metrics. This useful and indispensable broad view of the travel landscape can help guide policy and planning decisions. For example, we know that compared to the general population, bus riders are

disproportionately low-income, racial and ethnic minorities, and immigrants. However, the information is aggregated and does not allow for insight into the individual constraints that guide the travel decisions and experiences of individuals as they navigate large, complex, multimodal transportation networks in metropolitan areas. Ethnography can therefore tell us much more about these individuals than their mere presence in bus spaces. We can learn a great deal about their experiences on buses and the ways in which they interact with other people as well as the built environment. This insight can then ultimately inform management, operations, design, and marketing decisions at the transit agency level and potentially larger societal perspectives on the role of transit.

The third body of literature around mobility and travel includes an eclectic range of topics and methodologies that in many ways begins to bridge the gulf between studies of travel behavior and the sociology of the spaces where those activities happen. Earlier work in transport sociology addressed the relationship between travel and society, but the full vision did not come to fruition. More contemporary work in the area of mobilities does address the social aspects of travel. However, much of this work is theoretical and not particularly applied. As such, its usefulness in transportation planning is limited.

This project seeks to integrate and extend these disparate literatures. By using ethnography to study behavior on buses, the methodology draws from the sociology of public space work as a methodical, qualitative analysis of a largely overlooked urban public space. The travel behavior research informs this work by providing an understanding of the unique demographics of transit travelers, how travel behavior trends are changing, and how observed behaviors relate to policy and planning concerns. By bringing a sociological perspective to travel

behavior and demographics, this research broadens the mobility and travel literature by providing an empirical and applied analysis of the experiential aspects of travel.

3. METHODOLOGY

Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of “construct a reading of”) a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior.

– Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973)

There is no English equivalent for the term [*flâneur*], . . . the deliberately aimless pedestrian, unencumbered by any obligation or sense of urgency, who, being French and therefore frugal, wastes nothing, including his time which he spends with the leisurely discrimination of a gourmet, savoring the multiple flavors of his city.

– Cornelia Otis Skinner, *Elegant Wits and Grand Horizontals* (1962)

Riding on a bus, watching people, and gathering fieldnotes may have appeared at times to be like the daily outings of a contemporary flâneur, even though I was doing my bus riding with the deliberateness of a plan. While I was participating in this physical space as a rider, I did not always face many of the constraints or share the concerns of other riders. If I missed a bus or it broke down, I saw this as an opportunity to see how people would respond to the inconvenience. The delay did not mean I was going to be late for my job or miss an appointment. I did not have kids in tow or groceries I needed to get home and into the refrigerator. I also had the chance to look out the window, as many riders spend time doing, to watch the urban landscape go by. This was a very different perspective for me, as I was used to experiencing the built environment of Los Angeles while sitting in a car, often missing the intricacies of streets and neighborhoods whizzing by. When I was traveling six or eight miles an hour on a bus crawling through city streets instead of 45 miles an hour in a car and the road did not require my constant attention, I suddenly felt that I had much time on my hands – and in

many ways I did, as a three-hour trip on the bus from Pasadena to West Los Angeles would have taken me only 30 minutes by car.

Doing ethnographic work on buses meant that I had these moments of flâneur-like leisure where I could enjoy the richness of social life both on the bus and outside of it. Perhaps I found this time liberating not just because I did not need to be anywhere in particular, but also because, unlike many transit users, I was not dependent on buses as my sole mode of transportation: at the end of a day of fieldwork, I had the choice to return to the comfort and convenience of my car. At the same time, ethnography is hard physical, intellectual, and emotional work, and I was expending much energy closely watching people, gathering fieldnotes, and contending with the everyday challenges of this public space. While time-consuming, intense, and sometimes unpredictable, ethnography forced me to pay attention to many details I would have otherwise missed as a passive rider.

3.1. Qualitative Research and Ethnographic Methods

This research uses qualitative data gathered using ethnographic methods – in this case, the collection of fieldnotes through regular, extended participation in public settings – as well as secondary quantitative data sources to help inform the research design and analysis. In discussing research design frameworks, Cresswell (2003) describes the three main components of any research approach – knowledge claims, strategies of inquiry, and methods of data collection and analysis – and the ways these separate elements can and tend to coalesce into a framework. Table 3.1 provides a summary of the different elements of a framework rooted in qualitative approaches, the primary focus of this project.

Table 3.1: Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Tend to or Typically	Qualitative Approaches
<i>Use these philosophical assumptions</i>	Constructivist/Advocacy/Participatory knowledge claims
<i>Employ these strategies of inquiry</i>	Phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and narrative
<i>Employ these methods</i>	Open-ended questions, emerging approaches, text or image data
<i>Use these practices of research, as the researcher</i>	Positions himself or herself
	Collects participant meanings
	Focuses on a single concept or phenomenon
	Brings personal values into the study
	Studies the context or setting of participants
	Validates the accuracy of findings
	Makes interpretations of the data
	Creates an agenda for change or reform
Collaborates with the participants	

Source: Cresswell (2003)

Of the various approaches Cresswell (2003) describes, this research specifically includes constructivist knowledge claims and assumptions, ethnographic design, and field observations.

This research examines the culture on buses in Los Angeles in order to answer one primary research question and four sets of secondary questions:

What are the behaviors, types of interactions, and social expectations on buses in Los Angeles?

1. How is social order maintained and disrupted on transit vehicles? What factors explain observed differences in order and disruption?
2. Do buses differ in the expectations of rules and social order? Are there differences in strictness and looseness? What factors help explain differences in patterns of behavior (such as transit service type, characteristics of the physical environment, or time of day)?

3. Given that public transit is disproportionately patronized by the poor, immigrants, and racial/ethnic minorities, does the culture of various transit spaces relate to larger social dynamics and phenomena, particularly around race, class, and gender?
4. What are the implications of these findings for the design, implementation, management, and operation of transit systems in keeping and attracting riders?

The research approach for this project is based on induction and socially constructed knowledge claims. While this research does seek to identify causal relations between physical, demographic, and social variables, it is not based on strictly post-positivist knowledge claims, the operationalization of variables, and quantitative measures (Creswell 2003). These research questions help bring together and frame broader issues around the establishment and maintenance of social order; the relationships between status, identity, and behavior (particularly related to race/ethnicity, class, and gender); equity in, access to, and participation in transit spaces; and the influence of spatial design and the built environment on interactions and behavior.

Ethnographic approaches can vary in accessibility, the researcher's relationship to a study site and its participants, and the type and media of the data collected. Researchers studying public and quasi-public sites have relative ease of entry and, in the case of public sites, the behavioral norms of these places are generally quite broad (Lofland et al. 2006). As Lofland et al. (2006) discuss, "hanging out" is therefore an accepted activity, and a researcher gathering fieldnotes as an unknown observer – one whose researcher status is not revealed to study participants – does not face many barriers. Buses are such an accessible public space, even with the entry requirement of a bus fare, and I participated fully in the procedures and rituals of this social setting, as would any other rider, without ever revealing my status as a researcher.

3.2. Research Sites and Selection

3.2.1. Studying Transit in Los Angeles

An important issue in assessing the value and applicability of qualitative research is its generalizability. Specifically, how representative is the Los Angeles transit network to other urban transportation networks? If one views Los Angeles as a metropolitan area with an anomalous transit system, then generalizing my findings to transit systems in other cities becomes difficult. While one should always exercise caution in generalizing from nuanced and necessarily limited qualitative data, I would submit that in many important ways Los Angeles shares more similarities with than differences from other cities with large, extensive transit networks. Los Angeles' identity is rooted firmly in car culture, and most images of the city include automobiles, freeways, and dense, intractable traffic congestion. This identity helps to fuel the prevailing myth that no one in Los Angeles uses public transportation. The transit system in Los Angeles may not be part of the popular imagination and the city's social and cultural fabric as in cities like New York, London, or Paris, but Los Angeles has an expansive transit network that is a pervasive feature of its urban landscape. The city's system is the third largest after New York and Chicago in total annual unlinked passenger trips and is second only to New York in annual unlinked bus passenger trips, annual bus passenger miles, and vehicles operated and available for maximum service.¹⁰ The geographic reach of the system is also enormous with a 1,400- square-mile service area and over 180 bus routes and 20 Metro Rapid

¹⁰ APTA defines 1) *passenger miles* as "the cumulative sum of the distances ridden by each passenger," 2) *vehicles operated maximum service* as "the largest number of vehicles in operation in revenue service (i.e., the time when a vehicle is available to the general public and there is an expectation of carrying passengers) at any one time, typically during the morning or evening peak period or rush hour on a weekday," and 3) *vehicles available for maximum service* as "vehicles that a transit agency has available to operate revenue service regardless of the legal relationship through which they are owned, leased, or otherwise controlled by the transit agency" (American Public Transportation Association 2012a).

lines as of June 2012.¹¹ Table 3.2 shows in more detail where Los Angeles stands relative to some of the largest systems in the country, in New York, Chicago, and New Jersey.

The city itself is a global destination with large immigrant populations, and immigrants are heavy users of all modes of public transit, especially buses (Blumenberg and Shiki 2007; Blumenberg 2009). Both new and established immigrant communities in Los Angeles reflect a metropolitan area facing similar types of challenges as in other world cities. For example, racial conflicts have played out in Los Angeles during such events as the Watts riots in 1965 and the 1992 riots after the verdict in the police beating case of Rodney King; similar manifestations of racial tensions occurred during the 2005 rioting in the immigrant suburbs of Paris and the more recent 2011 riots in London and immigrant neighborhoods in England. As one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world, Los Angeles also faces a host of issues related to urban growth and constraints, housing, land use, transportation, the environment, and social and economic inequality. In these ways, Los Angeles is comparable to many other large cities in the United States and in other countries. While this research centers on the specific transit system and geographic area of Los Angeles, its findings may be generalized, reflecting the common characteristics shared with other large cities around the world.

3.2.2. Rapid Versus Local Lines

In 2000, Metro implemented two Rapid routes as part of a BRT pilot program: Line 720 running along Wilshire Boulevard, a major street that runs west from downtown to Santa Monica, and Line 750 running along Ventura Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley. The Rapid

¹¹ Since its inception in 2000, the Metro Rapid system has also included nine additional lines that, at various points in time, were discontinued or merged with other lines (primarily due to low ridership).

Table 3.2: Metro Service and Operations Measures

Annual Unlinked Passenger Trips and Passenger Miles - All Modes						
			Unlinked Passenger Trips		Passenger Miles	
			Number (thousands)	Rank	Number (thousands)	Rank
MTA New York City Transit (NYCT)	New York	NY	3,206,871.2	1	11,877,605.8	1
Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)	Chicago	IL	521,241.8	2	1,940,403.6	7
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro)	Los Angeles	CA	481,435.6	3	2,184,552.9	4
Annual Unlinked Passenger Trips and Passenger Miles - Buses						
			Unlinked Passenger Trips		Passenger Miles	
			Number (thousands)	Rank	Number (thousands)	Rank
MTA New York City Transit (NYCT)	New York	NY	842,637.6	1	1,838,396.5	1
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro)	Los Angeles	CA	386,029.8	2	1,517,647.4	2
Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)	Chicago	IL	318,672.8	3	739,267.9	4
Vehicles Operated Maximum Service and Vehicles Available Maximum Service - Buses						
			Vehicles Operated Maximum		Vehicles Available for Maximum	
			Number	Rank	Number	Rank
MTA New York City Transit (NYCT)	New York	NY	3,924	1	4,538	1
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro)	Los Angeles	CA	2,228	2	2,647	2
New Jersey Transit Corporation (NJ Transit)	Newark	NJ	2,179	3	2,544	3
Metro System						
Service area: 1,433 square miles						
Bus routes: 183						
Metro Rapid lines: 20						

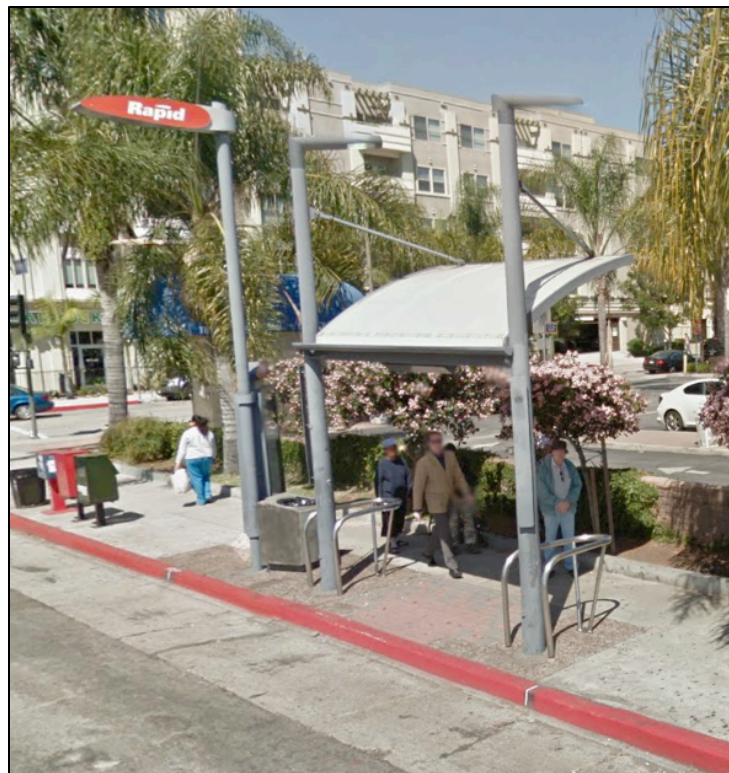
Source: American Public Transportation Association (2011b)

routes were modeled after the well-known system in Curitiba, Brazil – Rede Integrada de Transporte (RIT) – a network of high-speed, high-capacity buses running in dedicated bus lanes throughout the city. Transit agency officials have implemented BRT systems across the United States, but any one BRT system can include a variety of particular system designs and features (Hess et al. 2005). For example, some systems are integrated into the general traffic flow, while others have buses in dedicated, bus-only lanes. Metro’s Rapid buses run on surface streets with regular vehicular traffic, but are much faster than Local buses because of fewer stops (only at major intersections), signal preemption capabilities, and a low-floor bus design that speeds up the boarding and alighting process (Richmond 2005) (Figure 3.1).^{12,13} The buses do not adhere

¹² The distance between Rapid stops can range from about half a mile to over a mile.

¹³ With signal preemption, a transponder on a bus can turn a signal green a bit more quickly or hold a signal light green a bit longer as the bus approaches the equipped intersection. This allows buses to pass through intersections faster and more efficiently.

Figure 3.1: Rapid Buses and Stops



Source: Photo by author (top); Google Maps, 2012 (bottom)

to fixed schedules; they simply run as rapidly as possible along their designated routes. The system also includes rail-like features at many of the bus stops, including distinctive, demarcated bus stop shelters; maps and service information at freestanding kiosks; lighting; electronic countdown signs indicating the minutes until the next bus arrival; and advertisements at the shelters that generate supplemental revenue to maintain the facilities (Richmond 2005). Compared to other modes of transportation, the Rapid bus system in Los Angeles has also been extremely inexpensive to implement in comparison to rail. Light rail can cost up to \$30 million per mile to build and subway costs are even higher at up to \$300 million per mile. On the other hand, the BRT system in Los Angeles has cost about \$200,000 to \$250,000 per mile, a very different cost-benefit picture (Cabanatuan 2003; Hess et al. 2005).

The Wilshire and Ventura corridor pilot routes proved to be enormous successes. In an early evaluation of the BRT pilot routes, Richmond describes the travel time and ridership results of this new service:

Overall speed improvements of 29 percent were achieved on the Wilshire line, 23 percent on the Ventura line, with average system speeds of 14-30 mph, depending on the time of day and service direction. . . . Following Rapid service installation, bus ridership in the Wilshire corridor increased from 63,500 pre-Rapid daily riders to 90,000 as of August 2001, a net increase of 26,500 or 41.7 percent. 41,000 daily riders out of this total were using the new Rapid 720 line, with remaining passengers riding local buses servicing a larger number of stops (Richmond 2005:59-60).

Richmond (2005) also notes that surveys showed one-third of the Rapid riders had not previously used public transit, another one-third were current riders who began to use transit more, and the remaining one-third were riders who had switched from the Local to the Rapid service. While only 6% of Local bus riders had incomes of \$50,000 or more, the share of Rapid

riders in this income bracket was twice as large, 12%. The Rapid passengers' higher average incomes and the larger share of choice riders – those who have other transportation options, but choose to use the Rapid – reflect its parallels to rail systems.¹⁴ Richmond reports Metro's own view of its Rapid system: "The Metro Rapid program has demonstrated two critical elements: 1) customers perceive Metro Rapid as clearly superior to MTA's existing bus services; and 2) Metro Rapid's ability to increase transit's market share among discretionary travelers" (2005:60).¹⁵ This positive perception of the Rapid service as comparable to rail service – a sort of "rail on rubber wheels" – and as being attractive to choice riders is a significant way that it can be distinguished from Local bus service.

In contrast to the Rapid routes, Local lines have many more stops – often at every second or third corner along the route. Between major intersections in the Wilshire Boulevard corridor, the Local route can have half a dozen more stops than the parallel Rapid service; each stop and the subsequent merging return into traffic increases the total travel time between origins and destinations. Local buses also move slower through traffic, as they do not have the signal-priority capabilities of the Rapid. This was reflected, for example, by my observation that the trip time on the Local bus along one of my routes was at least 50% longer than the time for the same trip on a Rapid bus. In addition to operational differences, the Rapid and Local bus systems are also distinct in their design and physical features. Many newer Local buses include

¹⁴ The term "choice riders" is used frequently in transportation planning to distinguish between riders who have access to cars, but choose to use transit (presumably because it is a more attractive transportation option) and "captive riders," who – due to age, income, or disability – cannot drive and must use transit (also known as "transit dependents" in more progressive transportation circles). This language itself is problematic and suggests an assumed hierarchy in the patronage. Transportation planners reinforce this idea when they covet choice riders and consider their patronage to be the most desirable of transit goals. This is couched in rhetoric about "getting people out of their cars," environmental quality, and congestion mitigation, but also serves to create a distinction between desired riders and others (non-choice transit dependents).

¹⁵ These conclusions are excerpts from the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority Draft 2001 Long Range Transportation Plan (Richmond 2005).

the low-floor design of the Rapid buses, but others have steps leading up to the fare box and driver; a stop can consist of just a pole and route sign or additional amenities such as a shelter and benches (Figure 3.2).

If the travel time disadvantages are so significant, then why ride buses on the Local routes at all? There are several possible reasons. The first and most obvious is that the wider stop spacing on the Rapid mean that these buses may not stop conveniently near the origin or destination of a rider's trip. Second, the Rapid may not operate as many hours as the Local bus: for example, one Rapid line, the 780, does not in operate on weekends, and riders on Saturdays and Sundays must take two Local routes (Lines 180 and 217) instead to reach any of the destinations along that route. Third, the phenomenon of trip chaining – where travelers link trip activities together in a single “tour” rather than conducting several discrete trips – is easier on a bus route with many entry and exit points. Riders might use the Local bus for shorter trips, and some riders may only travel a couple blocks. Fourth, riders may choose to travel on the Local buses to avoid crowding on the parallel Rapid service. For example, the 720, a Rapid route, is almost always packed with riders filling the seats and standing in the aisles; the 20, a Local line running along the same route, was in my experience rarely, if ever, completely full. It is conceivable that a tired worker with a long commute across town would prefer comfort and a guaranteed seat over the speed and time advantages offered by the 720. Finally, transit vehicles, particularly in cities with poor weather, are known to provide temporary shelter for homeless people who may ride subways or buses all night or during the day to avoid inclement weather (Donohue 2002). For individuals such as homeless riders, getting from point A to point B as quickly as possible may not be the priority. Speed and mobility, in fact, might be

Figure 3.2: Local Buses and Stops



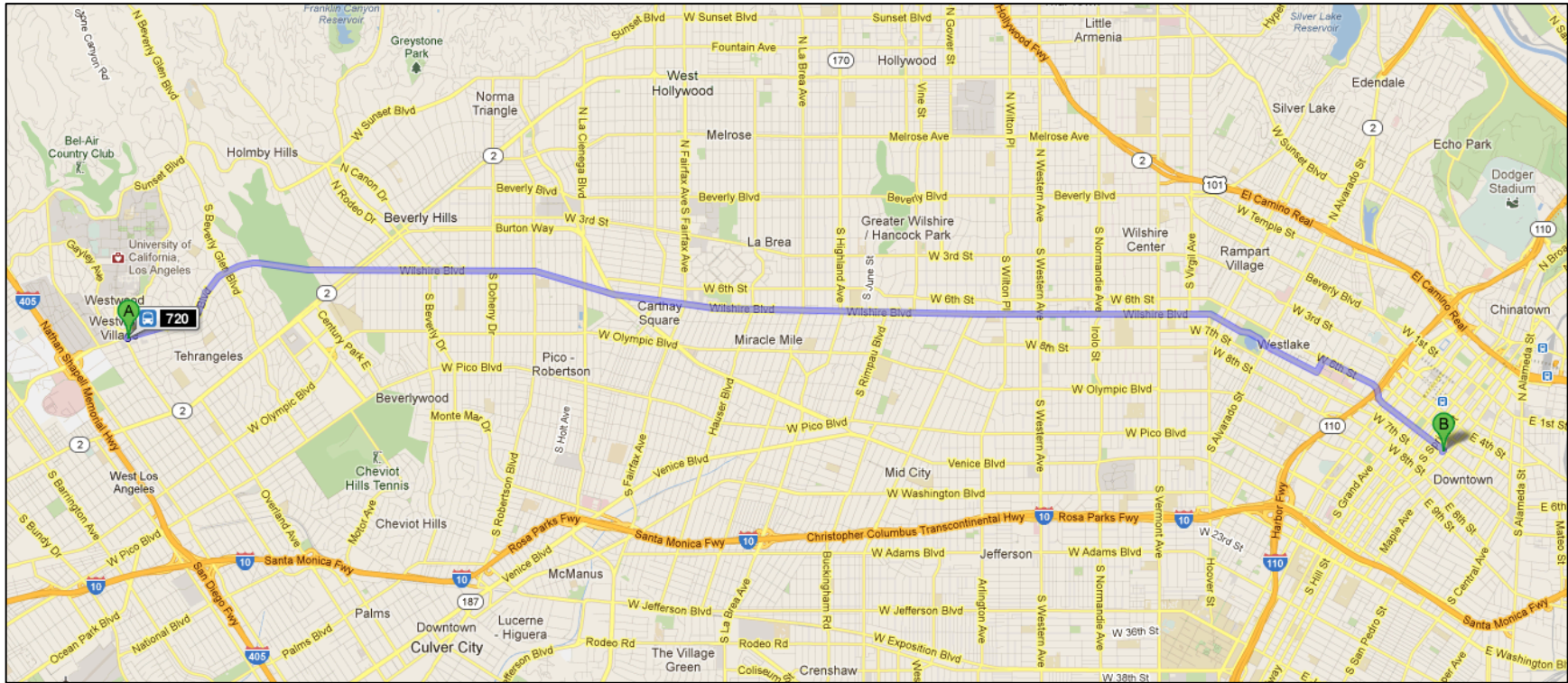
Source: Photos by author

disincentives and riding the slower Local buses would better fulfill their needs. While there are these specific alternative reasons for riding Local buses, research comparing Rapid/express and local buses still suggests that riders do place a premium on the service benefits of Rapid routes (frequency, reliability, ease of use, and speed) (Baltes 2003).

3.2.3. Line Selection

This research involves participant observation on five different bus lines that traverse different parts of the Los Angeles metropolitan area (see Appendix A for detailed end-to-end Metro route maps for each line discussed below). Fieldwork for this research began with Line 720, running along the Wilshire Boulevard corridor in Los Angeles. Metro put the 720 in place in 2000, one of the first BRT lines implemented as part of the Metro Rapid system. Strictly speaking, the 720 runs from Santa Monica at the west end to Commerce at the east end. However, many of the 720 Rapid buses run what is called a “short haul” route between Westwood and downtown Los Angeles (Figure 3.3). I chose this line because its rider demographics are among the most diverse in the entire Metro network. The line runs through several of the richest and poorest neighborhoods and areas of Los Angeles, including Santa Monica, Brentwood, Westwood, Beverly Hills, Koreatown, Westlake, downtown Los Angeles, and Boyle Heights. Table 3.3 shows demographic data for the major neighborhoods along this corridor, with very high percentages of whites in neighborhoods on the western portion of this route (a high of 84.2% in Brentwood, for example) and increasing percentages of non-whites as the route progresses east; Boyle Heights at the east end of the route has the highest percentage of Latinos, 94%. In Koreatown, Westlake, and Boyle Heights, over half to two-thirds of residents are foreign-born. The median income distribution between households in these

Figure 3.3: Rapid 720 Route



Source: Google Maps, 2012

Table 3.3: Demographics of Neighborhoods Along Lines 720 and 20

720/20*	Santa Monica	Brentwood	Westwood	Beverly Hills	Mid-Wilshire	Hancock Park	Koreatown	Westlake	Downtown	Boyle Heights
Ethnicity (%)										
White	71.3	84.2	62.9	81.8	33.6	70.7	7.4	4.5	16.2	2.0
Latino	13.5	4.5	7.0	4.8	19.9	8.5	53.5	73.4	36.7	94.0
Asian	7.1	6.5	23.1	7.6	19.8	13.1	32.2	16.5	21.3	2.4
Black	3.5	1.2	2.0	1.4	22.7	3.8	4.8	3.9	22.3	0.9
Other	4.6	3.6	4.9	4.5	3.9	3.9	2.0	1.7	3.5	0.7
Median income (\$)	\$69,013	\$112,927	\$68,716	\$96,312	\$58,483	\$85,277	\$30,558	\$26,757	\$15,003	\$33,235
Foreign born (%)	24.8	21.1	31.3	38.2	33.9	26.3	68.0	67.6	41.9	52.4
Ancestry (%)	Mexican (8.9), English (7.7)	Russian (8.9), German (8.1)	Iranian (10.3), Russian (6.6)	Iranian (20.8), Russian (8.3)	Korean (8.0), Mexican (6.4)	Irish (6.6), Russian (6.4)	Mexican (22.4), Korean (21.2)	Mexican (35.3), Guatemalan (6.7)	Mexican (23.1), Korean (3.6)	Mexican (81.6), English (0.2%)
* These neighborhoods are ordered from west to east.										

Source: Los Angeles Times (2012)

neighborhoods is wide: a high of about \$113,000 in Brentwood to a low just over \$15,000 in downtown Los Angeles. In addition, the 720 is perceived in transportation circles as a line that carries a variety of passengers such as domestic and service workers commuting to their jobs (in areas in the western portion of Los Angeles and in places such as Beverly Hills and Bel Air), students traveling to and from UCLA, white-collar workers commuting to and from downtown Los Angeles, and elderly non-drivers from all different income brackets.¹⁶

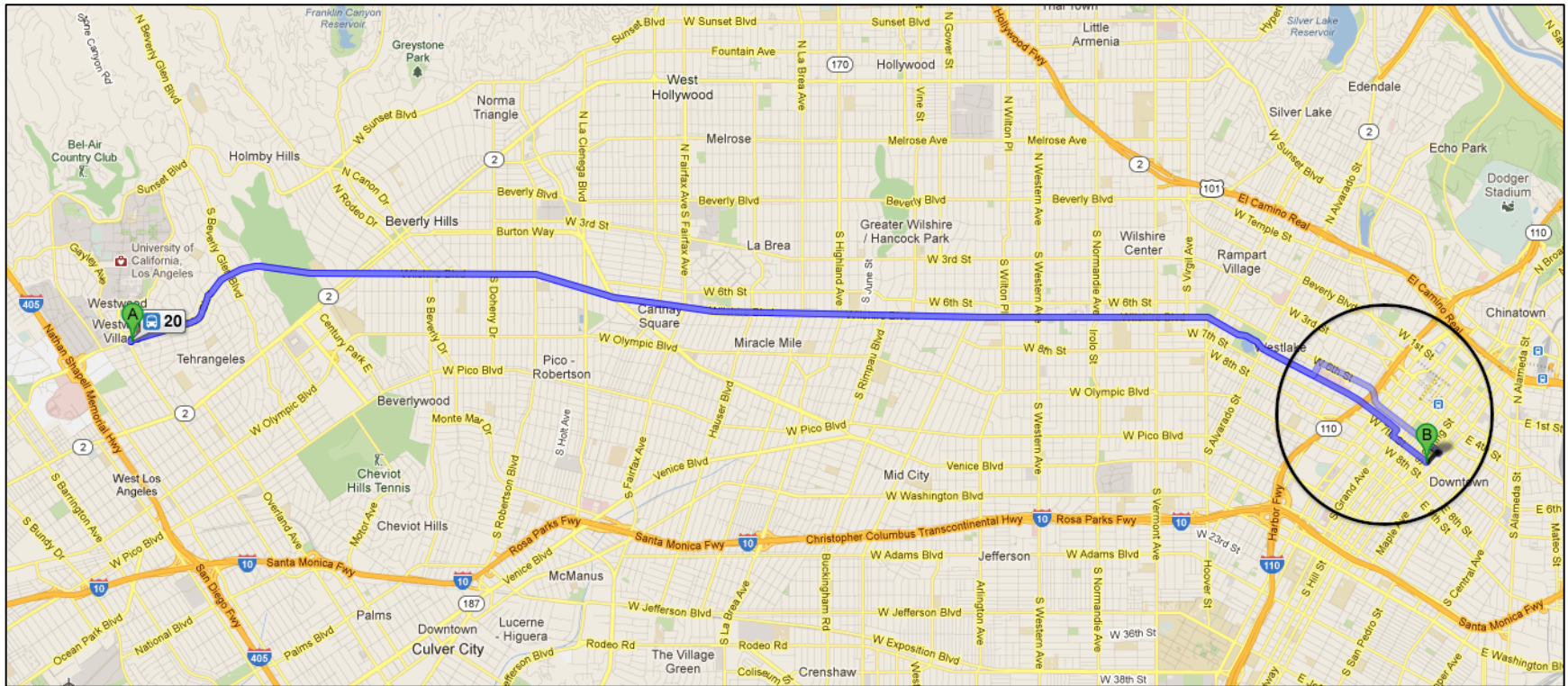
I rode on Line 720 mainly between Westwood and downtown Los Angeles, about a 12-mile stretch. Early in my data gathering, I decided to conduct additional fieldwork on another line, Line 20, a Local bus that also traverses Wilshire (Figure 3.4). This bus follows essentially the same route as the 720 from Westwood to downtown Los Angeles – other than the fact that it runs on 7th Street in downtown while the 720 detours north a block to 6th Street (see the circled area of Figure 3.4 for the route deviation).¹⁷ My fieldnotes from the 720 began to reveal interesting patterns of behavior that I suspected would become more apparent when contrasted with another line. By attempting to hold constant the bus routes, I hoped to tease out and understand other factors that might contribute to behavioral differences between the two lines.

I later added a second set of Local and Rapid lines running along the same route in different parts of the city in order to examine the ways in which geographic and modal subtypes might be contributing to differences on buses. Line 780 is a Rapid route that begins in Pasadena at Pasadena City College, northeast of downtown Los Angeles, and runs west and

¹⁶ I consulted with a member of the Metro professional staff in considering which lines in the system to survey. He and two other transportation planners who are familiar with this line all made similar observations about the demographic diversity of riders on the 720.

¹⁷ Line 20 runs to and from Santa Monica only very early in the morning (between 5:00 AM and 7:00 AM), and the route ends in downtown Los Angeles.

Figure 3.4: Local 20 Route



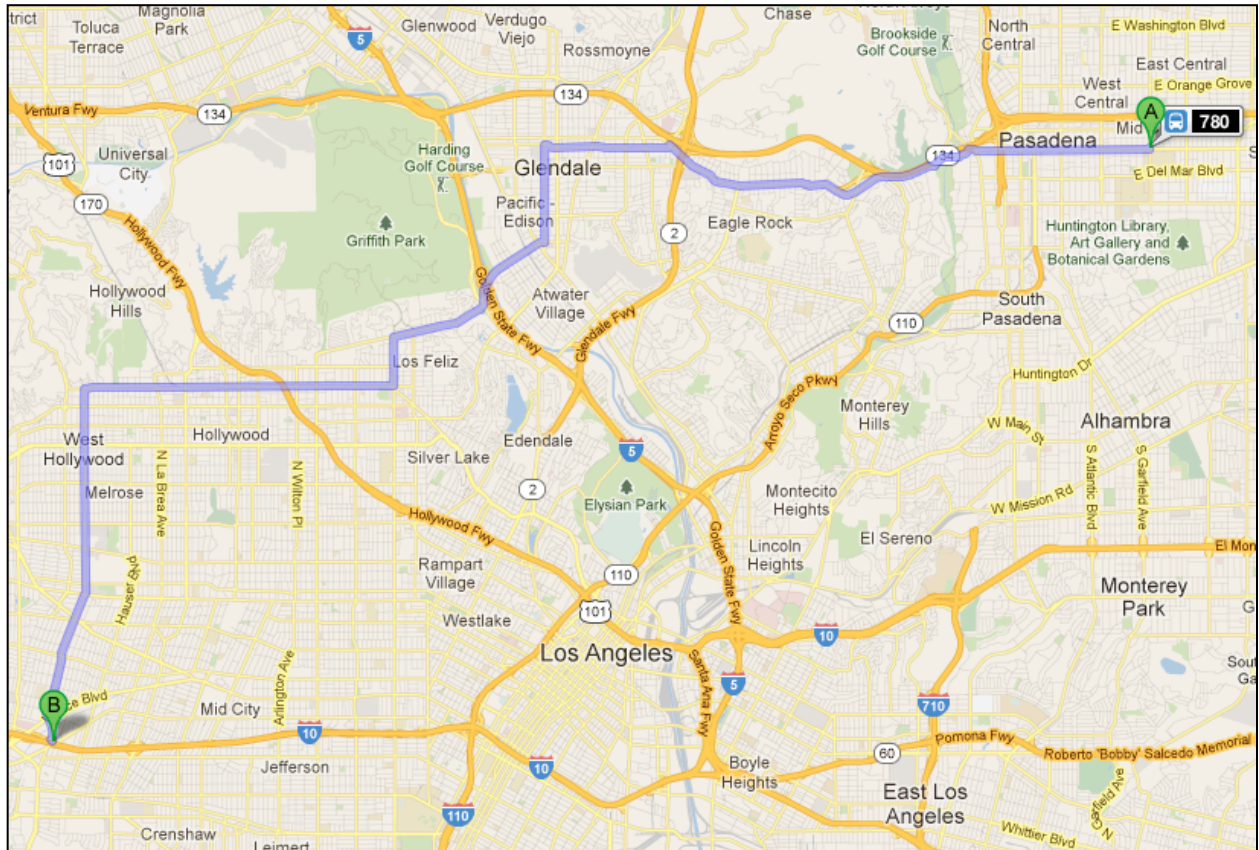
Source: Google Maps, 2012

south through a series of very different neighborhoods: Eagle Rock, Glendale, Los Feliz, Hollywood, West Hollywood, Fairfax, Mid-Wilshire, and Mid-City (Figure 3.5). The route ends at the Washington/Fairfax Transit Hub (Figure 3.6).¹⁸ I chose this route for various reasons. First, at 21 miles, this largely north-south route is much longer than the 720 and 20 routes. Second, this route passes a number and variety of locales resulting in a mix of riders and trip purposes. Along Line 780 are various commercial areas, including Old Pasadena, a busy, upscale shopping district; the Glendale Galleria and the Americana in Glendale, two large malls; a Costco in Los Feliz; the Hollywood and Highland shopping and entertainment center in Hollywood; The Grove, a large outdoor mall; and the Farmers Market, a historic and iconic market area adjacent to The Grove on Fairfax Boulevard. The route is also used by many tourists to reach various shopping, entertainment, and museum destinations along Hollywood Boulevard and south to Fairfax Boulevard, as well for as connections to the Metro Red Line subway system. Third, the neighborhoods along this line are particularly diverse, with an Armenian population in Glendale, Russian and gay communities in West Hollywood, and Little Ethiopia at the southern end of Fairfax Boulevard.

Table 3.4 shows that this route is ethnically diverse. West Hollywood and Fairfax have large percentages of white residents (81% and 85%, respectively), but non-white populations are more evenly distributed in the various neighborhoods than along the 720 and 20 routes.

¹⁸ A 2007 Metro system map identifies this terminus with a “Transit Center” icon, but only labels it as “Washington/Fairfax,” while other locations include this designation in the name (e.g., Pico/Rimpau Transit Center). Other maps call it the “Washington/Fairfax Transit Hub.” This site is actually nothing more than a large sidewalk under the I-10 freeway where over a dozen transit lines converge. Even on the hottest of days, it is a dark, cold, and unpleasant place to wait. This stop is heavily used – regularly at least twenty other people were waiting there to catch a bus or transfer to a different line. However, two benches were the only seating available and often there was no space to sit or the seating was dirty. The trashcans were usually overflowing with litter and debris strewn about on the sidewalk. Adjacent to the sidewalk was a large lot where the buses parked during layovers. The buses coming and going together with the freeway traffic also made this a very loud and polluted place. Figure 3.6 provides different views of this location.

Figure 3.5: Rapid 780 Route



Source: Google Maps, 2012

Figure 3.6: Washington/Fairfax Transit Hub



Source: Photos by author

Table 3.4: Demographics of Neighborhoods Along Lines 780 and 180-217

780/180-217*	Pasadena	Eagle Rock	Glendale	Los Feliz	East Hollywood	Hollywood	West Hollywood	Fairfax	Mid-Wilshire	Mid-City
Ethnicity (%)										
White	39.1	29.8	54.1	57.6	17.5	41.0	81.2	84.7	33.6	9.5
Latino	33.3	40.3	19.6	18.7	60.4	42.2	9.0	5.9	19.9	45.2
Asian	10.0	23.9	16.3	13.5	15.5	7.1	4.0	4.5	19.8	3.9
Black	13.9	1.9	1.0	3.7	2.4	5.2	2.8	2.2	22.7	38.3
Other	3.8	4.1	9.0	6.6	4.1	4.5	3.1	2.8	3.9	3.1
Median income (\$)	\$62,825	\$67,253	\$57,112	\$50,793	\$29,927	\$33,694	\$52,855	\$65,938	\$58,483	\$43,711
Foreign born (%)	32.2	38.5	54.4	44.5	66.5	53.8	35.9	23.2	33.9	35.1
Ancestry (%)	Mexican (24.1), English (5.5)	Mexican (27.1), Filipino (16.8)	Armenian (29.3), Mexican (10.5)	Armenian (21.2), Mexican (7.4)	Mexican (20.4), Armenian (11.3)	Mexican (16.9), Armenian (6.4)	Russian (14.2), German (7.5)	Russian (7.7), Irish (6.5)	Korean (8.0), Mexican (6.4)	Mexican (25.7), Unspecified African (1.8)
* These neighborhoods are ordered from north to south.										

69

Source: Los Angeles Times (2012)

Latinos are the majority non-white group in these neighborhoods: East Hollywood has the highest percentages of Latinos (60.4%) and foreign-born residents (66.5%). The income distribution is also less broad than along the Wilshire Boulevard route, with the highest median household income level in Eagle Rock at about \$67,000, compared to East Hollywood with an income level just under \$30,000.

The 780 Rapid route is also covered by two adjoining Local lines: Line 180 line runs from Pasadena to Hollywood, and Line 217 from Hollywood to the Washington/Fairfax Transit Hub.¹⁹ The transfer point for this route is in Hollywood. The 180 ends at Hollywood Boulevard and Argyle Avenue, and the 217 route starts at Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street, which is one long block west of the end of the 180 route. Figure 3.7 shows the transfer location from the 180 to the 217.

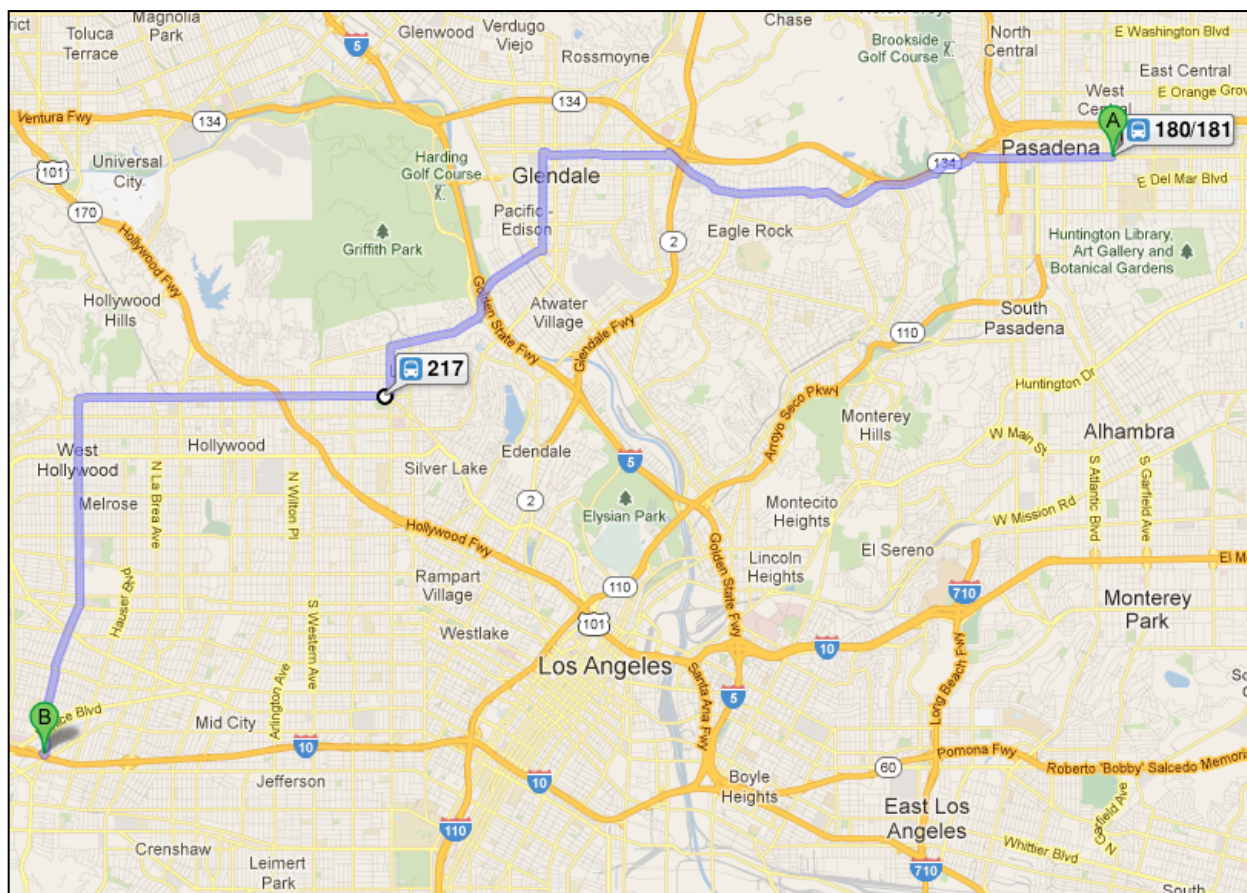
3.3. Ridership Characteristics

Data from Metro's 2009 on-board survey of these lines provides demographic information and a snapshot of riders using the five lines (Table 3.5).²⁰ Overall, they are largely members of low-income households, do not have access to cars, and use transit five or more days a week. A majority of riders on most of the lines have been using transit for five or more years. Latinos make up the largest ethnic group on each of the lines: they account for about half of riders on the 720, 20, and 780. Whites make up between 13% and 18% of riders on the various lines. This table also includes figures for respondents from all lines included in the survey and shows that

¹⁹ The 180-181 line runs along the same route between Hollywood and Pasadena. However, toward the end of the route in Pasadena, Line 181 heads north on Lake Avenue into Altadena, while Line 180 continues east and ends at the Sierra Madre Villa Gold Line station. I would ride both lines to and from Pasadena, but I would board the bus west of where the routes diverge. To avoid confusion, I will refer only to Line 180 in my discussion.

²⁰ Metro did not conduct an on-board survey of Line 20 in 2010. Therefore, I used the 2009 survey data that included all five lines for a fairer comparison.

Figure 3.7: Local 180-217 Routes



Source: Google Maps, 2012

the demographic characteristics of individuals from the five lines generally reflect the larger survey sample.²¹

Daily rider figures from the five lines (for the same period as the on-board survey) show that the 720 has the highest patronage of daily riders by far – with over 37,000 riders a day, more than twice the daily ridership of the 20 – and over four times the daily passenger miles of the 20 (Table 3.6). Riders on the 720 also have the longest average trip length, at almost six miles, or about half of the route’s length. Riders on the 780 similarly have a longer average trip

²¹ The total number of surveys for these five lines is not large (Line 217 only included 33 surveys, for example), so these figures should be considered general estimates only.

Table 3.5: Ridership Characteristics of Study Routes

Line	720	20	780	180	217	All lines
Ethnicity						
Latino	47.1	48.5	50.9	41.1	35.5	59.0
Black	12.9	19.5	14.9	15.6	22.6	19.0
White	15.7	13.5	17.5	14.4	12.9	8.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	17.1	10.5	7.9	20.0	16.1	8.0
American Indian	2.9	1.0	1.8	1.1	0.0	1.0
Other	4.3	7.0	7.0	7.8	12.9	5.0
Gender						
Male	58.8	41.2	46.9	49.4	46.7	48.0
Female	41.2	58.8	53.1	50.6	53.3	52.0
Age						
Younger than 18	1.4	12.4	7.2	10.2	26.7	9.0
18-22	17.4	15.4	18.9	11.4	13.3	17.0
23-49	62.3	45.0	48.5	60.2	46.7	51.0
50-64	15.9	21.3	19.8	14.8	6.7	18.0
65 or older	2.9	5.9	5.4	3.4	6.7	5.0
Household earnings more than \$26,000						
Yes	37.9	27.2	35.5	38.0	50.0	30.0
No	62.1	72.8	64.5	62.0	50.0	70.0
Use Metro bus/rail primarily to commute to/from work						
Yes	88.3	71.0	81.7	69.1	83.3	80.0
No	11.7	29.0	18.3	30.9	16.7	20.0
Car available to make this trip						
Yes	23.4	28.8	19.5	30.4	16.1	27.0
No	76.6	71.2	80.5	69.6	83.9	73.0
Days per week riding Metro						
5 or more days	69.7	72.4	76.1	61.5	66.7	71.0
3-4 days	17.1	13.8	17.7	22.0	16.6	18.0
1-2 days	9.3	9.0	6.2	12.1	6.7	7.0
less than 1 day	3.9	2.9	0.0	2.2	10.0	2.0
First time	0.0	1.9	0.0	2.2	0.0	2.0
Number of years riding Metro						
Less than 1	12.5	12.3	5.4	12.8	33.3	11.0
1-2 years	18.1	13.3	14.4	18.6	13.3	17.0
3-4 years	18.0	12.3	20.7	17.4	13.3	17.0
5+ years	51.4	62.1	59.5	51.2	40.0	55.0
Total responses	83	227	119	95	33	15,281

Source: Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (2009)

Table 3.6: Passenger Trip Characteristics of Study Routes

Line	Daily riders	Daily passenger miles	Daily average trip length
20	17,558	54,646	3.11
180	10,707	39,282	3.67
217	10,395	25,163	2.42
720	37,397	219,684	5.87
780	10,266	49,104	4.78

Source: Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (2009b)

length compared to the three Local lines. The number of daily passengers on the Rapid 780, about 10,000, was comparable to the numbers on the 217 and 180, the two Local lines serving the same route.

3.4. Data Collection

3.4.1. Sources of Data

This study primarily involves participant observation data, with additional data from informal interviews and a review of materials on various aspects of Metro's bus system. Lofland et al. (2006) review different sources of data available for various qualitative methods used to study social settings: 1) direct experience, 2) social action, 3) talk, and 4) supplementary data, including archival records and physical traces. Field research can yield different types of data in these various categories. This study's use of participant observation generated much direct experience data, a source that offers "the researcher some degree of close personal exposure to the phenomenon under study. Such experience can often provide especially profound and nuanced understandings of certain aspects of the topic of study" (Lofland et al. 2006:85). While this was the logical approach to take in a busy public space, such as a bus, the character of my fieldnotes evolved as I spent more time in the field, and they took on qualities of autoethnography, an issue I discuss in more detail in a later section.

I also collected social action data – "what people actually do" – which can include both verbal and non-verbal actions related to situated action (Lofland et al. 2006). Because talking to or actively attempting to engage with others, particularly strangers, is generally not a norm of bus spaces, much of the behavior and communication on buses happens through subtle body language and gestures that signal to others that things are positive or negative, cooperative or

hostile, or just largely neutral. Thus, I paid particular attention to these actions as forms of both message and response.

Talk data – “what people say” – included gathering details of people’s conversations in bus spaces, the kind of talk in action that Lofland et al. describe as “accounts or patterns of talk formulated for a particular end in a naturally occurring situation that is part of some ongoing system of action” (2006:87). Intensive interviews with (other) riders were not feasible on buses – the constant flow of people coming and going did not allow for formalized or predictable periods of time during which I could gather data from people; I also felt it would have been awkward and potentially biasing to reveal myself as a researcher.²² To minimize my effect as an observer, I developed an informal, off-the-cuff interviewing technique that I found conducive to bus riding, where I would strike up conversations with other riders when it made sense to do so in a particular context. Most often this happened when I could make reference to an event or activity that was transpiring on the bus and to which we could both relate. Sometimes people’s responses would spur a dialogue, and at other times they would merely acknowledge me and not continue the engagement.

Over the course of the study, I conducted an ongoing review of newspaper articles, reports, and studies on Metro’s Rapid system, which provided additional insight into organizational and operations developments, as well as the impact of events external to the agency (the recession, increasing fuel prices, system improvements). I also looked for personal

²² When I worked as an intern at a local transit agency several years ago, I was able to use my employee identification badge in lieu of a transit pass. I noticed that when drivers saw the badge, their behavior and demeanor would change considerably. For example, they would be exceedingly polite to other bus patrons and then look over at me repeatedly to see if I was watching. I assumed they thought I was making note and would report back to management. I felt that revealing myself to drivers and passengers as a researcher might elicit similar, potentially biasing responses or would require that I spend a great deal of time explaining my project rather than gathering data.

accounts of and references to riding transit in Los Angeles as an additional source of experiential information.

3.4.2. Data Collection Process

I collected fieldnotes on these Rapid and Local lines in 2005 and again from 2009 to 2011. I completed fieldnotes for 120 one-way trips (24 trips on each route) spread out over weekdays and weekends, peak and off-peak times, and in peak and off-peak directions (see Appendix B for the complete fieldwork schedule). For the 720 and 20 trips, I always started in Westwood and would usually take the bus to downtown Los Angeles.²³ There, I disembarked and took a bus back to Westwood. These trips generally took about two hours on the 720 and three hours on the 20. I rode the 780 Rapid from Pasadena directly to the terminus in West Los Angeles. For Local bus trips, I traveled on the 180 to the end of the line at the Hollywood/Vine Red Line station, transferred to the 217, and continued to the end of the route (the same location as the 780). The 780 trip generally took about four hours roundtrip; the 180-217 could take six hours or longer, depending on the time I spent waiting for connecting buses in Hollywood.

I traveled alone and engaged with passengers and drivers as a rider. Hence, my involvement in the field was as a participant observer. I never revealed myself to anyone as a researcher and, in this sense, I was participating covertly. I would record copious notes in a small notebook on the bus during the entire course of a trip, including while waiting at stops. These notes included detailed descriptions of the people on the bus, their activities, and actions; events that transpired; and verbatim records of utterances, exchanges, and conversations. On the bus, I did not have information about the backgrounds of the many

²³ On a couple occasions, I rode the 720 through downtown to Boyle Heights.

individuals whom I observed unless they shared details during a discussion or there was a visual clue (a uniform with a company's name on the shirt, for example). I would, however, gather as many details as possible when identity characteristics such as race/ethnicity, gender, age, and social status seemed relatively obvious.²⁴

When possible, I spoke with passengers and drivers to learn about their experiences on transit. I did, however, strive to remain conscious of situations where I might be creating too much artificiality by starting up conversations when such an interaction would not follow a norm of behavior. Often, these interactions began with a reference to a particular person or recent incident that I could use as a starting point. On multiple occasions, riders initiated conversations with me, and in these situations I would try to continue the interaction when it felt comfortable to do so. As a woman riding transit alone, concerns about safety did arise and occasionally limit my fieldwork. For example, I did not feel comfortable riding the bus late at night or getting off at certain, often-deserted stops in downtown Los Angeles. In particular situations where I felt someone (always a man) was violating my physical or mental space, I would remove myself from the interaction by either moving to another part of the bus or disembarking altogether.

After writing up the fieldnotes for each series of trips, I was able to distill components of the raw information by developing a coding scheme and using Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software package, to organize and analyze over 250 pages of fieldnotes.²⁵ This allowed me to

²⁴ Of course, reading and interpreting these identity markers involves assumptions and categorizations that can prove inaccurate or overly simplistic, particularly for a complicated and contentious construct such as race. I made note of these characteristics when I thought it was appropriate and used this information to inform rather than strictly define my broader analysis.

²⁵ Atlas.ti is one of several Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) programs available to facilitate analysis of various types of qualitative data. In this case, the coding of my fieldwork data allowed me to bring up categories of

identify recurring themes and patterns as well as atypical and more unusual events and activities. In addition, I obtained two years (2009 and 2010) of Metro's on-board ridership survey results for the five lines in order to better understand the demographic characteristics of riders on these lines and their reported levels of satisfaction with service and system amenities.

3.4.3. Role of the Researcher

I came to this project with two existing relationships to the world of transit. As a transportation planning student, I spent a number of years learning about transportation demographics, transportation policy and politics, and travel behavior – all focusing on transportation at the regional and systemic levels. My work and interests also include transportation equity issues, which involve understanding and examining transit passengers in aggregate ways through variables such as income, race/ethnicity, gender, and age. Therefore, my research perspectives have focused largely on thinking about people who use transit in abstract, quantified terms.

Another aspect of my identity relevant to this fieldwork is my participation in transit environments as a rider. I have used transit in a number of places, including Davis, California, the San Francisco Bay Area (mainly Oakland and San Francisco), Los Angeles, and to a more limited extent, New York, London, and Berlin. Unfortunately, I have often been a reluctant transit passenger and, if given the choice, will drive my car. For example, in Los Angeles, I rode public transit to and from UCLA for two years, but only because daily parking is expensive and I was not selected for a parking permit. I disliked that I had to travel almost two hours roundtrip to go the six miles between my home in Culver City and the campus. I resented the fact that I

excerpts from the fieldnotes (what Atlas.ti calls "quotations") as well as perform simple queries such as type of disruption by service type.

would have to wait for the bus in the hot sun and next to an unsightly gas station sometimes for up to twenty minutes. I disliked that the bus was often overcrowded, uncomfortable, and aesthetically unpleasing. In theory, I am a transit advocate; in practice, I am not.

I continue to struggle with this tension between my academic and professional attitudes and my personal behavior. In using ethnography to explore transit environments, I hoped to understand transit in very different ways. I wanted to examine bus spaces using very intimate and micro-level approaches in order to fully appreciate what I believed the transportation literature was failing to capture. Additionally, I wanted to experience buses as a social science researcher to dispel some of my own preconceived notions of this world. Prior to starting my fieldwork, I suspected that buses would be rich and fascinating microcosms of the social world (as they proved to be), and I looked forward to participating as a research rider and less as a pragmatic rider. By putting aside my own personal identity as a beleaguered, resistant transit rider, I sought to witness and document many of the behaviors and interactions I had deliberately ignored in the past.

Different paradigms and approaches to planning have shaped my identity as an urban planner, and this, in turn, has informed my role as a researcher – in some ways that are complementary and in others that necessarily contradict each other. For example, rational planning and the use of the scientific method have dominated much transportation research. When understanding transportation networks as functional systems transporting individuals or goods from point A to point B, transportation planners tend to focus on quantitative measures of efficiency, productivity, and costs and benefits (Meyer and Miller 2001; Papacostas and Prevedouros 2001). To a certain degree, this research has influenced my understanding of the

performance of transit networks: Do they move large numbers of people effectively and efficiently? Do the measurable benefits outweigh the costs? Does some particular investment appear to be the best use of available funding?

At the same time, I consider issues of equity in planning, as reflected in the central concerns of such paradigms as advocacy, radical, and feminist planning. In this way, I do not necessarily understand an effective and efficient transit system to be one that simply moves the maximum number of people in the shortest amount of time. Even in situations where issues of equity are considered in the rational planning approach – such as the cross-subsidizing of suburban commuters on rail by low-income urban bus riders – the measures are generally quantifiable ones that can be compared across types of riders, modes, and systems. My assessment and understanding of equity as a factor in the planning of transit systems and the design and operation of transit spaces are inherently less tangible and more abstract.

A tension therefore exists between these different perspectives of what constitute the physical and social elements of a “good” transit environment or system. The definition of a successful bus space can be based on different goals, including attracting as many riders as possible, attracting particular riders (“choice” riders, for example, who have other travel mode options), or ensuring equitable transit experiences and avoiding a hierarchical structure where some riders have particular amenities and others do not. Through my ethnographic fieldwork, I engaged with riders as a fellow passenger and participant observer in these settings, documenting both my own experiences in and understandings of transit space, as well as recording the physical and verbal activities of my fellow passengers. While gathering data, I worked to consider and be aware of my own perceptions and definitions about acceptable and

unacceptable behavior, the quality of interactions, and the intensity of disruptions.

Another dimension of the challenge in carrying out this approach is highlighted when considering conflicting outcomes, goals, and paradigm approaches. A goal to minimize disruptions in order to cater to particular riders could potentially lead to very different policy implications than a goal such as the development of safe and comfortable transit spaces for all users. If, for example, the analysis of my fieldnotes indicated that the presence of homeless individuals on buses often resulted in overt conflict with other riders or in more subtle tensions (feelings of discomfort or uneasiness), then a policy suggestion might be to ban particular people from buses or to price them out or curtail their ridership through premium pricing. While this is clearly a facetious example, it illustrates the importance of considering questions such as: 1) What are the values, norms, and expectations that I, as a researcher, bring into these spaces?, 2) How might my own perspectives affect what I choose to observe and how I document these observations?, and 3) How do I reconcile the different approaches to understanding transit systems that guide my work as a transportation researcher and the ideal outcomes as they relate to my data analysis? Thus, I faced the challenge of remaining conscious of my own subjective understandings of events and interactions on buses while taking advantage of the detail and richness that such experiential data collection methods can ultimately yield.

I reflected on these various factors related to my identity and perspectives on transit, and then noticed over time that my fieldnotes included more personal narrative, reflections, and subjective opinions about things I had previously relegated to footnotes. I began to understand my identity as a bus rider less as objective observer and more as part of an aspect and activity

of daily life, one that involved traversing the city by bus. I became more emotionally involved in the situations I witnessed and in which I was a direct participant, and found that I had feelings about and reactions to things that I wanted to see changed or occur differently. These realizations helped me better understand what observations reflected my own emotions, neuroses, and phobias in different physical and social spaces around things such as dirt and germs, physical contact with strangers, and feelings of safety.

I considered the autoethnographic qualities of my fieldwork, analysis, and reporting. Ellis describes autoethnography as “research, writing and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. This form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection” (2004:xix). Using this approach, one that Anderson refers to as “evocative autoethnography,” scholars have written about “topics related to emotionally wrenching experiences such as illness, death, victimization, and divorce” (2006:377). Anderson seeks to distinguish evocative autoethnography from what he calls “analytic autoethnography,” an approach with five features: “1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, 2) analytic reflexivity, 3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, 4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and 5) commitment to theoretical analysis” (2006:378). These elements of analytic autoethnography spoke to me as I was identifying more strongly as a bus rider and thinking about my own experiences and relationship to this social setting. I also began to see the narrative quality of parts of my fieldnotes as reflected in Anderson’s description of the researcher’s experience and possibly shifting perspectives:

Autoethnographers should illustrate analytic insights through recounting their own experiences and thoughts as well as those of others. Furthermore, they should openly discuss changes in their beliefs and relationships over the course of fieldwork, thus vividly

revealing themselves as people grappling with issues relevant to members and participation in fluid rather than static social worlds (2006:384).

In addition, I always sought to understand my experiences as they related to those of the riders around me; for example, I tried to note if things that bothered me deeply seemed to affect other riders in the same way (such as someone coughing repeatedly and not covering his face). Finally, I was not using my fieldwork merely to describe my personal experience, challenges, and issues with bus riding, but rather to “use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves” (Anderson 2006:387).

I did not set out to do autoethnographic work in this research, but I did find discussions about autoethnography, critiques of it (particularly evocative autoethnography), and Anderson’s alternative conceptualization of analytic autoethnography to be very useful in understanding my own evolution in identity and the sometimes instinctive and visceral responses I would have to particular persons or incidents. After a particularly grueling trip, I would feel physically and emotionally exhausted and unclear how transit-dependent people could possibly do that day after day and year after year. However, I believe tapping into my own emotions has ultimately helped me understand the social setting of the bus more fully, empathize more authentically with the people on it, and more effectively tease out the nuance and detail of interaction and behavior.

3.5. Summary

The delimitations and limitations of this research relate primarily to the methodology employed and the related selection of sites (both at the larger scale of Los Angeles as the site of a transit network and at the smaller scale of individual bus routes and lines). Ethnography is an

effective means of exploring and understanding the more detailed elements of physical and social environments such as bus spaces. However, immersing oneself in any setting for an extensive period of time is extremely labor-intensive, and the researcher may be forced to delineate the boundaries of the site selection itself and to make decisions about focusing on particularly important or relevant aspects of a setting. These self-imposed limits, together with the strategy of examining a smaller number of research sites in depth (instead of gathering data from a large sample size, as is often the case in quantitative research), can affect the generalizability of the research findings. In the case of this research, the use of ethnography as a data collection tool and the geographically extensive primary study site, the Metro network, do pose issues of generalizability that should be considered.

For obvious practical reasons, I was not able to study all of the nearly 200 bus lines in the Metro system, nor did I believe this would be a necessary endeavor, as my earlier research on buses showed some consistent overall patterns of behavior on buses. By selecting a group of study routes that encompass different physical and social aspects of the bus network in Los Angeles, I was able to consider observational differences between routes, while also controlling for particular variables to some degree. For example, in comparing Lines 720 and 780, modal subtype is a less relevant explanatory variable because both routes are Rapid lines. Similarly, the 720 and 20, while different modal subtypes, both run through the same neighborhoods along Wilshire Boulevard. Therefore, the set of lines included in the fieldwork analysis allow for a series of cross-comparisons that can be used to examine other facets of the overall Metro system.

4. THE RULES OF TRANSIT ENGAGEMENT

Get up in the morning, get on the bus
Get up in the morning like the rest of us
Places to go, important people to meet
Better not get up or you might lose your seat

– The Guess Who, “Bus Rider”

Being sober on a bus is, like, totally different than being drunk on a bus.

– Ozzy Osbourne

How does one go about riding a bus in Los Angeles? Bus riding initially appears to be a relatively simple and straightforward process: a person waits at a stop, boards the bus, rides it to a destination, and gets off the bus. Most people, even those who do not ride buses, are able to provide some general description of bus riding by drawing on their own experiences or observations. However, each of these steps involves a number of procedures, rules, and expectations – some official and some unspoken – that riders learn in order to navigate the transit network successfully. In Los Angeles, Metro provides logistical bus-riding information on its website through maps, trip planners, and descriptions of fare options. It also lists “riding tips” that describe some aspects of bus riding that may require a bit of insider knowledge, such as “wave to the bus operator to stop,” “wait for exiting passengers to leave, then board,” “if you are not familiar with the area, ask the operator to call out your street,” “be ready to exit when your stop is approaching,” and “exit through the rear doors whenever possible” (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority 2012b; Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority 2012c). Social interactions on a bus, however, involve many subtle and complex rules and expectations. Most bus riders do not learn these rules of

behavior from reading Metro's website; they learn from the experience of bus riding itself – watching other passengers, hearing drivers articulate and enforce the rules, seeing events transpire, and suffering the consequences of broken rules.

This chapter presents an analysis of the disruptions occurring in bus spaces when people violate the rules of bus riding in different ways. The scope of these disruptions and their impacts on the social stability of the bus vary. In some cases, a disruption may be so minor that people do not consciously notice it; in other situations, the effects may be felt long after the disruption itself has come to an end. This examination begins with a brief discussion of what constitutes normalcy in bus space, followed by a description of the qualities of normal, stable bus spaces and the procedural norms of bus riding. This then allows for the establishment of a baseline of the social expectations of bus spaces and the identification of disruptions and their triggers.

4.1. Normalcy in Bus Space

I have spent many hundreds of hours riding and observing people on public buses in Los Angeles. Normalcy in these environments is characterized more by what is absent than what is present. People most often do not talk on buses, and many engage in inward-focused activities in an effort to create social boundaries around themselves, the “involvement shields” described by Goffman (1963a) to create the perception of situational disengagement. Some read books and newspapers, listen to music through headphones, and sleep or sit with their eyes closed. The more their behavior says, “Leave me alone” and “I’m not available,” the better. For many, the goal is just to pass time in solitude: “Passengers on public transit may be likened to an audience at a theater in which no play is ever given. . . . Since there is nothing much to see or

hear, people fasten on the color of the curtain and the placement of spotlights or they look at a printed program”(Davis and Levine 1967:88-89). Riders without the props of disengagement look out the windows at the passing urban landscape or they stare at the head of the person in front of them or at the advertisements that run along the inside of the bus.

Most of the noise inside a bus comes from the bus itself; it is a symphony of rhythmic, mechanical sounds – the hum of the air conditioning, the creaking of the axles, the whir of the engine each time the driver steps on the accelerator, the plinking sound of the overhead sign, and the computerized voice saying, “Stop requested” or “Approaching Wilshire and La Brea.” As Davis and Levine (1967) point out, conversations on buses do happen if people arrive as dyads or triads, but often they become inhibited in such a public setting or the ambient noise is too great to carry on a conversation. The physical environment, therefore, is not conducive to talk among intimates, and it is even less comfortable to initiate a conversation with a stranger who may or may not be able to hear you.

Goffman’s theories about social order and public space help clarify what might be considered normal in bus spaces. Humans, argues Goffman, are attuned to sensing abnormalities in social situations, and “normal situations” are those where the perceived need for such alertness is minimal:

When the world immediately around the individual portends nothing out of the ordinary, when the world appears to allow him to continue on his routine (being indifferent to his designs and neither a major help nor a major hindrance), we can say that he will sense that appearances are “natural” or “normal.” For the individual, then, normal appearances mean that it is safe and sound to continue on with the activity at hand with only peripheral attention given to checking up on the stability of the environment (1971:239).

Hence, normalcy in bus space could be understood as an environment where the social setting is stable, and riders do not have to spend much time and energy anticipating or managing threats to and disruptions in the social order. Normality in bus space could mean simply an environment where riders feel at ease to spend their time staring out the window or engaging in an activity that serves to socially isolate them from other people on the bus. In order to better understand when occurrences disrupt a normal environment, I continue with a detailed description of the basics of bus riding and the minimum expectations of procedure and social interaction to which riders ought to adhere.

4.2. Bus Rules and Expectations

On a bus one day, I noticed a group of people boarding together – an older woman with two younger women and a younger man in their mid-twenties. I initially found it curious that they did not sit together: the man headed to the back of the bus, the older woman remained toward the front, while the two other women sat at the very front of the bus where I was sitting. One of the younger women tried to strike up conversations with the people around her, an atypical behavior, and they kept ignoring her until a couple, a young man and woman, started responding to her barrage of questions: “You look like you guys are in your twenties. Twenty-three? Twenty-two? Where are you from? England? Ireland? Which airline did you come in on? Where are you staying? Where do your parents live? Am I bothering you guys?” They patiently listened to her talk about losing her wallet on the bus the week before, the games she liked to play on her cell phone, and why she thought they should go to Universal Studios. At the same time, the other young woman from the group kept asking the older woman, “Are we there yet?” and looked anxiously out windows on both sides of the bus. The

older woman leaned over to the couple and explained that they were with a program that helped people with disabilities learn to do things such as go to the library, look for employment, hold down a job, and get around on the bus.²⁶

Observing these particular riders and their interactions with others was especially interesting for two reasons. First, the young woman's lack of inhibition in attempting to engage with passengers, the general reluctance of people around her to acknowledge her efforts, and then the very personal questions she asked when someone finally responded all highlight the important social norm of bus riding that people generally refrain from talking with strangers; the older woman then had to explain the reasons for the woman's violation of this rule. Second, this group of people and their purpose on the bus – to learn how to ride it – showed that the seemingly obvious and straightforward nature of bus riding actually is, for many, a process of acculturation that involves a multitude of small steps and procedures that people need to experience and, in the case of this group of people, have taught to them explicitly in order to successfully execute transit travel.

4.2.1. Waiting and Queuing

Travel to and from stops and stations and wait times are important parts of the out-of-vehicle part of a transit trip, and people arrive at bus stops mainly by walking (Zhao et al. 2003; Iseki and Taylor 2010).²⁷ While this integral off-system part of transit travel has received less attention, travel behavior researchers have examined the impact of wait times and shown that

²⁶ I got off at the same stop in Westwood as this group and saw them later at a coffee shop. I introduced myself to Teresa, the older woman supervising the group, and we talked for a while about the organization, Pathline, and her work there.

²⁷ Neff and Pham (2007) conducted an analysis of the data gathered in 150 on-board surveys conducted by transit agencies between 2000 and 2005. They find that about 60% of transit trips involve walking to a transit vehicle and almost 64% of trips include walking from a vehicle to the next part of a trip.

waiting is considerably more onerous for travelers than the on-vehicle travel time (Wardman 1998; Iseki and Taylor 2009). Behavior at a bus stop can at first glance appear to involve very little activity beyond standing or sitting and waiting for the vehicle to arrive, but in reality much is happening and different physical, social, and temporal features can influence this activity. People do not merely wait at a stop: they anticipate the arrival of buses, they plan their trips and share information with each other, they negotiate space with other riders as well as the non-bus-waiting activities that occur on urban sidewalks, they monitor the environment for their safety, and, increasingly, they connect with places outside of the physical realm of the bus stop through mobile devices and other technology.

If a stop has no physical amenities, such as a bench or a shelter, people locate themselves in different places – some wait by the pole, and others seek out shade or seating somewhere nearby. When benches and shelters are available, people generally use them as long as they are not dirty or poorly maintained. Riders may also use stop features in alternative ways, such as putting bags on a bench instead of sitting on it or standing behind a shelter in the shade as the sun moves. People do not normally talk to each other while waiting at bus stops, and if they do strike up conversations, they most often discuss a particular bus or bus line or commiserate on waiting or about bus travel more generally. While waiting for the bus may appear to be a relatively passive activity, it in fact requires riders to be prepared, fully engaged, and aware of what is happening around them – or else they might miss their bus.

At very busy transfer points with a dozen or more lines passing through and large groups of people waiting, people gain less of an advantage from queuing or waiting near the curb, where the flow of people on and off buses can be intense. Also, at stops where multiple lines

converge and buses line up in sequence, riders may never be entirely sure exactly where a particular bus will stop along the length of the curb adjacent to the stop. However, during peak hours when buses are more crowded and seats are at a premium, people may put more energy into positioning themselves where they perceive a prime boarding location, even if that involves jostling and maneuvering around other people. At less busy stops and during off-peak hours, people tend to cluster less while waiting and often wait to start queuing until the bus comes into sight. People wave to a driver, indicating their desire to board the bus, as Metro suggests, but body language and movement can also suggest intent, and a person stepping toward the edge of the curb is communicating a request to board. Someone stepping back away from the curb can indicate to the driver not to stop; interestingly, this gesture often also involves waving to the driver, but sends a different message to continue on rather than to stop.

4.2.2. Boarding

When a bus pulls up to the curb, the boarding process begins. People always board through the front door of buses in Los Angeles and the queue therefore starts here once the bus has stopped.²⁸ If riders are exiting from the front of the bus, people on the curb wait until the exiting riders have alighted before attempting to climb the steps to board, because pushing past people as they leave the bus is not acceptable. If someone with mobility challenges is boarding – an elderly person or a person in a wheelchair, for example – other people boarding generally defer by stepping back and waiting. If the driver needs to lower the wheelchair lift,

²⁸ The boarding of vehicles through any available door is the norm on most light rail and subway systems and on particular bus networks where riders purchase tickets prior to boarding. In Los Angeles, the Orange Line, a BRT line on a dedicated right-of-way with stations, allows riders to enter through any door on the bus. Beginning July 2012, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) moved to a system-wide policy of open boarding with proof of payment, the first transit agency in North America to use such a system on all vehicles. Allowing boarding through any door speeds up the boarding process considerably and reduces operating costs, with the downsides being increased fare evasion and the costs associated with increased fare inspection.

this is an additional cue to other riders that they should not immediately board the bus.

Sometimes the driver tells people to step back or wait. A rider with a bike is responsible for placing it in the rack on the front of the bus and securing it by pulling down a lever arm over the tires.

The Metro system has a base fare of \$1.50 per boarding or the option of a \$5.00 day pass as well as weekly and monthly passes, with the option of various additional transfer and express service surcharges. Bus riders pay fares various ways – cash, tokens, paper passes, reloadable TAP (Transit Access Pass) cards, and other special passes – and the speed of boarding can vary depending on the methods used. The cash fare payments are slowest as riders have to pause in front of the fare box and drop coins in or feed bills into a slot, while passengers using TAP cards only need to swipe the card over a transponder on the same fare box. On many buses, drivers have created an informal two-lane system of boarding to streamline the process, where cash fare riders stand closest to the fare box and TAP card riders walk up the other side of the steps, reach over to tap their cards on the top of the fare box, and continue on the bus. People with paper and other passes that just need to be flashed at the driver follow the same path as the TAP card passengers, bypassing the fare box. Generally, people follow this modified boarding system (the ones who do not are often tourists or other people unfamiliar with the system), but at times people queue out the bus door in one line and a driver indicates to people with TAP cards to board the bus and to form a separate queue by motioning to that side.

When people board a bus, they head to different places to sit. Some people sit down in the first available seat, particularly if the bus is crowded. Other people go to the back of the bus

or try to sit near an exit. Because elderly and disabled riders are given seating priority at the front of the bus, people already in those seats are expected to get up and move to different seats. If a row is empty, a person may choose to sit in the window or the aisle seat. A person who approaches another rider sitting in an aisle seat with an empty window seat points to the seat or asks to get by; if a person has bags or other belongings piled on a seat, the expectation is that those items will be moved with little or no prompting when another passenger wants to sit down. When the bus is full and people need to stand, they most often spread out in the aisle toward the front of the bus at first. As a bus becomes more crowded with standing passengers, people in the aisle start to move back. However, on very crowded buses, a driver often directs standing people to continue moving back, as they are reluctant as a group to move back and stand very close to each other if they can avoid it. When a bus is extremely full, the driver often enforces the rule that all riders must be standing behind the yellow safety line on the floor at the front of the bus.

4.2.3. Riding

The bus ride is most often a quiet affair aside from the bus noise itself, unless there is verbal activity of some of sort. When a bus reaches a stop, people get up to leave, or give up or claim seats; the rearranging of bodies is a constant activity. On Local buses, there is more movement as the more frequent stops mean that people are constantly boarding and alighting. Rapid buses, particularly crowded ones, bring flurries of activity at stops, but the chaos settles relatively quickly, and passengers know they can sit back for at least half a mile until the bus arrives at the next stop. As described earlier, some people sit quietly while others engage in passive activities such as reading, listening to music, talking on cell phones, or, more recently,

using smartphones to access the Internet. While most people sit down if there are available seats, some people choose to stand. Often, people use the flat platform area above the curbside wheel near the front door to set groceries and other bags down while the bus is moving. This appropriated space is actually quite coveted because on a full bus it means that people do not have to carry their bags or set them down on the floor. If the seats nearby are full, they usually stand in the aisle at the front of the bus near the driver and their possessions.

The unpredictable nature of the movement of a bus as compared to a fixed rail line means that people standing need to be aware of and prepared for unexpected movements and the momentum of stops and starts. On a crowded bus, people stand in the aisles and stabilize themselves by holding on to bus fixtures: the overhead handrail running along the inside of the bus, any straps that may be hanging down from this rail, the vertical poles next to the back of each seat located between the top of the seat and the roof of the bus, or a plastic or metal handle attached to the top part of the back of the seats.²⁹ Some people claim the space near the back door and hold onto a pole or just lean against the partition. Riders with carts or bags often stand in this area with their possessions. If a seat opens up, the person standing nearest to it usually claims it, but sometimes this person gives the seat away.³⁰

4.2.4. Alighting

Most of the Rapid buses have a system that announces approaching streets and intersections. Occasionally, a driver does this verbally over a public address system. A pull cord that runs along each side of the bus is used to notify the driver that someone wants to get off at

²⁹ The slang term “straphangers” refers to standing bus and rail passengers using these straps.

³⁰ This can happen for various reasons – an older person or someone with a child needs to sit. However, there is sometimes an aspect to this relinquishing of a prized seat that involves gender dynamics, where a man will give up his seat to woman.

the next stop.³¹ When the cord is pulled, it makes a dinging sound, and a sign on the inside of the bus reads “Stop Requested”; this helps to keep people from continuously pulling the cord. If there is a problem with the cord and it does not signal properly, someone else usually pulls it from a different location on the bus or calls out “Next stop!” loudly if necessary. On the longer trip segments between stops on a Rapid route, the request may be made well ahead of the stop itself. On Local buses, people must wait until the bus is on the block of that particular stop or the driver may stop too early. Similarly, if a rider waits too long to pull the cord, the driver does not have enough time to pull over at the stop safely. Often, people lean and look out the windows at street signs and landmarks in order to time the stop request properly.

As the bus approaches the stop, people prepare to disembark by standing and moving toward the door, usually toward the back of the bus. On a crowded bus, people begin moving to the back door early or risk not being able to get off at their stop. Much of this ritual to the back door involves non-verbal cues and body language, but people also ask to get by both from a window seat to the aisle and through any people standing in the aisle. Disabled or elderly people sitting in the designated seats at the front of the bus exit through the front door. People close to the front of the bus can usually leave through the front door as well without the driver stopping them, although oftentimes they make their way to the back door. On most buses, a green light pops up above the back door to indicate the bus has stopped and people can open

³¹ On other routes, I have noticed buses with a different stop request system where there is a button on every other pole instead of a cord. The vertical poles are on the inside of the seats (they attach to a horizontal rail that runs the length of the bus) and the buttons are about halfway up the pole between the seat and the top of the pole. The buttons are red and have “Stop” in white letters on them. They seem a little high, although it would be awkward for someone to reach over another person and push it if it were positioned lower. Because they are located on every other seat, they are hard to reach if the bus is crowded. Also, I saw older people and people with mobility problems having a hard time reaching them. Sometimes people seemed completely confused about how to request a stop, and they would look around the window for a cord. I once saw an older woman in front of me reach up and start tugging on a seatbelt buckle dangling from a small box above the window that was intended to secure a wheelchair. She did not realize that the “cord” was not working, but luckily the bus stopped anyway, and she got off without even realizing the error.

the door. If the door does not open properly, people yell out “Back door!” to the driver. On the newer, articulated buses, the doors swing in automatically.³² As people exit from the back door and step onto the curb, it is customary to hold the door open for the next person.

4.3. Disruptions in the Social Order of Bus Space

In one qualitative sociological study of bus spaces – a piece published forty years ago – Davis and Levine describe in general terms the behavior found on public buses: “What one tends to observe on transit vehicles is a large number of persons in very close physical proximity, but not in social interactions save for the occasional exchange of amenities emerging out of, and required by, their close physical presence. Although they act uniformly, their behavior is only slightly affected by signs or cues communicated to one another” (Davis and Levine 1967:86). Based on my research, I would argue that Davis and Levine are incorrect in their assertion that the social interactions in buses are occasional and behavior is necessarily uniform.³³ Rather, people in buses are constantly negotiating relationships, establishing and reestablishing boundaries, and disrupting the social order while working to maintain it.

Bus spaces are usually filled with constant activity; over the course of several minutes many things might happen, some routine and some less so. A disruption in the social order is a breach of routinized, normalized bus-riding behavior. In the broadest sense, a disruption is any event, however brief, that violates the common rules of bus riding. These are the rules that

³² On one trip, I was standing near the back door on a newer articulated bus with wide doors that look like ones on light rail and subway cars. However, these doors swung inward instead of opening out to the side. When the doors opened, one door hit me hard on the arm. It did not fully open until I was able to move to the side, out of the way. This is very poor design as the door opens right into anyone standing next to the rail; this is where people stand or lean when they are in that area.

³³ Davis and Levine’s (1967) work was published during the 1960s, a period of intense social upheaval around issues of race and equality with transit being one of the places of much contention. The Montgomery bus boycotts began in 1955; transit in the Jim Crow South was desegregated in 1961; and the 1964 Civil Rights Act further ensured that interstate rail, bus, and air service would remain desegregated. Thus, the Davis and Levine piece should be understood as reflecting a view of public transit at a very particular social and historical point in time.

allow large numbers of people in a confined space to travel together through space and time with minimal physical and psychological discomfort, conflict, and delay; rules that, for example, govern activity in public space such as cooperative motility, “the idea that strangers work together to traverse space without incident”(Lofland 2007:29). Many disruptions are quite obvious, when people act out in ways that would be considered aberrant behavior in most public spaces and under most circumstances – screaming, unwanted touching, emanating foul body odors. However, disruptions can be very subtle, as Emerson notes when encouraging ethnographers to look beyond the obvious and extreme troubles of daily life:

Pay close attention to the ordinary, small troubles that mark everyday life in any society: fleeing troubles that in many instances are quickly resolved and come to nothing; parochial troubles that are resolved locally and situationally, producing only small adjustments and changes in life circumstances; pragmatic troubles that involve not grand moral issues but commonplace responses such as “making do,” living with or around disturbances and upset (2009:537).

Emerson (2009) goes on to point out that ordinary troubles are not always readily apparent nor are the rules they violate, and so ethnographers have to delve deeply into the minutiae of social interactions.

After early fieldwork sessions where I initially detailed the behavioral and procedural norms described previously, I began to identify and understand disruptions more readily. In many of my early sets of fieldnotes, I described the intricacies of these very routine activities, including how riders went about getting on and off the bus, where people sat, and the unexceptional things they would do while the bus was in motion. These observations of the everyday aspects of bus riding would be punctuated by descriptions of very extreme events where the bus became chaotic and unpleasant. However, the mundane and expected routine

of bus riding quickly began to fade into the background of my fieldnotes as I was better able to understand and identify subtle deviations from expected behavior, as well the more obvious disruptions. These bus disruptions occur along several dimensions of scope, space, and impact: 1) negative to positive, 2) individual to group, 3) brief to sustained, 4) routine to unusual, and 5) intimates to strangers (Table 4.1). They are not mutually exclusive categories because the qualities of a disruption can take on several dimensions. For example, the disruption described as negative – the two men bickering and insulting each other – also has a temporal quality (in this case it was a sustained event that continued down a long stretch of Wilshire Boulevard). The following sections describe these disruption types in more detail, the ways these disruptions unfold in bus spaces, and the direct and indirect impacts on other people present in those spaces.

4.3.1. Negative and Positive Disruptions

Many stereotypes of bus riders and bus life are largely based on the negative disruptions that take place, those sometimes aggressive interactions that violate general social norms of behavior and personal space among strangers in public places. For example, on one trip, I boarded a crowded bus where the only available seats were near a man whose verbal behavior I found aberrant and potentially threatening:

The bus is almost full and the only empty seats are a few at the front in the disabled seating area. There's a man sitting across from me. He has a long, scraggly beard and is wearing what appears to be a pair of some kind of lizard skin cowboy boots. He also has a garment bag in the seat next to him and he has two or three sheets of paper clutched in his hand. [I see later that he has a wristband with a bar code on it and I wonder if he's come from the Veterans Administration hospital on Wilshire.] I notice that he's twitching a little bit and rubbing his face and his head. He's

Table 4.1: Types of Disruptions in Bus Space

Scope of Disruptions			Examples
negative	to	positive	<i>negative</i> - two men start bickering and insulting each other
			<i>positive</i> - a boy helps a man pick up the change he spilled on the floor
individual	to	group	<i>individual</i> - a man with a bulge in his pants stares at woman
			<i>group</i> - the smell of a man's urine-soaked pants fills the bus
brief	to	sustained	<i>brief</i> - a woman reaches out to help an elderly man sit down
			<i>sustained</i> - the Transit TV monitor volume is too high
routine	to	unusual	<i>routine</i> - riders flip up the disabled seats for a person boarding in a wheelchair
			<i>unusual</i> - an older white woman talks to herself and mumbles racial slurs
intimates	to	strangers	<i>intimates</i> - a woman argues with her boyfriend on the phone
			<i>strangers</i> - a man asks a stranger if he can use his cell phone

also mumbling to himself. At first I can't hear what he's saying but then I hear a constant stream of expletives. He's just kind of rambling on, saying things, including "shit," "fuck," "bitch," "Mississippi bitch," "fucking cunt," "bitch ass," and "motherfucker." He's not speaking in complete sentences, and it's just one long string of obscene words. I look around to see if I can move to a different seat, but every other seat is filled, other than the few around us. I decide that I really don't want to stand, and it's not going to be any less painful if I move over a seat. I decide to stay put and just keep an eye on him. (6/8/05, Line 20, Local)

This is not an isolated situation, and physical and verbal disruptions can signal unwilling or hostile interactions in an environment where talking and touching do not constitute normal behavior.

The perceptions of public transit as a menacing and unpleasant environment, together with the connotations of the word "disruption," might lead to the notion of disruptions as purely negative experiences. However, this is not necessarily the case and disruptions can also reflect very positive social interactions:

The bus is packed again. A woman in front of me in the disabled seats gets up to give an older woman her seat. The woman pats the older woman on the back as she passes her. A man in his

forties is standing in front of a man in his seventies. At one point the bus lurches forward and the older man stumbles a little. The younger man puts out his arm to catch him if he falls. The older man reaches for the cord, but can't quite get it. The younger man reaches over him and pulls it for him. There's an empty seat in the disabled seating area. The older man doesn't take it, so the younger man sits down. He looks at the older man (who is a bit wobbly) and says, "Want to sit down?" The older man shakes his head. A few seconds later, the younger man stands up, motions to the older man, and says, "Sit down. Sit down." (5/20/05, Line 20, Local)

On another bus trip, a woman leaned over to tell a man with a young child in a harness that the boy's arm was caught inside one of the straps, and she suggested that perhaps this was why he was crying earlier. Thus, people carry out cooperative acts that may be considered minimal – helping someone down the back steps, picking up something that has fallen, giving a fellow passenger directions – but they are causing a disruption, albeit a positive one, when they step outside of the bounds of normal bus behavior.

4.3.2. Individual and Group Disruptions

Disruptions on buses have another quality related to their scope of impact. They can be understood as occurring on a continuum from individual to group disruptions. At one end are incidents that affect an individual person; these are typically behaviors by one person toward another. For example, an older man in his seventies sat across from me and stared intensely at me. I stared back at him in an attempt to communicate that I was not threatened by his behavior. Then he came and sat in the empty seat near me, putting his bag in between us. What transpires then is an interaction that I found extremely uncomfortable and where I felt he violated my personal space, sexually harassed me, and tried to intimidate me:

He pulls out a small bottle of lotion (the kind you get in hotel

rooms) and hands it to me. He says something like “Put on your skin,” and runs his hand up and down my arm. His touching me is totally inappropriate, but I just kind of pull my arm back towards my body. At one point, he motions to two empty seats near us, and then points to me. Then he points above him and says something about it being cold and he motions again to the seats. I’m assuming he wants me to sit with him. I shake my head and open and tilt my hand toward him and the seat (I’m trying to say though my gesture, “You go ahead and move if you’re cold”). He grins and wags his finger at me (I take this to mean something like “That’s clever, but I’m not going to let you get away with it”).³⁴ (5/20/05, Line 20, Local)

This occurred on a fairly crowded bus, but I was the only one affected by what was happening. Occasionally, one of the women sitting near us would look over with what I thought might be a look of sympathy, but she was too far away to hear or understand exactly what was happening.

At the other end of the spectrum are disruptions that affect everyone on the bus to some degree or another. During a ride on a Local bus, a woman stood in the aisle in the middle of the bus and started wailing loudly. She started screaming and crying and launched off into a long, largely incoherent monologue: “I have seizures. I want to live! When you see my son, tell him his mama’s dead. Marlon Brando. Apocalypse Now. Get out of here! Fucking Mona Lisa! Asshole bitch!” She yelled, “Get out of here!” to several passengers as they exited the back door. A few of us started giggling and the woman heard us and homed in on an Asian man sitting in front of me. She said, “Get off this bus, you kimchi motherfucker. Buddha head. Take it like a man and suck it up.” In this situation, the disruption began as a generalized aural assault – the bus was not large and everyone could hear her ongoing rant. However, it then quickly shifted to the other end of the spectrum when she singled out one person for her verbal attack.

³⁴ This man’s aggressive and annoying behavior did not ease up, so I eventually felt it necessary to get off the bus before it reached the end of the route downtown.

This also began as a group of riders coping with an extreme disruption where our reassuring laughter was a way to acknowledge we were suffering through this together. However, it then became a very individual experience for that man, as none of us stepped in to stop the woman or defend the man. Instead, we all became quiet and looked away, lest she notice one of us and refocus her attention.

Most disruptions fall between either extreme and affect smaller groups of people in different ways. A few people sitting near a particular person hear someone talking loudly on a cell phone or muttering profanities. People sitting in a certain section of the bus where an activity is taking place are affected by a disruption occurring there, such as the rearranging of people in the disabled seating area to accommodate someone taking or leaving a seat. Some people are located in closer proximity to other people – people in the aisle seats or standing near the exit when the bus is crowded, for example – and so any physical disruptions affect them more directly than a person secluded in a window seat. A final note is that the scope of a disruption is not necessarily correlated to its intensity. My interaction with the older man involved just the two of us, and yet I found his unwanted advances profoundly disturbing. Many people may be able to hear a person talking loudly on her cell phone, but it may affect or annoy each of them minimally.

4.3.3. Brief and Sustained Disruptions

Another aspect of disruptions on buses is their quality as very brief or more sustained interactions. Morrill et al. discuss the distinction between the “familiar stranger” phenomenon when “urban dwellers develop relationships at a distance with those they recognize and observe repeatedly but with whom they never interact” and fleeting relationships where

“encounters are emotionally colored and evince some level of interdependence between individuals but have a transient nature” (2005:17).³⁵ Social disruptions on buses also have a quality of being more or less fleeting – both temporally and in terms of the investment of effort. Many disruptions are extremely brief – one person says a couple words to someone or touches someone else for just a second. In addition, Davis and Levine (1967) suggest that bus interactions are occasional. However, I observed a number of instances of people striking up conversations with strangers or very loose acquaintances and then working to maintain those interactions.

Some verbal interactions start with just two people; others move in and out of the conversation as they come and go in physical space. For example, I boarded a bus one day and sat next to a man and woman who started up a conversation about the magazine he was reading. This evolved into a discussion about their work, how they ended up in Los Angeles, where they were from originally, and their future career goals. Then a man boarded with a child and began to talk with these two:

The first man says, “She travels well.” The man with the child says, “She is a he.” The woman says, “Such a pretty face and long hair.” The man says, “It’s [the long hair] part of my heritage. I’m Apache. I’m really lucky, my wife is really accepting of my heritage.” He makes some comment about how he’s going to have to worry about his son when he grows up (implying he’s going to be a ladies’ man or something like that). The woman starts talking about how her father was really strict and jokes that boys would have to put in an application before they came to the house. Then they wouldn’t just have to deal with her father, but her brothers as well. The man says, “My mother did a few things right – and I can count them on one hand – and one thing was that she was really open about sex.” The woman affirms this by nodding her head. He says something about how he had this one in the right

³⁵ The familiar stranger is an idea drawn from the work of Stanley Milgram’s (1977) *The Individual in a Social World*.

way because it was planned (I'm assuming that he means he and his wife decided to have kids under the right circumstances). The woman asks what the boy's name is and the man says, "Elder Wolf." He says they call him "Elmy" for short, "like a tree." He starts to talk about the name, how the eldest wolf is the oldest and doesn't have to fight, and he wants him to have a calm and peaceful life. He also says, "He needs to live up to the name." The woman gets up to leave at one point, and the man says, "You take care, girl." She says, "Oh, I will. I have God on my side!" (6/8/05, Line 20, Local)

After she left, the first man did not engage in the discussion further, and I began to talk to the other man about his child. I asked him the age of the boy and whether he has other children. Later he and the child dozed off, and when we reached Vermont Avenue, I remembered he had asked the driver about that stop. I woke him up by touching his arm, and I helped him get his things together. He said to me, "Take care," as he got off the bus.

None of us invested a great deal in this interaction. I expected perhaps to run into the boy and his father one day if I continued to ride the 20 regularly, but on this day I had no expectations about an ongoing relationship with any of these people. However, I watched as people shared details about their personal lives, histories, and identities with other virtual strangers. The interaction was short-lived relative to the anchored relationships described by Goffman (1971) and Morrill et al. (2005), but we shared physical and, I would argue, emotional space for fifteen or twenty minutes in the confines of that bus.

I witnessed other similar events, such as a driver and two passengers debating local politics for the forty minutes from downtown Los Angeles to Beverly Hills, where the front part of the bus served the same purposes as the neighborhood barbershop or community center. On another trip, a woman told a man, a presumed stranger, how she wanted to get a particular perfume she smelled in a magazine advertisement. He looked at the advertisement and helped

her figure out which was a better deal: buying the individual bottles or the package offer. The man told her he liked a fragrance called Bora Bora. He said, “Bora Bora. The women loved it. I loaned it to my friend, and he scarfed half of it.” He pinched his fingers together to show how much there was initially and how much his friend took. At the next stop, the woman got up to leave and he said, “Remember, Bora Bora.” These examples show that in transit environments, somewhat sustained positive and negative disruptions do occur in addition to the the many brief ones.

4.3.4. Routine and Unusual Disruptions

Some disruptions are not part of the normal procedure of bus riding *per se*, but occur frequently enough to become part of the routine of the bus. For example, people regularly fumble with their dollar bills at the automated fare box, especially when the box rejects a bill, whereupon they flatten and attempt to reinsert it. Meanwhile, a line of other cash patrons often builds up, as well as riders not clued in to the pass-versus-cash boarding system (where riders with passes form a separate line) that has developed informally to accommodate the different times involved in processing these fare media. This disruption, albeit a relatively minor one, happens consistently enough that it almost becomes an expected part of the routine.

One incident is interesting in that it involves an articulation of expected social norms, but the direct acknowledgement of the norm is what actually made it a disruption. I was talking to an elderly woman at a crowded Rapid stop one day. She was in her eighties and very lucid; she told me a story about going to the Mayo Clinic to see a physician. She was still telling the story when the bus approached the stop. There were many people waiting, and they started moving into the space between the railings of the Rapid stop structure. The elderly woman was calm

and kept talking to me, even though there was a great deal of activity around us. I tried to stand back and let her go ahead of me, but she did not move in front of me. I turned to get on the bus so I would not hold up the boarding, and I heard another woman say loudly, “Let her on first! She should get on first!” I turned around, and a woman was looking at me and motioning to the elderly woman. She was, in fact, telling me that I had violated a social norm of boarding the bus by not deferring to the elderly woman – even though this was a misperception because I had already tried to let her go ahead – and the woman was reinforcing the norm by confronting me in front of the other riders.

Some very unusual disruptions happen in bus spaces, and these are the very odd and sometimes disturbing incidents that people remember and that shape popular perceptions of transit life. Many incidents are benign and even humorous – although some moments in an exchange can involve mild tension when it is unclear whether the comic theatricality will devolve into a hostile scene:

As the bus continues down Fairfax, I hear the grungy white man say, “Can I offer you change to make a phone call? I need to make a quick call. Just tell someone I’m almost there.” I turn around and see him talking to a younger Asian man. The Asian man says, “Sorry, I’m getting off.” The other man says, “Can you just call and say Ernie will be there in 15 minutes and then hang up? And tell him to bring a six-pack.” The Asian man pauses and then says, “I can do that. What’s the number?” The man says the number loudly, “323 . . . [I am not able to hear the whole number]. I’m Ernie, he’s Mike.” I hear the Asian man say, “Is this Mike? Ernie says he’ll be there in 15 minutes.” The white man says, “Ask him if he needs anything.” The Asian man says, “He says, Do you need anything? A pack of cigarettes? Okay.” Then he hangs up the phone. The white man says, “A pack of cigarettes,” and he laughs. (9/11/11, Line 217, Local)

While observing this exchange, I wondered if Ernie would become angry when the other man

initially refused the request to use his phone. Then I thought maybe he would want to take the phone to talk to his friend Mike directly. Instead, he made the gesture of offering change for the call and was clear that he wanted the man to do the talking to his friend. This ultimately kept the interaction going smoothly and led to the man successfully helping him.

Other unusual disruptions are less entertaining and less amicably resolved. A man and his friend boarded one day and essentially hijacked the physical and experiential space of the bus by causing a scene, becoming the main focus of attention, and forcing us to listen to their ongoing verbal exchange:

At the next stop, chaos ensues. As an older woman gets off at the back of the bus, a man jumps on through the back door. He has a bundle – a big bag and three guitars tied together. He throws the pile of things on the floor of the bus. He’s standing in the middle of the bus with a smoldering cigarette in his hand. He screams loudly, “There’s no seats back here! It’s Saturday! Carlos, get on the bus!” I see a hunched-over man at the front of the bus getting on slowly. The man screams, “Beverly Boulevard! Beverly Boulevard!” The driver says loudly, “You came in the back door.” The man with the guitars says, “The silver haired man will take care of it.” As the bus is pulling away, the driver says, “He didn’t pay for you.” One of the guitars is pressed up against my foot. I push it away with my foot. The man sits at one point, and he smells strongly of stale cigarette odor. He starts talking very loudly and says, “Eat right! Live right!” He continues to talk very loudly, but starts rhyming everything. He says, “Look at the menu. Eat the taste. Eat in haste. What’s the delight. If it tastes right. You drinking Sprite. You eatin’ it right.” He goes on and on, making these rhyming lines for about ten minutes as the bus continues to travel down Fairfax. (9/3/11, Line 217, Local)

In this case, I was the one who eventually intervened to end the disruption. The bus approached Beverly and the stop was announced over the speaker, but the man just sat there. The bus stopped and I said, “This is Beverly.” He did not acknowledge me, so I said loudly, “This is Beverly!” He looked over at me and said, “Oh, this is Beverly!” and then got up to gather his

pile of things. As he walked to the door, he looked at me and said, “You all right with me!”

Much of bus travel is relatively mundane and unexceptional, but it is these unusual disruptions – ones that are especially challenging physically or psychologically – that may ultimately come to define the bus experience for both riders and non-riders. These highlighted disruptions, particularly the very negative, unusual ones, can impact the social stability of the bus and the quality of the travel experience. As I will discuss in subsequent sections, these unusual moments can accumulate to turn the unusual into the expected and the bus into a less desirable place.

4.3.5. Disruptions Between Intimates and Strangers

A final dimension of disruptions involves the relationships between active participants. Disruptions between intimates are often clear: the man with the guitars yelling from the back of the bus to his friend Carlos at the front, the man leaning over and kissing and nuzzling the neck of his female companion, or the group of teenage girls sitting in each others’ laps and talking about braiding their hair later. These obviously familiar relationships among people traveling together abound in transit spaces – parents with children, pairs and groups of friends, work colleagues – and these people will often engage in more common disruptions such as talking loudly. In addition, disruptions between intimates do not always need to occur within the confines of bus space. Cell phones now permit people on buses to interact with others not on the bus and to transcend its physical boundaries. Often, the act of talking on the phone with the off-vehicle person becomes the actual verbal disruption.

In some cases, the relationship in the disruption may switch from one extreme to the other. For example, two men on a bus interacted as strangers for part of the trip until one

realized he knew the other. They then proceeded to reestablish the intimacy of their friendship by reminiscing and sharing updates about themselves and their common acquaintances. Even when complete strangers encounter one another on a bus and begin exchanging details about their lives, a quick shift can occur from complete anonymity to the establishment of a more intimate relationship. Most often these encounters are much less likely to evolve into anything even close to the fleeting personal relationships described by Morrill et al. (2005), due to the temporal and spatial qualities of Local and Rapid buses. People come and go from these bus spaces in large numbers and with a great deal of uncertainty. In very unusual cases, a personal relationship that begins on the bus may continue off the bus, such as when a man gave a woman his telephone number, and they made arrangements to meet later in the week; this, however, is far from the norm. On the other hand, the regularity of commuter buses encourages the development of personal relationships, as the same people are brought together day after day, and people build upon initial disruptions, such as talking to strangers, as they encounter the same people each subsequent time.³⁶

Finally, at times the level of familiarity between people as they engage in a disruption is not entirely clear, even when the event is detailed and ongoing. Two men boarded the bus one day and stood in the aisle of the crowded bus insulting each other:

An older white man in his sixties gets on the bus and starts pushing his way toward the back. He says, "Can you spare a dime? Guy behind me wants a dime." A younger African-American man

³⁶ Commuter buses generally operate during peak hours and in peak travel directions in the mornings and afternoons to destinations serving people traveling to and from employment destinations. These routes often have limited stops in order to decrease travel time. In Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) runs the Commuter Express service. Although the base cash fare for the Commuter Express is \$1.50, the same as the Local and Rapid services, an additional distance-based surcharge can result in a one-way fare costing as much as \$4.25. Because riders generally use these buses for daily commuting, the patronage on these buses often includes the same group of higher-income travelers, many of whom have used the same service for long periods of time. The Commuter Express also uses premium coach buses with comfortable, upholstered seats that recline.

follows behind him saying, “How big was your plantation?” The black man says, “Mr. Gilmore. Where did we leave off? How many slaves did your ancestors own?” The black man says loudly, “Excuse me, sir. I’ll be passing by now” and he pushes past the white man. They end up standing with about four or five people in between them, but they continue to comment loudly back and forth. The white man says, “I’m on public transportation because I can’t see. How do you know I’m not your pappy?” The black man says, “You’re a classic example of a redneck. You’re an ornery old devil. What have you been doing all your life?” (7/15/11, Line 720, Rapid)

The two men stopped talking as we approached a major intersection, and then at the next stop they got off the bus together without saying anything else. I assumed they were at least acquaintances of some sort, since one man addressed the other as “Mr. Gilmore” and this recognition suggested that the bickering was the continuation of an interaction that had started before boarding the bus. However, the nature of their odd-couple relationship, why they were traveling together, and why they shared so much verbal animosity, remained unclear to the other riders throughout the course of the exchange. In addition, the public space of the bus potentially altered the intimate-stranger quality of their interaction. Off the bus, one man could have ended the engagement by storming away, but in bus space the most they could do was move apart a few feet. Therefore, circumstances allowed the drama to continue on and on until they finally left together.

4.4. The Ecology of Disruptions

Disruptions can be messy things as they take on several dimensions, overlap with other disruptions, and do not always have clear starting and ending points.³⁷ A number of disruptions

³⁷ I was aware that the constantly shifting quality of the social and physical space of buses and the fluid boundaries of disruptions had the potential to limit aspects of the observations I made as a rider. There are disruptions I may have

can happen simultaneously on the bus at any particular moment in time, and they may be discrete or they may be related. Many disruptions, particularly the more mild ones, resolve themselves fairly quickly, and many people may not even notice that a glitch has occurred; they may work to reestablish the social order by casually ignoring a violation completely, or they may expend very little energy to acknowledge it. The ultimate impact of a disruption, therefore, can be difficult to ascertain, much less measure. While some disruptions clearly make the bus experience challenging, if not miserable, in many other cases the impact is largely neutral; these are occurrences that are part of daily urban life and the social life of public spaces, and they are not exceptionally extraordinary or exclusive to bus space. And some – the positive disruptions discussed earlier – can contribute to the sense of cooperation and cohesion on board the bus. The outcomes of particular disruptions are therefore not predictable or assumed, and their perceived intensity or importance can be somewhat subjective.

Disruptions can also affect individuals in different ways, and some people will react to particular stimuli while others appear largely unaffected. The universal response on a bus one day to a homeless man's body odor appeared clearly to be revulsion. One man waved his hand in front of his face, and the man sitting next to him reached up and opened the small overhead window. Then an older woman in her sixties with a small folding cart boarded, and I was surprised when she sat right next to him. She did not seem bothered at all by the man's odor, and she waited patiently as the homeless man picked up the dirty duffle bag he had placed in the aisle seat and put it on his lap so she could sit down. Later, the man who was waving his hand looked over at another woman, standing near the homeless man, as if to say, *How can*

witnessed that began prior to boarding the bus and others that continued after I left the bus. I tried, however, to observe and experience the totality of a disruption, if possible.

you possibly stand that?

I myself found body odors, extreme as well as milder, the single most unbearable and disruptive part of riding the bus, and I would notice smells immediately upon boarding and even after an especially pungent person had left the bus. I was extremely sensitive to this particular sensory experience, but urine, sweat, fast food, alcohol, passed gas, cigarette smoke, and the stench of marijuana on one man's jacket were all things that profoundly impacted my riding experience. I also disliked physical contact and would make every effort to avoid touching other people. However, when the bus was very crowded and I had to stand, I had no choice but to cope with the infringements of my comfort level. The effect of these disruptions is therefore sometimes quite obvious – discomfort or distress – but at other times the reaction may be suppressed, subdued, or controlled out of necessity by the circumstances.

Disruptions can also be unpredictable, with no obvious pattern to often varied or largely unclear triggers. At times, it can be hard to identify the point at which a disruption starts, and so pinpointing a cause becomes even more difficult. Factors such as crowding and uncomfortable temperatures inside a bus would seem to create an unstable physical environment that might then encourage people to disregard rules of behavior more readily. However, major disruptions occurred on full buses as well almost empty ones, and even under the most unpleasant of circumstances, such as an unbearably hot bus, people generally continued to follow the rules, perhaps as a way to make it through the ride. Tensions around identity, particularly around race and class, are also seemingly likely triggers, considering the history of buses as sites of racial contention and the contemporary racial inequalities related to transit use, real and perceived. Nevertheless, overt comments about race – such as the African-

American man who muttered, “Stupid motherfucker don’t speak English” when he felt an Asian driver had slighted him – were unusual and generally emerged during the course of a disruption, rather than being the cause of it. Issues such as mental illness, drug and alcohol use, and developmental disabilities can be the root causes of acting out and the resulting disruptions, but these violations and their outcomes can be extremely unpredictable.

The cause of a disruption can also be difficult to identify because a cascade effect can occur where one disruption causes another, and the dimensional aspects of these events might vary or overlap. For example, a homeless man accidentally dropped his very dirty, ragged jacket in the aisle of the bus as he exited. At subsequent stops, people got on, saw the jacket, and several of them grimaced and pointed at it: the jacket was a visual and spatial anomaly in a common physical space where it did not belong. One woman sat down and said to another woman sitting in front of me, “Did someone just leave that there?” The woman nodded her head and said, “I guess so.” In this case, the man dropping the jacket was initially an individual disruption that only involved him and his lost possession, but its presence on the floor led to riders engaging one another through body language and finally a verbal interaction between strangers in that brief exchange. These consequential events happened long after the homeless man, the source of the disruption, had left the bus.

4.5. Summary

This chapter has explored normalcy on buses and the people, events, and qualities that can disrupt the regular flow of social activity and interaction. Even in their most normal state, buses are full of activities and behaviors as people move in and out of bus space and work together, consciously or not, to fulfill their travel goals and needs. Much of what happens on a

bus is unremarkable and to be expected, based on a general set of procedural and behavioral rules; people avoid straying too far from the norm. However, disruptions do occur on buses with a regular frequency – major ones that require much mental and emotional energy and many smaller ones that are minor glitches in the ebb and flow of action, but that nonetheless contribute to the social life on buses.

These disruptions occur along a number of dimensions: negative-positive, individual-group, brief-sustained, routine-unusual, and intimates-strangers. The disruptions themselves can be complicated in the sense that a single disruption may embody multiple characteristics of different disruption types, or one disruption might trigger or flow over into another. However, identifying these types, even if the categories are not discrete, helps to make sense of the intricacies of bus behavior, an otherwise busy and complex social space. This understanding of disruptions then allows for further examination of the happenings on buses and the implications for issues beyond these micro-scale interactions. The next two chapters look at the ways in which these disruptions vary in space and time, the factors that influence differences in experience, and the challenges that disruptions pose for the management, operation, marketing, and design of bus systems.

5. ALL BUSES ARE EQUAL, BUT SOME BUSES ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS

People who want to understand democracy should spend less time in the library with Aristotle and more time on the buses and in the subway.

– Simeon Strunsky, *No Mean Street* (1944)

Ah! The ol' Number 22. Clean, reliable public transportation, the chariot of the people, the ride of choice for the poor and very poor alike. . . .

– Lisa Simpson

Much of what happens on a bus is relatively mundane and unexceptional to anyone other than a researcher interested in the intricacies of bus life. However, routines are regularly punctuated by the types of disruptions reviewed in the last chapter, some of which can require a significant amount of emotional and psychological effort to ignore. Others, however, are true spectacles met with casual indifference by the people witnessing them. One day, a man boarded the bus dressed entirely in black from head to toe: a long black wig, turtleneck, belt, gloves, lipstick, shorts, tights, and boots.³⁸ The outfit was odd enough, but then I saw he was dragging on board a full-sized mannequin strapped to a rolling suitcase – a mannequin dressed in exactly the same outfit from the wig down to the boots. While a couple of people looked up at the man in black and his mannequin twin, I was the only one who looked confused and a bit perplexed. The bus lumbered along in traffic, and our approach to Hollywood Boulevard was painfully slow, agitating the man. Finally, exasperated, he jumped up and ran off the bus at the next stop. The last thing I saw was the man running on the sidewalk with his long hair and

³⁸ The person's gender was not immediately apparent, but I assumed this was a man even though he was wearing a long wig.

plastic doppelganger bouncing behind him.

This particular observation happened on a Local bus running through Hollywood. While unusual things undoubtedly occur in many transit spaces – and anyone who has ridden a bus can likely share a similar tale about a colorful character or memorable event – these occurrences, and transit experiences in general, are not evenly distributed across space and time. This chapter explores this lack of homogeneity in the experiential aspects of transit travel, the patterns of behavior that emerge (or the lack of consistent behavior), and the ways in which physical and geographic elements of bus riding contribute to and help explain this diversity of experience.

5.1. The Hierarchies of Transit Space

As discussed earlier, this study focuses on five lines running along parallel routes, north to south and east to west, through different parts of Los Angeles. Aside from the geographic locations of these routes, the lines are most distinguishable in terms of the type of service they provide – Rapid and Local – as part of Metro’s larger regional transit network. Metro conceived of a Rapid system with bus and stop amenities and with branding that would make it distinct from the Local bus service running along the same major travel corridors. In fact, Metro highlights a number of these distinctive physical features by including a list of “key Metro Rapid attributes” in an overview of the service (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority 2012a).

The design of the buses is one of the most obvious and consistent features in the broader transportation landscape, and this distinguishes the Rapid service from the Local as the exteriors of the buses signify very different physical spaces. The Rapid buses are all painted

bright red with silver trim. These buses are newer, low-floor models, and many have a sleek, streamlined design. In addition, Metro began introducing articulated buses into the Rapid system in 2005; the 720 route was one of the first lines to use the 60-foot, high-capacity buses (Figure 5.1).^{39,40} The Local buses are smaller, boxier vehicles, painted orange with silver trim along the bottom, similar to the Rapid red and silver design (Figure 5.2).⁴¹ During my early fieldwork, many of the Local buses had an older, different color combination – the buses were white with orange stripes down each side. The newer color combination did not necessarily signify that the bus was newer or low-floor, only that it had recently received a paint job. For a period of time, I observed Local buses with both the old and new liveries on the Wilshire Boulevard route; initially this was confusing as I thought they might be buses from different services or providers using the same bus stop, and I suspect other transit riders may have felt similarly perplexed.⁴²

Bus space is not confined to the space within buses themselves; it also extends to the space of bus stops. In the case of the 720 Rapid and 20 Local lines running along Wilshire Boulevard, these are very different physical spaces with different expectations and rules of

³⁹ These buses have room for 57 seated passengers and, according to a Metro news release, provide 43% more seating capacity than the regular 40-passenger, 40-foot buses (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority 2006).

⁴⁰ The high capacity buses are not used on all Metro Rapid lines. Line 780 included in this study does not use high-capacity buses.

⁴¹ In their study of the branding of various BRT systems, Hess and Bitterman note that the new color scheme of the Metro Local buses came about as the result of the Metro Rapid design: “In conversations with transit officials in Los Angeles, we learned that the use of a distinct color palette for BRT has proved so effective that a ‘trickle-down’ effect has resulted in which non-BRT bus service has been redesigned to prominently exhibit a well-defined color palette that features a single color complemented by white or black. After the popular success of Metro Rapid, traditional buses serving local routes were painted bright orange and renamed Metro Local” (2008:34).

⁴² While the color schemes of the (red) Rapid and (orange) Local buses are consistent now, I find it a bit unfortunate that the Metro system has both the Red Line (a subway with stainless steel cars) and the Orange Line (an exclusive right-of-way busway that runs silver articulated buses through the San Fernando Valley). This ambiguous naming scheme can confuse riders not familiar with the various facets of Los Angeles’ transit system. Luckily, other operators with lines overlapping Metro lines have different and distinct colors on their vehicles, such as Culver City’s Green Bus and the Santa Monica Big Blue Bus.

Figure 5.1: Rapid Buses



Source: Photos by author

Figure 5.2: Local Buses



Source: Photos by author

behavior. As described earlier, the Rapid service in Los Angeles has often been touted in public forums and the media as a sort of quasi-rail system with many of the amenities of rail, including rail-like stops (Jarzab et al. 2002; Levinson et al. 2002; Hess et al. 2005) (Figure 5.3). Most but not all of the stops along Wilshire have shelters with large curved and almost suspended overhangs. There are metal railings on both sides and posts with light fixtures. The Rapid logo – a red oval shape that is pointed on one side (perhaps to suggest speed and movement) with “Rapid” in white letters – is high on a post above the stop. The color scheme on the signage and stops matches the color of the Rapid buses. These stops do not have benches, but seating is almost unnecessary when riders are guaranteed that a bus will arrive as often as every 3 to 5 minutes (and 10 to 12 minutes during off-peak hours). The stops are clearly marked spaces, distinct from the surrounding physical environment, visible from far away, and generally clean and well-maintained. Riders know a Rapid stop on Wilshire Boulevard when they see it, and they can find one easily when they need it.

The 20 Local stops are much more ambiguously defined spaces, designed like conventional bus stops – a small rectangular sign at the top of a metal pole at the curb (Figure 5.4). The sign lists the line numbers in small text. Sometimes one pole will have two or three different signs attached to it for the various routes stopping at a corner. There may or may not be a shelter or a bench at the stop.⁴³ The maintenance of these facilities varies widely, and I saw signs defaced with stickers and benches covered with graffiti. Without a shelter, waiting riders

⁴³ Law and Taylor’s (2001) innovative study found that shelters often are not located where we would most expect them: at stops with the highest patronage and where the most people wait for buses. Rather, the presence of these amenities is related to geographic location because advertisers want shelters in areas that they believe will provide the best return on their advertising expenditures, and these locations tend to be in higher-income neighborhoods.

Figure 5.3: Rapid Stops



Source: Photos by author

Figure 5.4: Local Stops



Source: Photos by author

are exposed to the elements, generally the sun in Los Angeles.⁴⁴ The buses are scheduled to arrive about every 10 minutes during the day, but these Local buses tend to be subject to variations in surface street traffic conditions, and their movement along the route can be much less regular and more unpredictable than the Rapid buses.⁴⁵

A clear relationship exists between space, behavior, and experience at the different bus stops. At the Rapid stops, the rules about queuing are clear. Riders know that they must stand in between the metal railings and in rows behind one another because the Rapid bus: 1) always stops at every stop and 2) always opens its doors to the space between the railings. Riders who do not follow these rules suffer the consequences:

A Rapid bus pulls up, and I see that it's full. The driver pulls the front door of the bus up past the "marked" bus stop area (two metal railings and a shelter). I see people starting to move towards the back door. I'm the only one who walks out of the bus stop area towards the front door of the bus. The driver opens the door and yells, "No more! No more!" at me and then shuts the door. I walk back to the bus stop area and there are still a lot of people there, but now I'm in the back of the unofficial queue. I'm a bit annoyed, and I figure I'm going to be standing up in the bus for sure when I finally get on. (4/29/05, Line 720, Rapid)

In this case, I violated what was an obvious rule to all the other riders: you may board the Rapid bus only from within the bus stop space. Once I moved beyond this space, I was unable to reclaim my place in it. There is relatively little physical conflict during boarding – jostling or pushing – and this is partly because the procedural expectations are clear. If you arrive first, then you are first in the queue and subsequently first on the bus, space permitting. (Figure 5.5).

⁴⁴ While people flock to Los Angeles to enjoy the mythical perpetual sunshine, standing in the hot sun waiting for a bus for more than five minutes can become extremely unpleasant. If it is a hot day and there is nearby shade available under a shelter, some other structure, or a tree, I have observed that people will almost always prefer shade over direct sunlight.

⁴⁵ During the evening and on weekends, wait times for Line 20 range from 20 to 30 minutes.

Figure 5.5: Queuing and Boarding at Rapid Stops



Source: Photos by author

In contrast, the rules of order at the Local bus stops are much more vague. Some people stand right next to the sign pole; others just wait in the general vicinity – sitting on a bench, sitting or leaning on a nearby wall, or standing in the shade of tree (Figure 5.6). This is partly because riders are never quite sure where a Local bus will stop. Drivers can stop anywhere within twenty or thirty feet of the sign pole, so riders invest less in standing in the “right” place for boarding because this place is never exactly clear. In other words, there is no obvious advantage to following any strict queuing protocols. The spatial ambiguity of these stops was illustrated by my experience negotiating space at a 20 stop on Wilshire. There was a large portable traffic sign on a trailer hitch in front of the stop, used to divert vehicles around construction on the next block up. Earlier I had seen the bus stop in front of the sign, so I assumed that was where I should wait. The bus approached, I waved to the bus driver, and I watched as she drove by me and pulled up past the sign.⁴⁶ A man and I ran to catch the bus, but the driver shut the doors and drove off. If it had been clear where we needed to wait, we certainly would have done so.

The configuration of stops is very different along the Pasadena to West Los Angeles routes included in this study, Lines 780 and 180-217. The amenities found at the Wilshire Boulevard Rapid stops – the clear stop boundaries, the shelter, the distinct signage – are generally lacking along this other route. Instead, Rapid stops are most often combined with Local stops to create a sort of “hybrid stop” (Figure 5.7). These hybrid stops usually have a shelter with seating or freestanding benches. A small sign that notes a 780 stop is at the top of the pole along with the Local route listings. On the middle of the pole is a small plastic box that says “Go Metro” with a

⁴⁶ Note that I followed Metro’s suggested protocol here as described in the last chapter to signal to the driver that I wanted to board.

Figure 5.7: Hybrid Stops



Source: Google Maps, 2012

map showing the location of stops along the Rapid route. These 780 Rapid stops are much harder to identify from afar because they lack the distinctive red logo and any other markers that separate the stops from the Local service. The ability to locate Rapid stops easily is an important feature of the system – not just for convenience, but also for safety – as I discovered one night during my first ride to the end of a Rapid line:

The bus drops us off around the corner from the main waiting area on Fairfax. I walk around the corner, and the area is dark and dirty. I don't feel especially safe. There are six or seven people waiting near a shelter, and a couple benches and a food vendor with a cart are on the other side of the shelter. I can't find the 780 sign initially on the main sign pole near the benches. I walk up to another sign down the street, but I only see "705" on the placard. I walk back to the area near the shelter and look at the signs again. I'm a little confused and a bit anxious because I want to be sure I'm waiting in the right place. I walk back to the other sign and look more closely. The placard is covered with graffiti, and then I notice that it says "780" also. (1/18/10, Line 780, Rapid)

At this transfer point, the 780 stop did not have a designated shelter, but did have a sign, albeit

one that was not very legible or well-maintained.⁴⁷ I still had to wander from sign to sign and was not even sure I had alighted at the right intersection until I located the defaced 780 sign. In addition to complicating wayfinding for riders, the lack of consistent stop design or signage (at the very least) means that the overall branding of the Rapid system has major gaps. Therefore, Metro is missing the potential of maximized system legibility through design. The agency's claim that "Metro Rapid's distinctive red color scheme makes it easy to identify Metro Rapid stops and buses" is obviously not a fully realized goal (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority 2012a). As Hess and Bitterman (2008) point out, the successful branding of BRT systems is far from irrelevant and, in fact, can help counter public perceptions of the bus as less a desirable mode of transport compared to rail and the automobile.

Clearly, putting Rapid-type shelters at every stop on a Local route would be costly, and the Rapid stops are tailored to the specific needs of the BRT system – namely, quick and efficient boarding and alighting. However, the contrast between the Rapid and Local stops is quite stark (Figure 5.8). When the stops are viewed adjacent to each other – they sit side by side at many major intersections in the Wilshire corridor – the distinction is even more pronounced. The spaces are not explicitly demarcated as "us versus them," but they do connote status differentials. One group of riders has a shelter and knows where to stand while the other group may or may not have to stand in the sun and, on occasion, will have to frantically wave down bus drivers. These are not static groups, of course, as people surely move back and forth between the Rapid and Local buses depending on their particular travel needs. However, as discussed earlier, the income demographics of the two lines are different, and so in the

⁴⁷ I recently returned to this transfer stop, the Washington/Fairfax Transit Hub, and noticed that there are now signs noting the Local lines that stop there, but there are no signs at all for the Rapid buses.

Figure 5.8: Adjacent Rapid and Local Stops



Source: Photos by author

aggregate they are different groups experiencing very different physical environments.

The hybrid stops along the 780 and 180-217 routes are more egalitarian in the sense that both Rapid and Local riders share the amenities – or lack of amenities – at these locations and no group of riders is privileged. While this prevents the two-tiered system of stops found along Wilshire Boulevard, the 780 and 180-217 lines are very much in need of the advantages that the more distinct and branded stops provide for Rapid riders around ease of use and the perception of a viable and desirable bus network. These routes also run through a number of heavily trafficked tourist areas, particularly the portion of the routes that runs from Hollywood Boulevard south along Fairfax Avenue past the Farmers Market, The Grove (a large shopping and entertainment complex), and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and surrounding museums. I often saw tourists on these lines, a segment of transit users clearly unfamiliar with navigating the system and for whom readily identifiable signs and stops would be beneficial.⁴⁸ The idea of universal design – where the design of products and environments serves the needs of all users – could be applied to these stops using a rider group unfamiliar with the local transit system and with special wayfinding needs (such as tourists) as a baseline.⁴⁹ With an awareness of the problematic nature of the Rapid-Local stop hierarchy along Wilshire Boulevard, designers could create consistency among the physical elements of these routes, particularly the stops and signage, that ultimately would improve branding and the transit experience of all riders.

⁴⁸ I assumed they were tourists based on “clues” like sightseeing maps, paper passes in hand, and cameras. Some traveled alone, but many traveled in pairs or groups; many spoke in languages other than English. They also often seemed confused and would look out the bus windows repeatedly to orient themselves. In some cases, local riders would strike up conversations or offer them help, and I could then confirm that these riders were visitors to the city.

⁴⁹ The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University identifies seven principles of universal design: 1) equitable use, 2) flexibility in use, 3) simple and intuitive use, 4) perceptible information, 5) tolerance for error, 6) low physical effect, and 7) size and space for approach and use (North Carolina State University College of Design 2011).

5.2. The Maintenance of Social Order on Buses: Tightness and Looseness

Goffman puts forth the notion of tightness and looseness in social spaces, which he understands as a “continuum or axis along which the social life in situations varies, depending on how disciplined the individual is obliged to be in connection with the several ways in which respect for the gathering and its social occasion can be expressed” (1963a:199). He mentions the range between formal and informal as a similar way of understanding social situations, but suggests that these terms imply a focus on clothing, sequence, and the scope of permissible activities. The idea of tightness and looseness, however, allows room for the many ways in which individuals participate in social settings. Goffman (1963a) adds that the permissible tightness and looseness are situational – exposing most of one’s body is acceptable on a public beach, but not on a public bus. In addition, the range of permissible activities can vary depending on an individual’s various social statuses around such factors as age, race, and class.

Bus spaces are closer to the loose side of this spectrum than the tight. There are rules of behavior in these spaces, but they are not the kinds of tight spaces Goffman describes where ceremony and proper attire are required. Almost anyone with \$1.50 has access to the bus and casualness prevails. Shorts and a T-shirt are as acceptable on a bus as a business suit. Slouching in a seat or leaning against a window is fine. People stand or sit wherever they choose. People carry on briefcases, backpacks, and plastic shopping bags filled with groceries. Clearly, there are expectations of behavior, but the range of acceptability is quite wide, and very few people are denied access to or expelled from buses.

However, comparing Rapid and Local buses, we see differences in this tightness-looseness criterion as well as the ways in which people manage social order and deal with disruptions.

Disruptions happen less frequently on the Rapid buses largely because fewer events transpire, but also because they are more directly squelched. A woman, dragging a huge cart off a crowded bus and telling people to get out of her way, made another rider angry, and he said, “Fuck off!” under his breath and within earshot of the woman and the other riders. This man was to a certain extent confronting the woman by saying “Fuck off!” and he reinforced two social norms about this space: 1) a large cart is not acceptable on an extremely crowded bus, and 2) if people are going to accommodate her, she is crossing the boundaries of acceptable behavior when she orders them out of her way.

During another trip on the Rapid bus, a rider addressed a developing disruption even more directly. A homeless man tried to get on the bus through the back door, but it shut before he could board the bus and the driver did not open the door again. Standing on the curb near the back door, he started screaming, “Aw, okay! Back door!” and became more agitated when the driver ignored him:

The homeless man is now standing in front of the bus causing a scene. A passenger standing near the driver says in an annoyed tone under his breath, “C’mon. You can get on.” He looks out the front window at the man in the street and says, “Get on the bus, you dumbass!” Then he says to the driver, “Open the door.” The driver opens the door, and the passenger leans out and says to the homeless man, “There’s the police right there” and he points up the street. Then the passenger moves back near the driver again and says, “He’s gone now. He saw the cops. He took off.”
(9/15/11, Line 780, Rapid)

In this situation, the driver asserted her authority in a relatively passive way by refusing to open the door, and the man was confronted with a closed door and the message it sent. While he tried to engage the driver in a face-to-face manner (as much as this is possible through a windshield), it was ultimately a passenger who lost his patience, asserted driver-like authority,

and rectified the situation by threatening to call the police over. This incident is an example of riders working to maintain a tighter social order on Rapid buses compared to drivers, who rarely became deeply involved in the strict enforcement of the “bus rules.”

As noted earlier, drivers on Rapid buses would tell passengers who are waiting with passes in hand to go around someone fumbling with cash at the fare box, or they would insist that people move back on a crowded bus until all bodies are behind the yellow safety line on the floor. Few drivers, however, insist on repeating specific rules over and over. One notable exception is a 780 driver who managed the behavior of passengers with an iron fist. At every stop, he loudly insisted that people board quickly and efficiently according to his rules – which unfortunately disregarded any individual needs of particular riders. When an older woman with a cane was slow to board the bus and a couple people reached out to help her up the stairs, the other passengers waited patiently on the curb. However, the driver said, “Let somebody else get on. We have to get going, ma’am. C’mon in, folks. Pass or transfer. I’m trying to stay on schedule.”⁵⁰ Later he scolded some teenagers he thought were not boarding fast enough by making a specific comparison to a Local bus: “C’mon, girls! C’mon! You’re on the 780, not the 181. Ready or not, here I come!” None of the riders ever challenged his authority, even when the elderly woman clearly needed more time to board. Rather, riders complied by boarding quickly and exiting out the back door to maximize the travel efficiency of the group. This was a cooperative environment only in the sense that it increased travel speed at the cost of customer service to individual customers.

The Local buses tend to be much more loosely regulated and controlled spaces. I saw

⁵⁰ The Rapid buses do not adhere to fixed schedules.

almost no one – driver or passenger – challenge another person about disruptive behavior. One very unusual incident on a Local bus stands out precisely because overt confrontation is relatively non-existent on these lines. A driver confronted a passenger about what she perceived to be disrespectful behavior toward her:

We get to a stop where a group of teenagers is standing. The bus stops and then pulls away without anyone boarding. Then the bus stops suddenly. I look up and I see the driver standing outside, near the front door. She says, "Watch your mouth!" and she's pointing to a boy, an African-American teenager. She gets back on the bus and tells the women sitting at the front of the bus, "He's a minor. He called me a black 'b'!" One of the women says, "Oh no he didn't." The driver says, "He's a child. He ain't nothing but 16. . . I'm a bus driver and I never seen a minor say that to me."
(11/2/10, Line 20, Local)

This confrontation was an anomaly, but the totality of her behavior over the trip suggested she was willing to assert control and authority in a space where this is not the norm. Earlier she had been aggressive toward me as I was boarding the bus. She had been gesturing at me, but I was not sure what she wanted and I looked confused. When I walked up the steps toward her, she accused me of giving her an inappropriate look: She said in a mildly hostile tone, "You're looking at me like there's a problem. Like I've done something." I said, "No, I thought you were asking me something." She said, "You were looking at me like something was wrong." I told her there must have been a miscommunication, and I moved away and sat down.

Later she used the speaker system on the bus to make a series of largely unnecessary announcements:

When we pull up to the next stop, she starts talking on some external speaker system to people waiting at the stop. She says, "There are three of us [three buses] pulling up so some of you can get on here." The driver tells a woman sitting at the front of the bus that she's going to get all the passengers ahead on the route

because she's the first bus. The driver then makes an announcement to the passengers on the bus about how two buses are broken and they're running behind schedule. She says, "Thank you for your patience and riding MTA." A man sits down next to me and says, "What is she talking about? Who cares? Just drive." Then the driver says over the loudspeaker, "Is anyone getting off here?" The man is clearly annoyed and says, "It's not like we're at the airport."⁵¹ (11/2/10, Line 20, Local)

When this driver made a spectacle of the time-consuming process of boarding a woman in a wheelchair and then lowering her back to the sidewalk, a woman next to me sighed loudly and then laughed, "So stupid." I did not witness the entire incident with the boy at the bus stop; I only observed what transpired after the driver had already left the bus and started yelling at him. It appeared this driver had an atypical need to assert control over the space of the bus through confrontations – first with me and then with the boy at the stop – and by becoming the literal voice of authority through her ongoing announcements. However, what makes her different from the Rapid driver who was repeating and reinforcing the bus rules is that her actions were largely ineffectual and, in fact, quietly mocked by passengers, while the Rapid driver's commands were obeyed without comment or complaint.

People on buses generally tolerate uncomfortable situations much more readily than they likely would in other public social settings, and the looseness of Local buses means people respond minimally to what in other contexts would be viewed as extreme situations. People endure the bodily violations often encountered on a bus – intense body odor, for example – for extended periods of time in ways they would likely not in other non-transit spaces. Nevertheless, the subtle differences in the ways riders respond to and negotiate these types of

⁵¹ I had never before seen a driver make an announcement to people outside of the vehicle. If drivers do use the loudspeaker to make announcements inside the bus, it is normally about upcoming stops.

violations also illustrate well the differences in norms and expectations between Rapid and Local buses. During one trip on a Local bus, a man's body odor completely saturated the bus. He was sitting in the very back of the bus, but we could smell him in the front. One woman handed another woman a tissue, and several people around me had their noses pinched or their hands cupped around their noses and mouths. A few people stood up and opened the little overhead windows and several other people coughed lightly. The smell continued wafting past me in waves, but no one said anything to the man or even to each other. In fact, no one even looked around or in the man's direction. However, people were communicating to each other through these physical cues that we were all experiencing this unpleasant situation together. On another Local bus, a man sitting at the front of the bus across from the driver leaned over the railing and sneezed and coughed repeatedly without covering his face. The driver did not say anything to the man even though he was very near the line of fire, and a woman sitting near the man looked over at another woman as if to say, *Can you believe this?* Two other women sitting near the man finally got up and moved to the back of the bus near me. I assumed they moved to get away from the man, but nothing in their facial expressions or body language necessarily suggested that they were disgusted or agitated.

Expressions of displeasure in similar situations were more apparent on Rapid routes. A homeless man on a Local bus smelled very pungent and the odor was even more pronounced when he moved to stand by the back door near where I was sitting:

At the Sunset and Fairfax stop, a woman gets on. She has on a bright, flowing tunic outfit with a scarf around her head. She pulls her cart near the back door and stands in a space there. Then she suddenly grimaces, looks around, and pulls her scarf around her mouth. She makes a gagging noise and grimaces again. Then she walks toward the front of the bus leaving her cart. She walks back

with her scarf still around her mouth. Then she takes her cart and walks to the back of the bus. She's responding to the odor of the homeless man, but no one has acted quite so dramatically about it. At Santa Monica and Fairfax, the woman gets off the bus, and I see her gagging and spitting into a trashcan. She wraps the scarf back around her face. (9/12/11, Line 780, Rapid)

A man on another Local trip got on the bus and reeked of urine. The woman in front of me grimaced and then immediately stood up and opened one of the small overhead windows. Then she walked to the front of the bus and sat in the seat directly behind the driver. I looked back and the woman sitting in front of the man looked miserable as she held her fingers under her nostrils. At one point, a man sitting at the front of the bus looked back at the man who smelled.

The differences in response to these similar situations were subtle: a quick and accusative look at the offender on the Rapid versus the collective attempt to commiserate and disassociate on the Local buses. The reactions to this example of an extreme disruption (as with disruptions in general) are similar to what Goffman describes once witnessing in a mental institution:

On some chronic male wards at Central Hospital, patients had an understanding with attendants that it was permissible to sleep on the floor, drool, hallucinate, and spit into paper cups; an extremely loose, informal definition of the setting prevailed, which provided one of the few comforts known to this way of life. But, in one such setting, I observed that when a patient urinated against a hot steam radiator to save him the trouble of going to the toilet, fellow patients sitting in the cloud of evaporating urine seemed to appreciate that they had tacitly agreed to forego the right to respond with anything but a slight frown or ironic smile to what was happening around them. . . . The bystanders seemed to express the fact that, while disapproving glances were safe, any interference would have brought them further into situational reality than was comfortable (1963a:207-08).

As with Goffman's mental patients, bus riders on Local buses deliberately ignore much of what happens around them. The man whose body odor filled the bus did not have to face a driver or fellow riders demanding that he get off. No one even looked at the man to assign blame or to have him acknowledge the effect of his presence on the bus. Instead, people covered their faces or plugged their noses and remained silent. In another case on a Local bus, a man stood by the driver and talked incessantly for about ten minutes using much profanity. I later asked the driver if he knew the man, and he shook his head and said, "Every time he gets on. . . . And I think I have a dirty mouth. Good grief." The driver could have told the man to leave him alone, sit down, and be quiet. Yet he did not, and instead the driver participated in the interaction, even if as an unwilling participant.

I would argue that in the context of a Local bus such as the 20 – with Metro's early passenger surveys indicating that riders found the 720 a superior service compared to other lines (Richmond 2005) – this very loose social order reflects perceived status differences. As the Local buses are considered the less desirable of the bus lines in terms of service and amenities, riders on the buses may have simply resigned themselves to the fact that they are in an inferior social space, one replete with disruptions.⁵² The way to negotiate and survive bus space then is for riders to ignore and tolerate the events happening around them. To be constantly "on guard," in Goffman's (1971) terms, would be inefficient and ineffectual. Stopping or even

⁵² While a significant body of research has examined mode choice from the perspective of riders, much of this research is quantitative, and as Beirao and Cabral (2007) point out, researchers choose what are often limited sets of variables to study. Several studies have used qualitative methods in an attempt to assess the discourse people use around different modes and the relations to emotions and perception (for example, see Guiver 2007). This research primarily uses interview and focus group data to understand the ways in which people perceive transit and car travel. While the findings provide useful details, the authors point out that negative perceptions of buses may be based largely on outdated experiences or ideas about transit, and not based on actual experience. Therefore, future research capturing real-time experiential data – through the use of mobile applications, for example – would provide an important source of insight into people's feelings and emotions as actual events play out in bus spaces.

acknowledging every disruption on a Local bus would be impossible, and people adapt behaviors to get them through the situation.

Social disruptions occur because particular individuals violate expected rules of behavior in bus space. Although demographic data indicate differences among riders who use particular bus lines (the different incomes of Local versus Rapid riders, for example), many riders, even during a single journey, may access – and move back and forth between – a number of elements of the transit network. The fieldwork data show that all types of disruptions occur on buses across the system, and variations among routes are reflected more in the emergence of disruptions, the level of tolerance for disruptions, and the responses from other riders. This suggests that the physical and social space of Rapid and Local lines, rather than any characteristics of the riders on those lines, is more directly related to regulation of behavior.

5.3. The Consistency of Experience: “Experiential Reliability” and the Starbucks Factor

In examining the influence of the psychology of travel on mode choice, Tehan and Wachs describe two categories of psychological needs and their relationships to public transit. The first category is personal-growth needs – affiliation, esteem of others, self-identity, and autonomy – which are “those [needs] that are oriented to an ‘outreach’ type of personal development or growth.” The second category is ego-defensive needs – security, conformity, rejection, and space – which reflect the “need to be safe and secure as an individual” (1972:5). The authors argue that the automobile industry has been much more effective, through design and advertising, at tapping into these psychological needs. Transit, on the other hand, has not been nearly as successful in fostering personality, self-control, and a sense of capability (Tehan and

Wachs 1972).

In other mode choice work, transportation researchers include a variety of variables deemed important to travelers, factors that will induce them to drive a car rather than ride public transit, for example. As discussed earlier, these studies have identified factors such as reliability, time, out-of-pocket costs, out-of-vehicle time (walking, waiting, transferring), in-vehicle time, comfort, speed, and security as salient in the decisions of travelers, who give these characteristics different weights (Black 1995). Thus, travelers perceive out-of-vehicle time as more onerous than in-vehicle time, so that transit travelers typically find lengthy bus waits and transfers more of a burden than slow-moving buses (Iseki and Taylor 2009; Taylor et al. 2009; Iseki and Taylor 2010). Reliability is the idea that time and speed will not vary significantly on repeated transit trips on a line:

Reliability is important to many travelers (especially commuters). They want to be certain they will reach their destinations on time. Often they leave earlier (thus lengthening the time for the journey) to be sure of arriving on time. This means it is important for transit vehicles to adhere to schedule; delays and breakdowns should be minimized (Black 1995:294).

The idea of “experiential reliability” extends this system-performance notion of reliability and couples it to the psychological impacts of transit travel. As riders participate in different transit environments, they may desire more predictable and consistent experiences. In other words, riders likely prefer bus spaces where they know what to expect in terms of social interactions and disruptions, in addition to schedule reliability.

A simple analogy helps to illustrate this idea of experiential reliability: Years ago when Starbucks coffee shops started multiplying across the country, I would make every attempt to patronize small, independently owned cafes in defiance of the burgeoning hegemonic

Starbucks empire. This was my own effort to do what I could to challenge the corporate coffee magnate and support the businesses struggling against it. However, I soon tired of the fact that every time I bought coffee at one of these small, independent cafes, I never knew what to expect. Most of the time I would not even finish the drink because the beans had not been roasted properly and the espresso was bitter or the steamed milk was lukewarm. I started to venture back to Starbucks where I knew that each and every time I plunked down my \$3.50 for a vanilla latte with soymilk, it would taste exactly the same as the last time I bought one, and the next time would be the same. In addition, I could go anywhere in the country or even the world and not be disappointed – lattes in San Antonio, London, and even Bangkok all tasted the same. Starbucks, in fact, has branded both a product and an experience. I know what my options are when I am ordering, I know the language, and I know the procedure. Unfortunately, I value my money and this consistency of experience more than I do my sentiments about corporations and cultural homogeneity.

Do different bus lines differ in relation to this idea of experiential reliability? Do riders on particular lines or types of service (Local versus Rapid) have more consistent travel experiences than on others? Do disruptions vary systematically by line or mode? Figures 5.9 and 5.10 graphically show a chronological list of disruptions on the 720 and 20 during fieldwork outings on two weekday afternoons. From this perspective, experiences on the two buses differ considerably, with a trip on the Local bus filled with a number of verbal and physical disruptions – from a man talking to the driver and using profanity, to screaming teenagers, to an aggravated and aggressive driver. My experience in the field on these two lines substantiates that disruptions on these two buses are vastly different. The only thing experientially reliable

Figure 5.9: Disruptions on 720 (Rapid)



Figure 5.10: Disruptions on 20 (Local)



about the 20 is that there will be expected disruptions and the strong possibility of some very unexpected ones. (Appendix C includes lists of disruptions for three additional sets of paired Rapid and Local trips, showing the differences between buses running along the same route.)

Qualitative research about traveler perceptions suggests that unexpected negative experiences – both actual and anticipated incidents – play an important role in keeping current riders, as well as attracting new ones (Beirao and Cabral 2007; Guiver 2007). However, this body of research is limited to just a handful of studies and further exploration of this topic is in order. If it is the case that riders do value this psychological consistency, then this has important implications for the ways in which transit environments are designed and managed.⁵³ Research examining the impact of the customer experience on consumer behavior highlights other ways in which this consistency of experience may be significant for transit riders. Verhoef et al. suggest that the consumer experience is understood to be “holistic in nature and involves the customer’s cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses to the retailer,” and current customer satisfaction is significant as it influences consumers’ expectations in the future (2009:32). Transit environments, however, are uniquely challenging in that many of the strategies that retailers can use to influence, design, or control the customer experience are beyond the direct reach of transit operators. The often emotionally and psychologically intense and largely unpredictable happenings on a Local bus generally involve other riders, and ensuring a consistent experience for users – even over the course of a single trip, much less over time – is a herculean, if not impossible, task. The solutions offered to minimize deviant customer behavior are largely infeasible in transit spaces. For example, compatibility

⁵³ I am merely proposing this idea of experiential reliability and its implications. It remains to be explored to what extent it may be a relevant factor in the decision-making of transit riders.

management, where similar customers are brought together in retail environments and interactions are managed, would be impossible in the constantly-changing space of buses (Martin and Pranter 1989).

5.4. The Bus as Community and Confessional

In an early study of bus behavior, Nash describes the bus as a “community on wheels” where “a peculiar urban form of belongingness emerges” (1975:100). Nash discusses the social dynamics that must occur for a community to develop on a bus: “All on the bus must enter into interactions that have parameters encompassing the revelation of biographies, feeling, and knowledge, i.e., the displays of competency in emotions and knowledge that can be judged by others on the bus as appropriate to a bus rider” (1975:120). While crowding on buses stifles any sense of intimacy and interaction, he argues, buses – even crowded ones where people are together for extended periods of time – help foster a sense of community. He describes a suburban commuter bus where passengers and drivers are such familiars that they celebrate birthdays, share coffee and donut duty, and include a group of men called the “Green Dragon Crew,” who drink and ride together.⁵⁴

Although Nash (1975) identifies the commuter bus as providing the prolonged contact necessary to facilitate community, an essay about a Metro driver describes a similar sense of camaraderie and familiarity. Carl Kozlowski, a writer and bus rider, profiles James “J.B.” Berry, a driver whose former local overnight route was the 180 from Pasadena to Hollywood, a route Kozlowski would ride regularly:

He [Berry] switched his route nearly a year ago to drive a route

⁵⁴ If these suburban commuter buses were homogeneous in terms of race and class, then shared identity might also contribute to this sense of community.

from El Monte to downtown LA. . . . What he didn't count on was how quiet that route would be – he estimates he has an average of four riders aboard at any one time – and how much he'd miss his regular riders from the 180 route, especially a core group of about a dozen mostly African-American men whose outrageous rapport and antics led to them calling their group "The Loco 180" (Kozlowski 2008).

Berry knew many of the riders on his route and described his relationships with passengers whom other drivers would likely find difficult:

Hollywood was special because I'd develop friendships with guys there, making my night go faster as we talked about everything from politics to sex, rock and roll and racial issues. . . . On the 180 line, all the homeless people that I come in contact with are not all alcoholics and addicts. . . . And a lot of them choose to come onboard each night and hang because it's the one place they feel accepted (Kozlowski 2008).

Berry clearly had strong connections to the riders on his route, and the numerous anecdotes presented in the article portray the 180 as a Local line filled with constant activity and the sorts of disruptions discussed in the last chapter. However, this space – with chaos on the bus itself and in the areas through which it traveled – still provided an opportunity for the driver and his array of passengers to connect in meaningful and intimate ways, despite the ongoing disruptions.

While I never witnessed a group of people on my bus trips organized like the "Loco 180" men, I did observe various "micro-communities" of people in anchored relationships – those that involve "recurring interaction and interdependencies that develop between individuals over time but are tied to a particular public place and narrow range of activities that do not, or

rarely, spill over into private households and other domiciled settings” (Morrill et al. 2005:18).⁵⁵

These interactions most often happened on Local buses and were always rooted in some bond of identity and relationship that also existed outside of bus space, such as various older Armenian men who boarded the bus and recognized each other, and Latina domestic workers who sat together in dyads and triads speaking in Spanish.⁵⁶

Some of these interactions, while relatively intimate, were too random and irregular to be considered true, anchored relationships. For example, on one trip on a Local bus, a white man saw an African-American man sitting across from him and said, “Caesar! I was just talking about you a few days ago! . . . I didn’t know you still lived in Hollywood.” They started talking, and the white man pointed to the seat next to him and told the man to come over, but the other man shook his head and pointed out the window. Then the white man moved, sat next to him, and patted him on the back. The white man said, “You know who I am?” The black man replied, “Country ass motherfucker!” and they both laughed. While the two men appeared to know each other, the white man did most of the talking with the other man occasionally offering a comment. His question about whether he knew him was said in jest, but it also appeared to be a mildly awkward attempt for some affirmation of recognition. In this case, the relationship occurred in a public place, but it was unlikely that it would become a recurring and ongoing interaction in the future. Later during their conversation, these men revealed a complicated backstory involving how they knew each other and their various mutual acquaintances, but their relationship and interaction was somewhere between fleeting and anchored in that they

⁵⁵ When I conducted my fieldwork, I did not feel comfortable riding late-night buses. My concern was not so much safety on the bus itself, but rather waiting at and traveling to and from stops late at night. Therefore, Kozlowski’s article provided me useful insight into the travel experience on the 180 during times of the night that were unfamiliar to me.

⁵⁶ The Armenian men were in Glendale, California, a city with one of the largest Armenian immigrant populations in the world.

may or may not have encountered and engaged each other again in transit space.

The design and operation of the Local bus appear to facilitate a transit space more conducive to fostering a sense of community, even though the rhythm and pace of bus – the pulling up to and away from the curb at every other corner, the constant and sometimes frenetic flow of people on and off the bus, the frequent turnover and reorganization of bodies in bus space – would seem to refute Nash’s assertion that long stretches of time are necessary to foster a sense of community. The Local buses run much slower than their Rapid counterparts and, while running on schedules, the Locals lack the perpetual focus on travel speed, fast boarding and alighting, and the atmosphere that comes along with such expectations of efficiency. The capacity of the Local buses is also lower, particularly when compared to the huge articulated Rapid buses, and so there is a greater sense of physical intimacy. This can heighten the unpleasantness of disruptive, negative behaviors in a more confined space. But the drivers also have more leeway to spend time doing things that would not be ideal under the tenets of the Rapid system. One night a driver on a Local route casually helped a woman carry a very large cart of groceries off the bus. An elderly woman sitting nearby told him, “You’re very nice.” On another trip on a Local bus, two women boarded the bus with a young child and a baby. The driver helped the woman with the stroller, and people cleared out of the front area of the bus so there was enough room on the seat for the two women, the child, and the carrier. This is not to say that a driver on a Rapid bus would not also extend the same help to these riders, but riders on Rapid buses must be prepared to negotiate that space under different terms and expectations – and in a much bigger hurry.

Buses are also spaces where a surprising amount of personal information is revealed

about the non-transit identities of riders. People strike up conversations and discuss intimate details of their lives – drug addiction, prison time, health issues – in the middle of a full bus and within earshot of many people. These disclosures, what I came to call “public confessionals,” almost always happened on Local buses, as was the case with a young man who started telling a woman about his troubles:

He says to the woman, “I’ve been in jail. I used to blame my parents. Everyone makes decisions. You make the wrong decisions. I can’t get insurance. I can’t get a job. . . . I did drugs. I did gangs. I did all that stuff. I got tired of it.” He continues to talk about the various things he did and how he’s trying to make better decisions now. Then he tells her, “I live in Glendale, by the cemetery. You know where the boys’ home is?” She says, “Yeah.” He says, “I was there for a year. It’s over by the train tracks.” The woman asks him about his job search. He says, “I went back to the boys’ home and asked for a job. They want me to get a GED.” Then he starts talking about getting kicked out of school and selling drugs. He says, “When you think it’s all good, it’s really not. I had a hard time thinking before I acted. Now I think before I act.” (8/23/11, Line 180, Local)

On another ride on a Local bus, a woman and a man in a wheelchair (who did not seem to know each other) started talking and soon he had given her his telephone number and made arrangements to get a haircut from her the following week.⁵⁷ He held out his hand to shake hers and did this several additional times. At one point, the woman said, “Do you have a walker?” He said, “No, I got shot in the back. I’m paralyzed.” The woman said, “Oh, I’m sorry. Did they take the bullet out?” He said, “No, they just have to leave it there. It could do more damage.” She asked, “Have you tried every doctor?”

Another example of the public confessional is the discussion described earlier between the two men – the African-American man and white man – who recognize each other during a

⁵⁷ The man and woman did not board the bus together. The woman also appeared to be mildly developmentally disabled.

trip and whose relationship lies in the realm between fleeting and anchored. They talked all the way down Hollywood Boulevard about people they both knew: the white man said one person was in the state prison at Corcoran and the other, a man named Big Mike, just was busted in Glendale. He mentioned another man currently in prison, and he said that they were in the same “yard,” an acknowledgement that he had also spent time in prison.

On another trip on a Local bus, the multiple loud and detailed conversations a woman had on her cell phone became part of the transit experience of most of the passengers on the bus:

She’s talking very loudly on her cell phone. She says, “The last few days have been hell for me. I was telling this woman about it. I just feel really unloved. You just pushed me away. And she said it’s all me. . . . What? No, you should just say, ‘Babe, I love you.’ I don’t know why you don’t love me. The last few days you just seem very detached from me.” She sounds like she’s going to start crying, but she’s also smiling. She ends the call and her phone rings a couple minutes later. She says, “Oh damn” and then answers it. She says, “Hi, Tina. The ultrasound went fine. And Eddie and I are fighting. I don’t think he loves me anymore. . . . Well, I don’t feel it. The doctor says I’m ten weeks and one day. She gave me all this stuff to read and free baby stuff.” The woman (still talking very loudly) says, “The doctor next week will be the doctor through the pregnancy.” She says this is the doctor who is going to set up the insurance, and she’ll be there for four hours at that appointment. She says, “No, not until I’m showing. No, he’s not here right now. I even apologized. I said I’ve been really emotional the last couple days. I miss him. I miss laughing with him. When we talk now, it’s just bullshit.” She stops talking. Then her phone rings again. She says, “I just sent you a text message. What do you think I should do with Eddie? We’re going to go to the Next Generation today. Next Generation . . . at the Jackie Robinson Center. Okay, I love you so much. I love you.” (1/27/10, Line 180, Local)

She hung up the phone, and a man sitting across from her asked about meetings at Next Generation. She paused for a second and looked at him as if he had been eavesdropping on her conversation, when actually most of the bus had been subjected to it. She asked how long he

had been clean and sober, and they briefly discussed his sponsor, someone she knew. Then suddenly she was back on her cell phone again, speaking very loudly – this time to point of almost screaming – and told Eddie, the apparent father of her unborn child: “Whenever you say ‘attitude’ and ‘pregnancy’ in the same sentence, that’s the worst thing you can say. Then I think this baby thing isn’t a good idea, and it’s bringing us apart.”

When these very long and drawn out public conversations took place, whether people on the bus talking to each other or a single person having a remote conversation via cell phone, they would most often happen on Local buses. It is precisely the lengthy periods of time in an enclosed space that create situations where audience role prominence prevails and “inhabitants of the public realm act primarily as audience to the activities that surround them” (Lofland 2007:31). In the case of transit, however, people are a largely unwilling audience to spectacles of public life aboard the bus, as they essentially do not have the choice whether or not to be bystanders. One’s only option is to leave the social setting – to disembark from the bus and wait for the next one or to walk – a relatively impractical prospect in most cases, when reaching a travel destination is the goal. Therefore, Goffman’s principle of civil inattention – the social politeness that can appear to be ignoring – devolves into the “Simmel-Spykman-Wirth-Milgram version of ‘stimulus overload’ and ‘psychological shutdown’ leading to the presumed ‘typical’ urban attitudes of emotional coldness and concern” (Lofland 2007:30).

Local buses initially seem to be an unlikely place for any form of community or intimacy to develop, particularly because they largely lack experiential reliability, and they operate at a pace that ensures constant activity and much distraction. However, Local buses are where people most often share the details of their lives with others and where individuals have

opportunities to engage more directly with each other in ways that are less possible on the fast-moving Rapid buses. At the same time, however, these qualities of the Local bus mean that riders who co-opt bus space – through loud, disruptive conversations, for example – subject other people to what can be unwanted social situations.

5.5. Summary

This chapter has explored differences in social norms and behavior on different bus routes and service types, as well as spatial qualities around bus and bus stop design. These comparisons reveal that the spatial and social appear to be very intertwined. For example, the more distinct features of the Rapid system – the rail-like stops along Wilshire Boulevard, the large and identifiable buses, and the red color scheme – create a physical and social space with stricter social expectations and therefore fewer disruptions in the social order. When disruptions occur on Rapid buses, people tolerate them much less and even take action to stop a disruption and restore social order. On the other hand, the Local buses are very loose social spaces where the rules of behavior are not only less clear and rigid, but also rarely enforced by drivers or riders. The constant disruptions on Local buses result in a lack of experiential reliability – or a consistency of experience – while Rapid buses provide a more even experience, with fewer glitches in the social order. Despite the numerous disruptions on Local buses, these spaces also foster a stronger sense of community and provide a level of intimacy where people often openly discuss very personal matters.

The physical elements of transit systems – buses and stops – are significant as part of a route’s infrastructure, but also for branding, wayfinding, and overall experience. As such, planners and designers should consider the cognitive and emotional impact of these features as

well as their objective usefulness for transit riders. Routes also vary by the looseness of social rules and by the extent to which disruptions contribute to a more or less consistent experience. The significance of social expectations on buses – and how violations play out – may be a largely subconscious matter for riders, but the impact of this consumer experience likely has short- and long-term repercussions. Finally, Local buses in particular have elements of a community on wheels, as described by Nash (1975). The design, operation, and management characteristics of different lines impact the ways in which drivers and passengers are able to pursue and maintain different relationships and also limit their ability to opt out of disruptive spectacles in public space.

6. THE TRANSIT WALK OF SHAME

You actually expect me to get on a bus? You have no idea why they put them great big windows on the sides of buses, do you? One reason only. To humiliate the people of color who are reduced to riding on 'em.

– Anthony, an African-American man, to his friend Peter in *Crash*, a 2005 film about race relations and tensions in post-September 11th Los Angeles

You can't spell "emotional abuse" without "bus" – which is why I do not take public transportation.

– Stephen Colbert

On a recent episode of the animated television comedy *American Dad*, the main character, Stan, sets out to prove to his deadbeat daughter and son-in-law that he and his wife, Francine, can survive on minimum wage for a month. When the son-in-law points out that they cannot use the family car because it would cost too much, Stan asks how they are supposed to get to their rental apartment. His daughter says, "The same way the maids get around." Francine grimaces, holds her hand to her chest, and whines, "We can't ride the bus. We're white." Stan says they will do it, and he and Francine join the pilgrimage of Latina domestic workers heading to the bus stop – sad-looking women with downcast eyes, carrying buckets and mops – as the sun sets on the horizon and a somber Latin guitar ballad plays in the background. The transit walk of shame.

Apparently, the real and perceived humiliations of using this mode are present not only when the bus rider is on the vehicle, but also during the trips to and from stops and stations and while waiting and transferring. Most people do not ride buses regularly, and yet bus culture in the popular imagination is well-defined as the place of the Other – immigrants, the poor, the

mentally ill, the homeless, and social deviants. This conception is well illustrated in a 2003 General Motors advertisement that ran in Vancouver, Canada, targeting TransLink, the local transportation authority:

Some of the ads showed transit buses with destination signs that said “creeps & weirdos” and “wet dog smell.” Other ads suggested that riding the bus exposed passengers to “hours of hell” and “bacterial stew”. . . . In a letter to Michael Grimaldi, president of General Motors Canada, Doug McCallum, chair of TransLink’s board, said the advertising campaign is “harmful to the efforts of TransLink and all other groups who promote environmentally responsible alternatives to single-occupant vehicle use.” Ken Hardie, TransLink’s communications manager, said he was “underwhelmed” by GM’s response. “They said, ‘if people were offended, we’re sorry.’ Well, people were offended.” Hardie said it was GM’s second attack on transit buses. In 1999, an ad campaign that used the phrase “The Bus Sucks” appeared in a promotion for the Cavalier, said Hardie, who added that the anti-bus campaigns target college students and are timed for graduation (Metro Magazine 2003).

Below the photograph of the bus with the “creeps and weirdos” headboard is text that says, “Luckily, there’s an affordable alternative,” and information about the Chevrolet Cavalier (Figure 6.1). The message to the consumer is clear: *Transit is inferior because you have to share that space with socially undesirable people. You are not one of them, you deserve better, and you should be doing everything possible to avoid transit. We can help you buy a car.* This advertisement violates conventional notions of political correctness, and yet it always elicits a chuckle from anyone who sees it, even transportation planners, because it taps right into the commonly held stereotypes of transit users and transit environments.

These ideas about transit abound in popular culture. Sandra Bullock’s character in the 1994 movie *Speed* has to ride public transit in Los Angeles because she loses her driver’s license after racking up too many traffic tickets. Her punishment is not only the status demotion that

Figure 6.1: Chevrolet Cavalier Advertisement

LUCKILY, THERE'S AN AFFORDABLE ALTERNATIVE.

Chevrolet Cavalier VL Sedan

\$12,998 OR **0%** OR **\$178/mo**

CASH PURCHASE PRICE* INCLUDES FREIGHT AND PDI FINANCING UP TO 36 MONTHS** 36 MONTH SMART LEASE*** DEMONSTRATES YOUR FIRST LEASE PAYMENT**

\$1,000 Graduate Program if you're a recent or soon-to-be university, college or CEGEP graduate, you can earn an additional \$1,000 off the price of your brand new vehicle.

Features:

- 5-Year/100,000 km Powertrain Warranty
- 2.2 Litre 140 HP ECOTEC Engine
- Dual Front Air Bags
- 60/40 Split Folding Rear Seat
- 5-Speed Getrag Manual Transmission
- Theft Deterrent System
- Tachometer

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Source: Mikael (2012)

comes with riding the bus to work and the inconvenience of having to run and catch it, but also mortal danger when a psychopath targets her bus by planting a bomb on it. The subtext is that public transit and public spaces more generally are deadly, treacherous places. More recently, two young African-American characters discuss transit in *Crash*, a film dealing with race relations and tensions in Los Angeles. Anthony and Peter (played by rapper Ludacris and Larenz Tate, respectively) are walking through an upscale commercial area, and Anthony tells Peter he is convinced that the large windows on buses in Los Angeles are part of a white plot to humiliate the people of color who have to ride them.

These examples illustrate that public buses are contested spaces in the popular imagination as well as loci where stereotypes, particularly about race and class, are simultaneously generated and reinforced in the mainstream mind. In the confines of the bus itself, however, negative ideas about buses also play out. People contend with different types of stigma as they participate in bus spaces, share physical and psychological space with other riders, and use a mode that larger society deems inferior. This chapter explores the “bad rap” of the bus, stigmas within bus spaces and among riders, and the ways in which people respond to stigmatized others and experiences, while managing their own identities on buses.

6.1. Bus Violation and Stigma

The experience on a bus can be very visceral both physically and emotionally. Few other public contexts involve a confined space with a low barrier of entry and where strangers are forced to negotiate and cooperate – or, in some instances, contend with those who fail to do so – and have little recourse over the actions of others. Goffman describes six modalities of violation, ways that the “territories of the self” can be breached. All of these violations occur on

buses, some occasionally and some with regularity: 1) the breaching of one's personal space, 2) touching and other physical contact, 3) staring and other visual incursions, 4) intrusive noises and sounds, 5) talking to and unsolicited encounters, and 6) bodily excreta (corporeal excreta – "spittle, snot, perspiration, food particles, blood, semen, vomit, urine, and fecal matter"; odor – "flatus, tainted breath, and body smells"; body heat – a warm seat, for example; and markings left by the body with imagined bodily excreta – something like leftover food on a plate) (Goffman 1971:47).⁵⁸ Violations of personal space and touching are constant occurrences on buses, particularly crowded ones. The close proximity of people and the looser social norms on a bus mean that staring and talking can be easy and effective modes of violation. The bodily excreta, body heat, and body markings (a dirty tissue, perhaps, or an unidentifiable stain on a seat) are also regularly encountered on buses. Therefore, bus spaces are, according to Goffman's list, spaces of perpetual violation and inevitably challenging for the people who use them.

The external perceptions of public transit, and buses in particular, then cast riders and vehicle spaces as existing on the wrong side of a dichotomous social and physical world. Sibley describes the exclusion that results from these boundaries, where people and places are clearly organized and "separations, between clean and dirty, ordered and disordered, 'us' and 'them,' that is, to expel the abject, is encouraged in western cultures, creating feelings of anxiety because such separation can never be finally achieved" (1995:8). He also discusses the non-human characterizations of people in these defiled realms (such as the use of rats to depict Jews and Gypsies/Roma) as a way to reinforce the divide between the self and the other (Sibley

⁵⁸ Goffman (1971) provides these specific examples of corporeal excreta and odors.

1995). Bus riders, while not depicted so callously as non-human, do contend with the popular perception that their presence on buses is something inherently undesirable and a situation they should aspire to change – this was the message of the Chevy Cavalier advertisement.⁵⁹

These negative stereotypes of riders suggest some people, those who are somehow flawed, are doomed to be transit dependents indefinitely, while others can achieve the aspirational goal of moving up to a better mode: the car. In the case of buses, this divide between riders and non-riders, the “us versus them” as described by Sibley (1995), is often tenuous, amorphous, and difficult to maintain. Bus riders are defined by their literal presence on a bus, but people are moving constantly into and out of bus spaces. They may take on and shed this identity several times over the course of a single day or even a trip, and may leave it permanently behind when they eventually acquire a private vehicle.

Stigmas are a way to help reinforce these social divides by marking people based on particular qualities that are deemed undesirable. Goffman describes the way particular traits come to represent negative qualities and how individuals associated with these traits lose credit as normal and ordinary group members:

When the stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind – in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive; sometimes it is called a shortcoming, a handicap (1963b:3).

⁵⁹ There are, however, examples of associations between non-human characterizations of people and other modes of transportation, such as the transporting of Jews to Nazi death camps in crowded cattle cars or Gilroy’s (2012) discussion of a reference to the car as a “coon cage” in a Ralph Ellison story, “Cadillac Flambé.”

Goffman's describes three categories of stigma that still exist to a certain degree to this day, while also reflecting the social and political climate of his time: 1) "abominations of the body – the various physical deformities," 2) "blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous or rigid beliefs, and dishonesty" (things such as mental disorders, imprisonment, addictions, alcoholism, and homosexuality), and 3) "tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion" (1963b:4). The stigmas Goffman (1963b) outlines are rooted in social identity and behavior, and he discusses in detail the various ways stigmatized people control information about their stigmas, manage their identities, and maintain relationships to their in-group stigma counterparts, as well as outsider "normals."

In examining the stigmatization of homeless and HIV/AIDS service facilities and the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) community responses to these centers, Takahashi adds a spatial dimension to Goffman's identity stigma theory: "Places, along with persons and groups, experience processes of devaluation (and likewise, valuation) whereby specific places come to be seen as less worthy than others" (1997:904). This socio-spatial stigma has two interrelated components: the social stigma of identity associated with people and the spatial stigma of the built environment. Stigmas identify and label certain people as others and this, in turn, facilitates the characterization of these individuals as non-productive, dangerous, and personally culpable for their dire situations (Takahashi 1997). At the same time, the places associated with these individuals – in Takahashi's case, the places where the homeless and people with HIV/AIDS go to receive treatment and services – become stigmatized in their own right. Sibley describes this process as one where "a fear of difference is projected onto the objects and spaces comprising the home or locality which can be polluted by the presence of

non-conforming people, activities or artefacts” (1995:91).

When a place takes on a spatial stigma, various dynamics occur and are perpetuated. The stigma becomes part of that physical space and is “inherited by the landscape and particular places” (Takahashi 1997:909). People engaging with these spaces may then become stigmatized because of their associations with them, while the stigmas are continuously redefined and conceptualized to both reinforce and counter existing characterizations (Takahashi 1997). Smith describes Takahashi’s conception of this spatialized stigma as a “process whereby stigma attached to people both *extends from* and *extends to* the stigma associated with places” (2010:860). This concept of socio-spatial stigma is relevant to buses as the identity stigma of the bus rider – a person using a mode perceived to be inferior to the car – comes together with the stigma of bus riding, which includes the marked spaces on the urban landscape of the bus itself, as well as the stops and stations where people must go to access bus space.

The bus, however, is in some important ways unique and differs from the fixed physical locations that Takahashi describes in that it moves through space and time. The perceived shortcomings of buses – in terms of physical and social environments, service, convenience, and comfort – generate a stigma that operates external to the bus itself and is perpetuated, as previously discussed, through popular culture and other media. However, different types of stigmas also emerge within the context of buses themselves, and people participating in bus spaces respond to and cope with these stigmas in various ways internal to the bus. The following discussion explores the stigmatized rider, the stigmatized mode, and the other ways in which riders work to manage stigma through denial of their identities and by the development of in-group bonds.

6.2. The Stigmatized Bus Other

While the bus may be perceived to be the mode of the socially undesirable, in fact, riders on a bus are not a homogenous group and hierarchies of acceptability are apparent. Those who step outside of the bounds of expected behavior – triggering or participating in many of the disruptions described earlier – become marked riders in Goffman’s characterization of the stigmatized. The marking of particular riders can emerge both from the ways in which others perceive them – through appearance, for example, and the assumptions and stereotypes of what is embodied in that presentation – as well as behavioral cues and responses to deviations from social norms. In some cases, both the perceptual and the behavioral come together to define and identify the stigmatized. The following discussion examines the stigmatization of particular people on buses by others who share the same space: those deemed social outcasts, individuals who disrupt the space or service of the bus, and others who fail to follow the proper rules of the bus. Passengers respond to these groups of people in different ways, from passive and indifferent to more active and direct.

6.2.1. The Social Outcasts: The Mentally Ill, the Homeless, and the Perverts

The social outcasts of the bus – particularly mentally ill and homeless riders – are the individuals most often conjured up in the “creeps and weirdos” vision of the bus. They represent the overarching perceived social negatives of bus travel and environments: to be in close physical proximity with those deemed undesirable and unpredictable and with little control over the circumstances in what will no doubt result in physically and emotionally unpleasant experiences. As with any stereotyped generalization of a group, there is an element of truth to this characterization, as these are individuals often actively or passively challenging

the norms of spatial and interpersonal behavior on buses. Those individuals whose behavior or appearance suggest they are mentally ill or homeless most often encounter civil inattention from other riders: “One gives to another enough visual notice to demonstrate that one appreciates that the other is present (and that one admits openly to having seen him), 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” (Goffman 1963a:84). Goffman points out that civil inattention is a right afforded to those who engage in appropriate behavior. However, civil inattention in compromised situations “may be extended in the face of offensiveness simply as an act of tactfulness, to keep an orderly appearance in the situation in spite of what is happening” (Goffman 1963a:87). Lofland also describes civility toward diversity as another principle of face-to-face interactions in public spaces: “Confronted with what may be personally offensive visible variations in physical abilities, beauty, skin color and hair texture, dress style, demeanor, income, sexual preference, and so forth, the urbanite will act in a civil manner, that is, will act ‘decently’ vis-à-vis diversity” (Lofland 2007:32).

People in bus spaces often respond to mentally ill and homeless riders by limiting their accessibility, because “when an individual opens himself up to talk with another, he opens himself up to pleadings, commands, threats, insult, and false information” (Goffman 1963a:105). Instead, tactics such as closing one’s eyes, looking away, or removing oneself completely from the interaction help a person to avoid active face-to-face engagement and the unpredictable consequences of such actions, as was my response to a woman I encountered waiting at a bus stop:

A white woman in her sixties walks up to the stop. She’s talking to herself and looks inside the trashcan. She stands next to me and

she's chattering nonstop. I hear her say, "He wants to make a baby. His little nigger prostitution ring in front of Starbucks." I look over at her and she gestures toward Westwood. I notice that her clothes are clean, she's not dirty, and she's holding a fairly nice purse. I get tired of listening to her ranting. She also keeps staring at me and trying to make eye contact. I move away from her to the other side of the bus stop. (8/26/11, Line 720, bus stop)

People would also convey this inaccessibility through physical actions such as turning away, moving parts of their bodies, or relocating to a different seat or part of the bus. For example, a dirty, disheveled man on one trip got on the bus and sat in the seat across from me. He smelled like body odor and he was holding his pants up because they were falling down. When he stood up to get off the bus, I was afraid that he was going to touch my leg or stumble and touch me so I instinctively pulled my body back as far as I could.

People on buses do not always react negatively or adversely to homeless and mentally ill riders. I witnessed interactions that involved a great deal of tolerance and even compassion, such as one instance where a homeless woman got on the bus, and the driver both talked to her and offered her food:

The driver says to her, "Do you like minestrone soup? It's Italian. I didn't get a chance to eat it." The driver grabs a paper bag from the bus dashboard and hands it to the woman. The woman says to the driver, "I didn't know you were still riding the bus. They cut my phone off. It was a \$200 phone." The driver says, "Why are you buying such an expensive phone?" The woman says, "I need it for show business. People don't want to see you with stuff like that. That's why they cut my phone off." A couple minutes go by and the woman says to the driver, "Is it true if you marry a rich man he will verbally abuse you?" The driver laughs and says, "I think it depends if you respect each other." (1/18/10, Line 780, Rapid)

Riders also participated in ongoing interactions with fellow passengers in ways that involved much more than just the civility toward diversity that is described by Lofland (2007). In this

situation, a man asked a woman sitting near him to take a photo of him and his female companion:

She [the woman taking the photo] looks a little strung out, and she's very skinny. She was looking around a lot and her teeth are dirty and rotting. She takes their photo and then starts talking to the man. She asks how long they're staying and where they're from. He says something about working in a library and she starts talking about different books. She's rambling a little bit. The man engages her by answering her questions and following up with his own questions. The woman with him seems uncomfortable and she doesn't say much or make eye contact with the woman.
(9/5/11, Line 217, Local)

Because the man was the one who initiated the interaction, perhaps he felt obliged to continue to engage with the woman who had snapped the photo for him. However, he also could have eased out of the interaction and responded in the same way as the woman with him, avoiding and ultimately ignoring the woman who was pushing up against the norms of acceptable social behavior. Instead, he continued not just to respond to her, but to actively engage with her as well.

The sexual deviant, or pervert, on the bus is a well-known part of the popular mythology of bus riders. Surveys of transit riders suggest groping and other inappropriate sexual behavior are ongoing problems on public transit, though the self-selection of respondents calls into question such findings and the extent to which this occurs is difficult to measure (for example, see Stringer 2007). One of the challenges in addressing lewd activity is that the boundary between tolerable and unacceptable can be vague. A man staring at a woman can create an uncomfortable atmosphere that highlights male privilege in public spaces, such as the following situation I witnessed on a bus:

A woman gets on the bus and she's wearing tight black pants and

a tight, shiny jacket. I notice her mostly because it's very hot out and I don't understand why she's wearing such an outfit. She fumbles around in her purse near the driver and finally pulls what appears to be a day pass out of her purse. She flashes it at the driver and walks back. As she's walking back, a Latino man watches her go by. He's not subtle. He's wearing sunglasses and he leans forward and looks over the top of the rims as she walks by. He also turns all the way around in his seat as she walks behind him and he appears to be staring at her rear end. (5/13/05, Line 720, Rapid)

Whether or not this situation is punishable and who would enforce a reprimand are largely unclear. A man I encountered on the two bus routes from West Los Angeles to Hollywood would stare inappropriately at women every time I saw him, and descriptions of his behavior appeared in my fieldnotes several times:

An older man is standing in the aisle near the woman sitting in front of me. He's wearing big glasses and he's turned around so he's facing her [the woman sitting next to me in the aisle seat]. He's grinning and staring at her in a lecherous way and I notice a bulge in his pants that appears to be an erection. I can't tell if the woman notices him because he's looking down on her. (1/29/10, Line 217, Local)

I noticed this man partly because I had seen him before, but I did nothing other than give him a dirty look to try to shame him. Women most often ignore these men because to make eye contact and acknowledge their behavior could open the door to more harassment and unwanted interaction. I saw women look out windows or focus intensely on cell phone conversations as ways to avoid interacting with the men around them. In one situation, a man ogled a scantily clad teenager by looking at her up and down, and she glared at him. However, this was an unusually direct, aggressive response and not the norm in these situations. Perverts, therefore, are one of the most stigmatized groups on the bus, but also one of the least recognized or acknowledged because of the largely invisible and underreported nature of their

activities (Loukaitou-Sideris and Fink 2009).

6.2.2. The Spatial and Service Disruptors

The spatial and service disruptors of the bus are those whose presence or behavior impacts the space of the bus in some way or slows down the effective functioning of the bus as it makes its way along a route. People engaging in one of the ubiquitous cell phone conversations that take place in the confines of a bus these days are an example of a spatial disruptor. I had assumed that most people were not especially bothered by these calls because I rarely observed anyone express outward annoyance, and because cell phone chatter is so common in many public spaces. However, after a woman who had been talking nonstop on her cell phone left the bus, a woman sitting near the driver said, "I don't know how people can talk on their cell phones all the time." The driver said, "She was on it from the time she got on." The woman said, "Personally, I like it when people can't talk on their phones." During this brief exchange, the passenger and driver were labeling the woman on the cell phone as one who disregards the shared space of the bus, making an "us versus them" distinction, even though they did not confront her while she was engaged in the act of disruption.

The more clearly stigmatized spatial disruptors are those people described earlier who overstep social boundaries in ways that can affect the social stability of a bus for a period of time. One night a homeless woman was standing in the aisle of a crowded bus and causing a scene virtually the entire time she was on board:

She says something to a woman in the back [of the bus] and the other woman says, "I don't smoke nothing." The woman says, "I do smoke! What's your name?" Then a homeless man gets on the bus. He's pushing his way through people and saying, "Move out of my way!" The man and woman start hugging in the aisle. It's

not clear if they know each other. The woman says, "Let's get some crack!" (1/29/10, Line 217, Local)

A British woman and her friend were sitting near me, and a man struck up a conversation with them, asking if they were staying in Los Angeles for the weekend. The man said, "How do you like Hollywood?" and they both laughed. The woman in the aisle continued to yell and act out:

The woman screams, "You ain't nothin' but a g-string!" I say to the British woman next to me, "This is the craziest bus in L.A." She says, "Can you smell the weed?" I tell her I can. We get to Hollywood and Highland and a number of people get off the bus, including the homeless woman. A man says, "We're going to miss you!" loudly as she gets off. She gets off with the man she was hugging earlier. The British woman says, "Good luck" to me as she and her friend get off at the next stop. I stand up and make my way to the front of the bus. A man is standing in front of me next to the driver. He says to the driver, "Never a dull moment. Have you had her before?" The driver says, "No, but it was the same thing last night." (1/29/10, Line 217, Local)

The screaming woman was clearly a stigmatized bus rider, someone who was violating the norms of the bus in ways that were excessive even for the loose social space of the Local bus. People responded by ignoring her, but also by acknowledging her to each other through direct references ("Have you had her before?") and less direct ("How do you like Hollywood?").

Riders often have to negotiate bus space with other riders who may be taking up more space than is acceptable or who may appropriate it in ways that inconvenience other riders. People bring onto buses an array of things to transport personal items: large trash bags, piles of shopping bags, boxes, duffle bags and luggage, carts loaded with groceries or pillows and blankets, and large buckets with work supplies. There is a great deal of tolerance for these physical incursions – only once did I witness a driver refuse to let someone board, a man carrying an uncovered car battery – and riders acknowledge this as part of bus-riding reality.

This tacit acceptance is understandable in a setting where many people at one time or another have had to use the bus to transport the physical objects that are part of their daily lives or work or, for many, the entirety of their possessions and the very things they need to survive. For people who lack the simple luxury of a car trunk or even dependable housing where they can store things, the bus becomes much more than just a vehicle for moving bodies around the city.

There are people, however, who push the boundaries of this otherwise very loose norm on occasion, and others will verbalize their status as stigmatized spatial disruptors:

A man is standing near the driver. He keeps hoisting his very large backpack up onto the railing over the wheel well. Then he finally sits down on one side of the disabled seating area. He's turned at an angle and his big bag is very close to a woman sitting in the first row of seats. She looks up at the man and the bag. A man sitting behind the woman stands up and pushes the man's backpack. The man with the backpack stands up and says, "It's 150 pounds!" The other man says, "No consideration! No respect!" The man sits down and his bag is again close to the woman. Another man sitting across from the woman stands up, taps the woman on the shoulder, and motions to his seat.
(9/14/11, Line 780, Rapid)

This was one of those unusual situations where riders openly confronted each other about behavior, and I initially wondered why this man's backpack was a more egregious infraction than any of the various other random and bulky things I had seen people lug onto buses. A set of unspoken rules governs personal belongings on buses where people are expected to make a reasonable effort to minimize the impact of their possessions on those around them – by standing near and monitoring their things, not using seats to store things if a bus is crowded, moving items out of the way if someone needs to get by, not blocking doors or aisles, and sharing space if necessary. When this man was oblivious to what was happening with his large

bag, he became stigmatized, a marked rider violating the rules of space and order, and other riders felt compelled to intervene. This interaction is very interesting because it reveals some of the tensions and frustrations underneath the surface of a generally well operating social setting where tolerance and accommodation help to keep things running smoothly. This situation also involved gender dynamics that pushed the confrontation along; I do not think the two men would have articulated their feelings if a man's space had been violated by the backpack (or at least a younger man) as he would have been expected to defend himself. More often than not, people respond to the violators by taking the easiest path out, such as the time I approached a man sitting in a window seat who had his legs spread apart. Even when he saw me approaching the aisle seat, he did not close his legs or try to move to the side. I looked around and saw an empty row across from him, so I went and sat there.

Service disruptors on buses are people whose presence slows down the regular service of the bus, particularly elderly and disabled riders who need the ramp to board, or people who argue with drivers or engage in some other action that keeps the bus from continuing on. Transit agencies, of course, must ensure that the elderly and disabled are served; in many cases, transit may be their sole means of transportation and access. However, the process of boarding these riders onto a bus can take a substantial amount of time and involve much rearranging of passengers when those in the front need to move to other parts of the bus. In the following situation, a man fought with a driver and refused to move for a disabled man in a scooter. The man was trying to discredit the disabled man and in the process became the stigmatized rider himself, the one who ultimately was the cause of the service disruption:

At the next stop, I hear the driver arguing with a passenger. There is a man at the stop who needs to get into the disabled area. He's

very obese and using a motorized scooter. A man is sitting on one side of the disabled seating area. The driver is telling the man that the man with the scooter will need those seats to turn around. The driver lifts up the seats on the other side, but the man refuses to move so he can flip up the seats on that side. He tells the driver, "You don't have to pick him up! I know the law! Call your supervisor and let me talk to him!" The man in the scooter gets on the bus, but can't turn around. He moves the scooter into the disabled area on the other side of the bus, but he is facing the back of the bus. The man who won't move yells, "You don't want to turn around!" This exchange continues and people on the bus are getting frustrated. One woman says, "It's late." The driver is talking to someone on a phone. People start to get off the bus to catch another Rapid bus. The man who wouldn't move finally gets off the bus. A woman jumps up and flips up the seats so the man in the scooter can turn around. I hear the driver tell the man in the scooter, "It ain't your fault. It ain't your fault." (7/1/10, Line 720, Rapid)

Because the driver contacted his supervisor, we were not able to leave the stop, even though the man had already left the bus. People continued to leave the bus to board other Rapid and Local buses that passed by the stop. The man who caused the scene clearly had mental illness issues of some sort and his statement that the driver did not need to stop was inaccurate, but his outlandish claim highlighted the fact that stopping for someone in a wheelchair does involve a series of actions that ultimately cost travel time.

On numerous occasions, people would sigh, groan, or close their eyes at times when someone in a wheelchair was boarding. During one trip, the bus came to a stop where a man in a wheelchair was waiting with a few other people and I heard the man behind me say, "Goddamn." To a certain degree, the mentally ill man might therefore have been expressing the frustrations of other riders. However, riders generally appeared to understand these service disruptors to be part of bus-riding reality. People would work to speed up the boarding process by standing and flipping up the seats in the disabled seating area for the driver, and they would

move to other seats quickly. The bus riders in wheelchairs also helped by getting into position quickly and often buckling and unbuckling the safety straps themselves or telling the driver they did not need to be secured. One man in a wheelchair diffused any tension by loudly exclaiming, “A man’s just trying to get around!” and smiling at the driver.

6.2.3. Freeloaders and Other Rule Breakers

Freeloaders are riders who try to board without paying, either by sneaking past the driver, entering through a back door, or talking the driver into letting them on for free. The stigma of freeloading most often involves driver-passenger interactions, although occasionally a rider would chime in, as was the case one day when two women boarded the bus and stood in the aisle talking loudly and complaining about people who board the bus through the back door. Drivers dealt with freeloaders by either letting them on the bus or kicking them off; those who acquiesced would either be very blasé or bound by social expectations. Many drivers would just wave a freeloader on after the person made the request. It was a subtle interaction that few passengers even noticed. However, other drivers were clear about the right way to ask for free rides and what they expected in return:

An older woman gets on the bus and sits in the seat behind the driver. She’s wearing tights, Uggs-type boots, and a wool jacket and she has various large rings on her fingers. She doesn’t look homeless or especially disheveled, but she sits down and looks around a little crazily (her eyes are darting around). The driver turns around and asks the woman, “Are you ready to pay?” The woman ignores her and mumbles something. The driver asks her again and she says, “I don’t have any money!” The driver says, “Then ask for a ride! I’ll give you a ride. Don’t just sit down.” The woman then says quietly and very calmly, “Can I have a ride?”
(1/18/10, Line 780, Rapid)

Later a man got on this same bus and said something loudly to the driver (I could not hear

exactly what he said, but it was something about not having any money). The driver said, “Can you be a little more discreet?” The man had walked past her, but he turned around and said, “Oh, okay. How do I do that?” The driver said, “Just whisper.” In these situations, the driver was in effect coaching the freeloaders in strategies to help minimize the amount of attention drawn to the stigmatizing behavior of nonpayment, what Goffman describes as “covering,” where people “make a great effort to keep the stigma from looming large. The individual’s object is to reduce tension, that is, to make it easier for himself and the others to withdraw covert attention from the stigma, and to sustain spontaneous involvement in the official content of the interaction” (1963b:102).

Other drivers did not help freeloaders get by, but rather expended great effort to let everyone else on the bus know that someone was breaking the rules. One driver eventually let a teenage boy on the bus without paying, but only after making it clear to him that his behavior was unacceptable and she had tired of his freeloader tactics:

He has a bill in his hand and he’s talking to the driver. I hear her say, “No, son. You ran that on me last week. I let you slide. It’ll take it. It’ll take it.” She’s pointing to the fare box. (I think he’s telling her that he only has a \$5 or \$10 bill on him and no change for his fare – I’ve seen other people do this.) After chastising him for about a minute, she points to him, looks at him directly, and says, “Take a good look at my face.” Then she lets him go by.
(5/17/05, Line 20, Local)

On another trip, a driver contended with a large group of rowdy teenagers. There was much chaos as they boarded and the driver was talking loudly and saying, “One dollar. One quarter. Right here. Right now. Show me your pass. Now. Get off the bus. I said get off the bus.” This driver was clearly willing to verbally label the freeloaders as troublemakers and expel them from bus space.

Riders would forego the rules in other ways, and certain drivers and occasionally riders would point out the behavioral deviancies to the rest of the bus. When an older woman boarded the bus, a man sitting in the disabled seating area with a suitcase and backpack did not move. She said to him, "Can you get up? That's for seniors." In another situation, a man near the front of the bus was not standing behind the yellow safety line and he stumbled after the bus lurched forward:

The man gets off at the next stop and the driver gets on the speaker system and says, "If you get off at the front, stand behind the yellow line. Don't come across the yellow line. If you do, you'll be getting off at the back." He puts down the microphone, but then says aloud, "If you want an amusement ride, go to Disneyland. This is not a toy. Don't make that a habit on every bus you get on." (11/5/10, Line 20, Local)

In this case, the violator was long gone and the driver never confronted the perpetrator directly, but he highlighted the rider's status as the stigmatized rule breaker, the rider who does not have the sense to ride the bus properly.

The uninitiated is a related group of riders who break the rules, albeit largely unintentionally. Adam Gopnik, in a piece for *The New Yorker* titled "The People on the Bus," recounts a "traumatic bus experience" that kept him off buses in New York City for twenty years:

I got on a bus outside the Metropolitan Museum, saw that the fare was fifty cents, and, with the unquenchable cheerfulness of the visiting Canadian, proudly pulled out a dollar bill – an American dollar bill – folded it up neatly, stuffed the dollar in the fare box, two fares, and looked up expecting the driver to beam at my efficiency. I will never forget his look of disbelief and disgust, mingled, I think, with a certain renewed awe at the enormities that out-of-towners were capable of (2003:50).

My observations on buses in Los Angeles show responses to new riders that are the direct

opposite of Gopnik's experience. When two women got on the bus one day, they told the driver they needed a transfer. He asked where they were going and then helped them figure out the cost and where to transfer. He explained the day pass option to them as well. He also said that he would tell the next driver to let them know where to get off. When he switched off with another driver halfway through the route, he indeed told the other driver: "These ladies are going to Venice. This man [in a wheelchair] is going to Normandie." Among passengers, I saw numerous incidents of people helping other riders who were confused. On one bus ride, I found myself helping a woman who spoke Spanish and very little English to figure out where to transfer. Then an older Russian woman who also spoke little English joined in and the three of us, each with a different primary language, were working to communicate as effectively as we could. I explained to the woman that she needed to ride the line to the end and go around the corner to catch the other bus. The Russian woman got up and made her way to the back door. She pointed to me, nodded, and said, "Yes, all the way. End. Yes, yes." Sometimes the help is unsolicited, as was the case when an elderly man tried to help a confused-looking rider:

The older man sitting behind me is talking to a younger woman who seems a bit lost. She doesn't seem to speak much English and doesn't seem that receptive to help. He's asking her if she's going to UCLA and is telling her that the bus is coming to Westwood. She makes a face and says the name of what sounds like a school of some sort, but she's not giving him enough information to help her. She gets up to leave and I turn around and smile at the man. He says, "I was trying to help her!" and throws up his hands as he smiles. (9/19/11, Line 720, Rapid)

The response to these uninitiated riders I observed was rarely the hostility and exasperation Gopnik describes. Rather, riders and drivers in Los Angeles often went out of their way to help others learn to navigate what can be an understandably complicated and overwhelming

system.

6.3. Managing the Modal Stigma of the Bus

Transit advocates like to point out the various advantages of bus travel as compared to the auto: it is more environmentally friendly than driving a car, it helps reduce congestion, travel costs are lower, and it can be more convenient. Indeed, alighting from a bus at a stop in Beverly Hills or downtown Los Angeles – where parking is notoriously difficult and expensive – challenges the external stigma of bus riding as categorically inferior and undesirable. However, transit has its disadvantages. When you are perched high in a seat on a bus, you can look out the window at people in their cars, comfortably ensconced in their own personal spaces, with their cup holders and radios and air conditioners. They have the freedom to change their travel plans by just turning left instead of right. They can buy bags of groceries because things are easy to transport in a car. Drivers never need to contend with sweaty, smelly bodies or a hot, airless bus interior or dirty handles and poles that have been touched a thousand times. People weigh the costs and benefits of travel when making their mode choices, and transit has inherent qualities that make it generally less desirable than the automobile; many of the service factors actually contribute to the stigma associated with buses as a mode of travel. People on buses manage these stigma-related challenges in a variety of ways – from complaining and commiserating, to working to normalize bus activities, to reconceptualizing their identities as bus riders.

6.3.1. Complaining

Civil inattention and attempts to limit direct interactions with others may be the norm on buses, but riders complain quite a bit about their experiences. Complaining as a response to the

modal stigma of buses involves an individual person making a comment about some shortcoming of the bus trip without any expectations about other people responding directly. On a bus that was moving along slowly, a man behind me said, "Let's get to Bronson. Goddamn." A woman said, to no one in particular, "This bus is freezing. I'm dying." During another trip on a bus traveling down Hollywood Boulevard, I heard a boy say to his friend, "So slow." Some complaining involved lengthier and more dramatic commentaries:

A few stops later, a man gets on the bus. He has a big white bandage taped to his leg. He says loudly as he's walking back, "Oh, it's hot in here! There's no air conditioning? You should turn on the air conditioning. No air conditioning?" Then he sighs loudly and sits down. (9/11/11, Line 180, Local)

A couple stops later a woman got on the bus with a small folding bike. As she made her way down the aisle, she bumped into the man with the bandage. She said, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me" and continued to a seat near the back door of the bus. The man continued mumbling and complaining. The woman said loudly, "The bike can come on the bus. I said I was sorry. Let it go!"

People would complain openly about drivers as well. On a bus one night, a supervisor boarded the bus to ride with the driver. A few stops later, the driver said, "Pull over here?" and the supervisor got off. He walked around the side of a building and I could not see where he was going. The man behind me said, "Oh, you gotta be kidding." A few minutes later the supervisor came back to the bus, and we pulled away from the curb past the front of the building, a convenience store. The man said, "He has a lot of balls, huh? Asshole." During another trip, a rider said, "Aw, what a dick" when a driver refused to let a group of us on a bus that did not appear to be full.

In all these cases, the complaining was a verbalization of discontent and dissatisfaction, a way to let off steam about the inferiority of transit travel. Complaining can also be nonverbal – when people would groan or sigh loudly, for example, or when a woman covered her face with her hand and grimaced on a bus overwhelmed by strong body odor. These are strategies where people express their feelings, subtly or more directly, but do not actively engage other riders on the bus or necessarily want affirmation about a shared inferior experience. This is a way to express displeasure without expending much energy or risking the consequences of a more open and aggressive confrontation.

6.3.2. Commiserating

In other cases, people seek acknowledgement from drivers or other riders on the bus. Commiserating with other people is a common and significant stigma management tactic. An experience shared with others – even just one other person – appears to mitigate the many challenges people faced using buses. Often, the commiserating event would involve short exchanges about a particular person or event. On one trip, our bus was delayed, and a woman asked if she could walk from where we were located on Wilshire Boulevard to downtown. Someone told her that she needed to catch a bus because it was too far to walk. She said, “I’m not in a hurry. I just want this [bus] trip to end.” I found myself engaging in acts of commiseration a number of times. Once, as a very disruptive man was preparing to exit the bus, I looked over at the woman sitting next to me and smiled at her. I said softly, “Please get off!” and she rolled her eyes. While standing at a stop on a very hot day, I said to a man who walked up, “It’s hot, huh?” He said, “It’s unbelievable.” These interactions, while extremely brief, make unpleasant circumstances appear more tolerable to those involved and, as was the

case with complaining, provide an outlet for pent-up frustration.

Discussions about service quality would emerge among riders and between riders and drivers. A number of these incidents were about specific issues regarding buses or service, but were also indictments of Metro and its perceived disconnect from management, operation, and design issues affecting riders. During one ride, a woman had a discussion with a driver about problems with the Rapid buses:

The woman asks the driver if they ran out of red buses (because this Rapid bus is one of the orange [Local] buses). The driver tells her that when it rains and the red buses go through puddles, it causes some problem and the buses go out of commission. The woman says, "Why buy buses that break down?" The driver says, "They're [Metro managers] idiots. Get two drivers so you can design buses that are comfortable for the public." The woman complains that the steps are too high and shallow and it's hard to get up and down them. She says that Metro should have riders help with the design also. She says that the buses stop too far from the curb. The driver says that the buses have to stop eighteen inches from the curb, but that she tries to get as close as she can. She talks about how the inside of the red Rapid buses aren't high enough for tall people and she was surprised the first time she went into one. (1/18/10, Line 780, Rapid)

One man complained to a driver about a different driver on that route, and the driver provided both a commentary on "those drivers" as well as details about her driving schedule:

The man says, "I was coming back yesterday. There was a driver, young, cocky, driving that bus crazy. Do you know her? Hispanic, young, attractive. She was driving that bus like a trucker." The driver says she doesn't know that driver. She says, "Us old drivers. We take our time. Like, I know exactly how long it takes to get from here to Eagle Rock. New people don't know that." The man asks, "How many roundtrips do you do?" She says, "Two and a half trips in nine hours. I usually drive nineteen." The man groans and says, "You're a very patient person." (2/11/10, Line 180, Local)

In this example, both the driver and passenger affirmed each other's service concerns and

challenges. Another example of an allegiance between a driver and passenger around service problems happened as the bus pulled up to a stop one night, and the driver started honking at the bus in front of him and flashing his lights. He then pulled up to the stop, opened the door, and said to a woman standing at the curb, "You should report him. He's supposed to stop. I flashed my high beams at him and honked to wait.⁶⁰ It's bus 6439. Don't tell them I told you the number of the bus. Just tell them you saw it, okay?" (11/5/10, Line 20, Local)

On a different day, a mysterious vapor started coming out of a crack near the back door of an articulated Rapid bus. A man near me took control by assessing the situation and relaying messages through the passengers to the driver:

A man sitting behind me jumps up out of his seat and walks to the front of the bus. Another man sitting near me says loudly, "You know you're leaking coolant?" but the driver cannot hear him because the bus is so long and we're sitting in the back half. Then I notice the bright green liquid that's pouring out of a crack near the side of the door. It's sort of gushing out and pooling on the floor. Periodically, the tilting of the bus toward the curb makes the liquid slosh out the gap between the bottom of the door and the floor. The man says, "It's pouring out over there." The man sits down across from the door watching it and says, "It's hot, too. See the steam. Look over, see it leaking down. You can smell it, too. We need to get off of here." (11/9/10, Line 720, Rapid)

When the man announced that he believed we needed to get off the bus, we all diligently stood up and prepared to make our way to the front of the bus. Someone yelled, "Sue 'em!" The man said to the driver, "It's radiator fluid. He's lucky it didn't fall on him." I heard someone say, "It did." Another person said, "That's a lawsuit!" While we in the back of the bus dealt with the situation at hand, following the lead of the man who stepped in as our temporary crisis

⁶⁰ Initially I thought the woman was a disabled rider and the bus driver had passed her by. However, I believe the driver was on a connecting bus and was supposed to wait for passengers transferring from another line that connected at that stop.

manager, riders at the front of the bus helped to relieve some of the tension by blaming Metro for the service inconvenience through the suggestion that a lawsuit might be in order.

Commiserating also happens frequently at stops as a way to ameliorate the tedium of waiting for what is often a late bus or the next bus after a missed one. At a stop one day, I saw two women running for a bus, but the driver did not stop. The bus then stopped at a light up the block, so the women ran down the sidewalk and waved at the driver from the curb. The driver ignored them. As they were walking back to the stop, I heard one of the women say in Spanish that the driver saw them running. At another stop on a very warm day, I felt as if I had been waiting for twenty or more minutes for the bus to come, a Local bus that usually runs frequently along Wilshire Boulevard:

A short, pudgy Asian man was talking on his cell phone in English, and he has a thick accent. He says to me, "What bus you wait for?" I say, "The 20." He says, "I see two, three go that way" and he points east [I'm headed west]. He says, "How long you been here?" I say, "I think I got here after you." He says, "I here when you get here. Sometime driver go." He points again. There are two other people (two women) also waiting at the stop. I think we're all pretty hot and irritated. The man says, "Maybe it is coming," and he looks at a bus up the street. (9/6/11, Line 20, Local)

Asking me how long I had been waiting and looking up the street for me were small gestures, but I felt much less frustrated by the fact that I had been waiting so long. This sense of a shared experience – in this case, a modal experience that was less than stellar – was a temporary fix for the immediate problem and a way for all of us, the modally dispossessed, to just get through that particular incident. On a different day, a woman at another stop walked up and started talking to me after she saw I just missed a bus:

She asks, "What bus are you waiting for?" I say, "The 217. The one he missed." I point in the direction of a man standing nearby. She

says, "You have to pay attention. They don't have compassion." I say, "Yeah, they stop down there, they stop here." I point up and down the block. She says, "One is coming that direction." She points to a 217 that's going south and turning the corner. . . . When the 217 pulls up, she waves to me. (9/5/11, bus stop)

Again, the commiserating here is important in temporarily alleviating the emotion and stress that come with traveling on a mode that allows little personal control and decision-making. I had no choice but to continue standing there waiting for the next bus; this fellow bus rider was telling me that my less-than-ideal situation was not my fault, but rather due to the fact that some drivers do not care ("They don't have compassion"). I then responded by pointing out that the buses for the same route stop in different places, a way to reassure myself that the challenges traveling by bus are due to factors beyond my control.

6.3.3. Destigmatizing Bus Space

Bus riders engage in various strategies to normalize bus space, various acts that help facilitate the smooth functioning of the bus and make it a less inferior mode of travel, but also that foster a sense of community and familiarity. Most often this occurs through a great deal of cooperation and, as described earlier, this includes the positive disruptions that help dispel the perception of buses solely as sites of deviance and other negative behavior. The cooperative acts can be very small, such as a woman who reached over to push back the teetering grocery bags of another woman, who had walked to the front of the bus to talk to the driver. On a mode that can be physically challenging for elderly riders, a driver pulled as close to the curb as possible when the bus reached an elderly man's stop, and a passenger helped him as well:

A couple stops later, the elderly man says, "I'll be coming out here, driver." When we get to the stop, he says, "Thank you for getting so close to the curb." He gets off at the front door of the

bus and he's having problems getting down again. A man who is waiting at the stop helps him lift a cart off the bus. The man says, "Thank you. You're a great man." (1/27/10, Line 180, Local)

In another situation, a woman's shopping bag dropped to the floor and a woman sitting nearby pointed to it and told her male companion, "Give her that." The man got up, grabbed the bag, handed it to the woman, and said, "Here you go, ma'am." As we approached another stop, a woman looked around for the pull cord, but it did not run to where she was standing. Two people immediately reached out and pulled the cord for her.

These cooperative efforts serve to make up for the challenges of transit travel, the many small factors that quantitative analyses of transit use, even rider surveys, largely fail to identify, such as the physical challenges for some people in getting on and off buses, the difficulties involved in transporting personal items, and the need to communicate with the driver. Drivers and passengers also cooperate in another interesting way that helps mitigate the aspects of bus riding that make it less ideal than auto travel. Often, the physical and operational features of a bus route – the stops, the schedule, the connections to other lines and parts of the transit network – function more efficiently in theory than they do in practice.

Drivers would often drop people off at locations not designated as stops for that route. For example, a passenger headed east on a bus to an intersection with a farside stop (on the east side of the intersection) might have to alight and cross two streets to reach the stop for a southbound bus connection. In this case, getting off before the intersection might mean the difference between catching a bus and missing it (and having to wait for a long period of time for the next bus). Many riders would ask drivers to let them off at unofficial points along the route, and drivers usually complied because they understood these intricacies of bus travel:

An older woman gets on. She's having a hard time getting up the stairs. She says, "I'm getting off at the next stop." The driver says, "Santa Monica?" The woman says, "If the light is still red by the time you get down there, can I get off on this side?" The driver says, "Yeah." The woman says, "Only if it's red." A few seconds go by and the woman says, "I missed the bus anyway." The driver says, "Which one?" The woman says, "The 4." The woman gets off at the Santa Monica stop (on the farside) and tells the driver to have a good night. (1/18/10, Line 780, Rapid)

In many cases, drivers would offer to drop off people without specific requests from riders: At Wilshire and Fairfax, the driver announced, "If you want to get off on this side, I will gladly let you off here. Those of you who want to get off on the other side, I will be happy to drop you off there." Along Wilshire Boulevard heading west, buses would often get caught in severe traffic near Westwood. On many occasions, drivers would let us off a block or even two from the actual stop at Wilshire and Westwood. These adaptations helped make the buses function in ways that were substantially more efficient for the people actually using them. If we had been forced to stay on those buses until we reached actual stops, the modal stigma of the bus would have been highlighted. Instead, these informal service adjustments emerged from a complicit understanding between drivers and riders about how the system could and should function better. These slight tweaks help improve the experience of bus riding and, in the process, lessen the factors that contribute to transit's stigma and perceived inferiority.

A final strategy to help counter the stigma of buses and make them more acceptable as public spaces involves what I came to call "friendly talk." This collegial conversation works to make the bus feel more like a "normal" public space, one that is more than a just space that brings people together whose primary bond is that they lack other, more desirable transportation options. These discussions would be rich and detailed, but were less like the

confessionals described earlier and more like pleasant conversations between strangers. For example, a young man told an elderly man about what happened on the show *The Deadliest Catch* the night before. Then he described one of his fishing trips to the man:

He says, "I'm a trout guy. Trout and catfish. I take wild green onions that you find in the Sierras." He talks about how he stuffs the fish cavity with butter, oil, onions, and peppers. Then he tells the man about eating a deep fried fish and how it was delicious. A woman sitting across from the younger man gets up to leave the bus. He says, "Bye, dear. Enjoy your kids on their four-day vacation." A couple minutes later, the older man gets up to leave the bus. The younger man says, "Bye, sir. Nice talking to you. Bye, captain!" (2/11/10, Line 180, Local)

Then the younger man turned to the driver and said, "I like when you meet people like that."

The driver responded, "A lot of people like that." The man said, "You must get a lot of regulars, huh?" She said, "Yeah, he's a regular." Then he asked the driver what she planned to do for Valentine's Day and the conversation continued. On another trip, a man chatted with the driver and reminisced about his first Ozzfest concert.

He tells the driver about how he lost his job at a cheap theater in Norwalk because he had tickets to see Ozzy Osbourne. The driver says, "You have a good memory." He says, "Yeah, I do." Then he tells her about the first time he listened to Black Sabbath. He says he was hanging out with friends and a woman told him to listen to it. He says, "I thought, Zeppelin sucks! That's chick rock anyway. Changed my life. Grew my hair out." (2/11/10, Line 180, Local)

These conversations – even those that only engage a couple people – serve to humanize and legitimize bus space and move it from the realm of the social deviant to one where regular people have the same sorts of friendly conversations and interaction they might expect to have in a less stigma-bound social setting.

6.3.4. Legitimizing the Bus Rider Identity

Another means that bus riders use to contend with the stigma of the bus is by addressing their identities as bus riders in various ways. On several occasions, riders would make comments rationalizing their presence on buses. A man talking on his cell phone one day said, “I’m on the bus right now. It’s my alternator.” Another man told a woman sitting near him that his car was in the shop and this was the first time he has been on a bus in twenty years. The woman at the stop who made the comment about drivers lacking compassion went on to tell me that she has a car she uses to get to work and go shopping, but she takes transit and walks for everything else. In these examples, particular riders make an effort to distinguish themselves from other bus riders – those without other mode choices and access to a car – by pointing out that they are riding the bus temporarily or by choice. This attempt to deny their identity as bus riders is subtle but telling.

On another trip, I heard a woman tell her friend, “They all come out at night” referring to the other bus riders around them, people she apparently perceived to be unlike herself and her friend. A man on one trip told the bus driver his opinions about the extension west of the Metro Red Line, where he thought the stops should go, and where it should be routed underground. He told the driver he did not think they should let homeless people in the stations. “They don’t pay their fare anyway. Do they?” he asked the driver. This distancing also can happen through physical cues such as the woman in a business pants suit, sweater, and loafers who was clutching a binder that said “Account Management.” She was sitting up very straight and stiff and looking around a lot. Her body language suggested that the bus was not a space she frequented often and she felt uncomfortable. Again, these riders are making an

effort to reposition their identities relative to those of others, either through verbal comments about the ways they are different or through physical signals about not belonging. By placing themselves outside of the realm of the transit rider in these various ways, they work to legitimize their own participation in bus spaces and distance themselves from the stigma that accompanies that identity and status, while also reinforcing the existence of the stigma to themselves and to those around them.

6.4. Summary

The stigma around buses is complicated and multidimensional. For one, it involves the stigma of identity – that of the bus rider relegated to what is perceived to be an inferior transportation mode as well as a locale populated by socially undesirable people. Simultaneously, these stigmatized individuals come to define transit spaces as uncomfortable sites of tension, violation, and exclusion. Much of this stigma is generated outside of transit spaces by popular culture and by stereotypes of those assumed to use transit: the poor, immigrants, and the socially and economically disenfranchised. Of stereotypes, Sibley says, “Both the self and the world are split into good and bad objects, and the bad self, the self associated with fear and anxiety over the loss of control, is projected onto bad objects. Fear precedes the construction of the bad object, the negative stereotype, but the stereotype – simplified, distorted and at a distance – perpetuates that fear” (1995:15). Thus, these stereotypes help generate and maintain the stigmatization of both a group of travelers and their mode of transport, a form of socio-spatial stigma where the physical and the social continually reinforce and perpetuate each other.

However, stigmas exist within the confines of transit spaces as well, and they reveal the

complex dynamics of transit spaces, the hierarchies of this unique mobile public space, and the ways in which people seek to manage their own identities and interactions. Various identity stigmas exist within the bus around those who are marked: the social outcasts, the disruptors, the freeloaders, and the rule breakers. These individuals are distinguished from the “normals” of bus space, and responses to their presence run the gamut from condemnation to tolerance to acceptance. The bus as a mode is stigmatized as well, and riders accept and also work to challenge the inferiority of transit as compared to the auto. People openly complain about their issues with buses and bus service, and they also help each other get through by commiserating. They work to legitimize their experience by fostering an atmosphere of normalcy – through friendly talk and in-group bonding – and they sometimes seek to normalize their own identities by disavowing their relationship to the transit world. In any case, the management of stigma within bus spaces helps to challenge some of the external perceptions of the stigmatized space and experience of transit while deflecting and mitigating some of the very real consequences of participating in bus spaces.

7. CONCLUSION

Sheldon: All right, I suppose I'll go put on my bus pants.

Leonard: What the hell are "bus pants"?

Sheldon: They are pants one wears over regular pants when one sits on bus seats that other people have previously sat on. But, perhaps from your lofty heights atop the corporate ladder, you've lost touch with the struggles of the common man.

– *Big Bang Theory*, CBS

People love to talk about buses in Los Angeles. Or rather, they love to talk about the one trip they ever made on a bus – usually unpleasant in some major way – or ponder what riding the bus must surely be like, even if they have never been on one. While conducting this research, I would regularly find myself deep in conversation with people asking if I really rode the bus for days just watching people, what was the strangest thing I had ever seen, and if people really used buses in Los Angeles. They were often surprised when I would describe the size of the bus system, and how it compared to those in other large cities. They would use buses, people told me, if public transit in general were more convenient and faster. But, time after time, people would also describe their most salient bus experiences, usually the very negative ones, to explain why buses were unfamiliar to them – how they would, of course, use transit except there was that time the homeless person smelled horrible, the woman started screaming, or they could barely move because it was so crowded. Their experiences turned them off to transit, and their preference for driving then made perfect sense.

Recently, I was telling an acquaintance at the gym about my project, and he looked over at his girlfriend, smiled at her, and said to me, "Bus pants. Do you know about the bus pants?"

Then he told me about the segment from *Big Bang Theory* and continued by recounting the horrible, six-hour bus experience he once had when he was carless in L.A. Buses are a source of fascination, mystery, and intrigue for many people in Los Angeles, particularly those who do not ride them at all or only very occasionally. The bus system is almost a parallel transportation world, one that people witness in operation as they navigate through Los Angeles in their cars, seeing people at stops and buses traveling on roads. Yet buses remain a public space into which they rarely set foot, and their perceptions of bus spaces are often shaped by popular culture or a single experience (or, in many cases, someone else's recounted single experience). For many millions of other people, however, buses are a daily reality, and riders contend with what is a very complicated social setting. The goal of this research was to document, unravel, and understand the social life on buses using ethnography not just to help fill in the large methodological gap in the transportation research literature, but also to reveal the complexities of bus spaces – as common, yet very overlooked, public spaces and an important part of our social world.

7.1. Behavior and Social Norms on Buses in Los Angeles

This research has shown that behavior and social interactions on transit – the rules of behavior, the procedural aspects of bus riding, and the types of disruptions that emerge in bus spaces – are relatively consistent. For buses to function properly, people must cooperate in the physical and emotional space of buses and follow a standard set of rules for waiting, boarding, riding, and alighting. These largely unwritten social rules also provide a baseline for normalcy in bus space: when someone behaves in a way that oversteps the boundaries of these norms, a disruption has occurred. The various disruptions in the social order identified from the

fieldwork in this study can be grouped along five dimensions: 1) negative to positive, 2) individual to group, 3) brief to sustained, 4) routine to unusual, and 5) intimates to strangers. These categories are not mutually exclusive and, in fact, the boundaries between disruptions can be unclear, particularly when they happen in sequence. The impact of a disruption can vary, with many disruptions being quite minor, while others upend the social stability of the bus in major ways for short or extended periods of time – sometimes even after the source of the disruption (most often a person) is no longer part of the physical space of the bus.

As further analysis of the fieldwork data has shown, behaviors and the disruptions that ensue from violated rules are not distributed evenly across bus space. Rather, differences in the built and physical environments of Rapid and Local bus networks coincide with systematic differences in behavior seen along these routes. The Rapid system along the east-west Wilshire Boulevard corridor, Line 720, has clearly and distinctly branded rail-like features and amenities; these elements help riders navigate the transit network more effectively by facilitating identification of buses and stops, conveying information about how to use the Rapids, and encouraging the fast and efficient boarding and alighting of passengers. The Local stops are much more ambiguously defined spaces: often a stop will consist of just a pole and a sign. At these less definitively marked spaces, behaviors are not as predictable and organized. People generally do not spend time queuing in anticipation of a bus arriving, nor is systematic boarding necessarily rewarded with the time and service advantages provided by the Rapid bus design. Local riders also often do not have the benefits of the shelters or shade that they can expect at Rapid stops.

The Rapid system as a whole, however, is not consistent and stops along the 780 route,

running north to south between the mid-Wilshire district and Pasadena, merge with Local stops to create hybrid stops, where the two lines share shelters, benches, or other stop features. The wayfinding and ease-of-use advantages of the Rapid system are diminished without the signage, infrastructure, and color cues found along the Wilshire Boulevard stops, and Metro's opportunity to create an aesthetically and experientially seamless system is lost along this route. While these hybrid stops avoid the two-tiered system of stops found along the 720 and 20 Wilshire Boulevard routes, this melding of the Rapid and Local systems along the 780 and 180-217 routes decreases the service efficiency and the advantages to having a clearly branded and highly distinct route.

Behavior on the Rapid and Local buses also differs considerably, with the Rapid buses being much tighter, regulated social spaces than the Local buses. Fewer disruptions occur on Rapid buses, and people are less tolerant to indiscretions by other passengers. Situations where drivers or passengers confront people about their behavior most often happen on Rapid buses. Local buses, by contrast, are looser social spaces of greater leeway in terms of disruptions, with many more disruptions and people rarely overtly expressing displeasure or discomfort. This lack of experiential consistency on Local buses results in a much less stable and predictable riding experience, and, in understanding transit use as a consumer experience, this poses concerns about the emotional and psychological challenges that riders face in using transit and about the difficulties in attracting new riders. At the same time, the Local buses, despite the ongoing disruptions to the social order, are more intimate social spaces where people are more likely to engage and share details about their lives – the confessional behavior of the bus.

Finally, the fieldwork from this research reveals the ways in which people manage bus

stigma within the confines of bus spaces. The stigma of the bus is socio-spatial in that it involves the stigma of bus spaces themselves, as well as the stigma associated with those using that space as bus riders. Much of this stigma is external to the bus, and the perceptions of buses and their riders are generated largely through popular culture. Within the confines of the bus, however, people do contend with stigma management as they negotiate bus space and the behaviors and social interactions within it. Not all bus riders are stigmatized, but the ones who disregard social norms become marked riders: the social outcasts, the spatial and service disruptors, and the freeloaders and other rule breakers. People in each of these groups somehow challenge the rules of bus space, with varying responses from drivers and other riders, including civil inattention and civility toward diversity, confrontation, indulgence, and empathy.

People on buses also cope with the modal stigma of bus riding – the ways in which bus service is inferior to other modes such as driving. They complain, commiserate, cooperate to make buses function better (including passengers working together and drivers altering bus protocols), and act to legitimize their bus rider identities. These different internal stigmas, the way they are applied, and riders' and drivers' responses to them show that the identities of bus riders are far from being homogenous. Rather, bus riders are operating in a dynamic social world where issues around stigma are constantly reshaped and evolving.

The sum of these findings points to several larger themes. First, behavior on buses is a complex phenomenon that is simultaneously consistent and inconsistent. Riding a bus is a largely routinized and predictable phenomenon as many of the rules of behavior are established and vary little across the transit system. A new rider may need to learn these

expectations, particularly the more informal and less official rules, but once a rider has assimilated this knowledge, the steps to riding the bus are relatively uncomplicated. At the same time, disruptions often occur in this generally smoothly operating system of social behaviors and cues. People overstep physical, psychological, and emotional boundaries constantly. The extent to which these are minor glitches in the social order – ordinary troubles with little or no consequence – varies as well when incidents occur that can disrupt service or significantly affect the experiential qualities of people’s bus trips.

Second, and related to disruptions in the social order, is the difficulty involved in directly controlling behavior on buses. Buses are by nature very accessible, egalitarian public spaces providing the service of mobility, one that some argue is essentially a social service, to anyone who needs it. The fare is this public space’s only barrier to entry, and the most destitute can still often board a bus simply by asking a driver to overlook this fee. As such, buses are sites of social diversity and result in a rich yet intense mix of people brought together in the confines of a somewhat small physical space. This is a public space filled with people who have different motivations, experiences, and abilities and so the levels of willingness to cooperate will inevitably differ. As a result, controlling behavior by directly limiting the access of particular people deemed undesirable is a strategy that would be largely infeasible on public buses – for example, the exclusion of homeless people from private and, increasingly, public spaces.⁶¹

Third, service type is a relevant factor in understanding behavior on buses in Los Angeles, particularly around physical space and amenities. The physical features of much of the Rapid

⁶¹ The higher fares, however, on premium services that tend to attract a higher income ridership, such as commuter bus routes or rail, do serve to exclude more people, thereby creating a more homogenous and potentially less socially unpredictable social space.

system are clear and distinct, a reflection of Metro's effort to create a high-quality bus system with superior service that will attract and serve new riders. The observed behaviors and the experience on Rapid buses were very different from those of the Locals with the Rapid bus experience, especially on the route along Wilshire Boulevard, usually orderly and relatively consistent. The Local buses, on the other hand, were the much more unpredictable, less regulated bus spaces. As the paired Rapid and Local routes were moving through the same geographic space, these differences in disruptions and people's tolerance of these disruptions suggest that physical space – both at stops and on buses – conveys different social expectations and norms.

Finally, socioeconomic status and identity appear to be less contentious issues than would be expected in a social setting that brings together people from different racial/ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Race in particular was a factor I expected to emerge regularly as a disruption trigger or a consequence of a disruption. Instead, overt racial conflict occurred only a handful of times and usually as a manifestation of mental illness rather than as a coherent attack on identity. And, while the markers of class status were present in bus spaces, they did not appear to be very relevant. A person's work clothes might be a clue to working- or middle-class status, just as filthy, unwashed clothes and bags of personal possessions would suggest someone is likely homeless. However, people rarely made efforts to distinguish themselves from other riders around class and in this sense, again, buses are very egalitarian, equalizing public spaces.

7.2. Academic Research and the Social Life on Buses

The findings of this study show that buses are indeed rich and dynamic sites of public life.

They reveal much not just about how people travel and what they experience during their journeys, but also about people's lives outside of transit spaces and the ways in which travel on buses interfaces with these other realities. Much of the public space research is applicable to buses, as evidenced by the references to many of Goffman's (1963a;1971) ideas on relations in public space. Several early studies examined the sociology of transit spaces (buses and subways) (Davis et al. 1966; Davis and Levine 1967; Levine et al. 1973; Nash 1975), but this research is over three decades old; the current findings reflect the role of transit in contemporary society, challenges facing transit agencies today, and the current social dynamics that are relevant in bus spaces. The findings also confirm that buses are indeed a legitimate public space where the complicated and intricate occurrences of social life play out as they do in many other public venues. However, they are also mobile public spaces traveling through and interfacing with different elements of the urban landscape, and this quality makes them distinct from other public spaces.

The travel behavior and demographics research tells us a great deal at the aggregate level about the people using transit, particularly that the ridership on buses is made up largely of low-income travelers, racial and ethnic minorities, and immigrants (Pucher and Renne 2003; Blumenberg 2009). This information, however, does not reveal much about the ways in which people experience and understand this mode, the compromises they make traveling on buses, the advantages bus travel affords them, and the challenges involved in using a mode that is ultimately an accessible public space. While the small body of qualitative transportation research sheds light on people's perceptions of transit, the focus groups and interview data reveal less about people's actual actions than the ways they talk about their experiences

(Guiver 2007). Participant observation, on the other hand, provides rich, experiential data about events unfolding over periods of time (in this case, bus trips) and therefore provides insight into the intricacies of both short, discrete events and longer, more ongoing events, relationships, and interactions that develop on buses.

This research also sought to bring together the more theoretical aspects of travel and mobility from the mobilities literature with the analytical and empirical side of transportation research. Using a sociological lens to understand transportation, a world that transportation researchers normally measure and quantify, sheds light on this large gap in the research literature. At the same time, the mobilities research focuses on more abstract notions of people's relations to travel – using concepts such as performativity and passengering, for example – that have little practical application and do not provide much tangible evidence to help inform transportation policy and planning or the management and operations decisions at the transit agency level.

A goal of this study, therefore, was to bridge these two extremes by employing ethnography to examine aspects of transit spaces, particularly around behavior and social interaction, that are difficult if not impossible to quantify, while also considering what the quantitative research tells us about the people using transit. A categorical variable such as race and ethnicity is important in understanding the demographics of transit ridership and the relationship of transit to other modes and equity issues, but to consider this factor as part of a critical analysis of the social life on buses is a much different perspective. Although this research ultimately suggests that, in the context of bus spaces, racial and ethnic identities are less salient than the world outside of buses perceives them to be, examining behavior on buses

through this lens is an important step in more deeply understanding people's experiences on buses.

This study's findings suggest that qualitative research should become a standard and accepted approach to exploring and understanding transportation and travel. A more specific focus on the transit experience could offer additional and alternative perspectives to our understanding of mode choice and travel behavior. In particular, real-time data from the perspective of transit users would provide invaluable insight into what users understand to be salient as they navigate public transit networks. The recent developments in mobile technologies provide researchers with a multitude of opportunities to capture these data and communicate with participants. These technologies, however, should also be used with caution due to different levels of access and technological literacy. In the case of transit, this is even more of a concern when considering issues of technological disenfranchisement among low-income and non-English-speaking monolingual riders.

7.3. Implications for Transit Policy and Practice

In *My Kind of Transit*, urban designer Darrin Nordahl advocates for design approaches to transit that help promote positive transportation experiences, ones that he believes will help lure people out of their cars because "a ride aboard transit should be seen as an opportunity to connect with all kinds of people and all kinds of places within a city, a compelling offer that the automobile cannot match. Quite simply, people should *want* to ride public vehicles, not feel as if they have to" (2008:124). His first case study is the transportation system running down Main Street, U.S.A. at Disneyland, and most of the other examples in his book involve tourist transit experiences: cable cars, streetcars, monorails, shuttles, and funiculars. Unfortunately, his

suggestions that transit agencies pursue modes that provide these experiences for people require that they also disregard what transportation planners know to be priorities for riders, such as travel time:

Speed and efficiency, though important considerations, should not be the sole criteria [sic] for successful transit, just as streets should not be designed exclusively for these purposes either. . . . Designing the transit car and transit route for the single purpose of moving people as quickly as possible through the city yields a diminished experience for both the passenger inside the vehicle and the pedestrian along the street. A passenger vehicle that travels a mere ten miles per hour, such as the New Orleans's streetcar, may be anathema to current transportation ideology, Indeed, such a pace, modestly more brisk than jogging, requires all traffic to move with leisure. Time that is lost to that destination, however, is time afforded to the passenger to people-watch, window-shop, and sightsee, to take pleasure in the sounds and voices heard along the street, and to savor the aroma of cafes, bakeries, blossoms, and unique scents of a place. (Nordahl 2008:136-37)

In the transit worlds Nordahl describes, behavioral disruptions are nonexistent and people need not rush to work in order to clock in on time or get home to put dinner on the table. Instead people travel in safe, quaint, idyllic spaces with other people who are more similar to than they are different from each other. A man on a bus talking on a cell phone described the next legs of his journey, the Red Line and then the Orange Line. Then he said, "I have to go to the house. I have to take the fucking buses. It will take a while. . . . I don't get it. I have 35 minutes to get to my house." For this transit rider, his primary concern is travel speed (and likely fewer transfers as well) rather than experiencing the pleasures of Los Angeles' urban landscape in a slow-moving vehicle.

In reality, transit operators are dealing with complicated social worlds – on their systems of buses and stops, as well as in the neighborhoods and communities through which their lines

run. As this ethnographic research has shown, buses bring people together to create a complex social setting, one where norms of behavior help maintain a certain level of social order while also helping to restore this order when the rules are broken. However, design alone will not create stable social spaces on buses nor will it guarantee positive experiences. A rider's experience on buses will include some aspects of design (as discussed previously in terms of Rapid versus Local lines), but is also heavily dependent on the realities of the urban landscape in which a system operates and the behaviors of the people who use buses. The many challenges riders face each time they participate in bus spaces – including disruptions, stigma, crowding, physical violations, psychological and emotional discomfort, and safety concerns – will continue to be part of the bus-riding experience. Although transit operators should always strive to provide services that are as safe, comfortable, and convenient as possible, to expect transit to be a purely positive and fulfilling experience is disingenuous and frankly infeasible.

Accordingly, this study suggests that transit agencies should conduct research that taps into more experiential aspects of bus riding; while passenger satisfaction surveys are economical, the information they provide is decidedly limited. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) recently released a smartphone application called “See Say” that allows riders to report information – photos, text, and location – to agency authorities (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority 2012). Although the tool is intended to help riders communicate with dispatchers about safety and security issues, transit agencies could use such an application to gather useful data about the physical and social aspects of transit trips. In addition, agency officials should consider commissioning ethnographic and other in-depth qualitative studies of their systems. While such studies are time-consuming, marketing research

firms in the private sector routinely conduct ethnographic work to reveal consumer attitudes and experiences.

Behavior on buses, as discussed earlier, is difficult to control, especially on a large network where a heterogeneous ridership is constantly coming and going. An important goal of agencies should be one of a consistency of experience with minimized disruptions, rather than the normative pleasurable transit experience that Nordahl naively advocates. Travel behavior research discussed in the literature review and the findings of this ethnographic fieldwork collectively suggest that travelers value a consistent and reliable transit trip, both with respect to departure and arrival times as well as the social experience of riding the bus. To create a more consistent experience, agencies can use strategies described earlier, such as the elimination of gaps in the branding of buses and stops throughout the system, in order to create a more predictable and easy-to-navigate travel experience; this in turn can help bolster riders' sense of ownership of transit spaces. In addition, the various issues of stigma explored in this study are ones that agencies can address more directly and proactively. The external stigma of buses and bus riding suggests that non-users need to understand the bus through a series of consistent experiences rather than through individual, largely negative ones. The stigma management happening on the bus, particularly modal stigma, can be addressed and ameliorated through a more thorough understanding of the things people describe and articulate – topics discussed while complaining and commiserating, for example – and the ways in which drivers and passengers adjust and adapt to different aspects of the process of bus riding itself.

7.4. The Evolving World of Transit and Final Thoughts

I conducted my participant observation work over the course of several years – in 2005 and then again in the midst of a major and ongoing global recession that began in early 2008. Social and economic developments can have great impacts on transit ridership and the management and operation of transit networks. While the overall Metro transit network remained largely the same during my fieldwork, these external influences, as well as various system changes and expansions, could affect the types and qualities of behaviors and interactions on buses in the long term. Along with the recession and high levels of unemployment, gas prices began to increase in 2008, and this affected transit agencies in significant ways. Higher gas prices resulted in record increases in transit ridership levels across the country, as people who normally drove began switching, at least temporarily, to transit modes. During the first quarter of 2012, overall transit ridership in systems across the country increased almost 5% compared to the year before. Overall ridership on Metro's system increased by 3.2% and bus ridership increased by 2.3% (American Public Transportation Association 2012b).

This has also likely led to some demographic shifts in ridership, particularly relative to income. A July 2008 article in the *Los Angeles Times* on increased ridership on public transportation describes an example of the ways in which demographic changes may affect public perceptions of transit: “The broader spectrum of riders eases what for some is a stigma – that the train is full of gangbangers and homeless people. . . . ‘In the last month, it’s me and 10 other people with briefcases and computers,’ [Sykes, a transit rider] says” (Mozingo 2008). Although this rider was specifically referring to the Los Angeles light rail system, the quotation

suggests that increasing numbers of new and infrequent transit users are in transit spaces and that the perception is of transit riders becoming “more like me” – although transit, and particularly buses, continue to be disproportionately used by low-income riders, people of color, and immigrants.

While ridership has been increasing, transit agencies have been contending with decreases in state and local funding. A 2011 American Public Transportation Association (APTA) survey reported that 70% of large agencies had cut services in the past year and half had raised fares (American Public Transportation Association 2011a). In addition, three-quarters of larger agencies had decreased their workforce. The more long-term outcomes of these push-pull influences on Metro ridership will emerge over time; however, the system has likely experienced an influx of new riders who may influence the social aspect of transit spaces by their unfamiliarity with established transit norms and by coming in with very different expectations of what constitutes acceptable behavior.

In addition to these external factors, some features of the buses and larger transit network itself have changed during the time I began and finished my fieldwork. Metro expanded the BRT system throughout the region, and Metro Rapid routes are now an integral part of the system. When I started my fieldwork, the system included approximately a dozen lines; currently there are 20 Metro Rapid lines in Los Angeles County.⁶² In 2005, Metro also opened the Metro Orange Line facility, an 18-mile exclusive, albeit at-grade, busway running from North Hollywood west to Chatsworth.⁶³ This route helps to link parts of the San Fernando

⁶² At one point during my fieldwork, there were 26 Metro Rapid lines in operation.

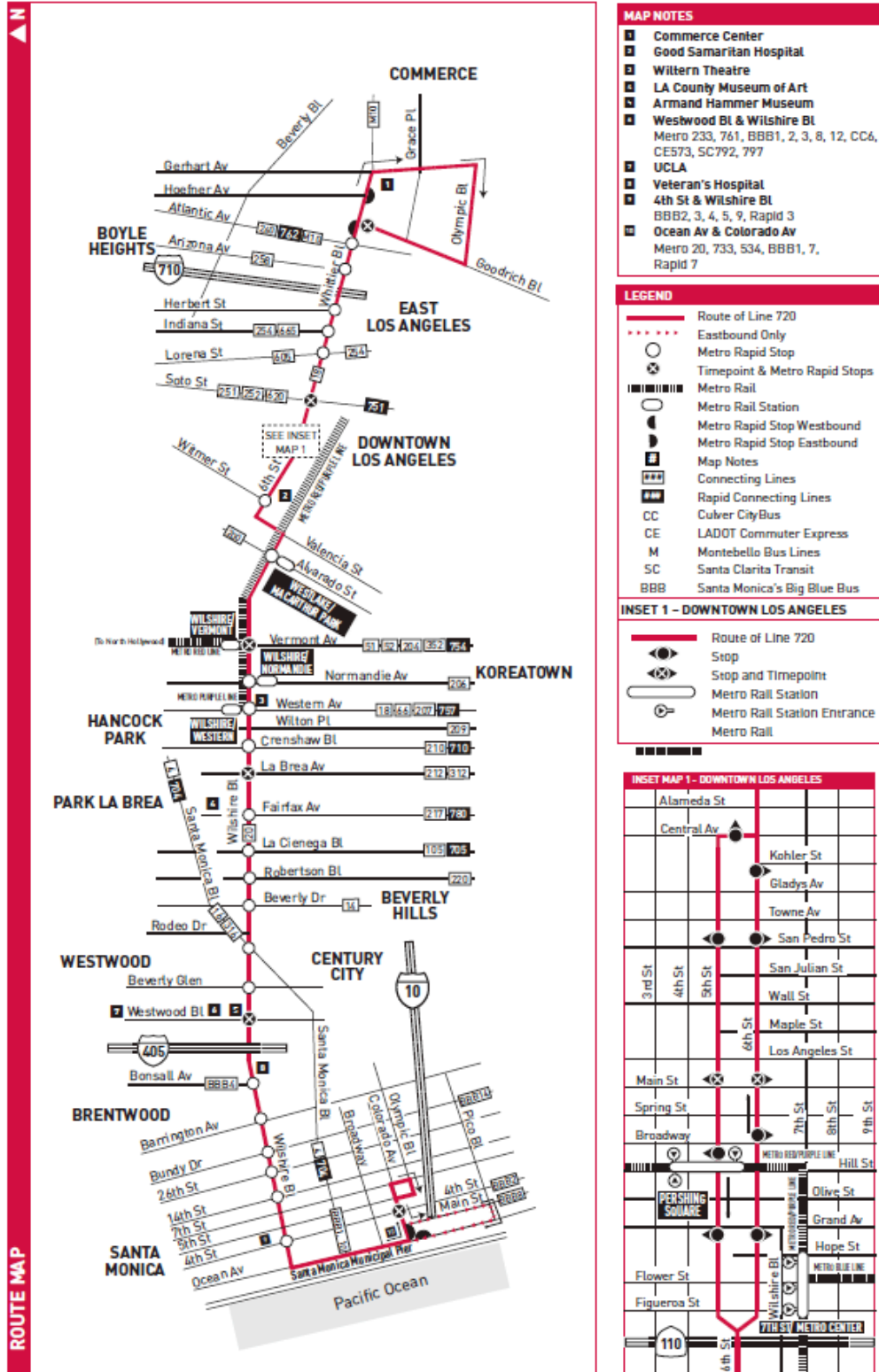
⁶³ The Metro Orange Line ran for 14 miles to the Warner Transit Center in Canoga Park until early July 2012, when the new Chatsworth station opened and extended the line by an additional four miles.

Valley to the Metro's heavy-rail subway system by connecting at the east end to the Metro Red Line's North Hollywood station. Metro, as described earlier, started using high-capacity, articulated buses on the Metro Orange Line route as well as various Metro Rapid routes, including the 720, in 2005.

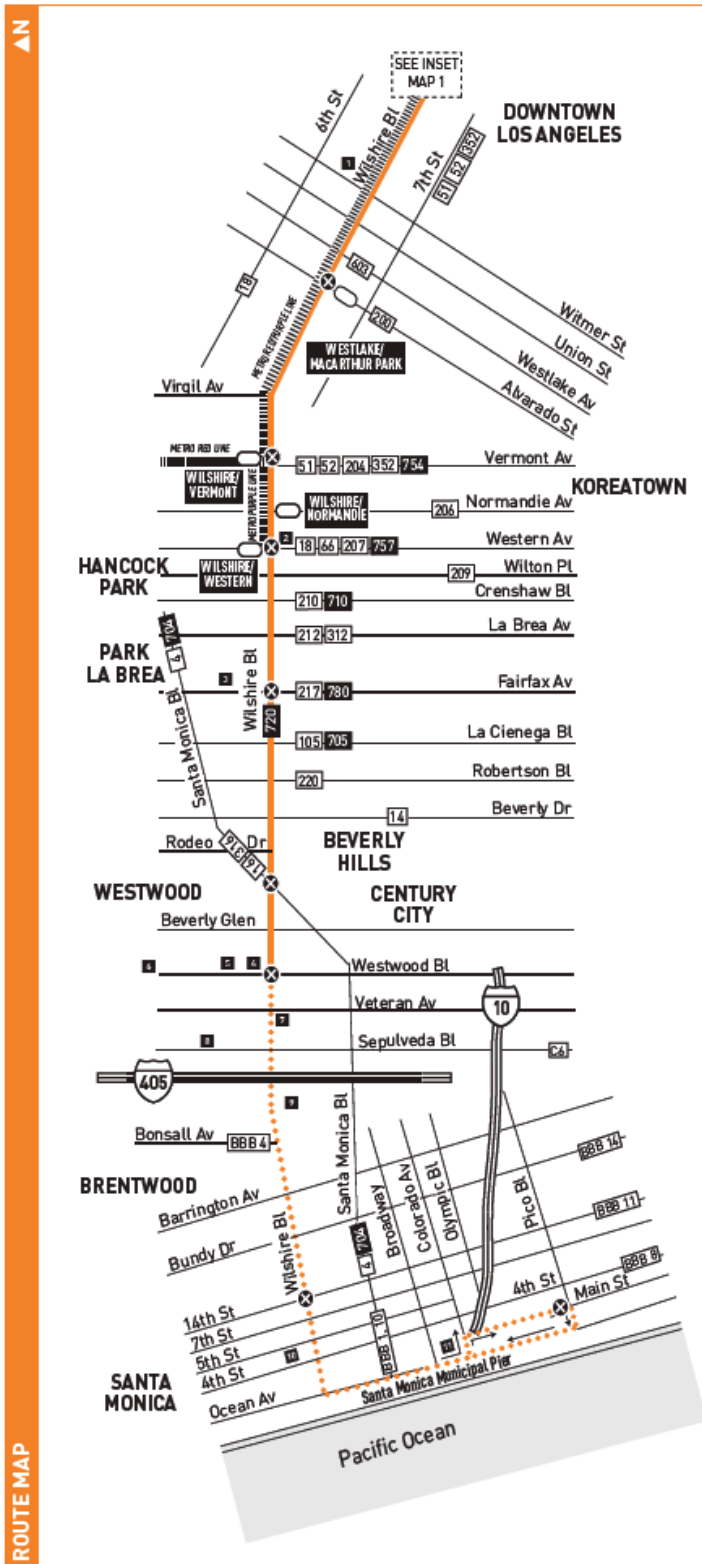
The Metro Rapid system will continue to evolve – for example, the agency is in the process of implementing a system of peak-hour, dedicated-curb bus lanes along Wilshire Boulevard to improve travel performance – and such developments in physical space and service may affect the social norms and expectations on buses and at stops. In addition, the approval of Measure R, a 2008 county ballot measure for a half-cent sales tax, is expected to raise \$40 billion for congestion relief and transportation projects, including a number of major transit projects. As the transit landscape of Los Angeles changes and develops in coming years and transit becomes a more viable, accessible option for people, the stigma of transit, and buses in particular, may decrease, and a larger, more diverse cross-section of the population may come to experience the social environment of bus space as a type of everyday travel.

8. APPENDIX A: STUDY ROUTE MAPS

Line 720 (Rapid)



Line 20 (Local)



- MAP NOTES**
- Good Samaritan Hospital
 - Wiltern Theatre
 - LA County Museum of Art
 - Armand Hammer Museum
 - Westwood Bl & Wilshire Bl
761, BBB 1, 2, 3, 8, 12, C6; Rapid 6; CE573, SC792, 797
 - UCLA
 - Federal Building
 - LA National Cemetery
 - Veteran's Hospital
 - 4th St & Wilshire Bl
BBB 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, Rapid 3
 - Ocean Av & Colorado Av
20, 33, 733, 534, BBB 1, 7; Rapid 7

- LEGEND**
- Route of Line 20
 - Route of Line 20 Late Night/Dwl Trips
 - ⊗ Timepoint
 - Metro Rail
 - Metro Rail Station
 - ⓧ Map Notes
 - Connecting Lines
 - Rapid Connecting Lines
 - C Culver CityBus
 - CE LADOT Commuter Express Bus
 - M Montebello Bus Lines
 - SC Santa Clarita Transit
 - BBB Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus

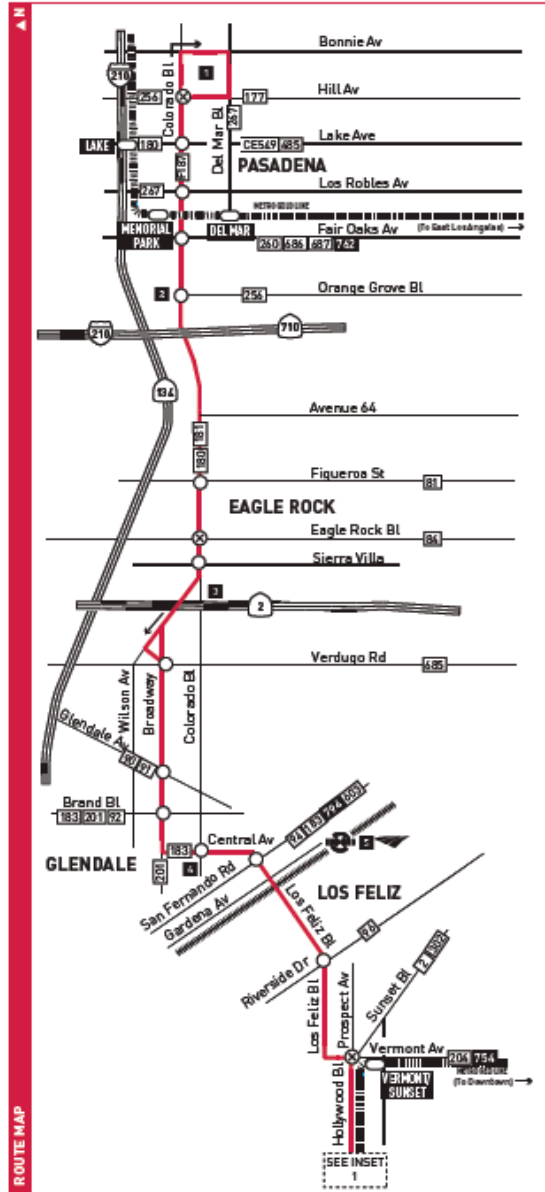
- INSET 1 - DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES**
- Route of Line 20
 - Stop
 - ⊗ Stop and Timepoint
 - Metro Rail Station
 - ⓧ Metro Rail Station Entrance
 - Metro Rail



ROUTE MAP

Line 780 (Rapid)

Effective Jun 24 2011

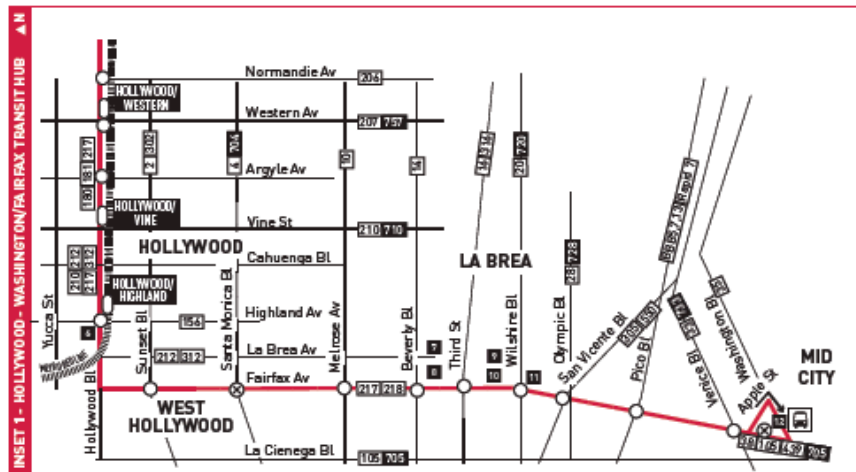


LEGEND

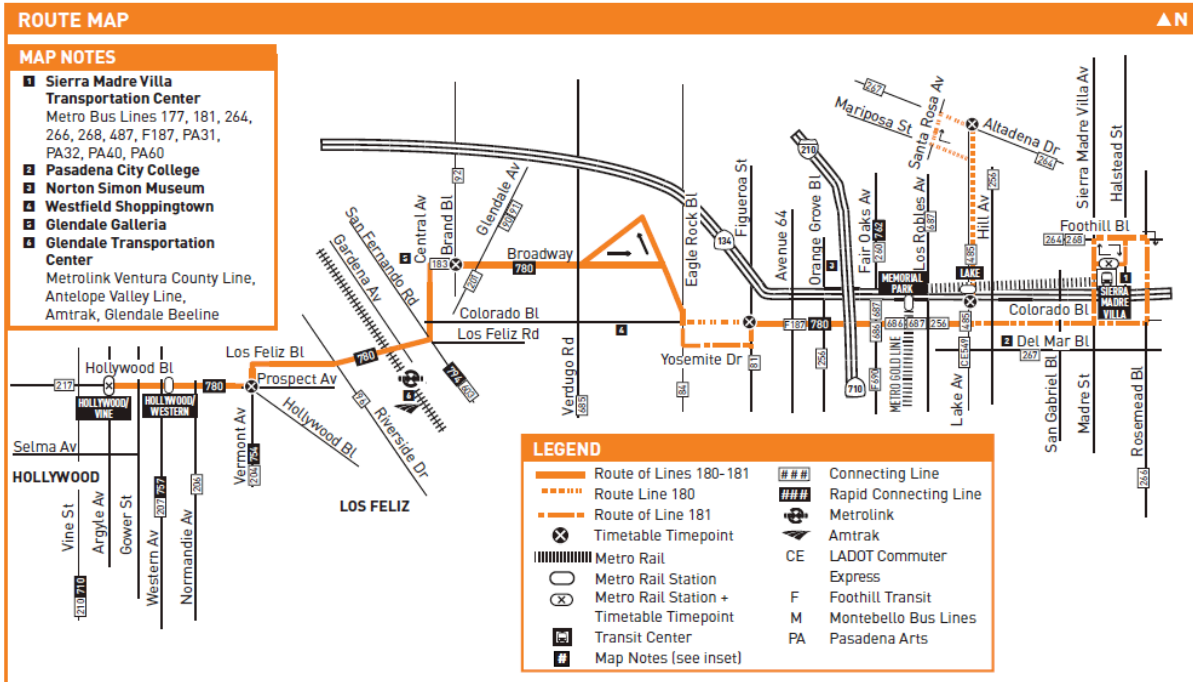
- Route of Metro Rapid 780
- Metro Rapid Timetable
- Timepoint
- Metro Rapid Stop
- Metro Rail
- Metro Rail Station
- Transit Center
- Map Notes (see Inset)
- Connecting Line
- Rapid Connecting Line
- MetroLink
- Amtrak
- Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus
- Culver City Bus
- LADOT Commuter Express
- Foothill Transit

MAP NOTES

- Pasadena City College
- Norton Simon Museum
- Westfield Shoppingtown Eagle Rock
- Glendale Galleria
- Glendale Transportation Center
MetroLink, Amtrak, Glendale BeeLine
- Kodak Theater
- The Grove
- Farmer's Market
- La Brea Tar Pits
- LA County Museum of Art
- Petersen Automotive Museum
- Washington/Fairfax Transit Hub
Metro 35, 37, 38, 105, 217, 335, 439, 534, 705; CC1, CC4; CE437



Line 180-181 (Local)



150984

Line 217 (Local)



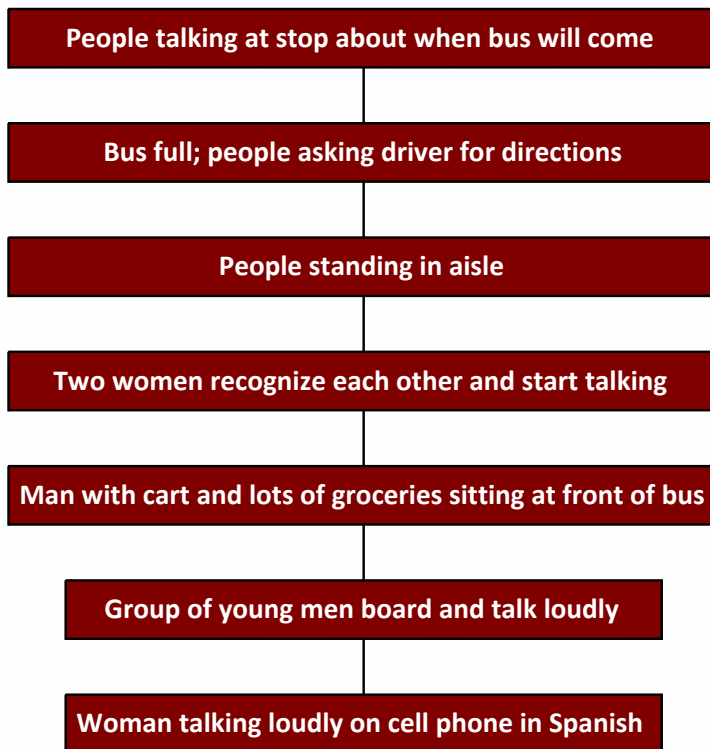
9. APPENDIX B: FIELDWORK SCHEDULE

720			20		
Date	Time Code	Direction	Date	Time Code	Direction
2/28/05	mid pm	east	5/17/05	mid pm	east
2/28/05	mid pm	west	5/17/05	late pm	west
3/15/05	mid pm	east	5/20/05	midday	east
3/15/05	late pm	west	5/20/05	mid pm	west
4/29/05	mid pm	east	6/4/05	mid pm	east
4/29/05	late pm	west	6/4/05	late pm	west
5/3/05	mid pm	west	6/8/05	mid pm	east
5/3/05	mid pm	west	6/8/05	late pm	west
5/13/05	mid am	east	6/9/05	mid pm	east
5/13/05	midday	west	6/9/05	mid pm	west
7/1/10	mid pm	west	10/28/10	mid pm	west
7/1/10	late pm	east	10/28/10	late pm	east
9/1/10	midday	west	11/2/10	mid pm	west
9/1/10	mid pm	east	11/2/10	late pm	east
11/9/10	midday	west	11/5/10	evening	east
7/15/11	mid pm	west	11/5/10	evening	west
7/15/11	evening	east	11/9/10	evening	east
8/22/11	evening	east	3/17/11	mid pm	west
8/26/11	early am	west	3/17/11	evening	east
8/26/11	early am	east	8/22/11	evening	west
9/6/11	mid am	west	8/26/11	mid am	west
9/6/11	midday	east	8/26/11	mid am	east
9/19/11	mid am	west	9/6/11	midday	west
9/19/11	evening	east	9/6/11	mid pm	east

780			181			217		
Date	Time Code	Direction	Date	Time Code	Direction	Date	Time Code	Direction
1/18/10	late pm	west	6/26/09	mid pm	east	1/27/10	mid pm	west
1/18/10	evening	east	6/26/09	late pm	west	1/27/10	mid pm	east
1/20/10	late pm	west	1/29/10	evening	east	1/29/10	evening	east
1/20/10	evening	east	2/11/10	midday	west	2/11/10	midday	west
1/22/10	mid pm	west	2/12/10	evening	east	2/12/10	evening	east
1/22/10	late pm	east	8/23/11	late pm	west	8/23/11	late pm	west
1/25/10	midday	west	8/30/11	midday	west	8/30/11	mid pm	west
1/25/10	mid pm	east	8/30/11	late pm	east	8/30/11	mid pm	east
1/29/10	evening	west	9/1/11	evening	west	9/1/11	evening	west
2/11/10	mid pm	east	9/1/11	evening	east	9/1/11	evening	east
2/12/10	mid pm	west	9/3/11	midday	west	9/3/11	midday	west
8/15/11	mid pm	west	9/3/11	mid pm	east	9/3/11	midday	east
8/15/11	late pm	east	9/5/11	early am	west	9/5/11	early am	west
8/23/11	evening	east	9/5/11	mid am	east	9/5/11	mid am	east
9/7/11	mid pm	east	9/5/11	midday	west	9/5/11	midday	west
9/12/11	mid am	west	9/5/11	late pm	east	9/5/11	mid pm	east
9/12/11	midday	east	9/7/11	mid am	west	9/7/11	midday	west
9/13/11	mid am	west	9/10/11	mid pm	west	9/10/11	mid pm	west
9/13/11	midday	east	9/10/11	late pm	east	9/10/11	late pm	east
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9/15/11	midday	east	9/14/11	midday	east	9/14/11	midday	east
9/15/11	midday	west	9/17/11	midday	west	9/17/11	midday	west
9/15/11	mid pm	east	9/17/11	mid pm	east	9/17/11	mid pm	east

10. APPENDIX C: ROUTE DISRUPTIONS

Line 780 (Rapid) – 1/29/10 – weekday evening



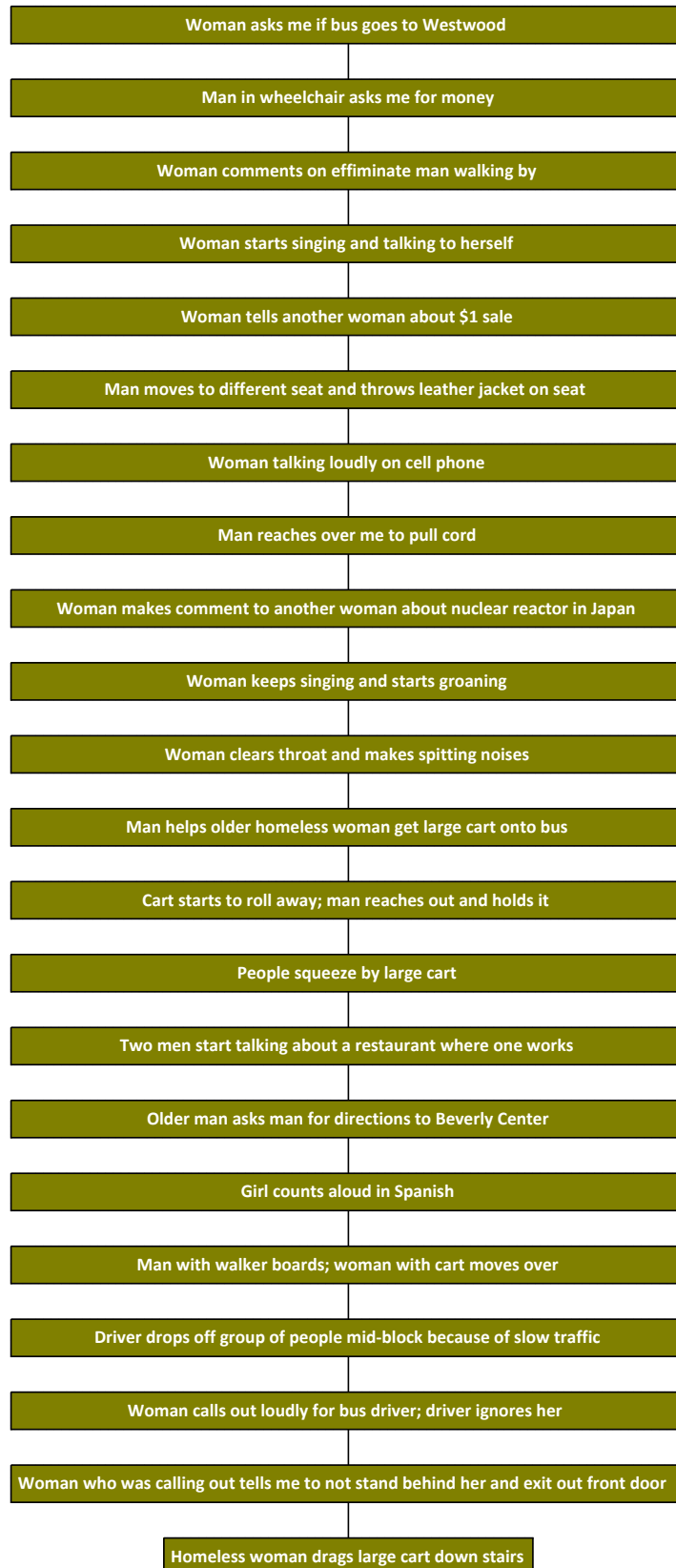
Lines 180-217 (Local) – 1/29/10 – weekday evening

Bus marked 17 is actually 38; people tell each other at stop
Homeless man drags suitcase onto bus
Men have long discussion about jobs, children, girlfriends
Woman starts screaming loudly
Men start conversation across bus
Man with erection staring at woman
Woman continues screaming profanities
Man laughs; woman starts yelling at him
Man starts conversation with woman sitting next to me
Screaming woman gets off the bus; man makes a comment to her
Woman standing near back door covered in dirty blanket
Man at transfer stop asks me if I know 180 schedule
Bus waits for Critical Mass riders to pass
Man opens small overhead window and tells people he needs cross-ventilation
Woman talking on cell phone
Man asks woman about movie mentioned during conversation; woman ignores him
Man boards with big camouflage backpack
Very large group of people get off at Glendale Galleria stop
Unattended bag with newspaper and sweatshirt left on floor
Group of girls board and talk about what to do rest of the night
Man with backpack start whistling loudly and waving at people
Man starts talking to himself; sleeping man wakes up and glares at him

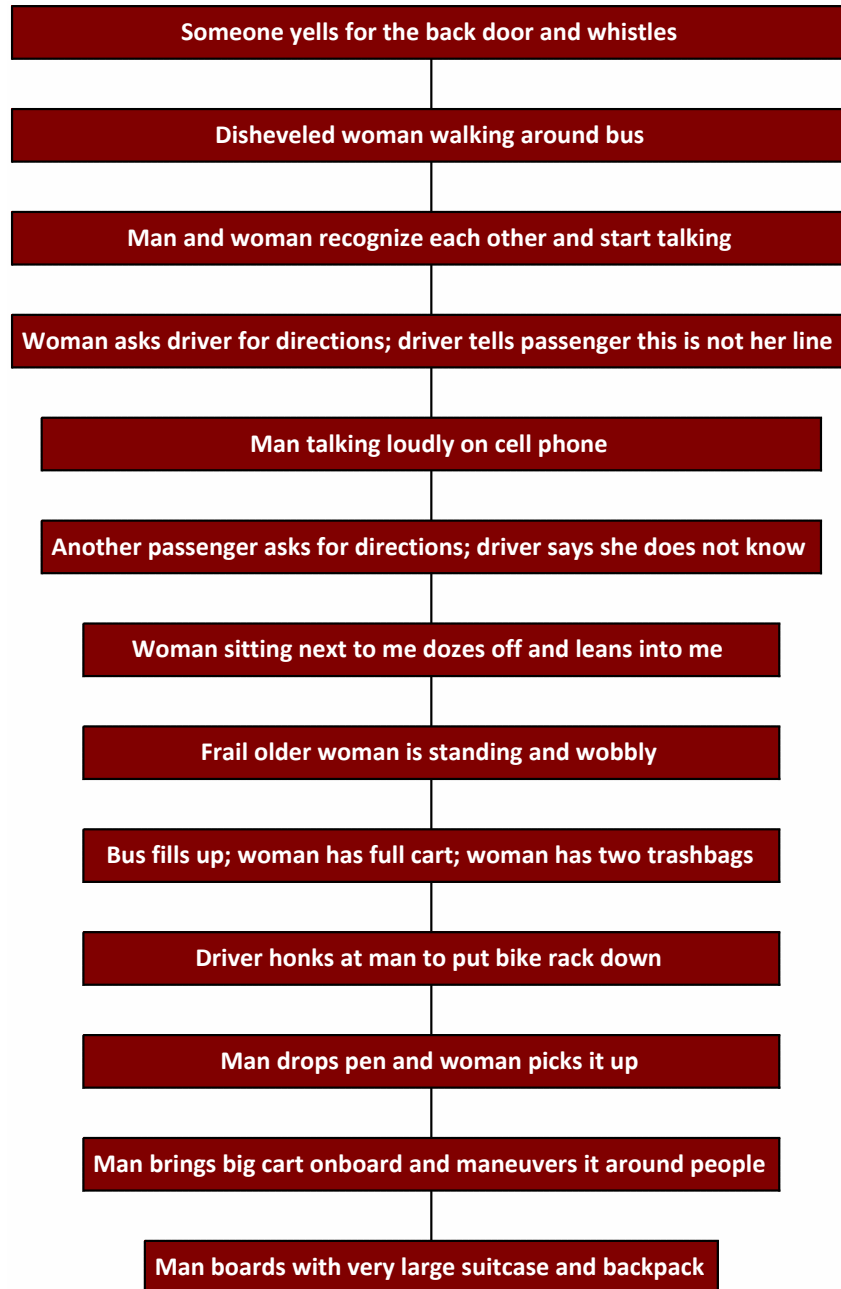
Line 720 (Rapid) – 7/1/10 – weekday afternoon



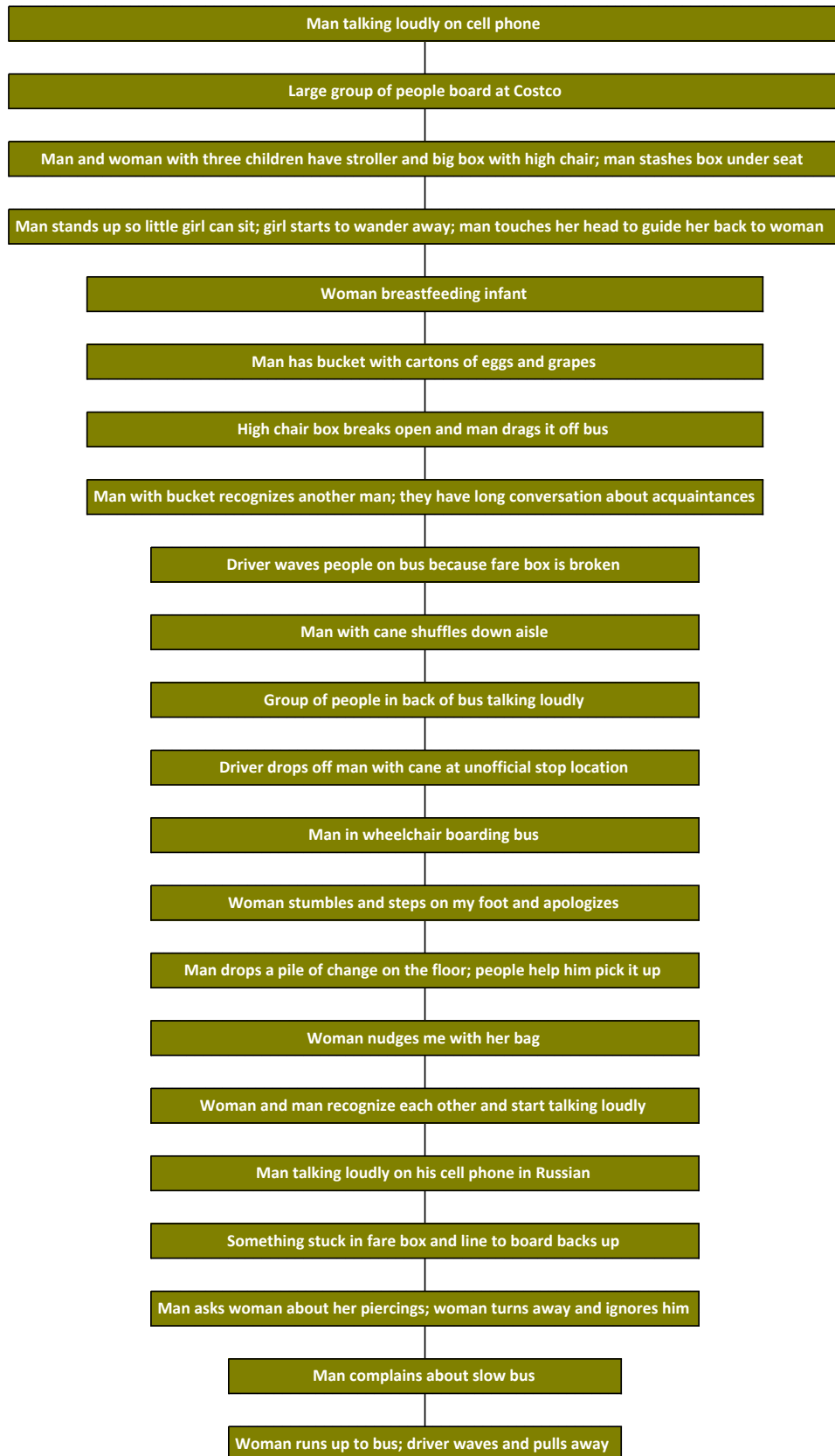
Lines 20 (Local) – 3/17/11 – weekday afternoon



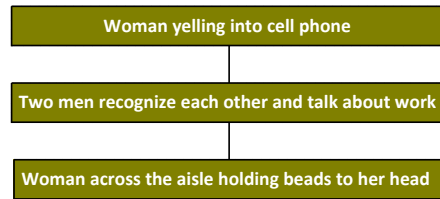
Line 780 (Rapid) – 1/25/10 – weekday afternoon



Line 180-217 (Rapid) – 8/30/11 – weekday afternoon



Line 180-217 (Rapid) – 8/30/11 – weekday afternoon (cont.)



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