Traveling with my Roaddawgz: Using Mobile Technologies to Collaborate with Youth on the Move

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Youth Trek

Formal Title:
Piloting New GPS and Cell Phone Technologies for T2 Translational Research with Mobile Homeless Youth
A Pilot Study with 5 Youth (aged 17, 18, 18, 19, 21)

Translational Technology Award
NIH/NCRR UCSF-CTSI
Grant Number UL1 RR024131
**Principal Investigator**
Amy Donovan Blondell Ph.D.

**Collaborators**
Youth Trek Participants
Dr. Marjorie Robertson, Co-Investigator
Dr. Claire Brindis, Co-Investigator, UCSF IHPS
Dr. Nicolas Sheon, UCSF CAPS, Co-Investigator
Ms. Mary Howe, Executive Director, Homeless Youth Alliance, collaborator
Mr. Kevin Koy, Consultant, Geospatial Innovation Facility, UC Berkeley.
E. Cristin O’Keeffe, JD, Consultant
Ms. Andrea Papanastassiou, M.A., consultant

**Specialists and Advisors**
UCSF Institute for Health and Aging: Dr. Pat Fox
Drs. Patricia and William Donovan
Inspiration: Dr. Jean Scandlyn, University of Colorado, Denver
Erica Monasterio, UCSF Adolescent Medicine and
Dr. Janet Shalwitz, Adolescent Health Working Group
The Late John Adair, PhD, Pioneer in Participatory Visual Research
Emory School of Public Health: Dr. Michael Kramer, Dr. Pamela Mink
Trans-Disciplinary Research

- Social Sciences
  - Political Anthropology
  - Urban Anthropology
  - Visual Anthropology/Sociology
  - Medical Anthropology/Sociology
- Geography
- Public Health
- Research Psychology
Qualitative: Oral History Style In Depth Interview, Bi-Weekly Interviews
Quantitative: 239 Question Online Survey (baseline and repeated every two months); Weekly Online Questionnaires (approx. 15 questions)
Evaluation: “Report Card Style” Evaluations of Housing and Healthcare (when received)
Cartographic: Audio Recorded Mapping Workshops Travelogueing, Mixed Method
gaps in the data, nevertheless we were able to get a good general picture from the information they contributed to map their travel routes. The young travelling through rural areas, and they turned the off transmitter frequently, often to save battery power especially on long train rides. So there were big privacy. We joked that if they were going to rob a bank they should not have their phones with them. Since they often couldn’t get service when they were only been able to make limited use of the geographical data. There are much easier ways to map travel routes: including personal report, We told the the bi-weekly interviews much before seeing any travel routes. Because it was a pilot study and we didn’t have much money for consulting hours, we have to create meaningful travel routes as the process was very time consuming and labor intensive. The researcher would usually hear about the travels during protected site. While it seems like this is almost real time, it wasn’t in effect because it took weeks for the researcher to compile and process the GPS data against this, erring on the side of caution, in case the young person said something that might identify her or him, and potentially cause future critique” venue through which youth participants could offer critical assessment, positive and negative, of housing and healthcare providers. We decided During peer review, in the grant proposal writing stage we had initially thought about the possibility of using yelp.com or another online “consumer critique” venue through which youth participants could offer critical assessment, positive and negative, of housing and healthcare providers. We decided against this, erring on the side of caution, in case the young person said something that might identify her or him, and potentially cause future discrimination in seeking services at the same site.

Introducing Traveloguing Options:
- The choice of whether or not to select and upload photos to share with the researcher
- Training on how to control the smartphone setting to turn on or off the transmission of geographical location to the researcher for the creation of travel routes.

Participants were trained by the researchers in the use of the smartphones, but proved more facile with the smartphones than the researchers and often developed new ways to use them on the road. Youth Trek participants reported that they used their smartphones in a number of ways. The most common use was for “the maps”. So, for example, if they were riding freight trains they could use an app like Google Maps to find out where they were on the train route and to identify where the next stop (or “hopout”) might be located. Homeless youth living in squats reported that the phones were very useful in orienting them in general, apps like the flashlight and the calendar helped them find their way in dark boarded-up buildings and to keep a schedule. One youth used the phone as a mirror, and used the phone’s camera for self-portraiture, trying on different outfits and trying on different looks. (See Chapter in Springer Subjectivities Volume 4). They used the phone to download music and videos; to get back in touch with old friends and family; and to keep in touch with friends they met during their travels. Since many of the friends they were trying to reach did not have phones, they used their smartphones to keep in touch through the social media site, Facebook.

Mapping Workshops:
With a few exceptions, most of the material from the mapping workshops contained far too many personal details to share as a map, nevertheless the Mapping Workshops, like the oral histories operated as foundational for the projects, laying the knowledge base for greater understanding in the months going forward, during which there were bi-weekly telephone interviews.

Report Card Evaluations:
Participants Graded or Scored Providers, A,B,C,D and F on Criteria, that the youth had articulated as important to them. During peer review, in the grant proposal writing stage we had initially thought about the possibility of using yelp.com or another online “consumer critique” venue through which youth participants could offer critical assessment, positive and negative, of housing and healthcare providers. We decided against this, erring on the side of caution, in case the young person said something that might identify her or him, and potentially cause future discrimination in seeking services at the same site.

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Youth Trek Travel Routes over a Six Month Period
This map represents June to November of Original four Youth Trek participants
Created by Amy Donovan with consultant, Kevin Koy of The Geospatial Innovation Facility, UC Berkeley.
Koy connected the Dots (which represent GPS transmissions), with lines to show continuity. There were periods when there was either no battery power, no internet service, or when youth elected to either turn off the phone and/or the GPS transmitter.
The train tracks are in brown. Image Created using ArcGIS by Amy Donovan Blondell and UC Berkeley Geospatial Innovation Lab consultant, Kevin Koy, M.A.
Open
Ended
Discovery
lost bridge.

Photo essay by Youth Trek photographer called “Zoe”

I made us walk, while we were hitchhiking, a couple miles to find this bridge. This bridge goes nowhere.
Photo by Youth Trek photographer called “Zoe”
May 2, 2011, EBD to Sparks, NV, and Mountain (with Geotag) We had just left Roseville, CA and we were on the wrong train headed to Sparks, NV. It was a beautiful summer, and we were lucky to get a Boxcar...We stopped in the middle of a mountain and I let the dog walk around and go pee. I was nervous the train would leave us but luckily it didn’t and we were on our way.

Photo essays by Youth Trek photographer called “Zoe”
EBD [Eastbound] to Sparks, NV [Nevada] and Mountain (with Geotag)
Train Ride through the Sierra Nevada Mountains in Northern California and Nevada. Youth Trek participant called “Zoe” called this freight train ride the “Most Romantic Ride Ever” in a photo of a boxcar kiss between her boyfriend and her taken on this train.
Riding Old Hobo Style.
Photograph by Youth Trek Participant called “Tara”
The train tracks are in brown. Image Created using ArcGIS by Amy Donovan Blondell and UC Berkeley Geospatial Innovation Lab consultant, Kevin Koy, M.A.
Satellite view of Portland Oregon, a site of migration route convergence.
Close-up of Portland, Oregon

They were recruited in Northern California and did not know one another. Within 6 weeks they had all had travelled through two square blocks of downtown Portland Oregon, Pioneer Square.
What characterizes a Wasteland?

What constitutes a Landscape of Opportunity?
Site of Convergence:
New Orleans for Halloween.
A Destination location along with De-industrialized Detroit, New Orleans sustained damage from Hurricane Katrina.
Both have considerable areas that are often characterized as Wastelands (tracks of foreclosed upon and uninhabitable housing). This is considered to be an opportunity for homeless youth in terms of squatting opportunities.
Seeking
A
Refuge
A Sanctuary Space
blue window
Photograph by Youth Trek Participant called “Zoe”

I was taking pictures, because I had a whole plan to make this our future squat, but it wasn’t abandoned. (Photo Essay for photo “blue window”, 2014)

Zoe thinks constructively about how to fix up a place, and her camera becomes a tool in the transformation of an abandoned building to a squat.

As she photographs parts of her intended squat, she uses the camera to jog her memory about the space, creating a visual record. Documentation is part of the planning process in which Hero lays the groundwork, creating a mixed media memoir through which she weaves a vision, with an eye toward her future home
Finding Resources:

Material Things
and
Human Kindness
Dani: Oh gas jugging ... I've been in a few caravans you get a few people in a car and drive to your destination instead of hitchhiking ... at the gas station ... [you] take a five gallon gas jug and you walk around asking people to fill your tank ... it works a lot better because if you just ask for cash then people don't believe you ... cause what else am I going to do with gas besides put it in a car, or blow things up but I don't want to [smile]... It's like [they are thinking] I’d rather give you what you actually need instead of giving you money, because if I give you money, you might use it to do drugs. And who is going to risk their money being spent on drugs they are not using.

R: [Laughing] So if someone says ‘Why lie? I need a beer’ – and that’s their sign you wouldn’t give ‘em money for a beer?

Dani: What I do is honesty, when I want a beer I go “Spare Change for a beer.” If I need food, I say “Spare change for food” ... I don’t want to be bullshitted so I don’t bullshit people. Someone walks by and I go, ‘Excuse me, I’m on a journey to find random and cool objects. By any chance, is there anything in your pocket that you’re not using that I could possibly use? Your trash is my treasure.’ It’s a pretty long thing, but people are like ‘Anything random? What?’ so they keep listening.

R: How do they respond to that?
Dani: Some people tell me they don’t have cash. And I’m like, ‘Dude, I’m not asking for cash.’ Or some people will tell me to, ‘get a job’, but probably the majority of people will give me something like paper or a bobby pin or something...shoestrings, paper bag, a cup, a key, a lot of candy, a lot of pot, cigarettes, cash, um women’s phone numbers.

R: Even though it’s not in their pocket?

Dani: ... They’ll give me their number... a piece of paper with random numbers on it – so it’s pretty random... It doesn’t have to be in their pocket they can write something down, give me something. As long as it’s from you, it doesn’t really matter what it is. They’re like: ‘You’re taking my trash?’...[and I say] ‘You’re taking the time to give me something that could possibly someday help me.’ It’s not about trying to get as much stuff or as much money as possible; it is about trying to take over the world one smile at a time. And people smile a lot when they don’t know what you’re asking for.

R: Where does the lint come in?

Dani: ...Oh, pocket lint ... everyone has some...it’s a joke, it’s not a joke, it’s, I don’t know, it’s just...

R: A transaction between two human beings.

Dani: Something to keep .... Besides boredom like, ‘Spare change’, and you’re just going to walk away from me anyways and I’m never going to see ’em again...why not make a lasting impression. ‘Hey that chick just asked me a random question. One day, and I’m going to see her again.’

R: How long did it take you go get a ball of pocket lint?

Dani: A week.

R: And where did you keep it?

Dani: My pocket.
Sedentarism as a feature of Nomadism
“Finding My Family”
and the relationship between
ART and the creation of Community
**water tower**

Photograph by Youth Trek Participant called “Zoe”

This image called *water tower* was also photographed by Youth Trek participant called “Zoe”, in her photo essay she said that she had “countless dates up there” and eventually had a chance to meet the artist. This public art location became a site for establishing community.
Discovery:
Finding a Squat to Make a Home
Foregoing Photographs by Youth Trek Participant called “Zoe”
Travel is often understood as a privilege of the rich. There is an attempt, through strategies of containment, to deny many people – women, youth, immigrants – the ability to travel, but the right of travel may be seen as a human right, a right which many homeless young people claim regardless of their lack of financial resources. They want to see the world and they witness beauty in their travels and they document that beauty.
Seeking Beauty:
Photograph by Youth Trek Participant Called “Gabriel”
“Riding old hobo style”
Photograph by Youth Trek Participant Called “Tara”
“My dog ... is the prettiest and most well behaved dog I have ever seen. And I often take pictures of her in front of street art I find. “

- Zoe
Jade Beach
on the Big Sur Coast of California
Photograph by Youth Trek Participant called “Dani”
“Old Faithful” Yellowstone National Park
*Photograph by Youth Trek Participant called “Freya”*
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