

Introduction

Before We Go Along

The June afternoon sun is starting to strengthen overhead as I wait for John on the sidewalk a few houses down from their own. I wipe my brow with the hem of my shirt, as the long walk from the subway through East Flatbush, Brooklyn, already has me sweating. I look at my phone to see whether John had responded to the text telling them about my arrival, but the only notifications on my lock screen are news alerts about the ongoing 2016 presidential primaries. Returning the phone to my pocket without reading the headlines, I take a deep breath to calm my racing mind. John and I are about to embark on a go-along—a type of mobile interview focusing on everyday life routines.¹ I have done nearly fifty go-alongs with John and ten other trans, queer, and non-binary (TQNB) youth throughout New York City over the past months. The soreness in my legs and the long list of questions swirling in my head are the culmination of weeks and weeks of wandering through the city with these young people.

After a few moments, John comes out the front door and walks down the block to meet me. Knowing that John lives with their grandmother who is critical of their queerness and gender fluidity, I thought it best not to be waiting directly in front of the house. We greet each other, and I hand John the small recording device, which they clip to their collar. As the two of us turn to walk down the Brooklyn sidewalk to start the go-along, I do a double take over my shoulder to see whether anyone was watching us. My apprehension stems from the sense that, given the setting, John and I walking in tandem likely stand out as a peculiar sight—I,

a cis² adult white man, and John who, despite identifying as genderfluid, is often presumed to be a young Black woman.

On John's previous go-along through the same East Flatbush neighborhood, a predominately Black and West Indian area, I was one of the only white people I had seen on our hour-long walk. I imagined it unlikely we could ever be read as peers given that John's size and presentation presumably resulted in others perceiving them as a younger teenager rather than as an adult. It was even possible that other people might read John as a *child*, despite their being eighteen years old. Further, as a gay man in his early thirties who had long worked with young people in educational settings, I was no stranger to the tensions of simultaneously being both a gay man *and* a teacher³—that through normative (and homophobic) lenses, gay men are often perceived as a threat to children, thus calling into question our capacity to be teachers of young people. Fears of being read as such spilled into the ways I experienced being a youth researcher, and certainly hovered near the front of my mind as John led me down the sidewalk.

Not five minutes into the go-along, John's phone rings. It's their grandmother. They pick up the call, and I try to deduce from John's half of the conversation what is being said on the other end of the line. It seems that whatever explanation John gave on the way out the door about what they were about to do was deemed insufficient by their grandmother. Grandma wants more information about what John is doing and whom John is with. I sympathize with John as they attempt to explain to their guardian what they are doing, especially since John's frustrated tone seems to signal their belief that they should not have to explain their actions to their grandmother, that John is grown enough to go about their own business. John slowly relents to the line of questions about their whereabouts and starts to explain to their grandmother what they are doing. It dawns on me, after conducting all these go-alongs, that I am about to hear a participant explain, in their own words, what *they* thought they are doing with me. I am about to witness John explaining how they understand the go-alongs, this research project, and their participation in it. I wonder whether John will recall how I had described the research project when I first recruited them to be part of the study. Will John remember to say that I was studying the everyday experiences of young adults? That I had experience working as a teacher? That this study had approval from my university's research ethics review board? That John had signed a consent form to take part in these interviews? That because they were eighteen

years old, they didn't need parental permission to consent to participate? That I had told John multiple times that they could withdraw from participating at any time?

I listen with bated breath as John tries to assuage their grandmother by assuring her that I am legitimate by virtue of being associated with a trustworthy LGBTQ youth agency, the Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI), which is hosting me as a researcher and where John has an internship. John's grandmother might be uneasy with John's queerness, but John mentioned on the last go-along that his grandma's concerns about John attending HMI were slightly alleviated since the internship there was a paid one. Speaking in a more and more frustrated tone, John mentions to Grandma that I am doing "some sort of dissertation for college." While not the vernacular I would have used, John seems to be pointing to the validity of what we are doing together by mentioning its connection to higher education. Because John is due to start college in the fall, I guess they hope this comment will smooth things over. John's responses, however, do not seem to be quelling their grandmother's concern, and she will not let John get off the phone. After a few more rounds of questions, John finally blurts out, "He's basically just following me and seeing what I do each day."

My shoulders tense up at John's description. While it was not technically untrue—I *am* just following John around to see what they did—hearing John say those words (specifically to a parental figure who I know to be unaccepting and unaccommodating of John's queerness and transness) makes me painfully aware that, if described in a particular way, what I am doing with John might be easily misconstrued or mischaracterized. Moreover, given my position as an adult gay man, John's words brought to the forefront of my mind that my relationship to John always has the potential be met with skepticism or even fear, that because our bodies are read as having different races, ages, and genders, my being with John alone in public might always be called into question as odd, or even potentially dangerous. Given my queer identity and the ways I am read as such or not—a reading that hinges on my gender and race and the contexts in which others interpret them—John's stilted attempt to describe our relationship reminds me of the ever-present threat that I just might be read as too gay to be walking around with young people, especially one like John who is read as being young and as not yet an adult. That John, despite their own willingness and consent to participate, was struggling to find an explanation as to what they were doing with me that would suffice

for their grandmother, suggests that they, too, are feeling the normative constraints of age, gender, sexuality, and race that shape our ability to move together through public spaces.

As Grandma continues to pepper them with questions, John grows ever more frustrated with having to explain himself. Their answers become increasingly quiet until John's voice is drowned out by the noise from passing cars. Finally, John lowers the phone from their ear, and I look down to see them holding the phone out toward me.

"I guess she wants to make sure you're not a serial killer by talking to her, or something," John says sheepishly before passing me the phone.



I promise to tell you about the conversation that followed when I took the phone from John and how I was able to convince Grandma that I was not, in fact, a serial killer. (If the suspense is too much to handle, however, I return to this moment with John and their grandmother in the chapter "John's Grandmother Has Some Questions.") In starting off this book by describing the first few steps of this go-along with John, however, I specifically lead us to this moment with their grandmother. I do so because I imagine that you, the reader, likely have questions about who I am and why I chose to do this research project with TQNB youth of color. You may well be asking what this "grown-ass man" (as I was once described by Scarlet, another participant you will meet) is doing engaging in a research project that involves going along with these young people as they move through their daily lives. Like John's grandmother, you may already have questions about my qualifications, about how I justified spending time in proximity to the young people, and why I am writing this book in this way.

At its core, this book offers an invitation and a challenge to you. It is both an invitation to go along with the young people and me as I retrace our journeys on these pages and a challenge to rethink how you are making sense of TQNB youth. Through my descriptive and analytical representation of the time I spent with the youth whom you will meet on these pages, you are invited to reconsider the ways in which you envision who these youth are and what their lives are like. As I narrate my own reflexive consideration of what it was like for me in my own body (and the attendant privileges my positionality often affords me) to spend time in public spaces with the youth, I ask that you similarly apply such a lens

to the ways in which you are in relationship to both the young people in these pages (through my writing) and to young people whom you encounter in your own lives (even if you are a young person yourself).

In this current moment, there is increasing public scrutiny of the lives and educational experiences of TQNB youth. Trans, non-binary, and gender nonconforming youth, especially, face particularly challenging obstacles in these times because of the recent rise in right-wing fearmongering campaigns. At the time of writing, there are considerable growing threats to the livelihood of trans children and young people (as well as adults) in the form of legislation in numerous states that would make trans students unable to attend school or access gender-affirming health care while also threatening any trans-supportive parents with child abuse for supporting their child's gender identity. Some of these laws are also requiring schools to out queer and trans students to their parents. Moreover, there are growing attempts to eliminate any inclusion of queer and trans topics in school curricula, including the possibility of making it a fireable offense for LGBTQ teachers to come out to their students.

I want to make clear from the start of this book that the root of the problem is that those who espouse those points of view look at youth who identify as trans or queer or non-binary as a *problem*—as doing or being contrary to supposedly universal and “natural” facets of young people. The growing danger that youth face as they continue to be used as a political foil by right-wing Christian and white supremacist ideologies is evidence of a specific (and of course harmful and hateful) way of thinking about TQNB youth and, arguably, the idea of *youth* as a whole.⁴ Moreover, it is necessary to see the connection to concurrent campaigns that have falsely claimed that critical race theory is both hatemongering toward white people and supposedly rampant in K–12 schools.⁵ At their root, these attacks come out of the belief that queerness, transness, sexuality, sex, gender, race, racism, coloniality, diversity, injustice, and so on are all issues that should not be discussed in proximity to young people. That young people are not fully developed enough to be privy to any knowledge about these supposedly *adult* topics. This is undergirded by the assumptions that conceive of children as being property of adults and that understand the figure of “the child” only through the lenses of whiteness as property.⁶ The current attacks on TQNB youth (as well as similar ones that occurred in previous decades) continue to gain traction because of the ease with which certain social actors can stand up in public and claim that children are under attack and, moreover, have their words automatically assumed to

represent the majority opinion.⁷ The seeming ubiquity of the desire to care for or protect young people makes it easy for those with social, cultural, and political clout to speak up at a school board meeting, on social media, or on a news program and exclaim how children are at risk of corruption, *and* for those claims to gain traction and raise alarm. Thus the central intention of this book is to reexamine the frames through which society is making sense out of the lives, bodies, feelings, thoughts, and actions of TQNB youth. For rather than seeing gender, sexuality, sex, and race as issues that interrupt the normative development of young people, we need to see them as issues that young people are always engaging with and about which they are constantly making their own knowledges.

This book challenges how society thinks about, perceives, and talks about TQNB young people by examining the ways in which knowledge about them is made. This includes rethinking how those of us adults who consider ourselves to be in solidarity with TQNB youth make sense of them as well. Through my telling of stories about time I spent with young people, the goal is to make transparent the mechanisms, theories, habits of thought, and methodologies I utilized to think through and write about what I experienced moving through the city during the go-alongs, including the pitfalls and stumbles in my own theorizing. This book works to blur the boundaries between conceptual and empirical academic writing through the narrativizing of the go-alongs. By writing out and thinking through the parts of the research process that usually get left on the cutting-room floor—the ones that are thought to just be part of the process of getting to the *results*—I shift methodological and theoretical lenses that traditionally delineate and guard the boundaries of qualitative research. The book stops to simmer and luxuriate in the moments that researchers are often taught to bypass or avoid altogether by writing out the research project as the focal event, rather than trying to write around the actions and affects that went into the actual doing of research.

To do so, this book keeps central how I encountered the youth during the go-alongs, how the youth related to me as a researcher, how together we interacted with the people and places that constitute New York City as we moved together through it, and how we were perceived by the city in return. Throughout, the book maintains a critical focus on writing through the processes of world-making that come out of such interactions rather than moving quickly past them to seek out the conclusions and findings to which writing about research is thought to lead.

The book comprises a series of essays about individual go-alongs. In these essays, the writing focuses on the act of doing the go-alongs,

including what we talked about, where we went, and what it felt like to be together. Writing about the go-alongs this way is not to say that this book offers straightforward accounts of what happened; they are not meant to be presented as raw data or as simple transcripts of what occurred. Rather, the form of this book eschews the traditional structure of an academic contribution to reconsider how knowledge about TQNB youth is made. It is common practice in academic writing based on qualitative research to present in the first section of one's writing the seemingly untouched data that was collected, and to then, in a following section, offer one's analysis of what that all might mean. To use the vocabulary of qualitative researchers, one's "findings" are often explained in one section in a way that assumes an unbiased presentation of data. For example, a researcher might include a section of an interview transcript or a paragraph describing a moment from participant observations so that the reader, too, can "see" the data before the researcher offers their opinions on it. Such presentations of data are then followed by a discussion section in which said results are analyzed or interpreted—where the researcher works to make a case for what they think the data means. That this is common practice among those who conduct certain forms of empirical research with human beings suggests an orientation to data which assumes that such presentation is a neutral act, that it is possible for a researcher to just show what they saw, witnessed, or heard, plainly and free of their own interpretation. Successful navigation and maintenance of this writing structure are often considered to be hallmarks of an ethical and reflexive researcher. This book explores what emerges when such a separation is undone.

The writing in this book avoids this divorce of the presentation of data and the analysis of it. Instead, the events of the go-along are represented as they are concurrently being analyzed. Writing this way works to challenge the idea that so-called data can ever be presented or represented in a way that remains untouched by the researcher's influence. It stems from the belief that there is no part of the research process that is not already a form of analysis. By bringing the presentation and analysis of data together in these essays, I hope that you, the reader, can better see the choices and decisions I made in doing this research project with young people. I place my theorizing about the time spent with participants in step with the movements we took together and in time with the theorizing the youth offered me about their own lives and how they see the world around them. By narrativizing the theorizing and the analyzing that occurred during the go-alongs (both by me and the young people), I hope

that the methods utilized to do this work become clear. By going along with the young people and me in this way, you will see how the time we spent together forced a shift in the ways I think about and with TQNB youth, and I hope that it inspires a shift in your own thinking as well.

This challenge, however, is not just one for researchers. The challenge to norms of qualitative research can be extended to the realm of everyday interactions as well. Anyone reading this, researchers or otherwise, participates in the theater of everyday human interactions. Everyone leverages the previous “research” they have done on other people to make sense of every new person they meet. Everyone utilizes their previously held assumptions and preconceptions about how the shape, size, color, presentation, and affect of a person all coalesce into certain notions of race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability. This book is my attempt to show you how I did that—including the ways I made mistakes while doing so—and to invite and challenge you to see how you do it as well.

In the remainder of this introduction, I explain how I was able to go along with youth (and how I arrived at go-alongs) by tracing my history working in education and youth work settings, and the ways my own positionalities shaped how I came to learn about the young people with whom I have worked throughout my career. Such a tracing will clarify why go-alongs are well suited to exploring the questions I sought to examine specifically with TQNB youth. I offer an account of how go-alongs worked within the context of my project and the challenges and limitations I faced when utilizing them. I explain how doing go-along interviews led me to consider a holistic methodology of going along; the experience of completing the go-alongs led me to consider how the ethos of going along might be instilled into the analysis of this research and the writing that came out of it. Lastly, I close the introduction with some advice on how to read this book. Given my challenges to the traditional form expected of an academic volume, I explain what to look out for so that this text can be read by scholars, teachers, policymakers, and young people alike.

Getting to Go-Alongs, or How I Got to Go Along

To explain how I came to go-alongs, I must go back to my work as a classroom teacher and youth worker prior to entering the academy. Before returning as a researcher, I worked at Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI) in New York City, an internationally known agency that supports TQNB youth, predominantly youth of color. There I oversaw several programs,

including a High School Equivalency diploma program, a college prep program, and after-school tutoring. As I learned what it meant for me to occupy the role of educator and youth worker, specifically with the privileges afforded to me given my relationship to maleness and whiteness, the vast differences between how young people at HMI and I experienced the world became clear—namely, how race, class, and gender identity affected our varying relationships to education, policing, housing, health care, food, economics, and transportation. This contrast was especially noticeable when considering that the areas of the city where the young people lived and spent their time were different from those where I frequented, in terms of both residential geographies and the businesses and establishments we chose to and/or were able to patronize. In other words, outside the time the youth and I spent at HMI, the rest of our days were largely spent in different parts of the city, including in different queer and trans community spaces or, in the case of the West Village and the Christopher Street Pier, by accessing the same queer and trans community spaces in different ways. Moreover, having moved to New York for the job at HMI, I was mostly unfamiliar with the places where the agency's youth members made up the rest of their lives, including many predominantly and historically Black and Latinx neighborhoods in Upper Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens.

In getting to know the young people I worked with, I got into the habit of asking them how they made their way through the city—what subway or bus they took to school, how they traveled to HMI after school, or how long it took for them to commute home (or wherever they went) after HMI closed. These conversations helped me get to know parts of the city with which I was unfamiliar. When young people told me they lived in neighborhoods such as Bensonhurst or Ridgewood or Parkchester, for instance, my initial knowledge of those areas was often limited to being able to match a neighborhood with the borough it is in and little else. In asking follow-up questions about how they got to and from those places, I learned which subways went to which neighborhoods and how many transfers it took young people to get there and back. I learned about the young people's knowledge of the city and about the ways that public transit affects how people travel to various parts of the city. Through talking with youth about their movements, I gleaned information on how their race, gender, housing status, and sexuality affected their relationships to space and place, both the neighborhoods where they lived and the queer and trans spaces in the city they frequented. I had stumbled into a habit that not only allowed me insights into how the youth made their way

to and from HMI but also highlighted that I knew very little about how they moved through NYC, how they encountered the currents of the city, and how they were encountered in return. These conversations also gave me an understanding of the city's geography that was much more vivid than the flat subway map one stares at while riding the train. My queries helped me learn more about neighborhoods and communities beyond those usually occupied by white NYC transplants like myself.

The research project that inspired this book sought to explore TQNB youths' everyday experience of those journeys I had learned about all those years. Using go-along interviews, the study was designed to focus methodological attention specifically on the moments youth are away from formal educational spaces to explore how they experience moving through the world when they are not near the adults charged with their care or are away from the places where youth are thought to spend most of their time (namely at home, school, or after-school/youth service organizations). As an educator and youth worker, I had only ever spent time with TQNB youth in schools or youth service agencies. As a result, everything I thought I knew about them had come from our interactions and conversations in those spaces. Moreover, when I entered the academy, it became clear that education research about TQNB youth also largely came from work done in these educational spaces. In other words, a great deal of research with these groups of young people was either conducted in schools and youth programs or focused on youths' relationships with teachers, parents, and other adults with normatively sanctioned relationships to young people. This includes the growing body of work on TQNB youth experiencing homelessness,⁸ which, though focusing on the experiences of young people as they are on their own in public urban spaces, are often based on studies done in partnership with TQNB youth-serving agencies. This demonstrates that most research with youth, my own included, is done under the advisement of or with the permission of an organization (whether youth agency, school, community group, or family unit). With my research, I sought to explore how young people make their moves when they are on their own.

Going Along with Youth

As a research method, go-alongs allow the researcher to move with youth participants as they go about their preexisting daily routines. Put simply,

go-alongs are a type of mobile or walking interview that takes place “in step” with the participants’ daily movements.⁹ The interviews are meant to occur during activities the participant is already doing. Go-alongs thus make the *everydayness* of the person’s life the place of the interview in addition to its subject matter. In this study, the go-alongs focused on spending time with youth outside of formal educational spaces and during the moments when they were away from the watchful eye of those adults charged with their care. Once participants consented to be part of the study, but before we did the first go-along, we sat down for a conversation about their experience with and knowledge of the city. Using a large map of the NYC subway system, I asked the youth to mark up the areas of the city they spent time in, the places they knew, the places they tried to avoid, and how they got around. These conversations helped the youth envision when and where they would invite me to do the go-alongs.

The go-alongs took place throughout four of NYC’s boroughs (sorry, Staten Island!). Some go-alongs were vast in geographic scope, starting and ending in different neighborhoods or boroughs as the young people traveled between home, school, work, and socializing—multiple go-alongs included journeys to the end of numerous subway lines in Upper Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn. Along the way, I noted the routes that youth took, how they moved around other people we passed, and what their movements indicated about their knowledge of the city. (The following chapters depict these types of go-alongs: “Shopping for Stripper Heels with Anna,” “Taking the D Train with Yetfounded,” and “To Grandmother’s House John Goes.”) Other go-alongs involved doing specific activities, such as going to the gym or clothes shopping, thus providing intimate insight into the activities that made up the young people’s daily lives and how they made decisions about where and how to spend their time based on their racial, sexual, and gendered positions. These go-alongs provided opportunities to explore how young people made decisions about food, clothing, recreational activities, and finances. (See, for example, “Scarlet and Popeye Work up a Sweat,” “Shopping for Stripper Heels with Anna,” “Scarlet Wishes She Was a Flat-Chested Lesbian,” and “Meeting Axel’s Posse.”) Other youth, especially those experiencing homelessness, invited me to spend time with them as they passed time in public spaces, such as parks and libraries. During these go-alongs, I was forced to accept that “going along” in these scenarios meant staying completely still and that there were things to learn about youths’ mobility in the moments they were not moving. (See “Library Time with Brian,” “La

Princess Doesn't Have Time to Have a Bad Day," and "Under the Trees at Lincoln Center with Ellioid and Dan.") During the go-alongs, participants wore a small recording device that picked up both our conversations and the cacophony of the city around us, except on the few occasions when I had technical difficulties. (See "Warby's Lost Tapes" about a go-along I failed to record.)

The go-alongs allowed me to move, talk, and spend time with participants as they went about their daily routines—the very ones about which I had always talked with young people earlier in my career. Justin Spinney explains the importance of mobile methods, such as the go-along, in the following way: "It is the hope that by engaging with movement, we will not forget to foreground the emergent and contingent nature of our relationship with space and place; that we will be able to place the senses of touch, smell, kinesthesia on the same footing as the visual and audible; and that we will not over-animate our subjects but instead focus on moments of movement and stillness to understand the ways in which mobile practice (re)produces culture."¹⁰ The go-alongs allowed for a focus on how the young people talked about their lives while moving through the flow of their daily routines or, in some cases, in the moments between their movements. This format accounted for how the specifics of the youths' everyday routines affected the interviews, including what impact my presence might have had on their experiences. Moreover, go-alongs, as a type of mobile method, had to be examined in terms of notions of dis/ability, as movement through space can surely reveal how one is able to navigate through one's daily routines.¹¹ This included my accounting for the pace at which youth walked, whether they decided to stand or sit while waiting for or riding the train, and how and when they decided to move from a stationary position.

The project utilized go-along interviews to examine notions of these youths' everyday lives and to intimately notice, discuss, and analyze the moments of young people's daily lives that are often imperceptible to and through research lenses. Go-alongs require paying attention to the environs of the interview and the affects created by the movements, including how the researcher's presence influences the journeys of the go-alongs. This is especially true in doing go-alongs with young people who may or may not be read as "adult" and how that affects the ways our ages, races, and genders were read by other people we encountered when the go-alongs took us through public spaces. Such dynamics were central in my execution of these interviews (the moment with John I described

earlier being just the first in many examples that follow in these pages) to better understand how young people were making their lives in New York City and how they were coming to make their own knowledges about themselves and the world around them, all while accounting for the impact of my presence on how they moved through the city.

Placing the Go-Alongs

I placed this study in New York City and used HMI for recruitment because I was particularly interested in the journeys that young people took to get to the agency's space and how they made their way through the city after they left. Given that HMI's location in Manhattan's Greenwich Village is far from the neighborhoods where most of the young people who access the agency's programming live, basing the study there would provide ample opportunity for a variety of dynamic go-alongs. While the study was not about HMI itself, the agency permitted me to do participant recruitment in its space in exchange for my volunteering to support program operations. Throughout the study, I volunteered nearly twenty hours per week working the front desk where each youth member checks in upon entering the space and assisting with the nightly dinner service, thus allowing me ample face time with a large swath of the agency's membership. I was grateful to be welcomed back to a place with which I was familiar, though I had to adjust to how I was present in the space as a researcher as compared to how I was as a staff member.¹²

Because roughly fifty to one hundred young people access HMI's programs each day, my being there provided me access to a large group of young people, all of them coming to the agency for a variety of reasons, including ballroom community programming, mental and sexual health services, academic support and job readiness training, housing support services, and arts and culture programs. HMI's members hail from all corners of NYC, some even coming in from surrounding areas outside the city. One key aspect of my selection of HMI as a home for the project was that most of the youth members travel to and from the agency by themselves via public transit, meaning that their modes of movement would lend themselves to the go-along method.

Doing this project in New York City itself was particularly important methodologically. Through my experiences working at HMI, I knew that

young people within the age range of my study often moved through the city alone (or at least without adult supervision).¹³ Doing go-alongs with young people in places where they were more likely to travel with a guardian might have forced conversations like the ones with John's grandmother to have taken place much earlier and with greater frequency, which would have presented a different dynamic to the study. The mobile freedom that many young people in New York experience allowed the go-alongs to take place without the presence of the adults in these young people's lives. Given that TQNB youth often have difficult relationships with parents and guardians, the spatial organization of and youth mobility practices in NYC offered chances to avoid parental control of the youths' movements. Furthermore, most go-alongs took place in highly trafficked areas that people passed through quickly, enabling the participants and me to blend into the crowd at times. However, whether we stuck out in the crowd or faded into the scenery was impacted by the simultaneous readings of our varying positionalities.

Place is a key element of this study and this book. It is impossible to avoid the presence and impact of New York City both in the narratives about the go-alongs and in my thinking about them. As NYC is arguably one of the most researched places in the world, this book is not the first academic text that is based on research in New York, nor will it be the last. Nevertheless, I work to write about the city in ways that speak to youths' understandings of and about the buildings, infrastructure, people, fauna, currents, affects, and knowledges that all combine to be called "New York City." While uttering the name of the city may strike a chord of recognition among many, it must be acknowledged that such recognition is not necessarily the same. The words *New York* likely prompt any number of mental images and emotional reactions depending on one's knowledge of and experience with all that the city comprises. Thus it is my hope that through reading this book, you become *less* sure of what you know about New York. Along with such an unpacking of New York, I note the importance of place also to emphasize that the theorizing and methodological positioning of this book are not intended to be confined specifically to New York itself. Especially because queer and trans theories have been critiqued for their US and Western centrality, I suggest that researchers can and should apply the go-along framework to different geographic and national contexts in order to experience what it is like to go along with people in different locations.

Those Who Went Along

Throughout the course of the study, I recruited eleven young people to take part in the go-alongs. They all selected their own pseudonyms. The go-alongs provided opportunities for me as a researcher to spend time with participants and get the sense of how their identities and social positionings affected their everyday lived experiences. Of the participants in the study, nine identified as Black or Latinx (one of whom identified as both); one identified their ethnicity as Middle Eastern Jewish; and one identified as white. During the time of the go-alongs, five of the participants lived in a group home or shelter run by one of NYC's agencies serving homeless LGBTQ youth. Five participants lived with a parent or other adult family members, and one lived in a private apartment they rented themselves. All the participants had experienced housing insecurity in some capacity at some point in their lives, ranging from those who spent time living on the streets to those who moved between homes of various family members at some time in their past. Four of them were enrolled in the City University of New York (CUNY) system, a collection of public two- and four-year postsecondary institutions. Two were finishing high school, and one was in a High School Equivalency exam prep program. Some of the participants had paid internships through HMI programming; others had jobs elsewhere, mainly working as child-care providers and in retail positions.

Explaining how go-alongs assist researchers in considering how their own positionality affects how they interpret that of their participants, Nicholas A. Scott writes that through this type of interview, “researchers and participants can more readily explore and deeply reflect upon the [participant’s] stream of perceptions, memories and experiences and how these relate to, and flow from, specific social and material contexts.”¹⁴ Go-alongs help researchers move beyond simple notions of identity and see how participants are read and perceived by others and how said reading affects their movements through the city. This is especially true considering the ways that participants’ racial and gender identities along with their housing status impact their ability to access and move through public spaces. (See, for example, “Library Time with Brian,” “La Princess Doesn’t Have Time to Have a Bad Day,” “Foxxxy and the Shoes of Many Colors,” or “Under the Trees at Lincoln Center with Eliod and Dan.”)

Age also played a significant factor. While the study was originally intended to focus on youth ages fifteen to twenty-five, all eleven participants were between eighteen and twenty-two years old during the go-alongs. Nonetheless, I use the term *youth* throughout this book in a way that encompasses the temporal and developmental fuzziness that all participants were experiencing—namely, the shedding of the remaining vestiges of childhood while still feeling unsure about their foothold into adulthood.¹⁵ Whether John would be read as a *child*, a *teen*, or a *young adult* while we moved down the sidewalk together is just one example of how participants and I were perceived differently based on where we were and who was around us. During the go-alongs, I was in my early thirties and recognized that I was (likely) in the oldest age range where I might be accidentally read as “youth.” On the other hand, since all my participants hovered around twenty years old, they were at an age when it was often beneficial for them to lean into looking older when possible. They knew it was often advantageous for them to be read not as a child or teen but as an adult. The privileges of my racialization and gender presentation also played a factor in how I was perceived alongside participants. As a man of European and Jewish heritage who is read as white, I can move through public spaces with certain privileges, namely being less likely to be stopped by police in public spaces. Numerous participants expressed that my being with them as they rode the subway or moved through the city stood to make their journeys safer, explaining that my body would deflect some of the unwanted attention they get from people they encounter in their daily lives. (See “Foxy and the Shoes of Many Colors” and “Scarlet Wishes She Was a Flat-Chested Lesbian.”) In other moments, my positionality thrust itself into the plots of the go-alongs in ways with which the young people and I, individually and collectively, had to grapple. (See “Scarlet and Popeye Work Up a Sweat,” “Shopping for Stripper Heels with Anna,” and “You Breaking Up with Me, Sam?”)

In terms of my own positionality, I note here that I alternate between describing the pieces of my identity as fact and pointing to the ways that such categories are always the result of the ways in which my body is read. I recognize this tension because I believe it speaks to the complexities inherent to categories and identities. While acknowledging that I experience a great deal of social privilege due to the ways I am read as and assumed to be white, male, and cisgender, I nevertheless am not interested in claiming any of those terms as identities. To do so would further strengthen said categories as immutable and natural, rather than

as the result of specific ways of knowing and understanding political identities. This thinking is shaped by much of the literature cited throughout, namely work by feminist scholars of color and queer and trans theorists who, in their own ways, call for critical approaches to conceiving of the terms we use to describe ourselves. In particular, one piece of advice from education scholar Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings stands out in this regard. Once, during a question-and-answer session after a keynote address, I heard her field a question from a white teacher who asked how they could best support their students of color. Ladson-Billings, who is responsible for introducing critical race theory to the field of education,¹⁶ replied simply: *You don't have to participate in being white.* What I took from this, and how it applies to how I represent myself (and the young people) in this book, is that to claim “white” as identity does not rectify the social and political inequities caused by normative understandings of race and racism, but rather only serves to reify racial categories as set in stone and universal. I heeded similar advice from Finn Enke’s theorizing about *cisgender* as a category meant to imply “not trans” and the ways that such an understanding, despite how it is used to imply allyship to trans people and communities, does more to undergird transphobic logics than undo them.¹⁷ That being said, I hope that while reading about my experiences with the young people, you see references to my identities, body, and racial and gendered presentations as always in the process of being formed and unformed. Even when I take the more simplistic narrative route and write about them seemingly as fact, I mean for you to always keep them under the microscope.

The multitude of possible reactions to my being together with participants, however, stayed at the forefront of my mind during the go-alongs. It was certainly on my mind while going along with John near their grandmother’s house in a predominantly Black neighborhood where my whiteness might draw attention or even suspicion, especially as I moved in tandem with John. (See both “To Grandmother’s House John Goes” and “John’s Grandmother Has Some Questions.”) Readings of my body were certainly on my mind during a go-along with Anna, a Black woman in her early twenties, when she took me to an adult novelty store in the Bronx. She wanted to buy new outfits, as she had just started working as an exotic dancer. As the salesclerk, who was also a Black woman, answered Anna’s questions about stilettos and lingerie, I wondered what she thought I was doing there with Anna. Did she think I was Anna’s gay friend there to provide fashion advice? Maybe she assumed I was Anna’s

john? Despite the questions running through my head, the clerk seemed more concerned about making a sale with Anna than paying any attention to me. This was a helpful reminder that sometimes the researcher might just blend into the scenery, if only for a moment. (This go-along is further described in “Shopping for Stripper Heels with Anna.”)

There were also times when it became clear that the participants were concerned that my being with them might have certain implications they had not previously considered before embarking on a go-along, especially given the mobile nature of the method. These concerns arose in the moments when the go-alongs moved us over certain geographic boundaries when youth realized that while they were okay being with me where we started the interview, they were less comfortable with my presence in the location where we ended up. On another go-along with Anna, we visited two grocery stores near the 72nd Street subway station on the Upper West Side. When she bought far more food than she could carry herself, I offered to help carry the haul on her ride home; at the time, she was staying with her aunt almost eighty blocks further uptown in Harlem. When we arrived at the apartment building, she expressed apprehension about my coming into the building because she did not want to explain to her aunt what she was doing with me. However, she could not carry all the bags of food herself. We decided on having me come up to drop the bags at the apartment door and then leave before she unlocked the door and went inside. Whether intentionally or not, Anna may well have used the go-along to her advantage to buy more food than her usual grocery runs allowed, thus saving her an extra trip. Along the way, she realized that her choice resulted in allowing me into parts of her life she was not sure she wanted me to see and/or where my proximity to her might be called into question.

Beyond official identity categories and social positions, there was one commonality that most of the participants shared: they were young people who spent a great deal of time by themselves and who largely made their moves through the city alone. Contrary to assumptions about young people always moving together in large groups, nearly all the participants I worked with traveled through the city and spent a significant part of their day by themselves—the exception being Dan and Elliod, who always moved as a pair. (See “Under the Trees at Lincoln Center with Elliod and Dan.”) Although the participants were not without friends or support systems, that they were often alone while moving through the city (and during their time at HMI) played a role in their agreeing to take part

in the go-alongs. I believe there are two reasons for this, one having to do with my recruitment methods and one to do with the nature of the go-along itself.

When recruiting in HMI's space, I had serious conversations with dozens of young people about joining the study, though only the eleven agreed to take part.¹⁸ Having these conversations during the agency's programs, I found it easier to strike up conversations with young people who spent time alone as opposed to those who moved around the space with groups of friends. This is important to note, as it both reveals the limits of my own recruitment strategies and shines light on aspects of the go-along as a method. My recruitment practices aside, given the intimate nature of the go-alongs, I believe it was difficult for some young people to imagine doing them if their daily routines involved traveling through the city with one or more peers by their side. While there were certainly many reasons youth declined to participate, this was certainly a significant one.

Nearly all the participants who did take part in the study typically arrived at and left HMI solo. This not only suggests that the go-along method might have worked better given participants' habit of solitary movements but also highlights that taking part in the go-alongs might have been advantageous for them. During a preliminary conversation with Foxy as they were about to sign the participant consent form, I explained to them how I had designed the study to minimize potential risk for the participants. Foxy stopped me mid-sentence and asked, "What do you mean risk?" They went on to explain with no uncertainty that my moving along with Foxy would make their commutes safer, implying that my body might act as a buffer to the daily transphobic slights Foxy receives as a genderqueer person. In the essays, I draw particular attention to moments when the youth seemed to use their proximity to my body and positionality to their advantage, thus challenging norms related to the researcher-participant relationship. (See, for instance, "La Princess Doesn't Have Time to Have a Bad Day," "Scarlet and Popeye Work Up a Sweat," and "Foxy and the Shoes of Many Colors.")

After the Go-Alongs

After completing the fieldwork stage of my research, I sat with the memories and remnants of the go-alongs for months and months. I listened and relistedened to the recordings of the interviews. Hearing the young