Just walking

Creative methods towards pedestrian equity

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'Walking Publics/Walking Arts**:** walking, wellbeing and community during COVID-19' was an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded research project exploring how adults across the UK experienced walking during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the role of creativity in walking activities. Employing a range of methods, from a large-scale survey to walking interviews and artist commissions, the research identified the potential of the arts to sustain, encourage and more equitably support walking during and recovering from a pandemic.[i]

The interdisciplinary research team, working across performance and visual arts, cultural geography and sociology, share an interest in creative walking practices, as scholars and practitioners. Our use of the term 'walking' does not presume bipedal mobility; walking is not just undertaken on foot and can include all sorts of technologies which help disabled people and anyone with mobility issues to move around. Walking can be undertaken indoors as well as out, and we also include imaginative walks – walks of the mind rather than the body.

Our research builds on the existing evidence base for the general benefits of both walking and art on physical health and mental wellbeing, locating this within the context of the pandemic. Quantitative research, our own included, indicated that during COVID-19 some people walked more frequently, but some people walked less (Gov. UK, 2021; Stewart and Eccleston, 2020 and 2022). Engagement with walking activity was unevenly distributed before and during the pandemic, and access to walking continues to be dependent on many variables, including opportunity, environment, health, and perceptions of safety (Twohig-

Bennett and Jones, 2018; Friends of the Earth, 2020). The concept of pedestrian equity – or 'just walking' – within and beyond the pandemic, has yet to be fully addressed. Our use of the term 'just walking' signals its doubled meaning and the implicit tension between walking as a supposedly simple act and walking as a question of equity and justice. Through knowledge co-creation with artists, in partnership with environmental and arts organisations, we were able to better understand how walking and creativity in combination might more equitably support walking by addressing systemic barriers and subverting walking 'norms'.

Understanding walking and creativity during COVID-19

There is a wealth of evidence that walking and the arts both play a role in sustaining and improving physical and mental wellbeing. The known physical benefits of engaging in walking activity include improving the performance of the heart, lungs and circulation, lowering blood pressure, reducing heart disease, improving flexibility and boosting the immune system. Walking also benefits mental health, registering positive impacts on mood, anxiety and sleep. Walking with others can help mitigate feelings of isolation (Morris and Hardman, 1997; Murphy et al., 2007; Hanson and Jones, 2015). Walking is also typically – though not exclusively – an outdoors activity, and often provides a route to accessing green spaces. Spending time in green space delivers additional mental health benefits (Twohig-Bennett and Jones, 2018). Engagement with the arts – which can variously involve imaginative, emotional, and cognitive stimulation and social interaction – may produce beneficial psychological, physiological, social and behavioural responses, ranging from and including enhanced confidence, new skills and peer networks, reduced isolation, and lower stress levels and anxiety. Some arts practices, such as dance, additionally harness the health benefits of physical activity (APGA, 2017; Fancourt and Finn, 2019).

'Creative walking' sits in the generative nexus of walking and art, and often also green space, although many artists seek strategically to locate and appreciate the green in the

grey, for example the wildflowers thriving in the cracks of pavements, thereby extending our understanding of 'green space' beyond partitioned 'natural environments' such as parks, forests or nature reserves.[ii] By 'creative walking', we refer to activities that people or groups may undertake while walking which have an imaginative, playful, or task-based framework. These frameworks add an additional layer or lens of attention to the walking activity, giving it a particular direction and focus. Examples of creative walking include following a painted stone trail or looking out for everything that is yellow on your walk. Our research also expands the definition of 'walking' beyond the physical act to include imaginative or proxy journeys.[iii] For example, 'Walks to Remember During a Pandemic: with memory I was there', by artist Louise Ann Wilson, demonstrates the emotional and mental benefits to be had in imagining a favourite walk, even when not able to undertake it (Wilson, 2020). In a proxy walk, a walk is undertaken at the request of, and on behalf of, someone else, and then relayed back, for example through drawings or photos which document the work, or simultaneously using video conferencing technology.

Our digital survey, addressed to UK-based adults aged 18 and over, ran from 27 April 2021 to 21 May 2021. The purpose of the survey was to help us understand, in more depth, how people experienced and felt about walking during the pandemic, and whether they created or encountered creative walking activities. Survey questions covered the period from the UK's first lockdown in March 2020, to the date the survey closed. Questions asked respondents to reflect on how often they walked, why, where, with whom, and how they felt about it during the different stages of the pandemic. We circulated the survey via project researchers' and partners' networks and though we do not position it as a representative sample of UK adult residents, the 1221 responses, many of them qualitative in content, offered useful insights into people's experiences of walking during the pandemic (Rose et al., 2022).

Key findings to emerge from our survey were that most respondents walked more, and walked more in their local neighbourhood, though some people walked less. The most popular reasons for walking included exercise, health, wellbeing, relaxation, to get out of the house, and to visit a green space. Daily walking helped establish a routine when working from home and offered a way to engage children in outdoors activity. Lockdown prompted many people to explore their local environments in more depth and engage in creative walking.

Our findings align with other studies; one reported that 74 per cent of Britons said they had taken up some form of exercise during the first lockdown, with the most popular form being a walk (Gov. UK, 2021), while Stewart and Eccleston's report for NatureScot found that participation in outdoors activity was higher than usual and that walking was the most popular activity of those visiting the outdoors, with increased numbers of people making visits to outdoor spaces for exercise every day during lockdown (Stewart and Eccleston, 2020). That they also found increased numbers of people taking no visits at all demonstrates clearly the widely variable impact of the pandemic on individuals and the corollary need for post-pandemic resources and actions to be alert to and address this continuum.

Creative walking during the pandemic

Our focus on creative walking during the pandemic is, as far as we know, the first study to explore this subject. It offers substantial new information, specifically around the potential value of creative walking as a tool of engagement with additional health and wellbeing benefits. Most of our survey respondents had engaged with some form of creative walking activity, particularly 'Following or encountering a "thing"', which might include art trails, window trails and treasure hunts. Many respondents also devised their own creative walking

activity, such as composing local guidebooks, walking to create digitally tracked shapes, or ‘themed’ walks.

Comments by respondents demonstrated the various positive impacts of creative walking, from stimulating the imagination, to motivating people to take exercise, and offering creative ways to safely connect with others and bridge physical distances. Simple interventions such as pebble or window trails fostered a sense of community and mitigated feelings of isolation. Photographing environments provided a way to document and make sense of the pandemic but also to engage more deeply with local places and, often using social media platforms, to share individual experiences with others. Creative approaches, including geocaching and treasure hunts, also offered encouragement for children to walk.

Barriers to walking

Alongside understanding why and how people walked during the pandemic, we were keen to identify barriers. The most frequently reported were the weather, work commitments, pandemic restrictions, time, physical and/or mental health, caring responsibilities and fear. Most of these barriers existed before the pandemic, but for some respondents they were exacerbated, and for a significant number – 23 per cent – the pandemic directly caused the issue that stopped them walking. This included fear of busy places, shielding, and health (Rose et al., 2022: 12–15; 38–43).

> I have really wanted a balcony or a garden during lockdown – somewhere I could be outside, get fresh air, and be in my own space. Instead, I have had to make do with walking to/from somewhere specific (shops, GP surgery) or very rarely hang out in a public area … because of where I live combined with how busy all the parks have been.
>
> Over the Winter especially I found it harder to fit in walks as I did not feel safe walking alone in the dark after work.

> I was paranoid about being viewed differently due to my perceived ethnicity, especially when hate acts spiked in the US, being a non-white person in a predominantly white market town.
>
> (Respondents to the anonymous survey)

While our survey is not offered as a representative sample of adults across the UK, other research similarly suggested that experiences of walking, and associated access to outdoor space, including green space, was inequitable during the pandemic. Sport England, for example, reported increased walking for exercise, but at the same time noted that 'those from lower socio-economic groups, older people, Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups and women' were all less likely to be active during the first lockdown (Sport England, 2020). That many people in these socio-economic groups were more likely to be key workers, and therefore also less likely to be working from home, suggests one correlation. Stewart and Ecclestone similarly note highest participation in outdoor exercise among men, younger age groups, residents of least deprived areas, higher social grades and those with good health. By contrast, 'older people, those living in the most deprived areas and those not in good health were most likely to have taken no outdoor visits at all' (Stewart and Eccleston, 2020: 13).

Walking commissions: 'walking with'

Recognising the positive impact of creative walking reported by many survey respondents, alongside the challenges they identified, we commissioned eight new walking artwork pilots to explore how creative walking practice might variously help to:

- promote health and wellbeing, recovery and renewal;
- maintain or enhance social connectivity and mitigate isolation and anxiety;
- build community;
- positively change people's perception of/relationship with their environment;

- empower individuals and facilitate pedestrian equity.

Our commissioned artists collaborated with a range of partners and explored very different methods of creative walking which responded to specific contexts, including a hospice and a dementia centre. All the works created sought to address intersectional issues of marginalisation and exclusion.[iv] Our commissions modelled various forms of 'walking with', which, borrowing from Springgay and Truman's work on walking as a research methodology, is a practice of walking that is 'accountable [and] is a form of solidarity, unlearning, and critical engagement with situated knowledges' (2019: 11). Such an approach places participants' experiences and expertise at the centre of the practice, allowing this to inform and shape both process and outcomes, rather than expecting people to fit into existing normative practices which then persist unchanged. Springgay and Truman critique participation as too often symbolic, framed through a logic of inclusion and rehabilitation, rather than an undoing of 'the structural logics of racism, ableism, homophobia, and settler colonialism' (2019: 13). While participatory models of inclusion may serve to bring the margins into the centre, such a move can disguise systemic structures of oppression.

Before focusing in detail on two of our commissions (Sheffield Environmental Movement and Open Clasp Theatre Company), we offer a snapshot of the other six, demonstrating the rich range of ways in which creative walking can be used to actively address and respond to barriers to participation. 'Finding a Way', developed by Kate Green in collaboration with Leominster Meeting Centre, devised a non-linear heritage trail around the town with and for people who live with dementia. 'Plantar', by Laura Bradshaw and Steven Anderson's, offered an audio-walk created for and to be listened to in the seasonal gardens of Glasgow's Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice. 'To the Moon and Back', by Shonagh Short, explored with a small group of mums in Bolton the daily walk to school, collectively revealing it as a significant journey of care and space of transition. Henna Asikainen's

creative walking was developed in collaboration with North East Solidarity and Teaching, a student-led charity based at Newcastle University which teaches English as a second language and organises community integration support for people in Newcastle who have experienced forced migration. Henna's walks, all of which ended in a communal meal, sought to challenge exclusionary cultural practices that impress a sense of homelessness and not-belonging. London-based Arts Canteen supported artist Areej Kaoud in the development of a live art piece, 'Intimate Distance', which used walking games to create imaginative and playful connections between bodies, responding to the physical isolation felt by so many during pandemic lockdowns. Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) partnered with artist Elspeth Penfold and East Kent MENCAP to explore how creative walking can create new approaches to public archaeology, working with a range of different materials, including rope, to open landscape up to different embodied experiences and representations.

Responses from artists, organisations and participants to each of these pilot projects demonstrates the potential of creative walking approaches to support participation in both walking and creative practices, and the wide variety of potential benefits which can emerge. Importantly, models of participation push against conceptual norms attached to 'walking', including what counts, who does it, and how it is done. For example, Shonagh Short, in her collaboration with mums – who, she notes, would not identify themselves as walkers – repositioned the daily school run as a meaningful and valued site of exploration and discovery. Laura Bradshaw's and Stephen Anderson's audio-walk not only offered patients a relaxing experience, but also their visitors. Staff observed that visitors to hospices need such restorative space too, yet often feel unable to leave those they are visiting. The artwork also functioned as an act of care for staff, an invitation to spend time on their own in the garden, to slow down, observe, and reflect.[v] Kate Green developed a new methodology, a form of the proxy walk, for her work with Leominster Meeting Centre. Her aim was to explore

Leominster guided by Centre members, in whatever way best suited their needs, 'walking with' people who had a range of mobilities, interests and experiences of dementia. Wearing a headphone with a microphone, and her mobile phone on a selfie stick pointing at either herself or the environment, Kate was joined by both those who wanted to physically accompany her and those who preferred to stay at the Centre, where a zoom screen ran on a giant whiteboard. Those at the Centre could see where Kate was and guided her by offering instructions. As Kate explained, they shouted '"go over there, or go into that shop and buy a cake, or take off your shoes and socks and run into the sea." Or I can ask them, "do you want me to cross the road here or to carry on towards the river?"' Kate recognised the walk as an improvised and fluid two-way interaction, left as open as possible to ensure participants have choice and agency in the walk's unfolding.[vi]

Walking, equity and creative interventions

Focusing in more depth on two of our commissioned art walks and the contexts within which they take place, our intention is to foreground the work that creative walking can do in addressing and challenging systemic barriers to equity and the social, structural, cultural and relational contexts in which 'walking' takes place.

Commission 1: Sheffield Environmental Movement (SEM)

SEM is a charity based in Sheffield which works with Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee communities to promote social and environmental justice. Led by Maxwell Ayamba, SEM was founded in 2016 as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Prior to setting up SEM, Maxwell was also co-founder, in 2004, of the '100 Black Men Walk for Health Group'.[vii] In 2015, this became Walk4 Health, expanding its invitation to women and people of colour. SEM's aim is to ensure everyone has a clean, healthy environment, pushing for a 'fair green deal' for individuals to help them develop resilient and prosperous communities

by ensuring the environmental sector listens to and is guided by all parts of society including people who feel 'invisible' and marginalised.[viii]

In 2021, project researcher Maggie O'Neill joined SEM for a walk and talked with participants about their experiences of walking. Maxwell offered key insights into SEM's formation. The initial '100 Black Men Walk for Health Group' was not founded as a rights or protest movement, but it inadvertently became a political statement in response to the paradoxical experience of Black people walking in the British countryside feeling simultaneously invisible and hyper visible. Even though Black people have and do inhabit the British countryside, their persistent erasure from rural history positions them as being 'out of place'. Being made to feel out of place can be a deterrent for Black people and people of colour and covert forms of micro-aggressions and more overt racism are significant barriers. In her walk with SEM, one participant admitted to Maggie that he 'didn't walk a lot during Covid because the area where I live, there is not much black people round there'. Maxwell also reminds Maggie that Black people have been written out of the landscape and have been 'culturally severed or detached from our heritage, our roots. So, walking in England is seen as a White privilege, hobby or sport.'[ix] Walking in the British countryside is a racialised activity.

One organisation with substantial connections to Britain's rural environment and influence over its reception and interpretation is the National Trust. Aiming to redress historical erasures by writing Black people and people of colour *into* British history, in 2020 the National Trust published an 'Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery'. This explicitly reveals the connections between many of the country houses and vast grounds to which they are attached and colonial practices, including the slave trade. As co-editor Sally-Anne Huxtable notes in her introduction, 'somewhere in the region of one-third of [National

Trust] properties can be directly connected to colonial histories [and] the research also highlights interesting evidence about the presence of African, Asian and Chinese people working on English and Welsh estates' (Huxtable, 2020: 5). In a later chapter, Huxtable writes that 'records and portraiture provide evidence that a number of people of colour lived at properties now in the care of the National Trust from the seventeenth century (and possibly even earlier)'. Some individuals with mixed African heritage owned properties, but the majority 'were servants, or possibly enslaved individuals' (Huxtable, 2020: 10).

In his discussion with Maggie, Maxwell identified other barriers to walking, including cultural perceptions (walking perceived as a way of livelihood or mode of transport, rather than a leisure pursuit), pressure on time and competing priorities, the commodification of walking including pressure to 'have the right gear', and lack of knowledge about and therefore confidence of being in the countryside, which causes anxiety. SEM's purpose is to support Black people and people of colour to access local green spaces, to build knowledge, skills, confidence and community through group walks, and to demonstrate, *through* walking, that green space is for everyone. As Maxwell puts it forcefully, 'where green becomes white, there can never be diversity', an insight which resonates with Jason Byrne's point that the cultural politics of park *making* encode and reproduce greenspaces according to 'White ideals of nature', including the notion of the urban pastoral (Byrne, 2012: 596). Though writing about Los Angeles, Byrne's findings can be extended to the UK, not least because many of the historical discourses underpinning USA environmental movements are anchored in racist European ideals which serve to recycle narratives of white goodness and innocence (Bratman and DeLince, 2022; Finney, 2014: 25–27). The cultural production of 'nature', as represented in these green spaces, perpetuates exclusionary ideas and practices 'of *what parks are*, *where* they should be built, and *who* they are intended to serve' (Byrne, 2012: 598, emphasis in original).

Inequitable access to green space is one aspect of environmental inequality, and is an enduring, intersectional issue across the UK. Predictors for being an infrequent visitor to green/blue spaces for recreation include socio-economic status and disability. The main reasons cited by people include distance from home or work, challenging topography and limited path networks, safety concerns and lack of time due to working longer hours (distributional inequity is both spatial and temporal) (Boyd et al., 2018; Nesbitt, Meitner, and Sheppard, 2018). Friends of the Earth's recent mapping of the 'green space gap' in England reveals not just a marked disparity in access to green space but 'a strong correlation between green space deprivation and ethnicity' (Friends of the Earth, 2020; see also Gov. UK, 2017). Signalling the intersectionality attached to issues of environmental justice, the link between green space deprivation and income is noted here too. Black people in England are also four times less likely than white people to have their own outdoor space (RICS, n.d.).

Green space inequality not only persisted during the pandemic but potentially deepened. Data collected in spring 2021 show that the majority of those visiting green and open spaces the previous four weeks belonged to higher socioeconomic groups, with those in lower socio-economic groups reporting lack of local green spaces and accessibility (Olsen and Mitchell, 2021; see also National Trust, 2022). The reported gap in 'green space' *provision* is important because it shifts the point of analysis and interpretation from a behavioural to a resource deficit. Where the former places responsibility on individuals and, by demographically grouping people together, risks essentialising behaviour, the focus on a deficit of resources, such as access and provision, centres systemic structures and resultant inequities.

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It is within this context of systemic environmental inequality, and indeed environmental racism, that our commissioned walk with Maxwell Ayamba and Sheffield-based artist Jenson Grant took place. Maxwell and Jenson collaborated with ROSHNI Asian

Women's Resource Centre. Established in 1992, the aim of ROSHNI is to 'advance the welfare and education of South Asian women in Sheffield'.[x] Notable in the Centre's contextualisation of their aim is reference to the women's isolation, due to cultural re-adjustment, racial prejudice and urban deprivation.

For this commission, Maxwell and Jenson developed a sci-art walking project to explore natural indicators of air pollution in and around Sheffield. Commencing while COVID-19 restrictions were still in place, Maxwell gave an online presentation about air pollution, including its potential impacts on health. This was followed by a face-to-face workshop introducing the OPAL tools which monitor air pollution,[xi] and in-person group walks to both inner city areas of Sheffield (Darnell and Sharrow), and to the Peak District (Longshaw Estate, purchased from the Duke of Rutland by the Sheffield Corporation in 1927 and now managed by the National Trust).

The OPAL tools offer a framework for measuring air pollution, with nitrogen-tolerant and nitrogen-sensitive lichen functioning as bioindicator systems.[xii] Supported by Jenson, the group used digital cameras and audio recorders to capture their experiences of walking together and being in both familiar and unfamiliar environments. Jenson and Maxwell then collaborated with the women to digitally manipulate, edit and compile documentation, creating a collaborative multi-media record of their project comprising titles, audio-recordings, still photos and video. The artwork created by the women foregrounds the attentiveness of their walking, of getting to know an environment through careful looking (the artwork presents a rich collage of shadows, shapes, textures and longer views) and also walking's hapticity (hands feeling branches and cradling soft mosses). The conviviality and collaboration of the group walk is foregrounded in the work too, with a branch held by someone so that someone else can take a photo, playfulness captured in a spray of water, and an ensemble of women gathered atop a slab of granite, their stories visibly circulating among

each other (see Figs 3.1 and 3.2). The audio segments of the artwork relate the resonances of distant homes in strange(r) landscapes, bringing the latter closer and making them more familiar in the process – 'It brings back [a] memory of home', says one of the women. Words in English, such as 'plant', are given their Urdu and Punjabi equivalents, recentring and valuing the women's knowledge. We are shown the women enacting skills of scientific observation, using magnifying tools to identify lichen and determine pollution levels, with cameras and audio recorders in hand to document their experiences, and later, computers to create the collaborative artwork. Also brought into focus are their observations and insights on the different environments they walked, with the Longshaw Estate perceived as having fresher air than the urban environments in which they live:

> What's it like here?
>
> Very fresh. Enjoyable.
>
> […]
>
> More green here.
>
> Feels like when you take a breath, it feels a different, nice breath.
>
> Fresh air.
>
> Nice weather.
>
> It's very nice.
>
> (Spoken text, transcribed from video montage)

This innovative sci-art approach addressed many of the challenges identified in our research. It used walking to create a convivial, safe space, which enhanced social connectivity between a group of women. It increased the women's knowledge of their environment and empowered them by reinforcing and extending the knowledge they already hold in new environmentally

focused directions. While walking and accessing green spaces have been shown to have demonstrable health benefits, vitally important in this work was the explicit acknowledgement of health and environmental inequalities, the two often implicated. The walks in Sheffield's urban environments oriented the women to the 'nature' on their doorstep. Using the OPAL toolkit also, however, enabled those women to 'read' the signs emitted by 'nature' regarding levels of pollution in the city air – the air which they breathed daily. Walking further afield, in the Longshaw Estate, introduced the women to a new area, possibly building confidence in accessing that space through both the visit and the subsequent creation of artwork documenting it which served to explicitly write the women into that landscape. (Notably, all the signs at Longshaw are only in English, and both Maxwell and Jenson acknowledged the importance of having a translator in the project [see Byrne, 2012: 596].) At the same time, having developed the knowledge to interpret the lichen signals, the women understood that this space, further away from Sheffield and where they live, was demonstrably healthier.

Like access to green space, experience of air pollution is stratified. Largely an urban problem, neighbourhoods with the highest air pollution levels are also the most ethnically diverse (Fecht and DeLince, 2015). Placing walking, environment and health into this wider context of environmental inequity is to insist on the politics at stake in 'just walking', holding together the multiple benefits and vastly different experiences of walking. While walking is good for health, this persistent message disguises the reality that not all walks are equal, and in areas of high pollution – toxic environments – the benefits of walking are perhaps more circumspect. In this 'walking with' work, the women may become empowered not only to walk more but to be part of a wider movement which insists on healthier local environments in which everyone can walk and take pleasure. While walking delivers personal benefits, 'just walking' gestures towards the need to connect walking campaigns to wider campaigns of

environmental equity, pressing for systemic and structural changes which will support more people to access the pleasures and health benefits of walking, taking us towards what Barbara Hudson calls 'beyond white man's justice' (Hudson, 2006). Here, justice is constituted by discursiveness – people can put their claims to justice in their own words and ways, in a process both relational and reflective.

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Commission 2: Open Clasp Theatre

Maxwell, Jenson and the women from ROSHNI Asian Women's Resource Centre used a sci-art-walking combination to make visible and share the women's existing knowledge *and* develop knowledge and agency concerning their environments. Open Clasp Theatre Company, with playwright Guen Murroni, used walking to reflect on women's experiences of walking and generate material for the creation of a new activist play addressing street harassment.

Open Clasp, based in the North East of England, collaborates with women excluded by theatre and society to create theatre for personal, social and political change.[xiii] Like SEM, then, Open Clasp both recognises and embraces the potential for personal transformation that may result from participation, in this case in the arts, but is committed to embedding this within a wider systemic context towards social justice, by 'changing the world one play at a time'. Pressing for social and cultural change is to resist neoliberal paradigms which focus singularly on self-help and which present structural oppressions as individualised deficits requiring individualised solutions. In this commission, Open Clasp collaborated with West End Women and Girls Centre, a community centre also based in the North East of England, which aims 'to build the power of women and girls, who have been and continue to be disenfranchised'.[xiv]

As preparation, project researchers Clare Qualmann and Maggie O'Neill visited Open Clasp to share with a team of creative practitioners, different concepts and practices of creative walking, focusing on storytelling, place-responsive writing and participation. Writer Guen Murroni then worked with two Gender Equality Peer Educators from the West End Women and Girls Centre to workshop and create 'We', a new theatre piece addressing street safety.

The endemic presence of street harassment is writ large in the walking interview Maggie and Clare undertook with Lily, a representative from the Centre. Lily started the walk at the mural on the wall of the West End Women and Girls Centre. The text on the mural reads 'Misogyny is a hate crime #NotWelcomeInElswick', a response to an act of sexual harassment committed by a local councillor.[xv] As they walked, Lily shared her own multiple experiences of sexual harassment in public spaces, mapping them across the route on which she took Maggie and Clare, indicating the safety mechanisms she routinely builds into her walks. These included the places where she texts friends and family to tell them where she is, and the locations of safe houses, inhabited by people she knows if she needs to divert her journey. Lily also reflected on some of the perceived heightened risks during the pandemic, including the quieter streets. Although Lily's walk was framed by harassment, zones of fear, and safety mechanisms for managing the space, the overall impression was that she nevertheless loved to walk and that her regular pandemic long walk to work had changed her attitude and approach to her own health and wellbeing, reinforcing her motivation to work with women and girls to instigate social change. Given the demonstrable benefits of walking to physical and mental wellbeing, it is imperative, as an issue of spatial justice, that the spaces in which walking takes place are felt by all to be safe.

Lily's experiences of street harassment will resonate with most women and are reflected in a 2021 YouGov survey on sexual harassment which found that 71 per cent of

women of all ages have experienced some form of sexual harassment in a public space, rising to 86 per cent among 18–24-year-olds (APPG, 2021). A subsequent survey in 2022 reported that 50 per cent of women felt unsafe walking alone after dark in a quiet street near their home and that 82 per cent of women felt unsafe walking alone after dark in a park or other open space (Gov.UK, 2022). As Lily's conversation with Maggie and Clare signalled, the pandemic did not improve women's experiences of public space. Plan International reported that 28 per cent of women and girls aged 14 to 21 'feel less safe now than they did before [the pandemic], with regards to going out in public' (Plan International, 2020). The most common reason reported 'was feeling that there are fewer people around to help if something happened to them (51 per cent)'.

The doubled idea of 'just walking' – simply walking and walking as a question of justice – felt particularly resonant in March 2021, following the disappearance and murder of Sarah Everard.[xvi] Many social media comments reflected that 'She was just walking home'. Like Lily, Sarah Everard purportedly practised safety mechanisms that night, including using her phone to call her partner while walking, and sticking to well-lit main streets. 'Just walking' is often a highly rehearsed and skilled routine.[xvii]

This is the context in which the collaborative theatre making of Open Clasp Theatre Company and the West End Women and Girls Centre took place, with collective and individual walking activities forming a key tool to generate material to be used in the creation of content for the play. The group worked together on ideas for the play, based on their life experiences, and the collective walking and writing workshops that they took part in. Together they built the character of Aliyah, a 20-year-old campaigner for safer streets, whose actions are inspired by her experience of harassment (see Fig 3.3). Following Clare and Maggie's earlier workshop, mapping, walking and writing in and in response to specific places fed into the process, along with group and solo walks to collect images, sounds, smells

and textures to inform the writing. The materials generated collectively were used by Guen in the writing of the script, which tells the story of Aliyah's campaigning journey, from responding to an incident of street harassment and culminating with the organisation of a mass protest march which blocks one of Newcastle's main bridges. Several of the play's scenes draw on the walking experiences of the young women, including a night walk in the park:

> ALIYAH: I hate how we walked down the park yesterday, ten of us, and two lads were behind us and we separated – and let them through. Ten of us, two of them and still … we were the ones to move. We opened up, almost in unison and let them through. We broke our line, we broke our group and we put our head down. And we got quieter and we got smaller.
> (Beat)
> This rage within me though. This rage within us. It's not a shot in the dark anymore. Because ten of us then was 20. And then 30, then 50 … And now we … we are hundreds. Right here. On this bridge, on this day.

'We' was staged as a public performance at Open Clasp's Annual General Meeting in June 2022, and it issued not only a call to the ongoing and urgent need to address and end public sexual harassment but also offered to the young women collaborators a powerful representation and acknowledgement of their lived experiences of moving through so-called 'public space' (see Fig. 3.4). Creative walking workshops provided the structure for collaboration and participation, which then shaped the play's content. The project's facilitators, reflecting on the use of walking as part of a creative process, stated that it would continue to inform their work going forward.[xviii]

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Conclusion

These two case studies support the findings of our wider research, providing detailed qualitative insight into intersectional barriers and challenges to walking experienced by different communities. They also demonstrate how walking can be both embraced for the pleasures it brings and put to work in addressing inequalities. Through the case studies, we demonstrate examples of pedestrian equity – or 'just walking' – within and beyond the pandemic. The knowledge generated by and with participants and partner organisations supports assertions that:

- Creative walking can engage diverse groups and engender new connections between people and place.
- Participatory creative walking experiences open up landscapes, spaces and creative practices, enabling access to those who are often excluded.
- Arts organisations seeking to engage communities can use walking as part of their methods to offer new insights and new modes of practice.
- Working with artists can support walking organisations to extend and widen their reach.
- Creating artworks from the experience of walking enables wider audiences to gain insight and understanding of exclusions, barriers and routes to 'just walking'.
- For walking to be 'just', it needs to be located within and used as part of wider movements tackling systemic inequalities.

Key insights

- Walking takes a variety of forms.
- Walking is always a political movement.

- Walking is not equitable.
- Combining walking and creativity can increase their impact.
- Creative walking offers routes to reflection and empowerment, treading pathways to more just futures.

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Figure 3.1. Participants from ROSHNI Asian Women's Resource Centre, standing in front of trees, with Sheffield Environmental Movement. Credit: Jenson Grant

Figure 3.2. ROSHNI Asian Women's Resource Centre identifying moss on a tree trunk with Sheffield Environmental Movement. Credit: Jenson Grant

Figure 3.3. Two women performers on stage, fists raised. Performance by Open Clasp Theatre. Credit: Ellen Dixon

Figure 3.4. Two women performers on stage. Performance by Open Clasp Theatre. Credit: Ellen Dixon

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[i] For more information, see www.walkcreate.org. The project was funded through Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) COVID-19 Rapid Response Fund. Project reference: AH/V01515X/1.

[ii] See 'Walking & Chalking' by Claire Collison, in Heddon et al., 2022, pp. 8–9.

[iii] We borrow the term 'proxy walk' from the artist Alec Finlay.

[iv] For further information on the commissions, see www.walkcreate.org.

[v] Laura Bradshaw and Stephen Anderson, interview with Dee Heddon.

[vi] Kate Green, interview with Morag Rose.

[vii] This group inspired the theatre show *Black Men Walking* (2018), by Eclipse Theatre, which addresses a range of important subjects, including the misconception of Black people's 'arrival' in Britain being the 1948 Windrush generation. The first Black British Roman Emperor, Septimius Severus, marched with his army on the Old Roman Road, now part of the Peak District National Park. See Marland and Stenning, 2020.

[viii] See: www.semcharity.org.uk/our-history/.

[ix] Maxwell Ayamba, interview with Maggie O'Neill.

[x] www.roshnisheffield.co.uk/asian-womens-resource-centre/.

[xi] www.imperial.ac.uk/opal/surveys/airsurvey/

[xii] See Jenson Grant in Heddon et al., 2022, pp. 14–15.

[xiii] www.openclasp.org.uk/.

[xiv] http://westendwomenandgirls.co.uk/.

[xv] Lily (pseudonym), interview with Maggie O'Neill and Clare Qualmann. The Centre is located in Elswick.

[xvi] Sarah Everard was abducted and murdered by a Metropolitan police officer as she walked home from a friend's house.

[xvii] The rehearsal and practice of survival tactics are powerfully invoked in Garnette Cadogan's essay 'Walking while Black' (2016).

[xviii] Interview with Clare Qualmann.