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**‘Walking...just walking’: how children and young people’s everyday pedestrian practices matter**

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**Abstract**

*This paper considers the importance of walking for many children and young people’s everyday lives, experiences and friendships. Drawing upon research with 175 9-16-year-olds living in new urban developments in south-east England, we highlight key characteristics of (daily, taken-for-granted, ostensibly aimless) walking practices, which were of constitutive importance in children and young people’s friendships, communities and geographies. These practices were characteristically bounded, yet intense and circuitous. They were vivid, vital, loved, playful, social experiences yet also dismissed, with a shrug, as ‘just walking’. We argue that ‘everyday pedestrian practices’ (after Middleton 2010, 2011) like these require critical reflection upon chief social scientific theorisations of walking, particularly the large body of literature on children’s independent mobility and the rich, multidisciplinary line of work known as ‘new walking studies’. In arguing that these lines of work could be productively interrelated, we propound ‘just walking’ – particularly the often-unremarked way it matters – as a kind of phenomenon which is sometimes done a disservice by chief lines of theory and practice in social and cultural geography.*

**Keywords:** Children's geographies, walking, mobility, children's independent mobility, new walking studies, children and young people

## **Preface**

An interview with a 10-year-old living in a new urban development in south-east England.

Interviewer:       Okay, and what did you play...?  
Simon<sup>1</sup>:            We played walking...just walking around.

## **Introduction**

In this paper we consider the importance of ‘walking... just walking’ for many children and young people’s everyday lives. We will show how, in our research with 175 9-16-year-olds living in new urban developments in south-east England, some particular (daily, taken-for-granted, ostensibly aimless) forms of walking were central to the lives, experiences and friendships of most children and young people. The main body of the paper highlights key characteristics of these walking practices, and their constitutive role in these children and young people’s social and cultural geography. Over the course of the paper we will argue that ‘everyday pedestrian practices’ (after Middleton 2010, 2011) like these require us to think critically about two bodies of geographical and social scientific research. On one hand, we will argue that the large body of research on children’s spatial range and independent mobility could be conceptually enlivened and extended to acknowledge bodily, social, sociotechnical and habitual practices. On the other hand, we will suggest that the empirical details of such practices should prompt critical reflection upon the wonderfully rich, multidisciplinary vein of conceptualisation latterly termed ‘new walking studies’ (Lorimer 2011). Indeed, in conclusion we shall argue that the theoretical vivacity of walking studies, and the concerns of more applied empirical approaches such as work on children’s independent mobility, could productively be interrelated. In so doing we open out a wider challenge to social and cultural geographers, to expedite this kind of interrelation in other research contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> To protect participants’ identities, all names are pseudonyms and individual urban developments are not named.

## **Two approaches to pedestrian practices**

In this section, we position our concern with children and young people's '*just walking*' in relation to two bodies of work which have framed many geographical and social scientific encounters with everyday pedestrian practices. First, we reflect upon the large body of geographical work dealing with children and young people's neighbourhood spatial range and independent mobilities. Second, we locate our work within the multidisciplinary conceptualisations and practices of new walking studies. In both cases, we own up to a kind of ambivalence: a sense that each body of work has been valuable in providing a vocabulary and imperative for studying walking, but also that each seems somehow ill-suited to studying the kinds of everyday walking practices – *just walking* – that are foregrounded in this paper. In both cases, too, we suggest that our ambivalence might prompt some broader challenges for social and cultural geographers.

### *Children's independent mobility and spatial range*

The most extensive and immediately-salient body of research relating to children and young people's walking practices is social scientific work on children's independent mobility and spatial range (see Hillman et al. 1990). Over the last three decades many social scientists have investigated this topic, often with a focus upon urban neighbourhood mobilities, and often applying methods and concepts from environmental psychology and transport geography (Matthews 1992; Mackett et al. 2007). This conceptual-methodological frame has afforded research exploring children and young people's walking in diverse (though typically minority world) contexts (Fyhri et al. 2011; Carver et al. 2013; Pacilli et al. 2013). This body of work has been important in calling for research on children and young people's walking routines, behaviours and boundaries. As well as developing widely-used terminologies, techniques and technologies for mapping and evaluating everyday mobilities (Badland et al. 2011), researchers in this area have made important wider contributions to understandings of children and young

people's geographies: for example, by evidencing gendered and class-based inequalities in spatial range (Matthews 1987; Brown et al. 2008), consequences of shifting social-historical norms (e.g. automobility, family practices or 'stranger danger') for independent mobilities (Mattson 2002; McDonald 2008; Karsten 2005), health implications of limited independent mobilities (Villanueva et al. 2012), or impacts of policy and urban planning interventions (O'Brien et al. 2000; Villanueva et al. 2013). This work was instrumental in shaping the concerns of subsequent geographical work with children and young people: as is evident, for instance, in the well-established line of research on young people's often transgressive mobilities in urban public spaces (see Valentine 1996; Matthews et al., 2000).

However, we also write from several related anxieties with the treatment of walking within this context. First, we note that many studies within this context ostensibly deal with walking, but rarely focus upon practices of *walking itself*. Although countless studies have produced metrics of distances walked and maps of spatial ranges, these analyses have rarely qualitatively explored the actual practices of walking – what happens during those distances walked and within those mapped ranges – and how such practices *matter*. We suggest that this limited mode of representing walking is problematic, not only because of a general erasure of qualitative richness, but specifically because everyday details, complexities, diversities, events and bodily practices of walking are fundamentally important to the lives and experiences of many children and young people. Second, similarly, many accounts of children's independent mobility have often been predicated upon rather static, simplistic notions of space, and of journeying from place-to-place. Many critics have noted how longstanding research methods dealing with transport practices tend to represent spaces as containers for action, and understand mobility as a fairly bare process of 'getting from A-to-B' (Spinney 2009; Cresswell 2010). We agree with Barker (2009; Barker et al. 2009) that this critique certainly pertains to many classic studies of children's independent

mobility and family transport practices. Barker's (2008, 2011) work has been important and distinctive in revealing the complex social, familial, bodily, affective and sociotechnical processes which constitute, and *matter* to, family car journeys. We agree with Mitchell et al. (2007) and Ross (2007) that children and young people's pedestrian mobilities could be productively explored in a similar way, but we worry that calls for conceptual experimentation in this research context have typically gone unheeded. As in Schwanen et al.'s (2012) critiques of transport scholarship, we suggest the apparent disconnect between traditionally empirical and conceptually-experimental work in this context raises some broader challenges for social and cultural geographers, which are followed through in our conclusion.

Third, accounts of children's independent mobility have often reproduced some problematically simplistic categorisations of identity and understandings of identity-formation. It is very common for such accounts to present clear-cut analyses of differences in independent mobility by age, gender, social class or ethnicity. While this analytical approach has produced some classic work and important data, there has tended to be something of a silence about how such identities are constituted and intersect in practice (see Hopkins and Pain 2007; Horton and Kraftl 2008), or how diverse groups of children and young people may interact and move in complex constellations (Christensen and Mikkelsen 2009; Benwell 2013), in the course of everyday mobilities. Moreover, it is common for accounts of children's independent mobility to reproduce a somewhat caricatured, 'cat and mouse' depiction of power relations between children and adults: whereby children and young people are subject to, and seek to transgress, adult boundaries with regard to their spatial freedom. Many studies have illustrated this kind of oppositional spatial interaction (see Sarre 2010), but in this paper we will argue that children and young people's mobilities are not always, only, necessarily quite like this. We will note that the taken-for-granted social and sociotechnical complexities of everyday walking practices (see also Horton 2012) can often unsettle neat accounts of contestations over public space. Fourth, we suggest that accounts of

children's independent mobility can often be a little uncritical in relation to some contemporary cultural anxieties and norms. In our reading, we find it remarkable how many studies open with taken-for-granted assertions lamenting the 'historical facts' of children's declining opportunities for ('good', 'healthy') outdoor mobility and play. Here and now, this discourse – of 'battery-reared children', 'bubble-wrapped kids', or a 'back-seat generation' (Romero 2010) – is so familiar and oft-repeated as to appear 'commonsense'. However, in this paper we note some somewhat different geographies and accounts by children and young people, which would seem to unsettle these normative assumptions. Specifically, we will note that children and young people who – by any measure – have a limited spatial range may still spend considerable amounts of time walking outdoors, and may nevertheless engage in rich, playful, social, exploratory, imaginative daily walking practices.

### *New walking studies*

Lorimer (2011: 30) uses the umbrella term 'new walking studies' to characterise a "recent push to towards a grounded consideration of walking as a social practice" in diverse, multidisciplinary forms of academic research and practice over the last decade. The term points towards a marvellously eclectic array of walking-thinking-writing practices (Ingold and Vergunst 2008): drawing upon influences as various as situationism, performance art, cultural geography, psychogeography, natural history, rhythmanalysis, phenomenology, flâneurie, social anthropology, autoethnography, urban sociology, actor-network theory, landscape archaeology, activist interventions, nonrepresentational theories, or landscape art/sculpture. This context has produced some beautiful, haunting, thought-provoking work on geographies of walking: Jones's (2005, 2008) walks through intertidal ecologies and childhood spaces, Lorimer and Lund's (2008) mountain trails, Pinder's (2005) urban explorations, Sidaway's (2009) mapping of geopolitical and personal 'shadows on the path', and Wylie's (2009) reflections upon landscape and love are notable geographical examples close to our hearts. Although diverse in their foci, these examples

share a commitment to thinking through *the practice of walking itself*. Indeed, we would argue that a key achievement of new walking studies has been to highlight four characteristics of walking practices. First, many new walking studies foreground bodily practices and multisensuous experiences of walking: noting, for example, the gait, rhythm, and musculature of walking bodies, the complex ways walks are sensed, or forms of corporeal training and tactics used by walking bodies in challenging terrain. Second, relatedly, there is often an implicit sense of the always emotional-affective nature of walking: perhaps most poignantly visible in accounts which use walking to reflect autoethnographically upon connections between landscapes and memories. Third, there is often a sense of the social nature and sociotechnical process of walking: highlighting the importance of social interactions, materialities and nonhuman agencies with/in walking practices. Fourth, many new walking studies highlight the political potential, and politicised context, of many walking practices: vividly described in accounts of activist walking interventions (Klawiter 1999), and neatly contextualised by critiques of the regulation of walking in public spaces (Namaste 1996).

New walking studies thus offer a potentially rich conceptual resource which might enliven and extend longstanding empirical approaches to transport and mobility – including the aforementioned work on children’s independent mobility. We suggest that the attentiveness to the bodily, emotional and sociotechnical characteristics of walking provide clear cues for better understanding the constitutive roles of walking in social and cultural geographies. In making this claim, though, we must highlight some recent critiques which identify several ways in which the insights of new walking studies may not be readily accessible beyond the cognoscenti. Indeed, despite our commitment to the precepts of new walking studies, we have not found it immediately easy to think about children and young people’s *just walking* using this frame of reference. Like Lorimer (2011), we note that new walking studies have overwhelmingly privileged (and probably romanticised) some very particular kinds of walkers, walking practices and walked spaces. One



could caricature new walking studies as preoccupied with wilful, artful, activist, clever and self-evidently meaningful or remarkable forms of walking. There is typically a focus upon walking-with-a-point: and often the point is, precisely, to make, develop or mull upon a point (a process which Sinclair (2003) wryly calls ‘walking-with-a-thesis’). Moreover, new walking studies often centre the narrative voices of the knowing, reflexive walkers engaged in these sorts of clever, purposeful, thought-provoking walking practices. In this context, then, walking is written and enacted via these walkers’ intellectual, artistic or politicised influences, which supplement or intensify the act of walking itself: so, in new walking studies, walking is rarely *just* walking. We note, too, that new walking studies frequently highlight walks and walking practices which are deeply-affecting and soul-searching for both participants and readers. We might also note a penchant for the everyday extraordinary, the revelatory, and sometimes the sacred and spiritual, in many new walking studies. Each of these tendencies is wholly understandable: after all, these walking/writing/thinking practices are so immediately compelling, interesting, evocative and writeable.

However, in this paper we wonder about some other kinds of walking, which have generally fallen outside the ambit of new walking studies. For we feel that new walking studies have so far tended to overlook too many varieties of walkers, walking practices and walked spaces which – being less obviously artful, wilful, affecting or politicised – may appear less worthy of scholarly attention. Middleton’s (2010: 657) work is especially important here in diagnosing a tendency to overlook “what could be considered the less remarkable, unspectacular and unreported everyday experiences associated with walking” – and a wider “lack of... systematic empirical exploration of the actual practice of walking” – in (and despite) the burgeoning academic literature on walking. Middleton (2009, 2010, 2011) uses the term ‘everyday pedestrian practices’ to denote these kinds of habitual, ostensibly banal and ‘unspectacular’ walking practices. Through careful qualitative research with adult London pedestrians, she argues that the everyday pedestrian practices of

“those who navigate, negotiate and traverse the city streets in their everyday lives” challenge representations of urban walking in policy and academic discourses (Middleton 2010: 579). Middleton thus provides an opening for research exploring the importance of everyday pedestrian practices for social and cultural geographies. We also read her work as having implicit critical bite: *how could* so social and cultural geographers (even those operating with new walking studies) have written so little about everyday walking? In this paper we develop this sensibility by highlighting the kinds of rich social and cultural geographies which become apparent when walking practices are a focal point for qualitative research. In particular, we question how everyday pedestrian practices *matter* (or not) to those doing them: how they may *simultaneously* be described as intense, loved, vivid, vital, playful, social experiences which are central to friendships *yet also* dismissed with a shrug as taken-for-granted, ordinary and underwhelming. In our conclusion, we offer this practice – and mattering – as a kind of phenomenon which is sometimes done a disservice by chief lines on theory and practice in social and cultural geography.

We suggest that everyday pedestrian practices *of children and young people* pose an especially stark challenge to extant literature on walking. As already noted, studies of children’s independent mobility seldom engage with the experiences of walkers or walking practices themselves, and children and young people have barely figured at all in new walking studies. Against this grain, this paper focuses on some key characteristics of children and young people’s everyday pedestrian practices. We note that these walking practices go on, under the radar of most extant research, and alongside normative societal anxieties, adultist rules, and limits to children and young people’s spatial freedom (Valentine 1996; Pain 2006). The methods and context for our research encounter with children and young people’s walking are outlined in the following section.

### **Research context and methods**

This paper presents data from a large-scale interdisciplinary ethnographic research project exploring children and young people's everyday lives in new-build urban developments in south-

east England (see acknowledgements). The walking practices discussed in this paper were contextualised by a geographically and historically particular set of policy discourses and urban planning practices. In 2003 the UK Government's Sustainable Communities agenda inaugurated a major programme of investment in housebuilding, focused in four 'Growth Areas' in south-east England (ODPM, 2003). Our project focused upon four case study communities in one Growth Area: the so called 'Milton Keynes / South Midlands' ('MKSM') area. The scale and speed of urban development in Growth Areas were, initially, substantial: in MKSM, more than 30,000 new dwellings were constructed between 2005-09.

Our case study communities were chosen as representative of different development types in this planning context. Although the four communities were diverse in demographics, design and characteristics, the planning and implementation of each community envisioned, regulated and affected children and young people's walking in similar ways. First, walking was idealised in plans for each community, which sought to construct walkable pathways and convivial public spaces for residents. This ideal was materialised via planning interventions which aimed to safeguard pedestrians and encourage walking: for example, via traffic calming measures, walkable civic spaces, and 'shared surface' thoroughfares – drawing on 'Home Zone' principles (Gill 2006) – where pedestrians and vehicles could, theoretically, co-exist safely. Second, the original plans for these communities included dedicated, walkable spaces – in the form of playgrounds, community centres, hangouts or multi-use gaming areas – for children and young people. However, in each community a post-2009 recessionary slowdown of housing development meant that these spaces did not materialise on time, as planned, or at all. Consequently, there were relatively few dedicated spaces for children and young people at the time of our research: in effect, there were few designed destinations for children and young people's walking. Third, in each community, local concerns about 'antisocial behaviour' meant that young people's presence and congregation in public spaces were monitored and (literally) policed by residents' associations and

police patrols. Moreover, the design principles of the communities included measures intended to 'design out' crime and antisocial behaviour. For example, there were few outdoor seating areas (to preclude congregations of 'gangs') and playspaces were deliberately positioned to be overlooked from all sides by residents. Fourth, the locations of these communities – at the edges of conurbations, or in isolated, self-contained 'village' locations – and relatively underdeveloped public transport links meant that families were typically heavily reliant upon automobility. As we will note, there were relatively few permitted opportunities for children and young people to walk to places outwith their communities.

Research was conducted with 175 9-16-year-olds living (and walking) at the intersection of these geographies of policy and planning. Participants from case study communities were recruited via schools, youth groups, community events and word-of-mouth. This paper presents data from two elements of the project.

- Semi-structured interviews – 175 young people (101 females, 74 males) participated in a programme of four themed interviews. Interviews were conducted one-to-one or with friendship groups in appropriate spaces within schools, youth groups, community events or public spaces in each community. This paper draws upon interviews exploring to 'everyday spaces and routines' and 'mobility and risk'. In these interviews, maps of the communities were on hand and often used by participants to orientate and illustrate comments.
- Guided walks – 51 interviewees led researchers on follow-up tours of key spaces and everyday routes within their community. The walks were led by individuals or friendship groups, and conversations were digitally recorded en route.

This paper developed from thematic analysis (using NVivo software) of transcripts from these activities. Walking emerged as a major theme: practically every discussion involved some

reflection upon the importance of everyday walking practices for participants' lives, friendships and experiences in the communities. Notably, most participants described a kind of outdoor walking practice which was a regular (more-or-less daily) feature of their lives.

### **Children and young people's everyday pedestrian practices in new communities**

In the following analysis, we outline seven recurring characteristics of their walking practices, as illustrated by qualitative data. These characteristics are loosely grouped into two sections. First, we outline the chief spatial-temporal characteristics of children and young people's walking, noting its *boundedness*, *intensity* and *circuitousness*. Second, we highlight some ways in which this walking was of constitutive importance for children and young people's social and cultural geographies, through its characteristic *sociality*, *narrativity*, *playfulness* and *taken-for-grantedness*. In so doing, we argue that these walking practices (particularly the ways they *matter* to children and young people) prompt critical reflection upon the key approaches to walking previously outlined, being inadequately described in most studies of independent mobility, and overlooked by new walking studies.

#### *Spatial-temporal characteristics of children and young people's walking*

In this section, we highlight recurring spatial-temporal characteristics – *boundedness*, *intensity* and *circuitousness* – which characterised the everyday pedestrian practices of children and young people who participated in our study. A key finding was that these children and young people's mobilities were intensely bounded by parents/carers but nevertheless intensely mobile within these boundaries.

##### *i. Boundedness*

Children and young people’s mobilities were, in many ways, intensely bounded and limited in these communities. As in many previous minority world studies (see Barker 2009) most participants were chauffeured, transported or accompanied on journeys to school, shops, leisure venues, recreational spaces, and most spaces ‘outside’ the community. In our case study communities, children and young people were universally, and in some cases profoundly, restricted in terms of where they were allowed to go without an adult. Most participants described three kinds of rules through which parents/carers delimited their mobilities. First, all participants reported rules about spatial limits: all described a ‘boundary’ beyond which they were not allowed to go without adult accompaniment. Parental rules significantly limited participants’ spatial range, with one-in-five allowed no further than 50m in any direction from their home. The parameters of the boundary set by parents/carers typically corresponded to a combination of: (i) the built edge of the new housing development; (ii) busy roads which should not be crossed; (iii) boundaries of parents’ knowledge and friendship networks within the community (i.e. many participants were not allowed to go to places adults ‘do not know’, or where there are no people that parents/carers know); (iv) parts of the community where, in parents’ opinions, there was some risk of encountering ‘unsafe’ or ‘dodgy’ people. As in the following discussion, these rules were often interconnected.

- Rose (10) [Pointing at map] I don’t go there...because my mum, because my mum doesn't like me going there...I'm not allowed to go [there] on my own.
- Fahy (10) No, neither am I. Not down there because...the cars just zoom past there...so I'm allowed from there round to about there with friends. Probably to just around there, because I'm not really allowed to go down the bottom [of the community]...because my mum doesn't really think that I'm safe...because there's loads of people just that, they're like, well how to, how can I put it? Well they look like.
- Rose Unsafe people.
- Fahy Yeah, like they're, they look unsafe...
- Rose And they look.
- Fahy They look really just.
- Rose Kind of weird and you kind of, the sort of person that you'd want to keep away from.

Second, all respondents reported parental rules relating to time spent outdoors. These rules were invariably articulated in terms of: (i) having to 'be in' by a specific time; (ii) having to 'be in' by mealtime or other family routine or obligation; (iii) 'free-time' being structured and limited by family routines and the logistics of scheduling visits and activities; and/or (iv) not being allowed to stay out 'after dark'. Third, moreover, outdoor play and independent mobility was conditional on being contactable at all times. As Sarah and Collette explained, many participants were only allowed out on condition they carried a mobile phone at all times.

Sarah (11) I'm allowed to go [out], as long as I've got my mobile...  
Interviewer What age were you allowed a mobile phone?  
Sarah Eight.  
Collette (11) Eight.  
Sarah Because that's when I started going out to play  
Interviewer When would you use your phone?  
Sarah In emergencies.  
Collette Er, when the gypsies are about and like if there's a teenager following you or someone you don't know following you. That'd be scary...My mum normally rings me but if I'm in trouble I do ring her...Once I got scared when I was, I think it was eight and I got really scared so I phoned my mum, went down this, near the park...phoned my mum, told her that I was a bit scared but she said to come back...and I was okay.

Parents/carers were evidently liable to call their child home at short notice: as Harry, notes outdoor play could thus be curtailed abruptly and unpredictably at any time.

Harry (11) I use my phone [when] just walking around the area, just in case I need to go home if there's something just come up then or if I need to come home about that time, certain times...straightaway  
Interviewer Okay, so your mum or dad would ring and get you to come home?  
Harry Yeah.

Such rules are familiar from many previous studies of children and young people's independent mobility (see Hillman et al. 1990; Matthews 1987; Brown et al. 2008). However, like Benwell (2013), our research leads us to question an assumption – commonplace in many of these previous studies – that children and young people will invariably experience such rules as negative, and

seek to resist these adultist impositions. In our research it was overwhelmingly the case that participants abided by these rules, and generally accepted the logics of risk which underlay them. As is evident in much of the qualitative material used throughout this paper, children and young people readily incorporated parents' discourses of risk into their own talk about the community: so that, for example, Sarah and Collette's discussion there was an easy slippage between mothers' and daughters' anxieties. In many cases, participants seemed to be as reassured by parental rules, limits and contactability as were the parents/carers themselves. These data thus challenge us to resist the jump to relatively neat critical positions or normative assumptions about children and young people' independent mobilities: in this case, at least, participants actively engaged with, and seemed to value, restrictions 'imposed' by parents/carers.

*ii. Intensity of movement*

We also question an assumption – again, commonplace in literature on independent mobilities – that intensely rule-bound and regulated spatial ranges necessarily limit the degree to which children and young people move around. Although, in our study, participants *were* often profoundly restricted in terms of where they were allowed to go without a parent/carer, it was also the case that, *within* their 'boundary', many children and young people were remarkably and intensely mobile, spending significant periods of their everyday lives on the move. Although participants were typically *spatially* confined, most were allowed to spend substantial periods outdoors each day within the permitted boundary. Walking thus emerged as a key everyday activity – often, as for Felicity and Robert, an *all-day* activity – for most participants, even those confined within a very small permitted spatial range.

Felicity (12)	We come out of there going on this big long walk where it goes all like that, we come along and then we get to the road, we cross over, we've got all the, we keep going until, keep going and keep going.
Interviewer	Until when?
Felicity	Oh, until we feel like it, then we'll turn round.



Interviewer      What's like the longest you've been out for?  
Robert (12)      A day...a whole day. Like from ten-ish to like eight.

In all communities, many participants reported walking for long durations and distances – though always within their boundary – during their free time. Often groups of walkers were accompanied by outriding cyclists or scooters. Some participants described how they would spend ‘all day’ or ‘all the time’ walking outdoors, weather permitting; others, like Zed and Daniel, described being physically tired by the physicality, duration and regularity of their walking.

Zed (11)            We're not allowed to get too far from [home] because, you know, dangerous, you never know what's outside.  
Oliver (10)        [but] you can just go really far.  
Zed                 Yeah, your legs ache, oh they're tired, you feel like your legs are going to drop off and then, you know, get away from you.  
Interviewer        And how long would you stay out for?  
Zed                 Oh my God, oh.  
Oliver              Two and a half hours.  
Zed                 No, double that thank you.  
Oliver              Probably...  
Zed                 Times that by two.

Through substantial, daily periods spent engaged in everyday pedestrian practices such as these, many participants reported that they had been, and knew, ‘everywhere’ or ‘all the way around’ within their boundary.

Collette (11)      I walk around a lot with a friend...I've walked, just end up walking round the village so I think I've been everywhere.  
Millie (10)        Sometimes we just go all the way round.  
Adesh (11)        We go all the way round, like walking round or we stay in one place.  
Interviewer        Do you go on your bikes or?  
Adesh              We used to but haven't got a bike anymore.  
Lara (12)         Yeah, I've been all round before...Like on foot.  
Suzie (12)        I just go everywhere

Indeed – contrary to most academic readings of parental rules – many participants, like Suzie and Hayden, described how they valued the freedom they were permitted within their narrow

permitted boundaries. Some participants, like Liz, reported how the parents/carers who had set stringent rules about spatial range nevertheless actively encouraged extensive mobility within this permitted boundary.

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Suzie (12)  | I like that [parents] trust me and I like it how I can just, like do, I pretty much have the freedom to do what I want and like be the person I want to be and stuff, so I think it's, I think it's great.            |
| Hayden (12) | Same here...Even me and...my friend, he's only eight...We have a lot of freedom as long as we don't go outside [boundary].  |
| Liz (11)    | [Mum] says that we need to get some fresh air and she says 'get your backside off the couch, turn the TV off and you're outside, get out' and, and...I always say 'can we go to the park?' And she always says 'yes'. |

Taking these points together, our research leads us to reflect that, while many previous, aforementioned studies have mapped and measured the boundaries of children and young people's independent mobilities, there has rarely been consideration of what is done within those boundaries – and how these practices *matter* to children and young people. In our research, at least, the very narrow parameters of permitted activity still afforded considerable degrees of mobility which valued as having constitutive importance for participants' social and cultural geographies.

### *iii. Circuitousness*

Participants' everyday walking was typically not destination-focused: walking was not, for these children and young people, most importantly an instrumental means of getting 'from A-to-B'. As already discussed, participants were typically driven, bussed or escorted to many key destinations. Moreover as outlined in the research context section, there were actually relatively few destinations to which young people *could* walk in the four communities. Spaces designed for children and young people were few and far between and, as already noted, most young people described how they were constantly moved-on and on-the-move from destinations like

playgrounds, shops and street corners. Instead, participants like Billie and Rose described a kind of ‘wandering around’: they were not *walking to* particular activities and spaces, but rather the walking itself was regularly the chief activity. In the absence of spaces to hang out or play, walking itself was an important means of entertaining oneself. We note that this kind of everyday, circuitous walking activity – not just a matter of walking ‘from A to B’; not even setting out for a specific destination – has largely been overlooked in studies of children’s independent mobility (and see Bissell (2013) on the broader overlooking of ‘pointless’, circuitous, neighbourhood-scaled mobilities within sociological and geographical studies of transport and mobilities).

Billie (16)            I think people our age don't sort of...hang out. There's not a lot of us that sort of come together and meet in one place... We'll go for a walk but we don't go ‘oh I'll see [you] at the park then’, ‘yeah, okay’...it's more wandering around.

Rose (10)            We're constantly trying to find a way to entertain ourselves outside, because the field hasn't got anything, the park we've been to heaps of times and also there's nothing to do because even though we've got lots of outdoor things that we can do like frisbee and stuff...we can't normally do [them] much because there's cars around and we don't want to hit them,...[Outdoors] we don't really, we don't necessarily play games, it's more like, just kind of messing about, not like, like being stupid messing about...it's not necessarily games, it's just like, just playing basically.

This walking generally involved multiple, repetitious circuits within participants’ permitted boundaries. While the routes and routines typically corresponded to the locations of friends’ houses, it was also notable that many participants tended to favour routes through relatively ‘quiet’, ‘back’ spaces. Spaces like courtyards, alleyways, drainage channels and street corners were evidently valued as spaces to meet, walk and socialise, slightly out-of-the-way of other groups of young people.

Collette (10)        We like it over there [in courtyard car park] because there's like loads of places where there's like, there's the back bits that are really quiet and you can play games and stuff, but you can't play ball games because you're not allowed

### *Walking as constitutive of social and cultural geographies*

In this section, we consider how these bounded, intense, circuitous walking practices were of constitutive importance in children and young people's social and cultural geographies. In particular, research participants frequently described how the rich *sociality*, *narrativity* and *playfulness* – but also the *taken-for-grantedness* – of everyday pedestrian practices cohered and animated friendship groups.

#### *iv. Sociality*

Like Christensen and Mikkelsen (2009), we suggest that the notion of *independent* mobility is often misleading as it disguises all manner of social, sociotechnical and collaborative practices – the multiple ‘companionships’ – which constitute mobilities in practice. Certainly, children and young people rarely walked alone, and their everyday pedestrian practices were central to their friendships within the communities. Walking was ‘just’ what friendship pairs or groups did, more-or-less everyday, and it was through circuitous walking (within participants’ permitted boundaries) that friendships were constituted and played-out in practice. Many friendship groups, like Izzy and her friends, talked about ‘their’ walk: a route which they would habitually and repeatedly walk, given the opportunity.

Izzy (9)                      My friends Elicia, Rachel, Bethany and Faith and sometimes Ethan also, well we are very close friends, all of us in our class and we just go round the village a lot...It's our walk...Rachel and Bethany are just round the corner from me...and then I go to Faith's house...then we come back down to go and get Elicia and Ethan because they're quite late, all the time.

Some friendship groups, like Collette and Sarah, discussed how they would use mobile phones to ‘arrange a date’ to walk with friends.

Interviewer              Do you meet your friends inside or outside?  
Collette (11)              Outside mostly.

Sarah (11) We, sometimes we arrange a date, like at school, like ‘Aiden, I’ll come and call for you tonight’ or ‘do you want to come and call for me?’, things like that.

More typically, though, friendship groups would routinely walk around the same route, ‘knocking for each other’ in roughly the same order: Harriet, Alice and Emma’s daily ‘rota’ was typical of this kind of habitual process (see also Middleton 2012; Schwanen et al. 2012; Bissell 2013).

Walking was thus a more-or-less unremarked, but nonetheless central constituent of friendships and in the daily routines (alongside getting changed, coming home from school, and so on).

Harriet (12) We knock for each other but mostly Alice calls for us, yeah because it's like a little...  
Alice (12) Circuit.  
Harriet Rota.  
Alice Rota, yeah...  
Harriet And she waits in for a bit while we get changed. We have to get changed out of our school gear.  
Alice Or sometimes they, I let them go and get changed, we have like something to eat first and then, and then they knock for me and then we like all play out because I'm ready, because I don't have to get changed.  
Emma (12) We usually do.

In these groups, some young people cycled, scooted or skateboarded alongside walkers: however, it was usually the case that the pace, route and pattern of these groups’ mobilities was set by those walking (cf Spinney 2009 on geographies of cycling). It was also the case that different friendship groups met, mingled and interacted in the course of their everyday walks. This could sometimes result in larger groups moving together through the community, as in the ‘reunion’ described by Jane.

Jane (14) Well I think it was about, before the summer we had like a little Year Six reunion, you remember on that grass?...Like all the boys were there, all the girls were there, it was really freaky  
Interviewer Was it an organised thing or did it just happen by chance?  
Jane No, it just happened...Me and Mel, Jennifer and Cath or Hazel were just walking past and we just saw all the boys so we just went over.

Sometimes these encounters could bring together young people of different ages, or from different parts of the community. Strikingly, as they described how these pedestrian encounters *mattered* (enough to call them a ‘reunion’, at least), participants described numerous ways in which young people took responsibility and cared for one another. In an echo of the kinds of small, supportive bodily practices and considerate interpersonal gestures noted amongst hill-walkers by Macpherson (2011), children and young people took responsibility for friends and fellow walkers in a range of quite touching ways, as in the following three quotations. Whilst walking, for example, children and young people habitually worked together to keep each other safe: looking out for one another, collaboratively checking their surroundings, and looking after one another’s possessions.

- Ella (10)            Like when there's a car coming my brother will always warn me because my skateboard's so, so noisy, so my brother has to come out with me and...he makes sure that I'm safe if there's a car coming and I make sure he's safe if there's a car coming.
- Emma (12)           And we always check, like down the alley if we're like just up between the gates then and if we are tempted to go [to nearby shop] we always check to see if we can see any people for about, we check for about two minutes to see if like some people just come out the bushes or something.
- Liz (10)             If I'm with [walking] Felicity then I sometimes, one of us goes in [the shop], one of us stays outside. And then we swap over. Yeah, and it's like ‘oh hurry up, it's like freezing out here’ [laughs].

These gestures of care and responsibility contrast markedly with popular representations of ‘antisocial’ young people in public spaces. It is rare to see this kind of care and sodality acknowledged in geographical research about young people’s mobilities in public space which, as already discussed, tend to foreground young people’s spatial limits, disputes over spaces, and capacities for resistive agency. It was also notable that children and young people’s walking practices demonstrated generosity and consideration towards others within their communities. As two examples, consider Rick’s consideration towards friends who have more constrained spatial ranges, and Lara’s discussion of the importance of ‘considerate’ cycling and walking.

- Rick (10) I don't go there a lot because my friend lives around here, so I kind of have to...He's only allowed around [indicates on map], so we usually play there and there's a little open space, so we just get a ball and kick around in it.
- Lara (9) [Me and] my two friends...I go on my bike but...[we] never like go like that [side by side], we always stay in a line, single file. I do prefer going on the road because I just feel like I'm not going to bump into someone walking. I don't like going on the footpaths because a lot...are really narrow so if there's people walking in front of me...I have to go on to the road...to be considerate.

However, as Valentine (2008) observes, everyday urban encounters are not necessarily productive of singularly positive experiences. We found that walking practices could also be part and parcel of tensions between different social groups within communities. Most participants described how their walking practices were characterised by an experience of always moving-on: whether being moved-on by adults, being moved-on by older young people (or, in turn, moving-on younger children), choosing to move-on to avoid conflict, or pre-emptively moving on out of a feeling or expectation that they will be asked to move. Natalia and Liz provided two examples.

- Natalia (11) The park and the shop are where like, usually where the teenagers hang out, so I'd like limit my time if I go to the shop because...I get a bit worried, so if I go to the shop and they're there I just quickly turn around and go. I just limit my time going there.
- Liz (10) We sometimes play out on this path, on our bikes and that, but because there are some people that live there which I don't like that much, they sometimes come out and then, sometimes...we don't get like told off, it's just we, we do have to like move at certain points, because some people are on their bikes or just walking their dog or everything.

In sum, these examples – of both responsibilities and animosities – demonstrate the mutually constitutive nature of just walking and all manner of sociabilities. They also indicate the relational manner in which walking/sociability is produced in everyday experiences: through inter-personal, intra-generational and inter-generational relations.

v. *Pedestrian knowledges and narratives*

Through their walking practices, many participants had developed a close, detailed knowledge of the built environment of their community. In interviews, they detailed numerous routes, quirks, features and ‘secret’ places, which were hitherto unknown to (us as) adults within the community. As in the following quotations, many participants demonstrated a keen awareness of useful pedestrian short-cuts within their spatial range.

- Natalie (13) I cut across the field. Yeah...I sort of made a little gap where the fence is...so like I come under the fence and I literally just cut across the field
- Imogen (10) We go down there, down there, down there, to there or we go that way.  
Izzy (14) Cut through the park...  
Neil (11) So there's a cut through between the houses there you can go through?  
Imogen We go, we walk along there.  
Izzy We go around the back.  
Imogen Because we, we took, we thought we'd...[walk] by the road and we were so scared because the cars were so near us we, never do that.

This close, pedestrian-paced apprehension of the communities (see also Fuller et al. 2008; Horton et al. 2011) was also manifest in children and young people’s remarkably acute observations of flora and fauna, and also more illicit spaces and goings-on, within the community.

- Sarah (11) [pointing to map] you come down there, this is my normal way, come round here and then...there's a metal gate...and then you just cross it and then go down...and then there's, like you [can see] the river and you've got geese there, you've got loads of different multi-coloured birds that are really funky.
- Anne-Marie (11) Well sometimes we just go and look around to see if there's any like animals like rabbits, so we can have a look...or foxes...There we, we spend a lot of time, we'd be in there like nearly every day.
- Emma (12) Yeah, behind one tree, once we were playing out and once we all went near the gate and then we just seen a few cans behind a tree.
- Harriett (12) No, not a few.  
Emma Quite a few.  
Alice (12) Not a few, loads...*Loads!*



Harriett           A box of lager and some bottles and some cans.  
 Emma             Behind a tree down there.  
 Harriett           We got a bit scared so we legged it.  
 [Laughter]

In interviews, participants seemed proud to share these detailed knowledges with researchers and each-other. They had developed a rich array of narratives and in-jokes through and about their walking practices. Humour, gossip and stories were evidently a key feature of their pedestrian practices and friendships (see Macpherson 2008 on walking humour). For example, most interviews featured some discussion where participants recounted stories about notable or amusing walks and incidents. Jessica and Jack's encounters with an ice cream van, a farmer, and cows, and Alice, Harriett and Emma's incident with a skateboarder, were just two examples of the way in which communities were narrated and enlivened as walks were recollected.

Jessica (9)        Do you remember...Well one time...me and my friend [went] chasing the ice-cream van all the way around the village...but he wouldn't stop. Because he didn't see us and he was playing the music too loud!...My brother got nearly shot by the farmer...because [the farmer] was trying to shoot a bird, he missed...and my brother was in the field...so he quickly ran out the field because he was worried the farmer was aiming at him rather than at the birds!

Jack (9)           I heard like...I went down to the other side of the field I see the farmer chasing bulls in his tractor. All you heard was 'moo'!

Alice (12)         Yeah, like a few days ago...there was these skateboarders [laughs]  
 Harriett (12)     Oh yeah.  
 Emma (12)        Oh yeah, there was skateboarders.  
 Alice             And we thought one of them was like.  
 Harriett          Following us.  
 Alice             Following us so we kept on.  
 Harriett          So we legged it up our street and then I went [to] hide behind the bush and then he just carried on walking because where.  
 Emma             I think he went [to the shop] or something, somewhere...  
 Interviewer      So he wasn't actually following you?  
 Alice             No, no, Harriett was like 'he could be taking, he could be taking the quick way for us'.  
 [laughter]  
 Alice             And we're like, 'Harriett how could he, he don't even know where we live?!'  
 Harriett          Yeah, but he might, he might see.  
 Emma             That was a fun day.  
 [laughter]

Through anecdotes like these, it was evident that walking was an important in children and young people's knowledges and relationships to their community, as well as a nostalgically-remembered part of the shared heritage of friendship groups. Through their walks participants also shared and developed rumours and stories about the community: for example, tales of angry farmers (as above) or the menacing men in white vans, haunted locations, and 'dodgy' 'council houses' recurred, with remarkable consistency, in all four case study communities.

- Jack (9)            Because guess what happened to me, I was running across the road but there's a little bit that's not safe because I got...followed by a man in a big white truck...and it had, and it had an orange light on. My mum's mate got chased by the same van and the man, the man has a hood so you can't see his face.
- Felicity (12)      There's some like paths I don't go down. Apparently there's some council houses and I wouldn't be familiar, I wouldn't really feel that like great if I was walking past the council houses because apparently, you know like how people say that not as nice people live in the council houses so I...would feel uncomfortable.
- Rose (10)          I probably wouldn't feel that safe [there] because...you feel you're in the middle of nowhere because there's just people's houses that you don't know, and...then they've got the haunted house and then the dark woods where there's like foxes and badgers and stuff like that and birds.

In some cases, such as 'the haunted house' in one community, these narratives were central to the popular naming of specific features of the built environment: such that, for example, that the name 'the haunted house' is now widely-used, by young people and adults alike, when talking about a particular derelict building on the edge of one of the case study communities. Indeed, arguably, it was in these ways – through walking narratives – that these 'new' communities gained meaning *as* places. All four of our case study communities were built on land previously designated as 'green belt' or agricultural fields). Young people's *presence* – as walkers – was therefore constitutive of a kind of emergent liveliness in these communities, as they gained new histories and memories, and

as meanings solidified around shared acts of naming, experiences, myths, fears and gossip. These pedestrian narratives – sometimes shared with and repeated by adults, sometimes not – are part and parcel of the socialities we referenced earlier, which, as we argued, are mutually constituted *with* walking diverse walking practices.

*vi. Playfulness*

Many participants explicitly described their walking practices as a form of play. That is, they were often not setting out to play, or walking to play spaces, but *walking itself* was portrayed as enjoyable and playful per se. Even among older participants, there was some slippage between the terms ‘walking’ and ‘playing’ (as in the prefatory phrase ‘playing just walking around’). It seemed that walking itself was enjoyed as playful, and for affording playful affects, experiences and interactions. This potentially playful character of walking was most visible in the way in which some friendship groups had developed walking-based games through their walks. In these instances, such as Alice, Harriett and Emma’s ‘Ghostbusters’ game, games were enacted in and through circuitous walking, or as walking morphed into playing morphed into walking. In the process, everyday spaces of the community could be enlivened and reimaged (in ways which were sometimes little opaque to adult onlookers: see also Horton 2012), in this case through the playful imagining of ghosts and ghostbusters around cars.

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Alice (12)    | And we play this game called Ghostbusters...   |
| Harriett (12) | It's a new one and there's one ghostbuster and two ghosts and.   |
| Emma (12)     | It's a really fun game.  |
| Harriett      | And we have to hide, the ghosts have to hide behind [cars] and the ghostbuster has to come round and they go [noise] when they see someone and then, there's a base because Rachel's front garden's like grass and then ...it's kind of like curved and then there's like a stony area with a tree and we use that stony area with a tree as a base. |
| [Laughter]    |  |
| Harriett      | And sometimes like we use objects like once I bought out a coat and that was like, the invisibility cape where you could hold it up and.   |
| Alice         | And then like.   |
| Harriett      | And then walk around to look for the Ghostbusters...So it is a good game.  |

Children and young people articulated their enjoyment of walking-play in diverse ways: for example, in terms of its 'adventurous', stress-relieving, or energy-boosting properties.

Anne-Marie (11) [I like playing and walking] because it's like adventurous, you get to go and see, look around because there's all like, it's, it's all different to like the park...Because it's adventurous and it's like, you're searching out new stuff that you didn't know.

Suzie (12) When I'm feeling stressed out and stuff I go for a walk and I tend to go to the woods...and...the fields...I like going on the walks...Yeah, I like going all the way round and then we, we come about here on the field and then walk down and up again. So I like walks.

*vii. Taken-for-grantedness, or 'just'-ness*

For all of that, the children and young people we encountered in our research overwhelmingly seemed to take-for-granted, and deprecate the importance of, their everyday walking practices. For all that walking practices were central to friendships, to play, and to the imagining and enlivening of communities, participants' talk about walking tended to involve the prefix '*just*': as in, what they were describing was *just* walking; walking was *just* what they did.

Interviewer	Do you tend to stay in one place or would you move around lots?
Paula (10)	We move, we move around...
Rachel (10)	We'd probably just walk around the village and chat.
Paula	We don't really, we don't really actually stay somewhere, we just walk around.

Anne-Marie (11) I like just walking round because it's nice to just like see people...Well sometimes we're...near my friend's house...we kind of like, we kind of like just walk any, like anywhere, any route really.

This just-ness was a characteristic of many participants' talk about walking, but it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what lay behind it: perhaps a slightly evasive desire to preserve some of the mystique of their friendship activities when talking with adult researchers; perhaps a disinclination to credit walking with any special importance; perhaps a reflex defence of their behaviour, in a

context where young people's presence in public space is too-often assumed to be menacing; perhaps bemusement, or the challenge of verbalising everyday, take-for-granted activities, friendships and experiences?

Harry (11) [I've] been to I think every area because, don't know, I just walk round a lot... Yeah, I just walk round and look round... Yeah, I, I've just, I just usually walk, walk in there and just not really doing stuff there, just walk round.

Emma (12) Oh...there's a walk that I like to go...Just like a walk...all the way over [the community]...just going on a walk.

This notion of *just*, which suffused so many respondents' accounts of walking, returns us to our earlier discussion (via the work of Middleton 2010) of everyday pedestrian practices which pose a challenge to many recent theorisations of walking. The routine, circuitous walks described in this paper were, evidently, considered pretty normal and unspectacular – *just walking* – even by those who participated in them. In this respect, these particular geographies of walking seem to sit uncomfortably against the willed, artful, deeply-affecting, manifestly-politicised walking practices which have featured in many new walking studies. We might even say that the walking practices discussed in this paper serve as a kind of antithesis of the walking practices foregrounded by many new walking studies. For the children and young people, walking was just what they did, and appeared to require little fanfare or commentary. Notwithstanding our interest as geographical researchers, these walkers seemed fairly reluctant to make much of a claim about the importance of their everyday walks (because, again, it was *just walking*). So while we have spent a large part of this section implicitly arguing that studies of children and young people's independent mobility could acknowledge some characteristics of walking – narratives, knowledges, details, everydayness, socialities, bodily practices – which are routinely discussed in new walking studies, we wonder to what extent new walking studies could accommodate this sense of *just walking*. This worry pervades the concluding remarks that follow.

## Conclusions

In this paper we have highlighted key characteristics of children and young people's everyday pedestrian practices in one geographical context. These practices – 'just walking' – were characteristically *bounded*, yet *intense* and *circuitous*, and constituted social and cultural geographies through their *sociality*, *narrativity*, *playfulness* and *taken-for-grantedness*.

Throughout, we have described how paying attention to this 'just walking' has unsettled our faith in some chief geographical conceptualisations of walking. We have argued that research on children's independent mobilities – in many respects a direct antecedent for our work, individually and collectively – has seldom disclosed the kinds of richness, diversity, intensity, sociability and sheer *mattering* which were evident when participants spoke of 'just walking' in our project. This has occasioned unease about the limited conceptual-methodological experimentation in this specific research context (see Schwanen et al. (2012) on transport scholarship more generally). It has also prompted us to worry about the normativity of assumptions about independent mobilities within this body of research, to the extent that it feels slightly daring to report that, in our study: most young people were *not* engaged in transgressive, oppositional mobilities; some young people actively engaged with, and *valued*, parents'/carers' rules about mobility; despite sometimes very restrictive spatial boundaries, most children and young people spent *considerable* periods of time playing and walking outdoors. We do not wish to romanticise these particular, situated experiences, but we now wonder why social and cultural geographies such as these are so infrequently reported in a large literature which is ostensibly about children and young people's walking in minority world neighbourhood contexts.

We have also argued that these young people's accounts of walking prompt some ambivalence when juxtaposed with 'new walking studies' scholarship. Conceptualisations drawn from new walking studies – on the bodily, social, sociotechnical and habitual characteristics of walking – have provided us with important cues for developing careful, novel understandings of children and

young people's social and cultural geographies in our research. However, we are left wondering at the overwhelming absence of children and young people – as participants or objects of enquiry – from new walking studies. Moreover, to a certain extent we wonder how readily new walking studies could accommodate the sense of *just walking* – taken-for-granted, largely unremarked, discussed with a shrug – articulated in this paper, given the emphasis upon vividly evocative, knowing, 'walking-with-a-thesis' critiqued earlier. In short, we worry that *neither* studies of young people's mobilities *nor* new walking studies quite does justice to the everyday pedestrian practices foregrounded in this paper.

These anxieties lead us to a twofold conclusion. First, in our specific empirical-conceptual context of children and young people's mobilities – and thinking via Middleton's 'everyday pedestrian practices' – we call for the theoretical vivacity of new walking studies and the concerns of more applied empirical research to be interrelated in more ways, in more contexts, via more empirical and conceptual work. We anticipate that such a move will afford all manner of novel insights and questions, not least around: the constitution of diverse social and cultural inclusions and exclusions via walking practices; intersections between walking practices and geographies of age, gender, class, ethnicity, disability, family or friendship; or planning and policy implications of the kinds of pedestrian practices highlighted here. Second, we suggest that the kinds of geographies foregrounded in this paper might pose broader challenges for social and cultural geographers. We propound 'just walking' – particularly the often-unremarked way it *matters* – as a kind of phenomenon which is sometimes done a disservice by chief lines of theory and practice in social and cultural geography. Our specific unease in this empirical case might challenge social and cultural geographers, more broadly, to consider whether other lineages of research and conceptualisation do a similar disservice to the social and cultural geographies they are purportedly about. The latent *awkwardness* of this paper's juxtaposition of immanent conceptualisation (new walking studies), longstanding empirical work (children's independent

mobility) and young people's own articulation of *just walking* may also prompt reflection: how come these different registers sometimes feel so irreconcilable, when they are ostensibly about the same thing? In our work we have found the tensions and interrelations between these registers to be productive in opening out wider points of discussion and critical reflection on research in our field. We challenge social and cultural geographers to expedite this kind of interrelation in other research contexts.

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