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Walk this way: the rhythmic mobilities of university students in Greater Manchester, UK

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ABSTRACT

Mobility in the context of higher education is often privileged to large(r)-scale international movements, neglecting the everyday mobilities practiced by students. This is important, as banal mobilities constitute important affective experiences for students. In responding to calls for a micro-bodily mobilities approach to student geographies in the UK, we draw on semi-structured interviews conducted with university students aged 18–25 studying in Greater Manchester. Through discussing the complex, multilayered everyday walking mobilities of students, we illuminate how embodied, emotional and affective walking mobility practices shape students' experiences and identities. Findings show that, for students in our study, moorings are often as important as mobilities to identity formation, and place attachment. Bringing to the fore the embodied, emotional and affective nature of student micro-mobilities is necessary, since various forms of movement and stillness are important to student wellbeing, enabling students to have space and time to think, reflect, and form attachments and belonging with people and spaces. This paper has implications for higher education and urban designers. We contend that it is crucial to draw attention to students' experiences of walking and sitting in the city, which significantly contribute to constructing sense of place and belonging to the university city.

Introduction

Mobility in the context of higher education has tended to be reduced to spectacular – one-off events – thereby downplaying the importance of banal everyday encounters that constitute important affective experiences for students (Holton and Finn 2018). However, students in this paper make clear that the embodied, emotional and affective nature of their micro-mobilities are of great importance to their wellbeing, giving them the space and time to think, reflect, and form attachments and feelings of belonging with both people and spaces, and are thus deserving of scholarly attention. This paper has important implications for higher education and urban design, as we contend that it is crucial to draw attention to students' experiences of walking and sitting in the city, which significantly contribute to constructing a sense of place and belonging to the university city.

This paper draws on in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with university students aged 18–25 studying in the hyper-diverse metropolitan county of Greater Manchester, in north-western England, UK, to gain insight into students' everyday im/mobilities. While the main focus of the study was to explore students' notion of 'place', how they build a sense of belonging and what

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communities they are part of, the theme of mobility emerged as a crucial reference in this study. In particular, the importance of banal, everyday mobilities emerged as being very significant to the students in our study.

Within the specific context of UK higher education, student mobilities can be critiqued for predominantly focusing on 'the semi-permanent move associated with leaving home and migrations over distance rather than mobility and everyday-life' (Holdsworth 2009, 1949). This ignores the fact that students are 'always on the move' in a multitude of ways (Holdsworth 2009, 1949). It is within this context that this paper explores the importance of the mundane practices of walking for students, to demonstrate how, through walking practices, students encounter difference, and how walking practices can serve to make the 'strange' familiar.

In so doing, this paper also responds to Holton and Finn's (2018) call for a micro-mobilities approach to student geographies in the UK. It achieves this through a discussion of research conducted at the micro-scale, which takes the reader into the everyday 'lifeworlds' of students, and in particular into their non-institutional spaces (such as streets and parks), which make up a significant part of their student experience (Holton and Riley 2013). We provide a discussion of the complex and multi-layered everyday walking mobilities of students in Greater Manchester, and in doing so, this paper illuminates how embodied, emotional and affective walking mobility practices shape students' experiences and identities. Moreover, in the absence of literature focusing specifically on temporal practices of students' engagements with place, this paper highlights the importance of rhythms of movement for students.

This paper is structured as follows. First, we engage with literature on student mobilities, before cohering academic literature on walking mobilities. This is followed by an engagement with literature on rhythms of movement. We then outline the methodology underpinning this study. Following this, we present findings surrounding two themes: student's everyday walking mobilities; and student rhythmic mobilities. Finally, we conclude, highlighting important implications for higher education and urban design. We argue that the affective and spatial experiences of students are important in overcoming a divide between being on-campus versus off-campus. Consequently, we contend that in order to nurture citizenship and feelings of belonging to the city and its wider communities, universities need to go beyond the narrow spatial focus on campus spaces. They can achieve this by not only signposting public spaces but also raising awareness about the importance of micro-mobilities to the embodied experiences of being a student. Moreover, this paper concludes by arguing that if urban designers wish to design effectively for people and society, and show a concern with everyday well-being in urban place (Wunderlich 2008), they must do more to recognise important rhythmic facets of students' engagements with urban spaces.

Student mobilities

When the mobilities of students have been considered in the extant literature, it has typically been in relation to national movements, and the internal migration of students, thereby downplaying the importance of mundane everyday encounters for developing feelings of belonging for students. For instance, Smith and Hubbard (2013) have focused on the geographies of studentification; that is, the increased sociospatial segregation that has occurred due to the in-migration of students into selected towns and cities as part of the expansion of UK higher education in the mid-1990s. Moreover, Holdsworth (2009) highlights that a greater proportion of students will choose to study at local higher education institutions, rather than move away. The author reviews evidence for a trend to more localised study among English higher education students, contending that the analysis of admissions data shows that higher education expansion has been concomitant with less interregional student mobility.

A second key point of attention in the academic literature has been on international movements of students, and how higher education is becoming increasingly internationalised (Holton and Riley 2013). For example, Perkins and Neumayer (2014) explore the uneven flows of international students

and call into question the central importance commonly ascribed to countries' university quality in shaping the mobilities of international students (Perkins and Neumayer 2014). They also argue that income in destination countries, and relational ties created by colonial linkages, common language and pre-existing migrant stocks are far more influential.

A third focal point in the literature on student mobilities has been on the distinction between 'local' and 'non-local' students (those who move to a new location to study, versus those who choose to remain local and often live at home) (Holton 2015). For those who choose to stay local, they are considered relatively 'immobile', compared to the students who travel to a new location. The focus in this body of literature has thus tended to be on the dualism between local and non-local students, and immobility versus mobility (Finn 2017a). Echoing Holton and Riley (2013), we argue that more research is needed at the micro-scale which takes the reader into the everyday 'lifeworlds' of students, and in particular into their non-institutional spaces (such as streets and parks), which make up a significant part of their student experience. At the same time, we contend that more research is needed to go beyond the duality perspective in order to uncover the everyday, the nuanced, and the banal of mobility practices that significantly shape individuals' contingent sense of belonging and place-making.

Whilst there is a relative absence of literature offering insight into students' everyday lifeworlds (Holton and Riley 2013), there are a few notable exceptions. For instance, Holton and Riley (2013) undertake place-based interviewing with undergraduate students to investigate the lived experiences of higher education students. The authors argue that walking interviews facilitate insight into students' narratives 'in place', showing how students' dynamic relationships with place shape their narratives of their term-time locations (Holton and Riley 2013). Further, Finn (2017b) explores the relationship between wellbeing, inclusion and sustainability, and in doing so, brings to the fore everyday student mobilities. Importantly, Finn (2017b) highlights that, for students, everyday travel is fundamental to, rather than a barrier to, their feelings of belonging and inclusion at university. This paper thus joins this small body of work in order to engage with student micro-bodily walking mobilities in, through, and beyond, university spaces.

This paper now coheres relevant mobilities literature, which does well to bring to the fore the emotional, embodied, and affective aspects of walking mobilities. This body of literature can provide inspiration as to how to address the relative absence of attention given to micro-bodily emotional, embodied and affective mobilities of student geographies.

Walking mobilities

Through a focus on everyday pedestrian practices in the city, Middleton (2010) makes clear that walking is not a homogenous means of getting from one place to another. The author examines how objects, such as clothing, footwear, and mobile technologies, are situated in complex socio-technical assemblages that are fundamental constituents of the embodied experience of urban walking. Further, Wylie (2002) illuminates the embodied nature of the mobilities of walking, contending that ascending Glastonbury Tor, Somerset, UK, is a sensuous, embodied experience. Moreover, through his account of walking along the South West Coast Path in North Devon, UK, Wylie (2005) discusses the affective and performative milieu of coastal walking, paying particular attention to feelings of anxiousness and nervousness.

Walking has long been considered an everyday practice through which humans negotiate their relations to city spaces (Forgione 2005). The *flâneur* was a literary type from 19th century France. The term '*flâneur*' evokes connotations of a leisurely man, an idler, an urban explorer, who practices strolling as a form of entertainment. Walter Benjamin, drawing on the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, contributed towards this figure – as an archetype of modern urban experience – becoming the object of scholarly interest in the 20th century (Shaya 2004). Feminist critics recognise that the discourse on the *flâneur* has traditionally constructed him as a male figure, and contend that sexual divisions of the nineteenth century made it impossible for the *flâneuse* to exist, arguing that women

experienced a lack of freedom to walk and gaze in the nineteenth century (Murail 2017). Further, Forgione (2005) has critiqued the focus on the *flâneur*'s gaze, contending that attention has often not been paid to the physical act of walking. Indeed, Wunderlich (2008) argues that walking in urban space is a multi-sensory experience, in which the aural, olfactory, visual, touch and taste contribute to the process of retaining a sense of place.

All of the literature drawn upon thus far assumes that daylight is the default condition for forms of mobile travel (Cook and Edensor 2014). However, Sidaway (2009) provides a corrective riposte to this state of affairs (see also Morris 2011). Reflecting on an evening's walk along the section of Britain's South West Coast Path that runs through the city of Plymouth, UK, Sidaway (2009) makes explicit how by walking this walk, one is confronted with the *affects* of geopolitics. That is, how the repercussions of war and death are folded into the textures of an everyday urban fabric (Sidaway 2009). Further, Pain (1997) has drawn attention to how young women's fear of violent crime constrains their independent mobilities in urban space, for instance, by avoiding dark, lonely and unfamiliar areas or streets. Dunn (2016) explores night walking in Manchester, contending that walking directly connects us to our surroundings in ways that other forms of mobility do not. Dunn (2016) argues that darkness provides escape from daily routines and darkness should not be positioned as negative, but perceived as opening up rich possibilities for sensory engagements with the city.

When conceptualising student mobilities, it is important not to downplay the importance of stillness for identity construction and belonging (see Collins et al. 2013). This point was made earlier by Urry (2003), who argues for the significance of moorings that are solid, static and immobile to be appreciated. Further, Skelton (2013) contributes here, proclaiming that how, and where, young people can/cannot move with speed or slowly, with freedom or constraint, are important to consider in order to enhance understandings of the complex relationality of im/mobility and its connection with identity formation. However, as Bissell and Fuller (2009) note, a focus on the dialectic of stasis and movement neglects other registers and modalities that are not necessarily reducible to this. With this in mind, Bissell (2007) thinks through the event of waiting from the perspective of embodied corporeal experience. Events of corporeal stillness, such as waiting and boredom, then, should not be conceptualised as dead periods of stasis; rather, as Bissell (2007) writes, each of these processes have the potential to be active and mobile.

As we have sought to highlight, work on urban walking has informed contemporary debates and discourses about mobility by emphasising the importance of 'more-than-human' actants. That is, the senses, dispositions, capabilities and potentialities of all manner of social objects and forces assembled through, and involved in, the co-fabrication of socio-material worlds (Whatmore 2006), to the emotional, embodied and affective experiences of mobilities. We now turn to draw on literature which has engaged with the multi-sensual rhythmicity of urban mobilities.

Walking and rhythmicity

There is an absence of literature focusing specifically on temporal practices of students' engagements with place. We argue that this neglect is important since the patterns of students' movements, encounters, and rest, contribute towards a place's temporal distinctiveness (see Wunderlich 2013). Moreover, we assert that being attentive to students' rhythms of movements opens possibilities for understanding everyday activity as a process of place making (see Vergunst 2010). In the absence of literature specifically engaging with students' rhythmic engagements with place, here we cohere literature exploring walking and rhythms.

Rhythm is intimately associated with movement and, as such, the spaces in which humans and more-than-humans (be it diverse objects, organisms, forces and materialities that populate an emergent world and cross between porous bodies, Lorimer 2010) dwell in, and move through, are composed of myriad rhythms (Edensor and Holloway 2008). It should be noted that rhythms are distinct from mobility – the key distinguishing feature being that an analysis of rhythms is concerned

with issues of 'change and repetition, identity and difference, contrast and continuity' (Elden 2004, xii). Lefebvre (2004), one of the main proponents of analysing the rhythms of cities, advanced the theory and method of 'rhythmanalysis'. Lefebvre's (2004, 15) central proposition is that 'everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is a rhythm'.

Echoing Wunderlich (2008), both walking and place are inherently rhythmic. The author distinguishes between three modes of walking: purposive; discursive and conceptual, arguing that all three are inherent temporal practices of place. Wunderlich (2008) argues that walking is a temporal and rhythmical practice, part of a wider group of place-rhythms characterising urban places. Similarly, Seamon (1979) describes walking as a 'place-ballet', arguing that walking is composed of synchronised patterns of human activity. Seamon (1979) details how 'place-ballet' comprises both 'body-ballets' and 'time-space routines'. By 'body-ballets', Seamon (1979) refers to a series of integrated gestures and movements which sustain a particular activity, during which movements flow rhythmically.

Another key scholar to bring to the fore the importance of walking in rhythms is Edensor (2010a). The author investigates place, regulation, style and the flow of experience, highlighting distinct rhythms of walking and the ways it intersects with diverse temporalities and spaces. Edensor (2010a) argues that walking is suffused with often competing ideas surrounding how, and where, to walk, by ideals and conventions laid down by both the powerful and not-so-powerful. Further, in the context of a particular street in Aberdeen, Scotland, Vergunst (2010) undertook an ethnography in order to listen to, and take part in, rhythms. Vergunst (2010) engages in both ordinary walking and more distinctive walking practices, to highlight how the ways in which people walk in streets can become part of both local politics and social relations.

As we have illustrated thus far, the notion of mobilities has potential to exemplify the variegated relations between people and places, thereby overcoming static, bounded, conceptions of spaces and places (Binnie et al. 2007). Further, engaging with rhythms can enable an understanding of the spatio-temporal specificities of place (Edensor 2010b). This is because rhythmanalysis goes against the notion of place as static, as rhythms are dynamic, part of the many flows emanating from, passing through, and centring upon place. This paper now turns to outline the case study location and method of data collection and analysis underpinning this study.

Methodology

Case study location

This research was undertaken in Greater Manchester, in North West England, UK. In 2018/2019, there were approximately 94,115 students enrolled across The University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), and The University of Salford (HESA 2020). The majority of Manchester University and MMU campuses and buildings are located on or around Oxford Road, south of the city centre. Oxford Road is considered the most well served bus route in Europe. The Salford University campus is approximately 30 minute walk from Manchester city centre and is also well served by buses. Study in Manchester (2020) promotes Manchester as a welcoming city, popular with international students, and as one of the most linguistically diverse cities in western Europe, with over 200 languages spoken. Moreover, according to a report by *The Economist*, Manchester is the most liveable city in the UK. The Global Liveability Index (2019), produced yearly by The Economist Intelligence Unit, ranked Manchester number one of UK cities, and 38th in the world.

Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were useful for researching complex behaviours, opinions, and emotions (Longhurst 2003), enabling us to collect a rich depth of information and a diversity of experiences (Nykiel 2007). Interviews with students explored the following diverse themes: spaces

and places students feel they belong to; spaces and places students feel excluded from; how use of spaces and places vary depending on the time of day or time of year; which communities students belong to; and experiences of hearing different languages in the city. Mobilities was not the intended focus of this research, but emerged as an important theme for participants in our study.

All interviews were audio-recorded to preserve spoken words. The research assistant typically conducted interviews with students in booked out rooms at the university or library, yet a telephone interview and Facetime interview were also conducted. These were convenient physical and digital spaces for participants, which they felt comfortable in (Longhurst 2003). With the majority of interviews taking place 'in situ', participants often had direct contact with the university spaces and places they were talking about, and the interview space could thus act as an oral catalyst (Trell and Hoven 2010).

Interviews were conducted in enclosed spaces, rather than on the move, due to the potentially sensitive nature of some questions (such as explorations of loneliness) – where participants may be more conscious and feel restricted discussing their feelings. Had mobilities been the intended focus, we would have moved away from conducting interviews as sedentary encounters to adopt walking interviews (Evans and Jones 2011). We recognise that accompanying students 'in the field' can enable researchers to explore students' narratives 'in place', and observe first-hand how multi-sensual, multi-layered experiences of places may be both captured and interpreted (Holton and Riley 2013). Indeed, following a sedentary interview, one participant in our study invited the research assistant to accompany her on a 'walk along' to Curry Mile (Wilmslow Road) in Manchester (see Badwan and Hall 2020). This walk-along reflective account highlighted the power of emotions in sticky places (Ahmed 2014), and how things make people happen as im/mobile individuals inter/intra-act with objects, places and spaces. We learned from this study the ontological engagement and entanglement of social researchers as they engage critically, emotionally and reflectively with unexpected research spaces.

Sampling

We used a purposeful sampling approach to recruit both male and female university students, aged 18–25 years. Respondents included undergraduate, masters and PhD students. This paper draws on qualitative data from nine semi-structured interviews (each lasting approximately 1–3 hours). All participants featured in this paper are able-bodied; the accounts of mobilities thus relate to this specific group of young people. Recognising that different bodies are able to move in different ways, and different groups have different spatial and temporal affordances, we encourage researchers to engage with rhythmic im/mobilities of a larger sample of students that accommodates for the diversity of bodily forms and abilities in society (Andrews et al. 2012).

Table 1 provides key biographical information on each of the research participants, and documents the interview durations. Our sample is not representative of all students in Greater Manchester, or elsewhere. Instead, we aimed to bring to the fore rich, singular experiences of

Table 1. Key biographical information for participants and interview duration.

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Socioeconomic Status	Level	Interview Duration
Sarah	F	White-British	Lower-Middle-Class	BA	56:46
James	M	White-British	Working-Class	MA	02:49:51
Samiya	F	Arab	Middle-Class	PhD	02:44:35
Sophie	F	White-British	Working-Class	PhD	01:52:59
Lena	F	White-Polish	Working-Class	BA	01:11:22
Robert	M	White-British	Working-Class	BA	01:12:13
Hassan	M	Arab	Middle-Class	PhD	01:48:21
Shanti	F	Indian-British	Not disclosed	BA	50:51
Amrita	F	Asian-Indian	Middle-Class	MSc	01:39:39

space, rather than searching for generalisable or exhaustive patterns of experience (see Malins, Fitzgerald, and Threadgold 2006 for similar methodological approach).

Positionality

The research assistant who helped with data generation is a white, female, in her twenties; this positionality inevitably had an impact upon the tenor of the research relationships (Bondi 2003). As Duncombe and Jessop (2008) contend, researchers often aim to be insiders in the culture of their participants, perceiving that minimal social distance offers the basis for rapport. Elisha, being a young person, and a former student, was somewhat floating between an insider and outsider position, which reduced a potential hierarchy between interviewer and interviewee, as she was able to empathise with students, which helped with rapport-building.

Data analysis

Our research assistant transcribed the interviews verbatim. We manually coded data using pen and paper, perceiving computer-assisted qualitative data analysis distances researchers from the data (Davis and Meyer 2009). We read and re-read transcripts, in order to familiarise ourselves with the data, and through this process, we were able to identify coherent categories (Taylor-Powell and Renner 2003). We followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) three-stage model of data analysis. First, a process of data reduction occurred, in which we organised the mass of data and attempted to reduce this. This involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data from transcriptions. Second, we undertook data display, in the form of a table. This provided a new way of arranging and thinking about the data. In this format, we were able to begin discerning patterns and interrelationships. Here, themes emerged from the data that went beyond those first discovered during the initial process of data reduction. Third, we undertook a process of conclusion-drawing and verification. Conclusion-drawing entailed stepping back to consider what the analysed data mean, and to assess their implications for the questions at hand. Verification involved revisiting the data many times to cross-check the emergent conclusions to ensure they were credible, defensible and warranted.

Ethical considerations

Our institution's research and ethics committee ethically approved the study. However, we also embraced the understanding of ethics as a process, rather than an initial step to fieldwork entry (Neale and Hanna 2012). We informed all potential participants about the research in an accessible information sheet, and obtained consent from participants for their involvement in the study. In order to ensure confidentiality, all participants feature in this paper with a pseudonym. This protects the anonymity of the participants, both on a day-to-day basis, and in the process of disseminating research findings.

Having detailed the methodology, we now present our findings surrounding two key themes: student's everyday walking mobilities, and student rhythmic mobilities, respectively.

Student's everyday walking mobilities

The data from the study highlighted the importance of everyday walking mobilities for students. In conjunction with purposeful walking, which is characterised as 'necessary walking' (Wunderlich 2008, 213); that is, to get from 'A to B', James, Hassan and Shanti also valued the opportunity to walk in spontaneous, discursive, ways. To expand, contrary to Urry's (2002) discussion of why travel takes place, in the context of student mobilities, it is not always the requirement of proximity that gives rise to movement. In other words, student mobilities were not always 'pointillist' (Bissell 2013,

349). Rather, students placed value on what Bissell (2013, 349, emphasis in original) terms 'point*less*' mobilities, as they are not oriented by points. Take the quotations from James, Hassan, and Shanti below:

> I love being around the city centre and especially on the way home [to Salford], I'll take the long way and wander around different areas … From MMU, up towards the Midland Hotel and then Piccaddilly and Deansgate, I am very familiar with all that now. I think that's because I have actively familiarized myself with it, I mean, the last couple of years I walk through it. Well, since I moved out of halls, I have basically walked through the city centre most days. But even when I was in halls, I used to just go off and wander around town and just get to know the city centre. (James)

> It's important in order not to lose so much time – discovering stuff each time. So, everything becomes automatic, you just go grab stuff, then you can come home; but sometimes it's good to have an adventure or something. I remember one time – once – I went on an adventure. So the thing is, a lot of the time I like hanging out with friends and all; so, this time I decided to go solo; so, I took the bike and I went to Alexandra Park. So, it's good to have an adventure from time to time, but it's also good to have that routine, in order to not lose time when doing stuff. (Hassan)

> I think – in Manchester – it's just one of those cities where I could literally just walk and explore a different part of Manchester; because it's so big and I wouldn't feel like, 'oh I shouldn't be here' or, 'oh, I need to turn back' – I've never had that experience – not yet. (Shanti)

As can be seen through the quotations above, for James, Hassan and Shanti, at times their mobilities are at times ostensibly aimless. Indeed, through reference to 'taking the long way around', 'wandering around', 'adventure' and 'exploring', their accounts have an almost situationist vibe of the '*dérive*'; that is, drifting without motive, letting themselves be drawn by the attractions of the space and the encounters they find there (see Bassett 2004). Their walking is equivalent to the literary *flâneur*, the 'city stroller' who gazes at the landscape whilst experiencing its now (Wunderlich 2008). James, Hassan and Shanti are not always walking (or in the case of Hassan, cycling) *to* particular spaces or activities, rather walking or cycling itself is the chief activity (see Horton et al. 2014). In Horton et al.'s (2014, 94) research into the importance of walking, students often appeared to depreciate the significance of their everyday walking practices, dismissing them as 'just wandering'. This resonates with the findings in our study, in which, despite recognising how such mobilities are central to their experiences, students such as James and Shanti downplayed the significance of such mobilities through the prefix 'just'.

Samiya, James and Sophie in our study placed emphasis on ephemeral micro-scale interactions (see Andersson, Sadgrove, and Valentine 2012), in a range of urban spaces such as parks and streets, and intimated that the act of walking served to help them overcome experiences of loneliness or a lack of belonging, and feel part of a community. Take the following quotations:

> Sometimes just walking in the street and observing people … I can feel them. [It is] this feeling, that contributes to my belonging to their community as a whole. (Samiya)

> If I went back home and I live in just a small village; if I walk into the village and go to the co-op [supermarket] or the pub or anything, you always see someone you know. Which is nice, but you can't just sort-of wander around gazing around at the world. Whereas, in the city centre of Manchester it's rare that you ever bump into anyone you know. But I do feel very familiar in that space now. Actually, this year in particular, I have noticed walking through Spinningfields [a destination for entertainment and shopping in Manchester city centre], in the morning; there are a number of people now that I see almost every time I walk to university and you don't speak to them, but you just get to know people that are on the same route to work. You get to know their face. (James)

> I think I feel more comfortable because I know – because when you speak face-to-face with people, you recognise them; say you go shopping or something – I might bump into people. It's a more familiar place, everyone on the street isn't a stranger – there might be one or two people that you know. So, yeah, I feel a better sense of belonging now that I've studied here for a couple of years and I know more people. Whereas, when I first came it was completely foreign – foreign? Its like, 20- minutes up the road away, but it's a completely different space. I didn't know a soul, everyone was completely different and the difference between going from

living in a – what you could call a more rural place (Wigan, home town) – I'm surrounded by fields, it's the same people that have lived there for their entire lives. Then, going to a more diverse city, but I think overtime it's got better and I feel like it's more like home now. (Sophie)

The above quotations from Samiya, James and Sophie support Cloke, May, and Johnsen's (2008) contention that places become meaningful by embodied and emotional interactions. To expand, Samiya speaks of walking as an affective experience, where she can 'feel' others, which contributes to her sense of belonging to a community. Further, James compares Manchester with his home locale, distinguishing Manchester as a city in which you can wander around and gaze at the world. James values the anonymity in Manchester – in that it is rare for him to bump into anyone he already knows. Nonetheless, he makes clear that the repeated act of walking the same route helped to build up a sense of familiarity with strangers, serving to make the 'strange' familiar. Similarly, Sophie makes clear how her sense of belonging has been built up over time, making a large city, that initially felt somewhat 'foreign', feel like 'home'. These quotations align with Ahmed's (2014, 11) assertion that: 'what moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place'. Indeed, for Ahmed (2014), movement does not prevent inhabitance from being grounded in particular locations; rather, movement connects bodies to other bodies. Indeed, Ahmed (2014, 11) highlights that attachment takes place through movement, and 'being moved by the proximity of other'.

For some students in the study, roads, streets, paths are not just instrumental in getting from point A to point B. Rather, they, through acts of repetition, rhythm, and movement become part of what gives dwelling and place-attachment:

At the start, it was sort-of getting your feet planted and discovering places and that's when you felt that you belonged there because it is new and you're discovering places And then, further through your course you sort of get a bit comfortable and that's when you belong because you feel you deserve that place and you've got to know it. Then, you are sort-of looking towards the next step and thinking of/comparing that to where you are going to go next. (Sarah)

Since I was a kid, I used to walk to my school, I always had this special attachment to the roads. On that road, I had all sorts of thoughts, all sorts of imaginations and stories, going on in my mind. It's the same when I am in the park, when I am just walking and these thoughts – memories sometimes, my future plans – it just feels so great. I remember that, when I went from primary school to middle school, the streets changed. And then from middle school to high school, the roads also changed. To university, and then when I got my masters – I went to another city and then I came here. So, I always feel like when I change the street, I am starting a new stage of my life and I always related to the street that I used to walk on. (Samiya)

For both Sarah and Samiya, it can be seen that walking on streets and discovering places has a symbolic value, indicative of a new life phase. For Samiya, walking on streets and parks provokes a feeling of nostalgia, bringing to the fore memories of childhood. Indeed, it is while walking in such spaces that she sensorially and reflectively interacts with place, firming up her relationships with urban spaces (Wunderlich 2008). These roads become 'sticky' and saturated with affect (Ahmed 2014). They embody meanings and reinstate feelings. Changing roads, therefore, signifies changing life.

Having highlighted the value of student walking mobilities for exploration of urban spaces, and building up a sense of belonging and emotional attachment, this paper now turns to engage with the rhythms of student mobilities.

Student rhythmic mobilities

Findings from our study show that the patterns of students' movements, encounters, along with acts of stillness and sitting, contribute towards a place's temporal distinctiveness (see Wunderlich 2013). Moreover, we assert that being attentive to students' rhythms of stillness and movements opens possibilities for understanding everyday activity as a process of place making (see Vergunst 2010). For participants in our study, movement was not a homogenous activity; instead, it was shaped by place rhythms, and consequently walking itself had diverse rhythms. For instance, rhythms of night

and day had an impact on feelings of safety for both male and female students in our study, which could cause students to purposefully alter their routes and create new geographies through adaptive mobilities (Skelton and Gough 2013). As Edensor (2013) articulates, there is a prevailing cultural understanding that darkness is a negative condition, a frightening, mysterious void; this can be gleamed through the quotations below:

> I do feel a little unsafe there [Fallowfield, a suburb of Manchester] at night; because I've said I've had a lot of eve-teasing[1] incidents over there and also, they don't keep the lights – I don't know whether that's all over the UK or if it's just there or what – but the streetlights go off after 8 or 9pm. (Amrita)

> We just wanted to get a flat somewhere that we could walk where we wanted to go. We didn't want to have to get buses or commute, via public transport. We used to be able to walk along the canal in the mornings, which I think is a beautiful area (down in Castlefield [a walkable area in Manchester renowned for its canals). I always used to appreciate how lucky I was to be able to live there and walk back and to, along these scenic routes. One thing to note there is, late at night I would probably not take the same route. I'd always go [via] the main road because I've not wanted to encounter any sticky situations down the canal, late at night. Although, it did always seem like a pretty safe area to me. (James)

As the quotations above highlight, the nocturnal landscape is visually apprehended in a different way to that of the day (Cook and Edensor 2014). According to Jackson (2012), 'knowing an area is seen as important in order to be able to read it, which in turn is equated with safety'. As a consequence of both participant's embodied knowledge of their places, they were able to position particular places not as inherently unsafe. Rather, there was a temporal dimension to feelings of danger. For instance, Fallowfield was perceived as unsafe in darkness, as were canals – which in the day are perceived as beautiful.

Students in our study seem to value independent mobilities, and paid attention to how the act of moving from one place to another can have therapeutic qualities (Gatrell 2013). Take the quotation from Amrita below:

> I love being with people, I'm not anti-social, but I do like being alone at times. So there have been places – especially in Salford or the university or just walking down the street, or at the Central library – there are places where I've been alone and I've been very mindful of my own thoughts. (Amrita)

Amrita seems to recognize the importance of therapeutic mobilities (Gatrell 2013); that is, there can be well-being gains from walking alone, allowing time to be mindful and process thoughts. Whilst green spaces are often thought to promote health and well-being, Amrita places value on both indoor and outdoor spaces, including the library and streets.

Students in the study, such as Lena and Robert, recognised that different spaces have different rhythms, which can contribute towards feelings of safety and comfort in spaces:

> Campus – it feels quite safe and you walk around and there's you don't have to worry about anything – you can just chill. I've never had to worry about anything … If someone approaches you like that, you don't feel endangered. If someone comes over to me in the street and tries to ask something – it's a red flag. (Lena)

> I like living in cities, but I don't like being too close to the centre to be honest with you. So, where I live – which is not too far, I can get the bus over to Manchester for £1.50 – be there in 15 minutes; but where I am – it's still quite calm and away from the hustle and bustle and all that. (Robert)

For Lena, spaces such as the campus were discussed as having a very relaxed vibe enabling one to 'chill'. The campus then, is positioned almost as island of safety, away from the street. Further, Robert can be seen to specifically choose not to live within walking distance of Manchester city centre. Instead, he purposefully chooses to live somewhere further out, and employs the affordances of transport to break away from the place temporalities typical of the 'hustle and bustle' of the city centre (see Vannini 2012 on the affordances of ferries to break away from the temporalities of city life). Vehicular transport then, more than walking, can be seen to 'weave distinct place temporalities' (Vannini 2012:241).

Our research shows that the notion of 'just-ness' mentioned previously in this paper (Horton et al. 2014:111) did not just apply to students mobilities, but also suffused Samiya and Amrita's accounts of relative immobility. It seems that, for students in our study, moorings are often as important as mobilities to identity formation (see Cresswell 2010). Indeed, in conceptualising 'sense of place', Tuan (1977) has contended that the stillness of place is fundamentally importance in forging attachments to locations. This can be seen through the quotations from Samiya and Amrita below:

> In Algeria [home country], it was really hard – for instance, to get your own space people interrupting you; it's either your family, your friends, or other people. So, I didn't get the chance to sit somewhere quiet, without anyone – just thinking. It means a lot to me, to do this. So, it was always in the streets that I used to do this. It's the same here. (Samiya)

> I forgot to mention one place; but that would be the Central Library, I really enjoy reading and I've taken a membership there and I go there at least once a week and I'll just pick up a book and I have this particular spot – I always try and go there – and I just sit and read and forget everything else. I think, the longest I've been there is for – maybe – six or seven hours – just sitting and reading. (Amrita)

The above excerpts could be conceptualised as highlighting the importance of the rhythm of stillness (see McCormack 2002); Samiya and Amrita value the opportunity to 'sit', 'think', and 'read', whether this is outdoors in streets, or indoors in the library. In line with Bissell (2007), rather than thinking through the event of sitting as slowed rhythms, we suggest that it takes effort and therefore some form of intentional action to sit and think. From this perspective, sitting and thinking are events in themselves, active *doings*, and should not be conceptualised dead periods of stasis (Bissell 2007). To explain, the 'ephemeral mooring' (Vannini 2011, 273) of sitting is actively and strategically undertaken by students in our study. Student geographies should thus be conceptualised as, to borrow Vannini and Taggart's (2012, 236) phrase, '"ballets" of movement, rest, and encounter'.

Having highlighted the rhythms of student mobilities, we can see how the participants referenced different rhythms with different intensities and emotions. From deliberate attempts of creating new geographies to avoid certain places at night, to therapeutic mobilities, just-ness and mooring, and time-bound walks, the students have continued to highlight the importance of the micro-bodily exploration of student mobilities in the city. Through this micro, reflective lens, we have been able to open a window into the spatial lived experiences of students in order to explore notions of place-attachment and belonging in the lives of students who are constantly 'on the move', in different ways and with different levels of intensities.

Conclusion

This paper opened by highlighting that mobility in the context of higher education has tended to be reduced to spectacular – one-off events (Holton and Finn 2018). As a consequence, the importance of banal everyday encounters that constitute important affective experiences for students have been downplayed. In an attempt to address this gap in the literature, through this paper we explored the micro-geographies of mobility, movement and experiences of students in Greater Manchester, UK, bringing to the fore the emotional dimensions of moving into, through, and beyond, spaces of higher education. This paper shows that neglecting the embodied, emotional and affective nature of student mobilities needs redressing, since such micro im/mobilities, both movement and stillness, are of great importance to student wellbeing, enabling students to have time and space to think, reflect, and form attachments and feelings of belonging to both places and people.

Our paper had many interesting findings regarding the diversity of student mobilities. For instance, our findings show that students are not always walking through cities in an attempt to get from A to B. Instead, students valued opportunities to walk in spontaneous, discursive ways. Further, for some students in our study, the act of walking served to help them overcome experiences of loneliness or a lack of belonging, and feel part of a community. For other students in our

study, it is while walking that they sensorially and reflectively interacted with place, firming up relationships with urban spaces (Wunderlich 2008).

Through this paper, we also brought to the fore the importance of student rhythmic mobilities. For instance, we highlighted that rhythms of night and day had an impact on feelings of safety, which could cause students to purposefully alter their route and create new geographies through adaptive mobilities. Further, what struck us was the importance students placed on walking and sitting/thinking in what is commonly perceived as 'unspectacular' and 'ordinary' spaces including streets and parks, which helped them to establish a sense of themselves and of their place. This paper has shown how student im/mobilities form an integrated part of place-rhythms, and contribute to the temporal continuity and distinctiveness of urban places (see Wunderlich 2008). Taken together, this paper extends the literature around students' social and cultural geographies. For instance, we have demonstrated how engaging with students' rhythmic im/mobilities might support students' experiences of university life, and affect their engagement with(in) local communities.

Given the relative social and cultural diversity of Manchester as a city and of its university populations, this paper has important implications for higher education and urban design in the city. As the university is often seen as a means to leave for the city, it provides a crucial anchor for young people. Yet, it is not uncommon for students to experience a divide between being on-campus *versus* off-campus. We have seen through the affective and spatial experiences of participants in this study the importance of overcoming this divide. In order to nurture citizenship and feelings of belonging to the city and its wider communities, universities need to go beyond the narrow spatial focus on campus spaces by not only signposting public spaces but also raising awareness about the importance of micro-mobilities to the embodied experiences of being a student. We therefore recommend that universities should work on strengthening university-city collaboration, by encouraging students to engage with city spaces (Winden 2014). This could be achieved by developing their research and education programmes with regard of the local/urban context. For instance, including city tours during induction week; teaching in outdoor spaces; and using the city as a 'living laboratory' during teaching; for instance, using observation of city spaces to engage with real-world problems (Winden 2014). In the words of one participant: 'We've got a big city . . . it's just whether people hear about it and if they do – whether or not, they feel like – actually they are encouraged to be there' (Lena).

To expand, and to echo Wunderlich's (2008) call, but in the particular context of valuing student im/mobilities, we argue that urban designers must pay to attention to students' diverse experiences of walking and sitting in the city, both in indoor and outdoor spaces. Urban designers must listen to the voices of students to ensure that their city planning accommodates for students' desires to not only get from A to B, but to wander around, familiarising themselves with places. Moreover, urban designers must be attentive to the rhythmicity of students' use of space; and they should build in spaces for students to sit, think and reflect, both inside buildings and in outdoors spaces. It is important for urban designers to think from the micro-scale of individual buildings, to the scale of the city, and beyond. This is because students have told us that engagements with both indoor (e.g. library) and outdoor city spaces (e.g. streets) enrich their notions of sense of place and placemaking, and enhance feelings of belonging, all of which can contribute positively to their wellbeing and mental health.

As Wunderlich (2008) contends, urban design is typically planned to facilitate the ease of moving between places. For instance, ensuring spaces are of an appropriate size; devoid of obstacles; and with safe routes. However, if wishing to design effectively for people and society, and showing a concern with everyday well-being in urban place (Wunderlich 2008), this paper argues that urban planners must go beyond this, and do more to recognise important rhythmic facets of students' engagements with urban spaces. We argue that it is important that urban planners create student-friendly cities (Russo and Berg 2004), and to do so they must consider the everyday mobilities and stillness of students as a specific demographic. This is necessary since students bring about social innovation and cultural change, and in turn contribute significantly to the vibrancy and economy of

urban spaces (Russo and Berg 2004). We align with Russo and Berg (2004), who contend that for a city to remain competitive in the long-term, it is necessary to plan strategically for student communities. The authors argue that a city needs to be attractive for students at all stages of their university journey: from the initial moment of choosing a place to study, to planning for their future work and residence location. Indeed, Russo and Berg (2004) recognise that the decision of where to study is less and less associated with the reputation of universities, and increasingly associated with the quality of life they think they will enjoy in a city. We contend that designing for the everyday mobilities and stillness of students may assist in making university cities feel more at home for students, which could help with recruitment, and student retention, both during their time at university, and following graduation.

Note

1. A common euphemism in South Asia for sexual harassment of women in public areas by men.

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