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The influence of gender on young women's everyday (im)mobilities in Inverness, Scotland

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ABSTRACT

Young women's (im)mobilities are influenced by a web of factors at the individual, interpersonal and macro levels of analysis. These factors, including young women's social identities, perceptions of themselves and their environment; parental rules; transportation systems; and systematic inequalities, influence how, at what times and where young women access the public realm. In this article, I argue gender is an often-hidden but significant force shaping young women's (im)mobilities in the public realm at different levels of analysis. Drawing attention to how gender influences mobilities is a necessary first step to making the public realm inclusive and accessible for women of all ages. This research was undertaken as part of a PhD in Social Policy. Qualitative data were collected with 41 participants over 8 months using semi-structured interviews and a pilot series of participatory workshops. Participants included young women, their mothers, key adults in young women's lives, and policy professionals. The findings reveal how gender suffuses the experiences, decisions, regulations, and policies informing young women's mobilities, often with a limiting effect. However, the strength of gender as a force affecting young women's mobilities, and the recognition of the role of gender in mediating young women's travel varied among participants. The contextual and intersectional nature of young women's mobilities accounts for this variation and begins to explain it. The research focused on the experiences of young women in Scotland, but the findings illuminate the persistent, and surprising ways that gender shapes young women's (im)mobilities in different contexts around the world.

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Introduction

Mobilities research is concerned with the movement of people (also things, values, and ideas) at different scales, people's experiences of movement, and the meanings they and others attribute to them (Adey 2017; Cresswell 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006). There is a growing and diverse body of research on children and young people's gendered mobilities (Brown et al. 2008; Guliani et al. 2015; Lesclingand, Hertrich, and Dutreuilh 2017; Porter 2011; Porter, Spark, and De Kleyn 2021; Rodó-de-Zárate 2015; Skelton 2004). Empirical findings give evidence to gender differences in children and young people's (im)mobilities and spatial practices in the public realm (Brown et al. 2008; Prezza et al. 2001; Tucker and Matthews 2001). This is, in part, because young women face 'gender stereotyping, gender-based violence, violations of their rights as girls, pernicious

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sexualisation and often amorphous discrimination' (Alsop and Clisby 2019, 855). As a result, where young women physically go, how they get there, and the meanings that they and others ascribe to their movements are all profoundly influenced by gender in combination with young women's other social identities (Barker et al. 2009; Christensen and Cortés-Morales 2017; Uteng and Cresswell 2008).

In this article, I analyse the tangled influence of gender, in conjunction with other intersectional and contextual factors, on young women's (im)mobilities in Inverness. I do this by critically considering how gender acts as a force impacting young women's mobilities at the individual, interpersonal and macro levels of analysis. First, I examine how young women's perceptions of their personal safety at times confined their walking practices, especially in areas reputed for violence. I then investigate how mothers' mobility regulations for their daughters, informed by their own, and their daughters' social identities, limit some young women's mobilities. Finally, I critically assess how the transportation sector falls short of meaningfully considering age and gender in transport planning and decision-making, deterring young women's use of it. I conclude that gender acts as an often-hidden force at the individual, interpersonal and macro levels which, combined with other factors, often limited young women's mobilities in Inverness. Research recognising the extent to which gender influences not only the scope and scale of young women's (im)mobilities, but their experiences of movement, is a necessary first step towards creating more inclusive and accessible communities for everyone.

Understanding young women's mobilities

Mobility is contextual and intersectional and research findings about what shapes young people's mobilities are consequently varied. This literature review highlights these differences and points to the need for more in-depth place-based qualitative research to uncover how gender interacts with other variables at the individual, interpersonal and macro levels of analysis to influence young women's mobilities.

It is first useful to problematise a common assumption about women's mobilities. In some contexts, limiting women's mobilities 'in terms both of identity and space, have been […] a crucial means of subordination' (Massey 1994, 179). However, research exploring gendered (im)mobilities must be careful not to impose unproblematised Western ideals equating increased mobility with liberation, or positioning mobility as 'intrinsically transgressive' (Clarsen 2014, 96). Ong (1999) questions the assumption that mobility is always 'liberatory' spatially and politically for everyone. Somewhat paradoxically, 'Mobility is not *essentially* resistance of domination; it can be potentially both, or either. Mobility is able to exert power that may well dominate, convert, contest and liberate' (Adey 2017, 118). What is clear, is that mobility and immobility, and the power of each, are significant influential forces in the lives of women of all ages and a topic worthy of research.

Some research suggests young women's mobilities are more limited, regulated, and restricted compared to young men, in part, due to heightened concern for young women's safety among different 'socialisation agents' (John et al. 2017, 15), including parents and caregivers, communities and young women themselves. Perceptions of young women's mobilities vary based on socio-cultural context, but persistent cross-cultural commonalities exist. Real and perceived concern for young people's safety, sexuality and social standing are often greater for young women than they are for young men of a similar age in a similar context, particularly among adolescents (Blum, Mmari, and Moreau 2017; Marcus 2019). Blum, Mmari, and Moreau (2017) study found evidence of this belief in the 15 countries they studied gender norms, including Scotland. Marcus (2019) found similar concerns for young women's safety and chastity in her research with Scottish Travellers. Media representations portraying women as victims further add credence to these fears (Gilmour 2022; Ndangam et al. 2015). Though gendered concerns for young women are widespread at the individual, relational and macro levels of analysis, the complexity and variety of young women's mobility experiences should not be overlooked.

Children and young people's access to public space and their mobilities therein differ, in part, based on their social identities (Brown et al. 2008; Karsten 2003; O'Brien et al. 2000; Stride 2016). Karsten's (2003) research on children's use of playgrounds in Amsterdam found differences in gender and ethnicity. Girls were more marginalised than boys in these spaces and girls from minority ethnic backgrounds were less likely than boys of the same ethnicity to frequent them (Karsten 2003). Karsten (2003) also found contextual elements like the built environment and time of day demarcated use of public space and girls were less likely to use playgrounds from twilight. This chimes with research on children's independent spatial mobility in the public realm in England which found 'girls and minority ethnic children were more restricted in their use of urban space' (O'Brien et al. 2000, 257).

Young women's social connections shape their mobilities. Brown et al. (2008) study in England found a gendered mobility gap between girls and boys which was closed by girls when they travelled in groups. Girls who travelled together were allowed the same freedom as boys on their own pointing to the importance of peers in enabling girls' mobilities. Family also plays a role in shaping mobilities. Stride (2016) conducted research with South Asian Muslim girls in Yorkshire on their physical activity. One participant shared how her aunt enabled her physical activity (and mobilities) by giving her rides to dance class and other girls said their families' expectations for what it means to be a young, Muslim women informed the physical activities they took part in (Stride 2016).

Parents/carers also help shape experience of travel as evidenced by two Australian studies. Gilbert et al. (2022) research on sustainable transport in two cities found parents' desire to ensure children were safe and comfortable helped explain why they drove their children in cars instead of encouraging other modes of transport. Porter and colleagues study on children navigating the neighbourhood found 'boys described a greater sense of freedom to travel independently' (Porter, Spark, and De Kleyn 2021, 6) than girls. Boys 'sense of freedom' stands in contrast to the girls who were responsive to their parents' gendered spatial expectations and did not express a sense of freedom when moving in their communities. In fact, the girls were more attuned to perceived risks.

These studies evidence widespread gender-based concerns and differential expectations for young women which sometimes, but not always have a limiting effect on their mobilities. Young women's mobilities are diverse and situated, influenced by family and peers, gender norms, the physical environment, and social identities, among other factors. The intersectional and contextual nature of mobilities means more research is needed to understand how gender influences the factors shaping young women's mobilities at the individual, interpersonal and macro levels of analysis. This research adds to literature on young women's mobilities and the meanings they and others give to them by laying bare the hidden influences of gender inequalities on young women's daily lives in the Scottish context. Only by identifying the complex effect of gender can inequalities in access and use of public space be addressed.

Designing and conducting the research

This research was completed as part of a PhD in Social Policy funded by a studentship awarded by the School of Politics and Social Sciences at the University of Edinburgh. Fieldwork was conducted from October 2018 to May 2019 in Inverness, Scotland. Ethical approval was gained from the University of Edinburgh School of Social and Political Science's ethics committee. I then considered ethics on an ongoing basis throughout the research.

The research aimed to explore the everyday (im)mobilities of young women in Inverness and the implications these had for their involvement in, and access to, the public realm. The research questions were as follows:

1. What factors limit young women's mobilities, and what factors encourage them?
2. If and how are young women's social connections related to their (im)mobilities?
3. Where do young women meet and how do they get there?
4. What are young women's perceptions of these spaces and journeys, and their access to them?

The research site

Inverness receives little academic research attention within the social sciences, with some exceptions (see Lloyd and Peel 2007; Salnikova and D'Arcus 2019). As of 2011, the population of Inverness was 48,201 (Scotland's Towns Partnership 2018). Inverness has a mixed demographic profile in terms of class and country of origin, and nearly 8 per centof the population was born outside of the UK and about 98 per cent is white (National Records of Scotland 2011; Smith, Sobey, and Ross 2014).

After moving to Inverness, I narrowed the research field site to focus on a smaller geographical area. Given the research focus on mobilities, I was interested in conducting research where young women used multiple forms of transportation. I selected an area that fit this criterion and was within walking distance of the city centre, meaning young women were less likely to depend exclusively on parents picking them up and dropping them off or public transport to attend school, see friends, or attend extracurricular activities. The area is residential and some parts experience high rates of poverty, unemployment and crime (Scottish Government 2020).

Gatekeepers and participants

As a necessary first step in participant recruitment, I sought out gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are usually trusted persons in the lives of young people and their families, and often have control over the spaces most suited for safe and ethical data collection (Mason 2004). Individuals at five different educational, youth and community organisations acted as gatekeepers, and each had varied levels of involvement throughout the research.

I used a non-probability purposive sampling approach to select participants which I supplemented with snowball sampling. In total, 41 people took part in the research including 12 young women between the ages of 13–17. The majority of the young women participants were white and from working class backgrounds. Some came from single parent homes, and/or were young carers. Most grew up in the area in and around Inverness. However, several had moved from other parts of the UK, or in one case, from abroad. The research also included young women who identified as Scottish Travellers, bisexual, and/or as having additional support needs. The experiences of gender non-conforming individuals are an important research area. However, all 13–17-year-old participants identified as female and referred to themselves as 'she/her', 'girls' and 'young women'. I, therefore, did not explore alternative genders in-depth as they did not arise empirically.

Young people are experts in their own lives and are best positioned to provide insights about their personal experiences and perceptions (Gallagher 2009). In addition, interpersonal relationships play a central role in shaping young women's mobilities and qualitative research benefits from including multiple perspectives (Harden et al. 2010). I therefore interviewed five parents/carers all of whom identified as mothers, 17 key adults who worked with young women in the area and seven policy professionals working in transport, urban planning, or other relevant fields.

Methods

I used a combination of qualitative methods to collect data, including participatory techniques and semi-structured interviews. Qualitative methods are a fitting way of addressing the research questions because they produce 'in-depth understanding[s] of children's relationships, contexts, and movements from the perspective of children themselves' (Christensen and Cortés-Morales 2017, 34). I ran four pilot workshops with young women consisting of participatory techniques. Inspired by the 'mosaic approach' I combined mapping, diagramming and photo-based activities into a series of workshops (Clark and Moss 2001). This variety allowed 'the strengths of individual methods to compensate for limitations in others' (Young and Barrett 2001, 142). I also conducted

38 in-depth semi-structured interviews with 40 participants from all participant groups. Interviews lasted between 25 minutes and 1 hour and 30 minutes depending on participants' responses.

Young women's (im)mobilities in Inverness

The findings are organised by three main themes roughly situated at different levels of analysis, recognising these levels are porous and often overlapping. The first section centres on the individual level and looks at young women's perceptions of their personal safety in the public realm. The second section, the interpersonal level, focuses on the ways mothers regulate their daughters' mobilities. The last section takes a macro view and looks at the influence of transportation systems and policies on young women's mobilities.

Young women's perceptions of safety

The majority of the young women participants lived within walking distance of Inverness city centre, and walking was recognised by participants in all interview categories as young women's primary mode of transportation. Most young women lived close to their school and walked there and back every day, sometimes twice a day. Several young women, mothers and key adults shared that it was not uncommon for young women to walk distances of three to four miles at one time if there was something they needed or wanted to do, for example, to go to the cinema, or to see friends. The young women often used walking as an opportunity to socialise with friends. Emma, for example, said she and her friends, 'just sit and have a laugh when we're walking around, we'll just laugh about things'. Similarly, research exploring pedestrian practices in England found that walking was valued by children and young people for its '*sociability* […] and *playfulness*' (Horton et al. 2014, 101); characteristics captured by Emma in her account of laughing with her friends while out walking. Moreover, walking created a moving place for meeting friends outside the home (Christensen and Mikkelsen 2013). Young women created a place for social interaction when they walked together which proved an opportunity for fostering friendships. Walking for young women was thus an unremarkable, but central feature of both their friendships and daily routines (for similar findings see Horton et al. 2014).

Young women's experiences of walking in the public realm, including their feelings and emotions while doing so, were additionally shaped by their assumptions about the safety risks they are likely to face. In many settings worldwide, young women are socialised from childhood to believe that they are more likely to experience harm in the public realm than young men because of the widely held association of femininity with victimisation and masculinity with crime perpetration (Callanan and Rosenberger 2015; Hollander 2001).

This research was no exception, and young women participants often did not specify the precise nature of *what* they feared but explained that there were places and routes that they chose not to use because they were scary, creepy or unknown. That being said, not all young women perceive safety or experience fear in the same way (Pain 2001; Rodó-de-Zárate 2015; Wattis, Green, and Radford 2011), and fear of crime, in particular, is influenced by 'a range of factors including income, class, area of residence, housing status, sexual orientation, disability, [and] experience of victimisation' (Pain 2001, 901). Mothers and key adults in the research were more descriptive in their explanations of what young women fear than the young women themselves, citing young women's fear of violent crime. However, at times adults dismissed the legitimacy of young women's blanket fears and, instead, differentiated safe and unsafe neighbourhoods. One mother, Angela, shared that, while her daughters do not have a curfew, they often choose not to be out at night because they had heard stories of 'lasses getting attacked'. She said, 'My girls don't have curfews, they do what they want, but that's why they don't want to go out because they're scared'. Angela told her daughters that the attacks they referred to happened in a different part of Inverness and tried to assure them their own neighbourhood was safe. Yet, according to Angela, while her daughters were

happy to traverse their neighbourhood during the day, they were not willing to do so at night because of the stories they heard. The correlation between young women's heightened perception of risk and night-time was a theme that arose during interviews with both young women and adults.

This example furthermore evidences that young women's perceptions of risks to their personal safety are profoundly affected by gender and this plays a key role in determining their 'experience of the city and freedom of movement' (Rodó-de-Zárate 2015, 414). Young women's fears are informed by representations of young women as victims propagated by the media and fuelled by place-based stories of attacks (Ndangam et al. 2015). Notably, it is not necessarily actual violence that sparks such fears, but rather 'the social production of women's vulnerability' (Rodó-de-Zárate 2015, 414). Young women's fears often differ from young men's (Pain 2001; Rodó-de-Zárate 2015), and understanding young women's personal safety concerns are central to understanding gendered experiences of mobilities within the public realm.

Young women participants said they avoided parts of the public realm where violence was reputed to have taken place. Take Emma, for example:

> Emma: There's this one lane, […] It's quite near here and I don't like it, especially in the dark.
>
> Interviewer: Why don't you like it?
>
> Emma: Because, just as you like, go down the street bit, there's like another turning and it's a dead end and it's quite scary.
>
> Interviewer: Is it scary? Why is it scary?
>
> Emma: Because it's always like really dark under there and you never know if someone's following you.
>
> Interviewer: Have you ever heard of that happening before?
>
> Emma: Yeah, I'm pretty sure, I'm not like, I did hear that apparently someone got killed in like, the little lane bit. Like, just at that dead end and I'm like, yup, I'm not going down there.

In this example, Emma had not personally experienced a physical attack in this place, nor did she know anyone who had. Fears, however, are often learned over time, not only from personal experiences, but through 'local discourses of risk' (Murray 2009, 481), which are often gendered and attached to certain places. This, in combination with her personal knowledge of the place, meant that it was a route she chose to avoid. In this way, fear 'shape[d] [her] mental maps and hence, [her] everyday geographies' (England and Simon 2010, 202). It should be noted that while the young women participants expressed fear of attacks from strangers, young people are more likely to experience violence at the hands of someone they know (Pinheiro 2006) . In Emma's account, her fear was heightened based on the place being 'dark' rather than it being night. This is particularly salient in Inverness given the limited hours of daylight during the winter months. On the shortest day of the year the sun rises at 9am and sets at 3:30pm meaning young people walk in the dark to get to and from school. Davidson similarly found that in her research with young people in a Scottish city that 'environmental conditions, such as darkness or isolation, were highlighted as indicators of risk' (Davidson 2013, 6) by some young people.

According to Vanderbeck and Johnson (2000):

> Concerns about violence and personal safety frequently have concrete spatial manifestations in terms of people's use of space and the ways in which they navigate their environments. (15)

This was true in this research as places reputed to be unsafe were generally avoided by young women on their own. Key adult Denise shared how the reputation of one neighbourhood as violent and dangerous impacted a young woman who was spending time with her friends there:

> Yeah, we have got one girl […] she originally went to a different school, and she moved here and just this week actually she was saying that she was out with friends who live here at the weekend and then they all kind of got split up, they had to run away, someone was chasing them, and she was terrified. She said, "I was genuinely

> terrified, I thought that I was going to get murdered" so she had to phone her mum and dad to come and get her because she didn't know where she was and because of the perception of the area she was convinced that within an hour she'd be dead, that someone would have got her and take her away. So, her mum and dad had to come pick her up. She was really frightened. But when she was with her friends in that area, she was okay. But as soon as they got split up, she was terrified. Nothing did happen to her, she was okay, but she was frightened.

From this quote, the reason that the young woman was frightened when she was separated from her friends was 'because of the perception of the area', the perception being that she was likely to face personal violence (i.e. get murdered). This example illustrates the power of place reputation in creating and reinforcing where young women do and do not want to spend time.

There are, however, certain factors that do override place-based fear of violent crime. For example, this young woman's fear did not deter her from going into this neighbourhood with her friends to begin with. Her perception of the area as dangerous became an issue significant enough to prompt her to call her parents when she was separated from her friends, and she had lost her bearings. The negative neighbourhood reputation meant that she did not want to be in the area alone, because being alone made her feel more at risk of experiencing harm.

Young women were more likely to venture places that they considered unsafe if they were accompanied by friends. When young women travel together, they often feel more safe (Matthews, Limb, and Taylor 2000; Skelton 2004), even when the place is unfamiliar, or of ill repute. The young woman in the previous example was not from the area and her lack of personal knowledge and experience of the community contributed to her feeling more frightened. Her fear was grounded in what she knew of the place from others, and her brief experiences there, which was then amplified by her perception of its allegedly dangerous reputation.

The examples in this section demonstrate how young women's fears of violent crime and the negative reputation of certain spaces and places act as spatial constraints limiting their access to certain parts of the public realm. In some cases, this functioned to curtailed young women's mobilities depending on the time of day/night and if they were on their own or accompanied by friends.

The role of mothers in shaping young women's mobilities

Mothers played a large part in determining young women's movements and journeys in Inverness. Mothers' mobility regulations for young women were influenced by their fears and anxieties, but also by their interpretations of the environment as risky or safe; their own lived experiences; and their perceptions of if/how social identities such as gender, age, and ethnicity heightened young women's risk of harm. This is in keeping with research in England which found 'teenagers were commonly restricted in where and when they were allowed to go by strong parental constraints, fuelled by fears and anxieties' (Matthews and Tucker 2006, 165).

This section spotlights Fiona, one of the mothers who took part in the research, because she had the most concerns for her daughter's journeys without an adult compared to the other mothers. Her views also capture an array of common concerns expressed by the other mothers in the research and found in the literature. Moreover, her example highlights the way in which 'race, gender, and class together shape parental worry and strategies of caretaking and control' (Gordon 2008, 35).

Fiona lives with her family a short walk from their local garage (a Britishism for corner shop). When asked if she allowed her children to go places on their own, Fiona said:

> No, no, no, no, no, no – they're not allowed that. Even to the 13-year-old. She'll ask me, "Mum, can I walk over to the garage to get juice?" I was like no. […] but wouldn't it be something that like 16, 17, then I would let her go, but otherwise I'm frightened because you never know who's out there driving, you never know who's walking past.

Fiona regulated her daughter's mobility based on safety concerns (Foster et al. 2014). Stranger danger, traffic accidents and bullying are just a few of many factors affecting parental decision-making related to young people's mobilities without an adult (Malone 2011; Shaw et al. 2013). Fiona's comment, 'you never know who's out there driving', may refer to the risk pedestrians face from traffic accidents, but equally it may also refer to the risk of encountering dangerous people, a fear more clearly expressed by her second comment, 'you never know who's walking past'. However, unlike Fiona, Sharon saw Inverness as safe in comparison to the larger English city she grew up in. Sharon said, in Inverness, 'the kids can wander around if they want to. They don't have to be picked up and dropped off from every activity'. These contrasting accounts of Inverness illustrate the power of parental perceptions of place in determining young women's mobilities, resulting in different rules and expectations for their daughters' movements.

The risk of injury from traffic was also identified by key adult Ian. He shared that a recent road survey carried out on the route from Fiona's home to the local garage found a lack of appropriate safety infrastructure including sidewalks and streetlights along the road. Once identified, Inverness Council addressed the issue by constructing a footpath. While the road safety risk to pedestrians was identified and remedied, Fiona's fear for her daughter's safety while walking alone, like the other mothers in this research, was more than an issue of infrastructure, and was also linked to the people her daughter might meet along the way.

For Fiona, the threat that people posed to her family went beyond the abstract fear of 'stranger danger' (Pain 2006). Fiona and her family identify as Travellers, an ethnic minority in Scotland, and their experiences of racism informed their choices. Fiona said:

> I just don't like [my children to] go, like if they go walking by themself, because you never know who is out there, ey? This world is just too dangerous, ey? Well, that's what I think anyway if they [non-Travellers] know they're Traveller kids, they're going to get picked on […] that's why I left the house [up North].

Fiona identified being a Traveller as a factor which made her daughter a target for bullying. Travellers in Britain experience racism and discrimination from the wider non-Traveller public (Cemlyn et al. 2009; Cromarty 2018), and these experiences have implications for their mobilities. Fiona explained that prior to living in Inverness she and her family lived in a town in Northern Scotland where children shouted profanities at her children based on their ethnicity. These experiences contributed to her decision to move to Inverness.

Young women's lives are 'racially structured' in a way which 'impinges on their daily mobilities' (Nayak 2017, 295). Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young women in 'majority white localities' in the UK experience 'risk laden movements' (Nayak 2017, 295), particularly in the absence of adults. Fiona's fear that her daughter would experience bullying based on her ethnicity, combined with her own past experiences, influenced her attempts to minimise these risks through limiting her daughters' mobilities without an adult.

Like ethnicity, young women's age influenced parental mobility regulations (Brown et al. 2008; Valentine 2003). In the first quote from Fiona, she spoke about how, at 13 years old, her daughter was not allowed to walk to the garage; she conceded, however, that at '16, 17 [years old], then I would let her go'. Fiona viewed her daughter's young age as a characteristic that made her more at risk from a variety of threats, and mobility freedom as something that she would allow her daughter to a greater extent when she was older and (presumably) more able to keep herself safe, or at least navigate threats.

Growing older was seen in the research by the majority of mothers as justification for giving young women more mobility freedom. This is in keeping with literature which shows older young people have more spatial freedom than younger young people (Hopkins 2010). Three young women also said that age was a determining factor in how far, and/or how late they were allowed by their parents/carers to stay out. Sharon, for example, gave her son more freedom of movement than her daughter because he was older. However, out of all the mothers interviewed, only Fiona's mobility regulations for her daughter were also overtly tied to gender.

Fiona had strict rules about whom her daughter could undertake mobilities with based on gender. Fiona said:

> I wouldn't let my girls like, 14–15 [year-olds] run about with boys and all that because it's not right. Anything could happen, you know what I mean. They could sleep together, fall pregnant, do you know, stuff like that.

Olivia, a young woman who identified as a Traveller (not Fiona's daughter), similarly evidenced the gendered nature of young women's mobilities in some Traveller communities. She explained, 'sometimes [Traveller] girls are just a little different than [Traveller] boys because [Traveller] boys can be like a little bit more, like, they have more freedom sometimes'. Fiona and Olivia's comments correspond with findings from Marcus' (2019) research with Traveller girls in Scotland; she found Traveller families regulated girls' mobilities to protect their chastity, reputation and future marriage prospects. Ian similarly commented on the norms he observed from his work with Travellers in Inverness. He said:

> [Traveller] girls shouldn't be alone with boys, their virginity is very much protected, they're very much looked on as soiled goods if they lose their virginity and the chances of getting a husband are limited.

Parental adherence to cultural norms thus informed young Travellers mobilities in terms of where, how far and when they moved through their communities, but also with whom they went places with.

Marcus (2019) furthermore observed, '[Traveller] girls revealed that their individual movement was restricted […] because they are girls they were not allowed to leave their homes unaccompanied' (211). In some cases, gender norms and expectations within the Traveller community related to how a young woman should act and behave contributed to young women Travellers having less unaccompanied mobility than non-Traveller young women in this research. In keeping with Fiona's quote and Marcus' (2019) findings, evidence of gender-based mobility regulations within the Traveller community in Inverness arose in an interview with key adult Elaine who worked with Traveller families. Elaine said, '[Traveller] young women don't go places on their own, really. I think they're accompanied a lot of the time [by family members]'. However, this was not always the case, and Olivia shared she goes for runs and bikes on her own and in groups with other young people. These examples evidence the influence of cultural norms on mothers' perceptions of the risks young women face, and the mobility regulations they put in place to manage these risks. However, contrasting Fiona's views and Olivia's experiences further highlighted that Travellers are not a monolith, and cultural norms may be followed to greater or lesser extent by different individuals and families.

Parents' decisions governing young women's mobilities are influenced by their perceptions of the environment as safe or risky, lived experiences, and understandings of how social identities such as age, gender and ethnicity relate to the likelihood of encountering threatening situations and young women's ability to navigate them. Differential understandings of these social categories, in combination with other factors, contribute to producing inequalities and differences in young women's mobilities (Christensen and Cortés-Morales 2017, 22). These findings also highlight that it is necessary to consider gender, and gender inequalities within the broader setting of the social world. Risman asserts that, 'no longer can we think about gender inequality as if it operates in isolation from race, ethnicity, sexuality, and nation-state' (Risman 2018, 27). It is essential to recognise the way in which gender inequality relates, interacts and enforces other systems of inequality (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013).

Gender and the transportation sector

Buses were mentioned by seven young women in the research as a form of transportation they used in Inverness. Of these, three took the bus on a weekly basis to attend university courses. This journey was necessary for the completion of their studies, and the bus passes were paid for by the

university. Prior to attending courses there, two out of three of these young women said they did not take the bus at all. Buses were not a preferred or enjoyed mode of transport among young women. According to key adult Zoe, the young women she works with are 'pretty unwilling to take public transport'. Some of the reasons for young women's infrequent, or reluctant use of buses in Inverness included cost, atmosphere, and accessibility. For example, Leah, attended a weekly course at the local university. She explained, 'buses are good, but they can cost a lot if you're going two places'. Though Leah took buses to the university for classes she often walked home with friends, which took her an hour, significantly longer than the bus journey. The university provided her bus pass, however, Leah lost hers and had not replaced it. Instead, she walked to save money, but also because she enjoyed the extended opportunity to socialise with her friends.

Young women also commented on the atmosphere in buses. The atmosphere of a transit space is shaped both by its physical and material attributes and by the people sharing the space. The following excerpt from my interview with two young women highlights the importance of atmosphere:

> Interviewer: And how do you find that experience of taking the bus? Do you like it, not like it?
>
> Morgan: I actually don't mind it. I mean it's kind of annoying when there's loads and loads of people and you have to stand.
>
> Eve: And when you're squished together in a tiny little space and the bus driver keeps letting more people on, and then people start getting aggressive and shouting at each other.
>
> Interviewer: Really?
>
> Eve: Yeah.
>
> Interviewer: What happens then?
>
> Morgan: Do they?
>
> Eve: It's happened a few times.
>
> Morgan: I've never noticed.
>
> Eve: The bus drivers just tell them to be quiet, but he can't really do anything cause he's driving.

Young women's perceptions and experiences of atmosphere are subjective. Morgan and Eve, though traveling on the same bus route, experienced bus travel differently. Both valued their personal space, but while Morgan was annoyed by the crowded bus and having to stand for the duration of the journey, Eve used much stronger language to describe her experience. She highlighted being 'squished' and other passengers' aggressive behaviour as negative aspects of bus travel. The aggressive behaviour Eve witnessed was a surprise to Morgan, who did not recall this though they travelled on the same route. The physical experience of being crowded affected both young women's comfort while taking the bus. The aggressive behaviour of other passengers, and the driver's inability to change their behaviour, highlight the way that Eve's experiences were influenced by the presence of others. Dawn, a mother, similarly explained that her daughter did not like 'the over crowdedness' of the bus, and for that reason avoided bus travel altogether.

One central aspect of taking public transportation is the experience of 'being with others whilst on the move' (Bissell 2010, 217). In some cases, this creates a sense of shared experience and togetherness; however, it may also result in 'uncongenial relations between passengers' (Bissell 2010, 278) which may make the journey unpleasant, as was the case for Eve. While a bus is moving it is near impossible to extricate oneself from the prevailing atmosphere of the open interior which typically affords little personal space (Clayton, Jain, and Parkhurst 2017). Overcrowding is a transport issue affecting all passengers; however, it affects women in particular (Ceccato 2017). Overcrowding on public transportation, although not a 'cause of sexual crime against women in transit […] is definitely a facilitator' (Ceccato 2017, 279), and while this was not explicitly said

by participants, is perhaps an underlying concern for them. The presence, proximity and behaviour of others affected young women's experiences of bus travel, though it did not always prevent their use of it.

Lastly, accessibility, in terms of ease of travel between home and a given destination, is a challenge affecting young women's use of different modes of transportation, particularly when traveling between residential parts of Inverness. Accessibility is largely controlled by local transportation infrastructure, including the location of bus stops and bus routes, which are often determined without intentionally considering the transport needs of women, not to mention young women. Bus transport was not always convenient for young women who wanted to travel to destinations outside the city centre because of the placement of bus stops and the routes which are determined based on profitability by commercial operators, rather than by their usefulness to passengers. Furthermore, transportation that provides a direct connection is often more costly (i.e. taxis and cars) than buses, so the issue of accessibility is more pronounced for those who are not able to afford this type of transportation.

Systems, policies and structures within the transportation sector impact young women's everyday mobilities. In Scotland, women are underrepresented in the transport sector, especially in leadership positions (Engender 2017; Wynn and Correll 2018). In 2020, women led only two out of Scotland's 16 transport authorities, public companies and regional transport partnerships, up from one in 2017 (Engender 2017). The absence of women in the transportation sector affects the way that decisions are made and *whose* needs are prioritised. From drivers to high-level management, women are not equally represented in the transport sector though they make up the majority of public transportation users (Engender 2017).

The majority of transportation professionals interviewed, both men and women, recognised the underrepresentation of women in the sector. However, they did not necessarily feel it was within their remit, or that they had the capacity, to create programmes and policies that specifically consider the needs of young women. In interviews this 'gender-blind' (Engender 2017) attitude towards policy and programme development was conveyed and, contradictorily, at the same time a commitment to gender equality was also expressed. However, it would be unfair to label the transportation industry as indifferent to the needs of young women. Transportation professional Andrew said:

> I do think that the gender equality area that you are looking at is one that we could do more. I think actually getting better input from younger people is something that we could be doing more of and better and we are keen to pick up on both of those areas.

This is an example of a transportation professional who wanted to incorporate the 'social, cultural, economic and political roles and needs' (Engender 2017, 66) of different gender and age groups; challenges, however, remain.

Firstly, there is the issue of competing priorities. Transportation professionals in the Highlands face challenges due to the size and complexity of the region they are providing services for (roughly the size of Belgium). Creating sustainable, frequent and accessible transportation routes in a mostly rural setting comes with a hefty price tag. The large size of the Highlands and the complexity of the transportation challenges within the region were mentioned by the majority of the policy professionals I interviewed whose remit not only includes Inverness but all of the Highlands. The transportation sector is stretched thin and working hard to keep services running. In the face of such challenges, the needs of particular demographic groups were not prioritised.

The second challenge is that of consultation. I asked the policy professionals I interviewed if and how they conducted community consultations. Some said that when community consultations were conducted, the feedback was not usually disaggregated by age and gender. Disaggregated data is important as it identifies the differential needs and experiences of various demographic groups and helps identify inequalities (Halliday 2020). Key adults shared that transportation is often identified as a significant challenge for young people in the Highlands; they also shared the difficulties they have had trying to communicate young people's views to the transportation industry. Key

adult Bethany said, 'we have tried working with the bus company, but it didn't end well. We're going to try again though'. This bus company did not get back to me regarding an interview, however, another transportation professional, James, asked me, 'With your discussions with young people, what is their perceptions of transport in Inverness?' Transportation professionals are not indifferent to what young people think, but it is unclear to what extent interested transportation professionals and young people are connecting in order to have these conversations.

Public transportation policies and programmes in Inverness have traditionally not considered the specific needs of young women. The lack of gender and age disaggregated data from community consultations mean it is impossible to know if young women's views are being considered in transportation decision-making. Given the lack of consideration for the needs and preferences of young women in the sector, it is unsurprising that buses were not young women's preferred mode of transport.

Conclusion

This article analysed young women's contextual and intersectional (im)mobilities using a gender lens. Young women's movements through the public realm are both limited and enabled by a web of interconnecting variables at the individual, interactional and macro levels of analysis, all of which have gender dimensions.

At the individual level, young women's mobilities are shaped by their abilities, preferences and understandings of their identity as 'young women', in combination with their other social identities. Young women's experiences and choices about their movements and journeys are suffused by their assumptions about the safety risks inherent to women, often with limiting affects. However, these limitations may be overcome when young women travel with friends, something that they do often, and report enjoying.

At the interactional level, parents, as well as peers and other community members, have the power to both limit and encourage young women's mobilities. Young women are socialised from childhood to believe that they are more likely to experience violence in the public realm than young men. This at times, limited young women's mobilities, or at the very least, caused them to feel uncomfortable during their journeys in certain circumstances. Parental mobility regulations also affected young women's mobilities. These regulations are informed by mother's own experiences, their interpretation of the environment as risky or safe, and their perceptions of if/how social identities heighten young women's risk of experiencing harm.

At the macro level, young women's mobilities were both limited and enabled by transport systems, policies, structures and widely held place meanings. Young women's travel patterns historically have not been considered by transportation planners. This may be because there are fewer women working in the transportation sector, and because there is a lack of gender and age disaggregated data from community consultations on transport and urban design; thus, young women's perspectives are not considered. Moreover, in the face of competing priorities, issues of equality based on intersecting social identities are not prioritised by transportation professionals.

From young women's personal perceptions of safety at the individual level, to parental rules at the interpersonal level, to the overstretched transport systems at the macro level, in this article I highlighted the way in which gender operates as an often invisible, and influential force affecting young women's mobilities in the public realm. That said, the strength of gender as force, and the recognition of the role of gender as a problematic factor constraining young women's mobilities varied among research participants due to the contextual and intersectional nature of their mobilities. This article contributes to the academy by showing how gender, at the individual, interactional, and macro levels of analysis, influenced young women's daily lives. The pervasive influence of gender on young women's (im)mobilities often goes unnoticed and unproblematised and this research is a step towards addressing that gap. There is a need for researchers in the future to take a multidimensional approach to gender within childhood and youth studies to expand our

understanding of the complexity of its effects on different aspects of young people's lives in Scotland, and beyond.

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