

Taking a walk: the female tourist experience

Abstract

This feminist, qualitative study explores the experiences of female tourists who like to walk during their holiday. The findings highlight that women's full access to the benefits of walking whilst on holiday are constrained by their feelings of vulnerability and their perceptions of possible risk if walking alone, particularly at night and in isolated spaces. In order to cope with perceived risk, participants employed a number of safeguarding and self-surveillance strategies. This study therefore supports other research on female tourists that highlight the differences among male and female tourist experiences, and that point to the measures women take to keep themselves safe.

Key words

Walking women benefits constraints risk safeguarding

1. Introduction

Walking as a tourism and leisure activity is on the increase. It is the most popular outdoor recreational activity in the United Kingdom (Crust et al. 2011) and Europe (Davies et al. 2012). Walking is one of the simplest and most natural forms of recreation and exercise that is accessible to most people (Roberson and Babic, 2009) and it is known to provide significant health benefits (Forsyth et al. 2009). Walking is classed as a tourism activity, when it involves travel to the destination where walking takes place. Kastenholz and Rodrigues (2007) highlight the importance of the activity of walking in a variety of tourism types. Along with Weston and Mota (2012), they underline the importance of walking as a tourism activity because it carries positive economic and environmental impacts and contributes to the development of a sustainable tourism product that benefits residents and visitors alike.

The physical and mental health benefits of walking have been well documented both within and outside the tourism literature. There is evidence that regular walking of a moderate to vigorous intensity benefits physical and psychological health (Morgan et al. 2010; Guichard-Anguis 2011). Walking in nature has received much research attention, being shown to improve physical and mental well-being (Pretty et al. 2005; Barton and Pretty, 2010; Pretty et al. 2007; 2005; Goldenberg and Freidt 2009). Barton et al. (2009) for example found evidence to support the psychological health benefits (improved mood and self-esteem) of day walks in the English countryside and similar findings were produced in Rodrigues et al.'s (2010) study of international and Portuguese walkers in Portugal.

Studies further highlight psychological values to walkers such as self-fulfilment and a sense of achievement (see Hill et al. 2009; Edensor 2000; Urry 2007; Arellano 2004; Crust et al. 2011; Stevenson and Farrell 2017; Cutler et al. 2014). Moreover the value of social interaction with other walkers has been noted (see Roberson and Babic 2009; Darker et al. 2007; Ratina 2017; Collins-Kreiner and Kliot 2016; Kyle and Chick 2004; Anderson 2004; Adaval and Wyer 1998). Walking has also been a way to take a break from the monotony and stress of modern domestic and professional life (see Karupiah and Bada, 2017; Kyle and Chick 2004; Anderson 2004; Adaval and Wyer 1998; Den Breejen 2007).

Researchers have pointed to the importance of solitude to walkers. Hyun et al. (2016) found that walkers can often be independent reflective travellers who seek solitude. Indeed, Solnit (2014) identifies a strong link between walking, solitude and reflection and suggests that being sedentary is not conducive to reflective ruminating. Similarly, Keinänen (2016) links intellectual activity with walking, and Cutler (2014) argues that bodily movement is a key stimulant for thinking. Rhythm has

been found to be a significant contributor to creative thought while walking (Edensor 2010). As MacFarlane (2012, p. xi) observes, the imagination can only be freed during walking, which offers a 'reconnoitre inwards'. Nietzsche (1893) described walking in solitude as a path to self-renewal: *I need solitude, which is to say, recovery, return to myself, the breath of a free, light, playful air, a thorough-going examination of self -- which can only be achieved by cultivating solitude.*

This feminist, qualitative study considers the female tourist experience of walking whilst on holiday. It documents the perceived benefits of walking to women, but it focuses most attention on the constraints that female walkers face due to their gender. As Scraton & Watson (1998) argue, tourism is a site for the maintenance and reproduction of complex power relations, and women's leisure is therefore shaped by gender. Though women may gain the same benefits from walking as men, they may well encounter obstacles due to their gender. This paper makes a contribution to the literature on the female tourist experience by focusing on the gendered nature of the activity of walking and the safeguarding work that female tourists often do. Though many studies have focused on the benefits associated with walking and on the constraints that women face in their tourism and leisure time, little research has brought the two topics together in a dedicated study.

2. The female tourist experience

2.1 The benefits of travel for women

There is a wealth of research on the female tourist experience to point to the positive effects of travel on women. Much of this research has focused on the solo female tourist or on all-female travel. The cited benefits include: relaxation (Cai and Combrink 2000; McNamara and Prideaux 2010); self-discovery, enlightenment, education (Cai and Combrink 2000; Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter 2001; Lin and Lehto 2006; Cockburn-Wooten et al. 2006); existential authenticity (Poria 2006); pampering (Junek et al. 2006); social interaction (Junek et al. 2006; McNamara and Prideaux 2010; Li et al. 2011), including with family members (Durko and Petrick 2013); (Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter 2001); a sense of autonomy and self-empowerment (McArthur 1999, Poria 2006 ; Khan 2017; Wilson and Harris 2006; McNamara and Prideaux 2010; Yang et al. 2018a,b; Xu and Liu 2018).

Many studies highlight the value of freedom from domestic responsibility (Berdychevsky et al. 2013; Butler, 1995; Chiang and Jogaratnam, 2006; Poria, 2006; Stone and Nichol, 1999; Wilson and Harris, 2006; Small 2005; Cockburn-Wooten et al. 2006). Others focus on the freedom that women experience on holiday from norms for sexual behaviour (Berdychevsky et al. 2015, 2010, 2013). Tourism can represent a liminal space where women engage in sexual behaviour that they might avoid

at home, being a site therefore for resisting gendered expectations of women's social and sexual behaviour (Weischselbaumer 2012; Berdychevsky et al. 2015; Berdychevsky et al. 2013). The idea of resistance is found in other studies of female travel. For example, Seow and Brown (2018) and Yang et al. (2016) observed that for female Asian tourists, the very act of travelling solo was an expression of their resistance to cultural expectations of women.

2.2 The constraints faced by female tourists

The literature identifies that women face constraints on their leisure that men do not face. This understanding is highly important to this study. Leisure constraints are defined as factors that inhibit the ability to take part in leisure activities (Jackson and Henderson, 1995). Gender has a substantial influence on leisure opportunities, including tourism; it can pose an obstacle in terms of full participation (Wilson and Little, 2005; Gibson et al. 2013). Wilson and Little (2008, p. 183) argue that travel experiences are 'gendered, sexualised, socially and culturally constructed'. They point out that the influence of gender on travel reflects an uneven distribution of power in society and the oppression and subordination of women. This must clearly be considered in an analysis of women's tourist experiences (Figueroa-Domecq et al. 2015).

The notion of the gaze is important in the female tourist experience. Jordan and Gibson (2005) theorise the male gaze on female tourists as a sexualised objectification of women that acts as a sort of surveillance. Jordan and Aitchison (2008) go further in describing sexualised male attention as sexual harassment. The male gaze often instils feelings of fear in women (Berdychevsky et al. 2013), and men are often viewed with suspicion (Cockburn et al. 2006; Seow and Brown 2018). According to Brown and Osman (2017) sexualised male attention is a serious constraint on women's ability to enjoy their trip because of concerns for their comfort and safety. Indeed, the relationship between fear and leisure are significant themes in the current study.

Safety and danger are important considerations for women on holiday (Wilson and Little, 2005, 2008; Yang et al. 2018a, b). This is noted in the mixed-gender study of the fear experienced by hikers by Coble et al. (2003, p. 2): 'because of fear of attack by a man, many women may forego the health and fitness benefits, the opportunity to be close to nature, the chance for personal renewal, and the experience of self-reliance that solo hiking provides.' Physical appearance can be a mediating factor. In their study of solo female Asian tourists, Seow and Brown (2018) report that their participants felt that their Asian heritage brought them more attention from men: their Asian appearance set them apart and made them more vulnerable. Meanwhile, in their study of female tourists' experiences in Egypt,

Brown and Osman (2017) reveal that their participants' status as non-Egyptians made them vulnerable, even when they dressed in accordance with local norms.

According to Seow and Brown (2018) certain tourist destinations are avoided by women as they are perceived to be unsafe and off-limits. This is a particular concern for those women wishing to travel alone, as solo female travel may be seen to be inappropriate and therefore unsafe in certain cultures (Wilson and Little 2013). Wilson and Little (2008) conceptualise this practice as the 'geography of women's travel fear', which views some places as unsafe for women.

Safeguarding receives prominence in the literature on female tourists, as women adopt many measures to keep themselves safe (see Chiang and Jogaratnam, 2006; Berdychevsky et al. 2016; Khan et al. 2017). The emphasis is on the individual to navigate possibly unsafe situations, and this can place limitations on women's behaviour and activities. Vera-Gray (2018) states that keeping themselves safe and monitoring the environment for potential risks are ingrained, almost unconscious, activities for women due to their fear of attack. This fear is not without grounds: the primary targets of gender-based violence are women and adolescent girls (United Nations Population Funds, 2008). Due to personal experience or media stories of violence and harassment, women limit their use of public space in a number of ways, particularly when they are away from home (Wilson and Little 2008; Wilson and Little 2013). They may modify their dress, conform to local norms of behaviour, avoid unsafe places, avoid going out alone (Brown and Osman 2017). They may also restrict their movements to certain areas and certain times of the day in a bid to keep themselves safe (Osman et al. 2019). They may also avoid certain activities, such as hitchhiking, due to their vulnerability of threats and attacks (Packer 2008). As Wilson and Little (2008) point out, travelling around an unfamiliar place can be daunting, especially for solo tourists. This is especially the case for solo female tourists in patriarchal cultures, where attitudes towards women may deviate from those they experience at home (Brown and Osman 2017).

Jordan and Aitchison (2008) describe the behaviour used to avoid male attention as self-surveillance. Of relevance to this study, they state that their drive towards self-preservation means that a female tourist cannot be the flaneuse that she might like to be on holiday. Women find that they have to limit their opportunities for walking around the streets alone, or for socialising with locals and other tourists. Coble et al. (2003) also found that their female participants negotiated their fear of hiking alone by adopting 'a mix of wary attitudes and proactive safeguards' (p. 2). However, as Cockburn-Wooten et al. (2006) point out, women may tire of watching themselves whilst on holiday. It is important to stress that despite their safety fears, most studies indicate that women are determined to keep travelling, even if they have to modify their behaviour.

The literature review on female tourists highlights the benefits to women of travel, but it also underlines the important themes of safety and risk, self-protection and self-surveillance. Taking a holiday might not generally be associated with caution and fear, with watchfulness and safeguarding. However, as Vera-Gray (2018) points out, the high incidence of gender-based violence means that women are used to looking out for their safety. This clearly places limitations on women's ability to fully enjoy a holiday. The current study set out to explore the benefits that women gained from walking whilst on holiday as well as to examine the constraints that they faced as a result of their gender.

3. Methodology

A feminist approach to research was used in this study. Reinharz (1992) describes this as research which must make a difference to women, it is research on women, by women and for women. It carries the intention of highlighting sexist practices and issues that are important to women (Yuill, 2012). These principles were congruent with the ethos of this study, which was to explore women's perspectives, and give them a voice as 'producers of knowledge' (Jackson and Mannix 2004). We categorise this as a feminist study because our participants are all female tourists who were encouraged by us, the female researchers, to reflect on how gender impacted on their walking experiences whilst on holiday. The data are interpreted through a feminist lens, in the understanding that gender and power relations inform tourism activities (Pritchard and Morgan 2000). As feminist researchers, we are committed to viewing tourism spaces as sociocultural constructions that reflect and are informed by wider societal norms and attitudes (Scruton and Watson 1998; Wilson and Little, 2008).

A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for a study of women's experiences of walking because it focuses on "the understanding of social phenomena and the ways in which people make sense of and extract meaning from their experiences" (Jones et al. 2013, p.3). It leads to the production of rich data that are of a depth that is often missing in quantitative research. Feminist researchers often prefer the use of qualitative methods because they give voice to female participants (Flick, 2014).

Furthermore, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state, qualitative research is appropriate to exploratory research. Narrative interviews were used because they permit the participant a great degree of flexibility and freedom of response, and limit the influence of the interviewer (Riessman 2008). A statement on positionality in qualitative research is important because of the impact this may have on the research (Flick 2014). The researchers are female, one is white British, one is white Russian and one is black Grenadian. They are aged between 30 and 58. Two are regular walkers. Enthusiasm for

walking was a factor in establishing rapport with participants, as was shared experiences as women of vulnerability and fear of danger, but it was not felt that the research was affected by the ethnicity or age of the researchers.

Purposive and criterion-based sampling was adopted. Three sampling criteria were identified: participants must be adult, female and enjoy walking as part of their holiday (of many kinds: short or long walks; in urban or rural settings). Some participants were accessed through social and professional networks, and snowballing sampling was used thereafter. A total of 11 participants took part in the study. This sample is justified in qualitative inquiry because the focus is on meaning and context rather than generalisation (Jones et al. 2013). Participants were aged between 32 and 58, worked in a range of professions and were all British apart from one Russian and one Turkish participant. Pseudonyms are used to protect identity.

A loosely structured approach was taken to the narrative interviews. An opening question focused on their walking activities on holiday, whilst the second question focused on the ways in which participants felt that their gender influenced their experience of walking. Prompt and probe questions were used to elicit rich data. Interviews were conducted in Autumn 2018 and lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. Ethical approval was granted through the authors' university research ethics committee.

The technique of thematic analysis was used to treat the data, involving the four steps of transcription, familiarization, coding and categorizing (Braun and Clarke 2006). Analysis was conducted by one researcher, and the codes and categories were discussed and agreed on by the research team. This process led to the development of four themes, which are represented in the headed sections of the findings section. As is typical in qualitative research, a dialogue with the relevant literature tied to the emergent themes is held in the findings section.

4. Findings and discussion

6.1 The benefits of walking

The participants walked regularly in their leisure time for a variety of reasons, and highlighted walking as an important factor during their holidays. They were motivated to walk for a number of perceived benefits. These are discussed below and the literature is used to support and interpret the findings.

Clearing the mind

For many participants, walking has a calming effect and offers an opportunity for reflection:

Walking is about contemplation and wellbeing. Thoughts are clearer when I am walking. It's like a meditation. I noticed that I am at peace when I am walking. I am aware of the comfort that I am getting. It relaxes my brain, sweeps away worries, helps to obtain peace. Ekaterina

I think it gives you time to reflect. It clears your mind. The fresh air helps clear your head and if you've got a lot of things going on, you are able to just think, it makes you feel more positive because you are able to exercise as well as think about the things that perhaps are troubling you. Sarah

Participants drew a connection between rhythm and calm:

Maybe it is connected with the rhythm of the walk, as you don't concentrate on your movement - it goes automatic, while your brain is not concerned with anything else but the problem I am putting there to solve. Ekaterina

The benefits cited by participants can be understood by reference, not to the tourism literature, but to those writers such as Solnit (2014) and Ford (2017) who draw links between walking, peacefulness and thinking. They highlight the importance of rhythm in achieving a meditative state: the rhythm of walking takes over the conscious mind, leading to a state of meditation: “the rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts” (Solnit 2014, p. 5).

Being in nature

Walking in nature was particularly important to participants, both at home and away. Attunement with nature was an important benefit to be gained from walking. For Rosa, walking permitted a connection with the sea:

When I see the sea, I feel, 'ahh it's so beautiful!' I feel not inspired exactly, but transported, like I feel full of awe. I am in the elements and I am surrounded by beauty, it's that combination of walking in something beautiful that is just... actually I suppose it is close to a religious experience.

A similar feeling of awe was described by Sadie, this time produced in a mountainscape:

I remember climbing mountains in Greece and just sitting and getting a sense of ... a sense of something bigger than me, something spiritual. Walking for me is a spiritual activity for sure. I felt a

part of the mountain rather than a tourist sat on top of it. I had a similar experience when I stayed in on the Isle of Skye, I had a beautiful little cottage underneath the mountains, just me and oh my god astounding scenery. Sadie

For Paula, walking allowed her to experience the weather:

I like to walk in the rain. I am quite happy to get wet. I like it. It feels good when it's really cold and windy and you can feel the power of the weather. It makes you feel much more awake and you realise that you are alive. It is a sensation. We don't experience the weather; it's not an important part of our lives anymore.

The participants' comments are echoed in the tourism literature on walking in nature. Nyaupane et al. (2014) and Wylie (2005) state that walking holidays can permit an immersive and awe-inspiring encounter with nature. Meanwhile, a link is made between the experience of natural, isolated environments and meditative thoughts, silence and restfulness (Bruneau 2012; Laing and Crouch 2009; Caulkins et al. 2006).

Being alone was often important in achieving a sense of oneness with nature, as expressed by Julie:

I quite enjoy the physical challenge involved and I enjoy the space of being on my own for two or three hours, you know that is quite pleasant as well, you know it is a kind of space where I am on my own. I am happy to be on my own and I don't need other people with me. I am actually happier walking on my own.

Interestingly, the need for solitude whilst walking and thinking sits at odds with the psychosocial benefits often cited in research on walking. The psychoanalyst Storr (1997), writing on the importance of solitude, notes that there are two competing human drives: one for companionship and love, and the other for independence and autonomy. Both are viewed as equally important for a fulfilled life. 'What goes on in the human being when he is by himself is as important as what happens in his interactions with other people' (ibid, p. xiv).

Exploring the tourist destination

For all participants, walking offers a chance to get to know a tourist destination; it is used as a means of transport and as a means of discovery:

If I am going to a city, then I use walking as transport. I get a bus to the place where I want to walk around and then I spend ages walking there, walking is definitely a part of the holiday. It's a way to see things. Rosa

The importance of walking as a means of transportation is acknowledged by tourism researchers: Sarmento (2017) observes that walking is the main way in which tourists move through and negotiate space.

For Julie, walking offers the chance to explore a destination without an itinerary:

I like this concept of walking and getting lost and having no particular direction. I'll just go off and see where I end up particularly if I am in an urban area because you know you can just kind of wander around. Sometimes I see things that are interesting so I go and walk to them and just explore them without actually really knowing what they are, where they are. Julie

As Markwell et al. (2004) note in their research on walking tours, walking can improve people's awareness of their environment.

For Paula, the sense of discovery is heightened by the freedom from plans and time:

It's nice to walk and not have any boundaries, just to go out and say, 'Ok let's go this way, let's experience the landscape'. You move slower, so you see so much more, you experience more because of that speed restriction. You don't have to be anywhere very quickly. It feels like how it should be. It feels much more natural, the pace feels more natural. You know we spend our lives dictated by timetables. Most of our existence is time focused and time sensitive and I think walking frees you from that. Paula

Time disappears for me; I don't have a good relationship with time at all, it is always my enemy, but when I walk it tends to fold away. It's like I find where I belong in a way. Sadie

These sentiments are discussed by Curtin (2009) who found that time is suspended in some forms of wildlife tourism, allowing the tourist to reconnect with nature and their inner world: '*there is time to stand and stare, and contemplate. ...socially constructed modern fast time dissipates and is replaced by stillness*' (p. 451). Kastenholz and Rodrigues' (2007) make a similar observation in their study of hikers on walking trails in Portugal, who were motivated by the need to intimately experience the landscape they were in without the pressure of time.

Improving physical health

All participants highlighted the health benefits of walking, both at home and away:

Walking is quite a nice low key activity that keeps me in balance. I occasionally get slight back problems and walking is really good for my back and I often feel that walking also helps with my knees. It makes me feel physically good. Julie

The physical health benefits of recreational walking including weight loss and disease prevention are well documented in the literature (see Davies et al. 2012; Cross-Bardell et al. 2015) and they are well understood by participants.

This section of the findings focuses on the benefits associated by our female participants with walking. There is an emphasis by participants on the power of walking to calm and clear the mind, particularly in a natural environment. Notwithstanding the physical health benefits, it is the impact on the mind, its link to a sense of peace, that was most cherished. This study adds incrementally to the underpinning literature in its identification of the benefits of walking for female participants. As the following section will show however, the constraints faced by women may pose an obstacle to their ability to fully enjoy or take part in walking whilst on holiday, therefore limiting their full appreciation of the associated benefits.

6.2 Feelings of vulnerability

In contrast with the previous section, this section documents the constraints that participants faced uniquely because of their gender and particularly in relation to their solo walking activities.

Participants felt that their gender influenced their walking experiences, and this related consistently to insecurity, to their vulnerability as women. There was a pronounced sense among all participants that being female, especially when alone, made them a potential target for attack. Participants were aware that the chances of being attacked were low but this did not prevent them from experiencing trepidation and anxiety, as Ekaterina expresses:

When I travel, I am aware of my gender, I am aware of the risks. I don't know what is in the mind of a man coming towards me in the dark, I can't see his eyes or facial expression and I don't have any protection, any way to physically defend myself. It can be uncomfortable. I think this discomfort relates to being a woman.

Rosa identified that what was most unnerving was the experience of fear:

What I don't like is the fear of being attacked; it's almost like part of your consciousness. When I am walking down the street if there is a man walking at night on the same pavement coming towards me, I feel real anxiety until he is gone. I don't want to alert him to the fact that I am nervous but when I do turn around just to check he is gone, then I feel really relieved, but I don't feel safe until I get back to the hotel. I think it is the fear that is so horrible. I went to the Cotswolds lakes recently. I started walking around a lake and then I realised: 'God, there is nobody around, I am going to be quite isolated.' I thought: 'no, I am going to go back. I wanted to have the exercise, but I am not doing this'. I felt too vulnerable, and when I walked back there was a guy walking towards me on his own and again I felt: 'Agh, bloody hell' He looked perfectly friendly and I wouldn't show that I am afraid; I think I nodded like walkers nod to each other. He looked fine but what does that mean! And it was only when I got back to the car parking area then I felt: 'Ok I am not doing that again'. So I missed out on a whole dimension of the holiday because I just didn't feel safe. And I hate that feeling!

Rosa's evocative account calls forth the extreme discomfort associated with feeling afraid. It reveals a fear of being attacked that is embodied in the approach of a man. Indeed, unease about an approaching stranger was commonplace, particularly at night:

You see somebody coming towards you, and there's a slight moment when you think, 'oh I am on my own here, no one is in sight or anything'. It's a kind of paranoia which is probably you know incredibly low risk but I am aware. Julie

This unease was particularly pronounced after dark:

As a woman we are much more vulnerable than a man. If a man is walking your way, you are aware of him, you don't know what will happen. I don't want to feel this way but when you see a man on the road or you hear a step behind you, especially if it is getting dark, it's frightening. Layla

What ran through participants' accounts was the quality of the unknowable, an uncertainty that could manifest as fear regarding the intention of the approaching man. As previous studies have noted, the perception of risk is pronounced among women, and can be highly disturbing, regardless of the likelihood of attack (Wilson and Little 2008, 2013). This study therefore lends weight to previous research that has highlighted fear as an important constraint on women's ability to participate fully in tourism and leisure (see Coble et al. 2003; Berdychevsky et al. 2013). Wilson and Little (2008) refer to the geography of women's travel fear to understand women's fear for their safety in certain destinations. This study reveals that fear is pervasive in many destinations and contexts, particularly at night.

4.3 Being vigilant

In response to potential danger, participants described being on guard, in a state of vigilance:

I am always aware when I see a lone chap walking who looks slightly odd, you know, I will watch him and I will subconsciously map him and occasionally I might turn to see where he has gone. Sadie

If I see a person walking towards me with their hood up then I would sort of adjust my posture and be purposeful, you know I would be wanting to show them that I am strong, purposeful on a mission.

Sarah

There was a heightened responsiveness to possible danger. Though the likelihood of being attacked was perceived to be low, Rosa articulated that the basis for fear was grounded in reality:

We see so many stories of women being attacked. It's ingrained in us that women are vulnerable to attack but you know statistics show that's true anyway. I am quite nervous of what men can do. I think we are potential victims and it makes me nervous. The reality is that a massive proportion of the male population is fine and these things are relatively rare but it is definitely in the consciousness. Knowing that something safe doesn't take away from that tiny possibility that it might not be. I wouldn't want to risk it.

The above accounts highlight participants' feelings of fear and alertness to the possibility of danger. These feelings are not unfounded. Much of women's fear of violence is based on perception; nevertheless there are good grounds for their fears, as around the world, women are the main victims of sexual attack (World Health Organisation, 2014). Indeed, Aitchison (2005) notes that vulnerability is experienced at home and on holiday, though vulnerability may be increased in an alien environment, particularly where social norms for gendered behaviour are different (Brown and Osman 2017). Having said that, this study shows that women are nervous on home ground, in familiar territory, if they are alone.

6.4 Safeguarding strategies

Awareness of their vulnerability placed restrictions on women in a number of ways, including the type of holiday taken, whether to travel solo, where to walk and what to wear. As such, participants

had to forego some activities that they would like to participate in. Ekaterina was vigilant about her solo status whilst traveling and walking around a destination:

If I am travelling on my own I'll think about how I dress, how much I drink. It is for protection, a kind of attempt not to attract unwanted attention.

Indeed, much attention was paid by participants to their dress, as Jane commented:

I don't dress in such a way that I would be inviting attention though I do think I should be able to dress in any which way I wish to choose. As a feminist this is important to me, but I worry about risk.

Participants' freedom to wear what they like was an important feminist value, and they were discomfited by their correlation between dress and possible attack. Due to their fear of harassment or male violence, these women took precautions in order to protect themselves. Wilson and Little (2008) argue that the tourist landscape is used differently by men and women; women need to do "what's safe, right and sensible to keep themselves out of harm's way" (p. 182).

For some, solo hiking was declared off-limits:

I know that some women go on walking holidays on their own. I wouldn't do that. I fear some kind of assault, be it physical or verbal. I try to avoid offering myself as a potential victim. Ekaterina

Sarah meanwhile described perceived risk as a reason for avoiding backpacking:

I think you put yourself too much at risk to do it on your own - there are routes in New Zealand where you can either cycle or walk but not on my own, I wouldn't do that. I wouldn't enjoy it.

Brown and Osman (2017) and McNamara and Prideaux (2010) report that it is common for women, particularly for solo female tourists, to gauge the safety of a destination before making a travel decision, but this study shows that even in a relatively safe destination, women are anxious for their security.

Walking at night was perceived to be fraught with danger unless the routes taken were well lit and well populated:

I'm careful at night, don't walk anywhere at night that doesn't feel safe and well-lit; I don't walk anywhere deserted. I think they are the only two adjustments. If I were with somebody else I wouldn't

really think twice about walking around a lake or going out at night. I wouldn't think, ' well I won't go on my own' because I prefer travelling on my own. Rosa

I wouldn't go to places that aren't really well lit you know because I think these days I am being sensible. I don't want to accidentally find myself in a dodgy area of a city without realising it you know so I have kind of adjusted my times. Julie

Sarah adopted a strategy to keep herself safe that she borrowed from a memorable scene in a film:

I remember seeing a film where a lady was advised, if you are walking home late at night, walk in the middle of the road because people are less likely to be lurking, and I thought that was a really good idea and that has stayed with me.

This study corroborates the research undertaken by Jordan and Aitchison (2008), which articulates female tourists' heightened awareness as self-surveillance. They adopt a strategy to keep themselves safe that simultaneously restricts their capacity for fully enjoying their trip. As Wilson and Little (2008) state, fear leads women to limit their opportunities for walking around the streets alone: women on holiday have to constantly gauge the tourist landscape for danger and “strategise accordingly” (p. 181). Vera-Gray (2018) argues that women in public spaces are used to making decisions about where to go, how to travel, what to wear, in order to keep safe. This is so commonplace to them that it is an aspect of their negotiation of public spaces that they take for granted.

5. Conclusion

Research on walking and hiking from a tourism, sport and leisure standpoint has consistently focused on the mental and physical health benefits of walking and on the experiences and motivations of walkers. The important link between walking and creativity has been drawn by writers and thinkers outside these domains, adding a richness to the understanding of the tourism and leisure activity of walking, and improving our sense of why people walk and how this impacts on their creative and intellectual life. This study supports the literature on the benefits of walking, which are experienced by the female interviewees who walk as a part of their holiday.

Conversely, this study highlights that women's enjoyment of walking and their full appreciation of the benefits of walking whilst on holiday are constrained by their feelings of vulnerability and their perceptions of possible risk. Participants in this study were mindful of their vulnerability if walking

alone, particularly at night and in isolated spaces. There was a fear of attack or a perceived risk associated with walking alone, which impacted on their enjoyment and behaviour.

In order to cope with this perceived risk, participants employed a number of safeguarding strategies. This study on female walkers therefore supports other research on female tourists that document differences among male and female tourist experiences. The ability to fully enjoy the benefits associated with walking as a tourism and leisure activity is shown to be impacted on by gender.

More research is needed to improve our understanding of the experiences of female walkers. To this end, further research using an intersectionality perspective could be conducted on women in different nationality and cultural groups. Research could also centre on destinations in a variety of sociocultural contexts with different sociocultural norms and expectations for behaviour.

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