


RESEARCH ARTICLE

The gender of walking: female pedestrians in street photographs 1890–1989

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Abstract

This article focuses on the role of gender in walking by studying thousands of street photographs taken between 1890 and 1989 in the city of Turku. Analysis of the photographs presents female pedestrians as the most numerous and continuously large group on the urban streets and reveals gendered patterns and practices of walking. Furthermore, it showcases how female mobility patterns were ignored and harmed by the car-centred city planning and traffic solutions of the mid- and late twentieth century. At the same time, women's walking appears as a central enabler of the fragile technological system that is motorized urban transport.

Female pedestrians might have been the most numerous group on streets and roads, globally and historically, but we may never know for sure as they are also the group least studied. The 2010s have seen a rise in scholarly and artistic interest in walking, including everyday walking practices. Artists and researchers such as Deirdre Heddon and Cathy Turner argue that the existing tradition of talking about the history and culture of walking is built on a fraternity, a genealogy of specifically male narrative and ideology. From Rousseau's walks, through the nineteenth-century literary figure of the flâneur, to the situationist concept of *dérive*, theories and methodologies of walking have concentrated on an individualist, heroic, epic and transgressive male experience and mainly ignored or objectified any female walkers and their experiences.¹ As I will argue, taking gender into account and studying the female pedestrians' everyday mobility reveals a picture of the modern city that has all the time been in plain sight but ignored, an urban structure being held together by walking women. The focus on everyday walking and its gender structures not only sheds new light on the history of urban mobility but can – and should – inform present-day discussions on urban space and transport.

¹D. Heddon and C. Turner, 'Walking women: shifting the tales and scales of mobility', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22 (2012), 224–36.

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In this article, I study the gendered history of urban walking through the analysis of a large number of photographic street views from one Finnish city, Turku.² Turku is one of Finland's largest cities; it is situated on both sides of the Aura river on the west coast of Finland and has a compact city centre with a grid plan that originates from the early nineteenth century.³ I have compiled my photographic sources from the Photograph Archive of the Turku Museum Centre that holds a collection of over a million photographs, negatives and slides depicting Turku, extending from the oldest photograph taken in Finland in 1842 to present-day photographs. For this study, all pictures taken between 1890 and 1989 and showing street views from the grid plan area, in the background, foreground or as the main subject, and with at least one vehicle or person on the street, were considered. This produced a database of over 3,500 photographs. During the period I study, the city of Turku collected systematic data on pedestrians only on two occasions: once in a two-day traffic count on a bridge in the city centre in 1948 and once in 1983 in an afternoon pedestrian count around the market square as a preparation for plans of a possible pedestrian zone.⁴ These statistical sources give a very limited picture of the history of pedestrians in Turku and call for the use of alternative sources, such as street photographs, for a more detailed picture.

These photographs were taken for diverse purposes by a multitude of photographers from private individuals to journalists, documentarists, employees of the city and museum staff. Mostly, their main purpose has not been to document the traffic, but more generally the buildings, sceneries and views of the city. Some of the pictures, especially in the 1950s and the 1960s, were taken by the museum employees to document buildings that were to be demolished. These are also the decades best covered by the material in the photograph archive. While mainly aiming to document something other than traffic, a large number of archived photographs show a stretch of one or several streets with people and vehicles moving or standing. The photographs used in this study are neither representative of everything that has happened on the streets of Turku, nor evenly distributed in time and space. As single photographs, they are biased in many ways. However, as an archival collection, their number and qualities enable both qualitative research and a comparative quantitative study of the everyday practices and phenomena of urban walking, behaviours that are difficult or impossible to study through other kinds of sources.

During the hundred years studied in this article, traffic, mobility practices and the city space of Turku underwent drastic changes which were in many ways similar to changes happening in other cities of the western world, but which were locally

²Part of the analysis in this article is based on an earlier book chapter on this topic that has been published in Finnish: T. Männistö-Funk, 'Kävelevien naisten kaupunki: sata vuotta sukupuolta Turun kaduilla', in T. Artukka, J. Keskinen and T. Saarenpää (eds.), *Kaupungin varjoissa, arkistojen valossa* (Turku, 2018), 77–94. Research behind this article has been funded by the urban research programme of the city of Turku and the Wenner-Gren Foundations.

³Turku is Finland's oldest city and was the capital city until the beginning of the nineteenth century. The grid plan was introduced as the city was rebuilt after the great fire that had destroyed it almost totally in 1827.

⁴O. Laisaari, *Turun yleiskaava ja kaupungin kehittämishjelma* (Turku, 1952); Turun kaupunki, *Keskustan liikenteen vaihekaava* (Turku, 1984), 17. A pedestrian zone of some 400 metres was established on one of the streets near the main market square in 2001.

produced and catalysed. As elsewhere, in Turku the focus of planning, documenting and studying these changes has been on motorized traffic. Other types of mobility, but also mobility's connections to a complex and shifting system of everyday practices and materialities, have not attracted much interest and remain difficult to study, due to the lack of statistical or literary sources. This lack of interest and difficulty of study are also gendered issues.

In research, the typically female transport and mobility practices have received far less attention than those that are coded male. As Tim Cresswell and Tanu Priya Uteng have pointed out, for example, the fact that more women than men use public transport has not been studied outside transport planning and has never been explored in the way that the relationship of men and cars has.⁵ This means that even when it comes to women's mobility in the past, we know the most about the part that happened inside male-coded, well-researched types of mobility, like automobility and the late-nineteenth century fashionable cycling.⁶

The traditional field of transport history has been slow to incorporate gender perspectives, but the shift towards the new field of mobility studies in the twenty-first century, also referred to as 'the new mobilities paradigm', has brought gender into the scope of studies as an analytical category. As a response to feminist critiques, the bourgeois masculine subjectivity of the old mobility and transport studies has been called into question, bringing under scrutiny the power relations embedded in mobility and transport.⁷ During the recent decade, gender analysis has shed new light on such key concepts of mobility as space, speed, accessibility and sustainability.⁸

In this article, the emphasis is on the gender aspects of urban walking and their historical change. Based on the analysis of the photographic sources, has walking as a mobility practice been gendered, how big has the role of gender been, and how has it changed during one hundred years? Sub-questions include: how does the street as a gendered space appear in the photographs and what has this meant for practices and possibilities of walking? How have changes in modal split and urban structure correlated with gender aspects of pedestrian mobility? What implications does the historical analysis of urban walking as a gendered practice have for the present-day questions of accessibility, sustainability and equality in urban mobility?

The most central method of analysis has been a quantitative, geographical analysis of the photographs. As an analytical tool, I have prepared dot maps that show

⁵T. Cresswell and T.P. Uteng, 'Gendered mobilities: towards a holistic understanding', in T. Cresswell and T.P. Uteng (eds.), *Gendered Mobilities* (New York, 2008), 1–14, at 3.

⁶On automobility and women, see for example Virginia Scharff's pioneering study *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (New York, 1991), and M. Walsh, 'Gender and American mobility: cars, women and the issue of equality', in C. Divall (ed.), *Cultural Histories of Sociabilities, Spaces and Mobilities* (London 2015), 29–37. On early cycling, see for example P.G. Mackintosh and G. Norcliffe, 'Flâneurie on bicycles: acquiescence to women in public in the 1890s', *Canadian Geographer*, 50 (2006), 17–37; A-K. Ebert, 'Liberating technologies? Of bicycles, balance and the "new woman" in the 1890s', *ICON. The Journal of the International Committee for the History of Technology*, 16 (2010), 25–52.

⁷M. Sheller, 'The new mobilities paradigm for a live sociology', *Current Sociology Review*, 62 (2014), 789–811; M. Walsh, 'Gender in the history of transportation services: a historiographical perspective', *Business History Review*, 81 (2007), 545–63.

⁸Cresswell and Uteng (eds.), *Gendered Mobilities*; S. Hanson, 'Gender and mobility: new approaches for informing sustainability', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 17 (2010), 5–23; K. Martens, *Transport Justice: Designing Fair Transportation Systems* (New York, 2017), 54–5.

the numbers and locations of the street users and vehicles visible in the studied photographs in different decades and years. Using dot maps to analyse social phenomena is a methodology that originates in the early twentieth century with the Chicago school of sociology.⁹ Additionally, I have qualitatively analysed the performance of gender and gendered practices visible in the photographs. The article is divided into three main sections. The first section will give a general view of the gender of walking in the city of Turku during a hundred years through a mainly qualitative reading of the photographs. In the second section, I take a closer look at some gendered walking patterns and analyse them mainly quantitatively. The final section concentrates on specifically female pedestrian practices and their relationship to the changes in urban transportation.

More than just flâneurs: genders on the street

The urban walking of the nineteenth century has often been approached through the figure of the lone male flâneur, whose gaze has been the point of view for culturally significant narratives of modern urban life. This consumerist and sexualizing gaze has portrayed women mainly as objects, special interest being taken in 'fallen' women such as prostitutes and lesbians. At the same time, female pedestrian mobility has been seen as a target of social, cultural and physical restrictions.¹⁰ Most importantly, the bourgeois moral laws that supported the rigorous gender division of the time have been portrayed as not allowing women to wander the streets at will, especially when contrasted with the figure of a male flâneur.¹¹ The central role the flâneur has had in literal and historical narratives of walking in urban spaces has steered even the authors pondering on the possibilities of women in those spaces. This again has placed the focus on exceptional practices, not the most common everyday walking that is the focus of this article. Taking this male figure as the measure and key to urban practices, researchers have been debating the possibility of a female flâneur, the flâneuse. It has been pointed out, for example, that women could also be spectators of urban life, and such respectable bourgeois women as charity workers and social reformers could actively take to the city.¹² Another socially acceptable possibility for bourgeois women to roam the city was offered by newly established shopping streets and department stores.¹³ Judith Walkowitz has argued that the Victorian discourses of city as 'a dangerous sexual labyrinth or as a fairyland of consumer pleasure' have been remarkably enduring in the cultural imagination of gender and street space, categorizing walking women roughly into harassed and vulnerable middle- and upper-class women or streetwise working girls.¹⁴

⁹See R. Shonle Cavan, 'The Chicago School of Sociology, 1918–1933', *Urban Life*, 11 (1983), 415.

¹⁰D.E. Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets. Women, Representation, and the City* (Ithaca, NY, 1995); B. Schmucki, "'If I walked on my own at night I stuck to well lit areas': gendered spaces and urban transport in 20th century Britain', *Research in Transportation Economics*, 34 (2012), 74–85, at 79–80.

¹¹Mackintosh and Norcliffe, 'Flâneurie on bicycles', 17–19, 22; J. Wolff, 'The culture of separate spheres: the role of culture in nineteenth-century public and private life', in J. Wolff and J. Seed (eds.), *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class* (Manchester, 1988), 117–34.

¹²Mackintosh and Norcliffe, 'Flâneurie on bicycles', 22–4.

¹³A. Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, 1993), 36.

¹⁴J.R. Walkowitz, 'Shopping, street harassment, and streetwalking in late Victorian London', *Representations*, 62 (1998), 1–30.

During the nineteenth century, the city streets raised anxieties due to their potential of threat to social order by mixing classes and genders. In public discussion, women embodied the dangerous freedoms a city presented. Proper women should not linger in public spaces, and the politics of public space categorized women according to their class as respectable or dangerous.¹⁵ When we turn to study qualitatively the photographic street views and the pedestrians visible in them, urban street space appears as a major stage of gender and class performance. Walking women are not a homogeneous group, and until the mid-twentieth century the class divisions are almost as poignant in the appearance of pedestrians as the gender divisions. In the photographs from Turku, we see both upper-class and working-class women walking the same inner-city streets in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the former rarely walking alone no more rarely than the latter, but clearly separated from each other by different clothes, especially their head-gear, as well as the tasks they are performing. For example, on the market square and at the riverside fishing boats we see women in hats buying and women in scarfs selling food. Servants of upper-class households with prams and aprons are also recognizable. The head-gear was also a signifier of class for men, but the differences in appearance are subtler on the visual level captured by the photographs. The same applies to foot-gear. In the mid-twentieth century, the working-class women in their boots and the middle-class women in their high-heel walking shoes are easy to tell apart even from far away, due to the different posture and style of walking. As late as the 1960s, some older women wear head-scarfs with a knot under the chin, making this the most long-lived single piece of clothing in the street photographs.

Judith Butler's theory of performative gender argues that gender is produced in a continuum of performative acts that are naturalized but also contain a possibility of challenge and change, through 'wrong performances'.¹⁶ The performance of gender in the street photographs is strongly class-specific, and walking on the street appears as a central public performative act of gender and class. Unlike in the countryside of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where the horse carriage was the vehicle of choice and walking was left to those with no other means,¹⁷ in the city all social classes can be seen walking. It was on the urban streets that the turn of the century 'new women' and the later 'flappers' could appear with their new and contested performances of middle-class femininity. As Mary Louise Roberts has pointed out, the commodified boulevard culture also directly invited urban inhabitants to perform gender in this way.¹⁸ In Finland, for example, short skirts paired with sheer silk stockings were a phenomenon heatedly discussed

¹⁵A. Loukaitou-Sideris, I. Ehrenfeucht and R. Ehrenfeucht, *Sidewalks: Conflict and Negotiation over Public Space* (London, 2009), 89–91; M.P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore, 1990).

¹⁶J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990); J. Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London, 1993).

¹⁷K. Antila, 'Hevoskyydillä ja automobiilillä', in J. Masonen, K. Antila, V. Kallio and T. Mauranen (eds.), *Soraa, työtä ja hevosiä: tiet, liikenne ja yhteiskunta 1860–1945* (Helsinki, 1999), 184–214.

¹⁸M.L. Roberts, 'Gender, consumption, and commodity culture', *American Historical Review*, 103 (1998), 817–44, at 843.



Figure 1. The crossing of Humalistonkatu and Yliopistonkatu streets in Turku, seen from Humalistonkatu, 1928. Photo: Turku Museum Centre/Gustaf Welin.

in the press for the supposedly dubious new feminine traits they presented.¹⁹ **Figure 1**, a street view photograph taken in 1928 in Turku, encapsulates characteristics of gender performance on the street in showing, among many other things, a silk-stockinged woman in a fashionable short dress, small hat and dainty high-heel shoes just passing a woman coming from the opposite direction and wearing long skirts, low shoes and a white head-scarf attached under the chin.²⁰

As Philip Gordon Mackintosh and Glen Norcliffe have shown in the case of late nineteenth-century cycling, performing gender in a class-specific, respectable manner was a central prerequisite especially for women's autonomous mobility.²¹ In the street photographs, the pronounced class-differences in the gender performance become subtler in the post-war decades, especially in the 1960s as Finland undergoes a rapid period of societal changes and urbanization. However, the performance of binary gender, either female or male, remains a constant feature through the whole period of one hundred years. The only exception can be seen in the youngest adults in the 1970s pictures, wearing clothing and hair-styles that bring the female and male appearance very close to each other, especially in the warm seasons. Taking into account the historical endurance of the binary gender

¹⁹K. Vehkalahti, 'Jazztyttö ja naistenlehtien siveä katse', in K. Immonen, R. Hapuli, M. Leskelä and K. Vehkalahti (eds.), *Modernin lumo ja pelko: kymmenen kirjoitusta 1800–1900 -lukujen vaihteen sukupuolisuudesta* (Helsinki, 2000), 130–68.

²⁰Gustaf Welin: Humalistonkatu 6. Turun museokeskuksen valokuva-arkisto.

²¹Mackintosh and Norcliffe, 'Flâneurie on bicycles', 17–37.



Figure 2. The crossing of Yliopistonkatu and Humalistonkatu streets, seen from Yliopistonkatu, 1968. In the 40 years between this and the first photograph, the fashion has changed, but gender remains the most readily recognizable category. Photo: Turku Museum Centre/Turun Sanomat.

categories as naturalized tools of societal organization and power,²² the consistency of binary gender on the street is hardly surprising. However, studying a large number of street photographs from different decades through a gender perspective makes the power of this categorization in public space striking.

Through the decades and changing fashions of dress, pedestrians on the street remain strictly in two binary gender categories, making performative gender their most readily recognizable visual characteristic. The bodily form, posture and profile produced through technologies of clothing and for example hair for each gender changes through time, but always follows the binary categories. All the pedestrians in the street space have to be either male or female, including small children, and an adult pedestrian's gender is usually the one thing that can be recognized even from a great distance when other characteristics are not clear enough to be seen (see [Figures 1–2](#)). This makes the binary gender performance a basic requisite of walking on the street.

The historically strict binary gender system and performance is also the basis of my quantitative analysis in this article. Based on a visual observation of the photographs, I cannot say anything about the personal gender identities of the people in pictures, but their material representation of either female or male gender makes it possible to analyse the division and significance of the performed gender of the pedestrians. At the same time, the historical strictness of the gender-binary on

²²J.W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), 41–50.

the street draws attention to the co-production of gender and space. Not only are certain spaces restrictive on the basis of gender, gender does not exist independently but is co-constructed with the spaces it occupies.²³ Feminist approaches to walking have critiqued the ways in which the ideal type of flâneur breaks free of relations through the act of walking. In contrast, they highlight walking as a relational activity that can be best understood as 'walking-with' rather than as the individualist walk implied by the flâneur.²⁴

Judith Butler has pointed out that walking on a street, one of the most mundane and unremarkable of freedoms, can become a contested act for people who perform gender in a 'wrong' way, and can thus become a minor performative disruption of gender and race. The right and possibility to walk on a street has also become a political question as a prerequisite for taking bodily political action by assembling in a public space.²⁵ During the hundred years studied in this article, alternative performatives of gender in street space have included visibly gender-nonconforming homosexual men and women, especially in bigger cities. Alternative gender performatives have helped homosexuals recognize and meet each other in the public space but have also made them targets of aggression by challenging the heterosexual script of the street.²⁶ In the photographic street views from Turku, such queer performances are invisible, partially because we might not recognize them from a frozen picture without a very large amount of contextual information, partially because people taking representative street photographs may have chosen to exclude any such nonconforming performances. The same applies to bodily disabilities, which are not visible in the photographs. Thinking about these invisibilities, and the rigour of gender-regulation on the street, highlights the social, cultural and physical prerequisites of the simple act of walking on a street. It shows how the most fundamental act of human mobility is socially and culturally constructed in its very physicality.

Female streets: gendered patterns of walking

Pedestrians are everywhere and they are the biggest modal group on the streets through all the decades. This central result of the photographic analysis of urban mobility seems simple but has far-reaching implications. Pedestrians are visible in nearly all of the thousands of photographs I have studied. During all the decades studied, they are the biggest group of street users in the photographs. Even in the 1970s, it is rare to find a picture in which other modes would be more numerous than pedestrians. The photographs cannot give information about absolute numbers of different street user groups, but instead they show a large quantity of moments on the street, and the people and vehicles on the streets at those moments. Despite this, photographs enable a comparative statistical study of

²³S. Subramanian, 'Embodying the space between: unmapping writing about racialised and gendered mobilities', in Cresswell and Uteng (eds.), *Gendered Mobilities*, 35–45.

²⁴Heddon and Turner, 'Walking women'; S. Springgay and S.E. Truman, *Walking Methodologies in a More-than-Human World: WalkingLab* (London, 2018), 136–8.

²⁵J. Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), 138.

²⁶Loukaitou-Sideris, Ehrenfeucht and Ehrenfeucht, *Sidewalks*, 44–7; G. Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890–1940* (New York, 1994).

pedestrian flows and practices in the urban street space.²⁷ As Barbara Schmucki has proposed, they give a chance to study groups that have not been in the focus of urban mobility planning.²⁸

Michel de Certeau describes in his classic essay on 'Walking in the city' pedestrian tactics as creating their own kind of spatiality, 'practicing the space' that remains foreign to the totalizing, geographical and geometrical view of the city that the 'urbanistic project' has historically assumed. While walking creates the city and gives it life, de Certeau argues that it is difficult to study and that its essence cannot be revealed by mapping routes.²⁹ However, when tracing the role of such structural aspects as gender, mapping patterns of walking can significantly help an analysis that aims to make the gendered practices of walking visible.

I have mapped the different moving and parked vehicles visible in the photographs by time and place. As the number of photographs and also their locations vary from year to year and decade to decade, it is not possible to make an absolute quantitative analysis based on them, but their large total number and distribution over a long period of time and a relatively limited geographic area of approximately six square kilometres enables a comparative analysis between shares of different types of mobility in different times and also the mapping of popular routes and nodes of traffic. In addition to vehicles, pedestrians have also been marked on dot maps, according to gender when it was possible to define this based on the visual data. This allows a quantitative analysis of walking as a gendered practice.

When looking at the photographic sources from Turku, one sees late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century streets teeming with women, contrary to what the historiographical concentration on restrictions to female mobility would lead us to believe. The archived photographs from these decades show mainly the streets of the innermost city, popular sites being the street and bridge leading to the market square, and the square itself, riversides, surroundings of the cathedral and the railway station. On all these spots, female pedestrian are as numerous or almost as numerous as male pedestrians. In the decades up to World War II, there is not a remarkable difference in the number of female and male pedestrians visible in the street photographs, which continue to focus on the innermost city centre and the riversides.

From the 1950s on, there are more photographs even from the less central parts of the grid plan area, and there, a strong over-representation of female pedestrians can be detected. On all of the outer grid plan area streets that have been photographed more than once, female pedestrians outnumber the male pedestrians. On many streets, two-thirds of pedestrians are female, on some streets even three-quarters (Figures 3 and 4).³⁰ In the inner grid plan area, the division is more even,

²⁷See F. Cochoy, J. Hagberg and R. Canu, 'The forgotten role of pedestrian transportation in urban life: insights from a visual comparative archaeology (Gothenburg and Toulouse, 1875–2011)', *Urban Studies*, 52 (2015), 2267–86.

²⁸Schmucki, "If I walked on my own", 74–85.

²⁹M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, 1984), 91–110.

³⁰A single photograph from these streets has usually between one and five pedestrians who are in the picture close and sharp enough to be visually recognized as female or male. Examples from some streets that were photographed quite densely: Hämeenkatu street has in the 1950s photographs 103 pedestrians that can be visually assumed female and 48 that can be assumed male; Itäinen Pitkäkatu street respectively



Figure 3. Female pedestrians from the 1950s photographs on a dot map of the Turku grid plan area.

female pedestrians outnumbering male pedestrians only slightly.³¹ On the outer grid plan streets that were also photographed in the 1970s, the same gender-division can be observed to continue (Figures 7 and 8). In the inner grid plan area, a change starts happening towards the end of the 1960s. Streets that had shown a relatively even division between female and male pedestrians become female dominated by 1970.³² This development continues in the 1970s when almost all of the inner-city streets show a two to one ratio of female and male pedestrians (Figures 5–8).

The only street that shows more male than female pedestrians during all the studied time periods is Läntinen Rantakatu street directly at the north-west riverside (see Figures 3–8).³³ This street is exceptional in the way that photographs show many pedestrians sitting on benches that face the river or standing nearby

53 female and 23 male pedestrians; Piispankatu 47 female and 20 male pedestrians. Examples of even bigger female dominance: Kaskenkatu street has 72 female and 24 male pedestrians pictured, Sirkkalankatu street 38 female and 12 male pedestrians.

³¹For example, Puutarhakatu street has 108 female and 76 male pedestrians in the 1950s photographs.

³²For example, the adjoined Humalistonkatu and Yliopistonkatu streets have in the 1965–69 photographs 72 pedestrians that can visually be assumed female and 43 that can be assumed male.

³³Female pedestrians recognizable in the photographs from the 1970s amount to 37, male pedestrians to 46. The relation stays approximately the same through the decade.



Figure 4. Male pedestrians from the 1950s photographs on a dot map of the Turku grid plan area.

talking to people sitting on the benches.³⁴ Most of these stationary pedestrians are male. Most of the female pedestrians on the street are walking, not stationary, and a significant number of them are pushing prams.³⁵ Both the high number of men on benches and women pushing prams can be linked to the role the riverside streets assumed as an area for outdoor recreation, especially from the late 1960s. Previously, the river Aura smelled strongly and unpleasantly on sunny days, due to raw sewage that flowed into it, but the water treatment plants built in the late 1960s and early 1970s changed the situation.³⁶ The street photographs reveal the highly gendered pedestrian use of this newly attractive street space.

The gender distribution in the pictures could have been affected by many factors, one of them being the time of day and the day of the week that the photographs were taken. Information on these has mostly not been attached to the archived photographs, but we can assume that most of the pictures were taken

³⁴In the quantitative analysis of the photographs, I counted people standing or sitting in the street space as pedestrians. They form a very small number of all the pedestrians, especially the ones sitting who are concentrated mainly on the riverside or the Brahenpuisto park situated near the cathedral.

³⁵This riverside street shows the highest density of prams in the whole grid plan area during the whole period of analysis.

³⁶J. Vallin, 'Aurajoki avioviemäriä: ketjuuntuminen ja jätevesiongelman ratkaisut', in S. Laakkonen, S. Laurila and M. Rahikainen (eds.), *Harmaat aallot: ympäristönsuojelun tulo Suomeen* (Helsinki, 1999), 159–74.



Figure 5. Female pedestrians from the 1960s photographs on a dot map of the Turku grid plan area.

on a week-day during normal working hours, as taking them would generally have been part of the day-job of their photographers. As a larger share of men than women worked outside home, many men were most likely at their work places when pictures were taken. In the beginning of the 1950s, some 10 per cent of Turku inhabitants were housewives and some 1.5 per cent housemaids and servants.³⁷ The percentage of women in the workforce grew in Finland between 1950 and 1980, but not dramatically. In 1950, 55 per cent of women between 15 and 64 years living in cities worked for pay; in 1970, the share was 61 per cent and in 1980, 65 per cent. The percentage of men working dropped from 93 per cent in 1950 to 74 per cent in 1980.³⁸ One explanation for the relatively low percentages in 1980 is the growth in professional and higher education. At the same time, the population of Finnish cities more than doubled.³⁹

However, workforce participation is only one factor in gendered patterns of mobility. Late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century studies, from other Nordic countries, have shown that differences in workforce participation do not sufficiently explain the differences between male and female mobility patterns.

³⁷Laisaari, *Turun yleiskaava*, 95–6.

³⁸R. Jallinoja, 'Miehet ja naiset', in T. Valkonen, R. Alapuro, M. Alestalo, R. Jallinoja and T. Sandlund (eds.), *Suomalaiset: yhteiskunnan rakenne teollistumisen aikana* (Helsinki, 1985), 243–7, at 252.

³⁹V. Laakso, *Turun kaupungin historia 1918–1970: ensimmäinen nide* (Turku, 1980), 43–8.



Figure 7. Female pedestrians from the 1970s photographs on a dot map of the Turku grid plan area.

In present-day studies, structural and societal gender divisions appear to explain the differences in mobility patterns to a far greater degree than individual and private factors, such as the number or age of children in the household. Both household work and paid work outside the home are still gendered to a high degree: typically, female employment zones are situated in space differently from typically male employment zones.⁴² At home, women continue to bear the main responsibility for the running of the household. Changes in this respect are slow and seem to have very little effect on gendered mobility patterns. Whereas the number of trips made by women and men can be equal, women have been found to make more trips for the sake of others, men for the sake of themselves.⁴³ Women also show more complex activity patterns in their mobility.⁴⁴ This can be an explanation also for the historical patterns I have detected in the photographs. Making many trips on foot was an integral part of women's daily lives in Turku, both for their paid and unpaid labour, and for combining the two.

⁴²N. Cattan, 'Gendering mobility: insights into the construction of spatial concepts', in Cresswell and Uteng (eds.), *Gendered Mobilities*, 83–97.

⁴³Hjorthol, 'Daily mobility of men and women', 206.

⁴⁴Gil Solá, *På väg mot jämställda arbetsresor?*



Figure 8. Male pedestrians from the 1970s photographs on a dot map of the Turku grid plan area.

The invisible city of women: walking in the cracks of the system

We can only speculate whether the dominance of female pedestrians existed on the more peripheral grid plan area streets during the earlier decades (when these streets were rarely photographed), and equally during different times of the day and days of the week, but the important overall results of the analysis remain that, during the hundred years studied, pedestrians have constantly been the largest group of street users, and female pedestrians have formed the majority of pedestrians at least in the decades after World War II. Furthermore, specific gendered practices of walking can be observed. Both women and men walk, but often in different areas and most often separately from each other. Through the whole research period, women and men walk (or stand) on the streets mostly alone or in female or male pairs and groups. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there are slightly more couples of one female and one male in the photographs than during the rest of the period, but they are still a rarity in comparison to other combinations. From the mid-twentieth century, some groups with a female and a male adult plus one or more children start to appear in street photographs, but even they remain a marginal group among all the pedestrians. Child pedestrians are overall relatively rare and mostly accompanied by a female pedestrian. However, throughout the twentieth century, the photographs also show a few single male pedestrians walking with children.

It would require an article of its own to explore the ephemeral texture of gestures, gazes and minor but constant decisions over where and how to walk that are part of every pedestrian's practice and that photographic sources can also make visible. However, it can be noted there does not appear to be a distinct difference in the confidence and use of space between female and male pedestrians in the pictures. There are some interesting exceptions that could be further studied. As mentioned earlier, men form the majority of pedestrians sitting on benches. The majority of all pedestrians throughout the study period act in a way that appears composed and controlled; it is very uncommon to see people running or gesticulating. Small deviations can be observed; one of them is some pedestrians walking on the kerbstone, rather than on the sidewalk. This is not very common, but forms a detectable practice of walking that continues throughout the decades and is more typical of male and children than adult female pedestrians. Schmucki argues that disciplinary measures undertaken in cities during large-scale motorization, aimed at reducing the number of accidents by restricting the free movement of pedestrians especially from the 1960s on, affected women more than men, as women walked more than men and for example much more typically pushed perambulators and pushchairs.⁴⁵ In my sources, the 1970s photographs in particular show waiting for the light signal at crossings as a new dominant pedestrian practice and female pedestrians as its main practitioners.

Walking with children is one typically female pedestrian practice that can be observed in the photographs. Another, even more typical, is carrying bags, baskets, parcels, buckets, jars and other kinds of small containers. Lately, academic attention has been directed to consumer logistics as an important feature in understanding developments in consumption.⁴⁶ From a mobility perspective, especially interesting are the so-called 'vehicular agencies', meaning the merged and mobile entities of persons and their belongings and/or persons and their vehicles in the city space.⁴⁷ Analysing the street photographs from Turku, we can observe that women have historically, through the whole period of one hundred years, participated more often in vehicular agencies that have made them slower, such as carrying things and transporting children, moving on foot and wearing high-heel shoes, whereas men have in general been more often part of vehicular agencies that have made them quicker, like carrying less or no things, wearing flat shoes and using more bicycles and cars than women (for example, see [Figure 9](#)). In line with the feminist idea of *walking-with*, using walking as a means of building relations rather than escaping them,⁴⁸ these gendered, socio-technical assemblages of walking can be recognized as central components of walking in space.⁴⁹ They also highlight the practical role of much of women's walking in a city: taking care of the logistics of food and water as well as other bodily needs of a city's other inhabitants.

⁴⁵Schmucki, "If I walked on my own", 80–1.

⁴⁶J. Hagberg and D. Normark, 'From basket to shopping bag: retailers' role in the transformation of consumer mobility in Sweden, 1941–1970', *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, 7 (2015), 452–75.

⁴⁷C. Calvignac and F. Cochoy, 'From "market agencements" to "vehicular agencies": insights from the quantitative observation of consumer logistics', *Consumption Markets and Culture*, 19 (2016), 133–47.

⁴⁸Heddon and Turner, 'Walking women'.

⁴⁹J. Middleton, 'Sense and the city: exploring the embodied geographies of urban walking', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 11 (2010), 575–96.



Figure 9. Typical female vehicular agencies in the city centre of Turku, Yliopistonkatu street in 1959. Photo: Turku Museum Centre/Carl Jacob Gardberg.

Women's shopping in the city has in historical research often been framed as a pleasure, rather than a necessity. The possibility of women going shopping on their own has been seen as a precondition to the existence of a female flâneur, roaming the public space without an escort.⁵⁰ However, if we look outside the cultural frame of the upper classes and the cultural imagery of a flâneur, we see a very different picture, showing women's walking as an absolute necessity for the functioning of the whole city, not least for the purposes of shopping and taking care of water, waste and sewage. In the 1950s, the role of women's walking was also acknowledged by societal actors promoting the rationalization of household work. The Finnish association Työtehoseura calculated in 1952 that all the Finnish women together walked every day the distance from the earth to the moon while carrying water from the well to the house and to the animal shelters.⁵¹ Even in Turku, as late as

⁵⁰Friedberg, *Window Shopping*, 36.

⁵¹T. Katko, *Vettä! Suomen vesihuollon kehitys kaupungeissa ja maaseudulla* (Helsinki, 1996), 122.

1950, only 57 per cent of the households had running water.⁵² In cities, grocery shopping was another main task for female pedestrian logistics. On average, women carried home some 60–70 kilogrammes of groceries in a week, mostly by foot.⁵³ Many of the streets where photographs show a high number of female pedestrians, like Hämeenkatu and Itäinen Pitkätatu streets, also had a high density of grocery stores in the 1950s. Speciality stores were more heavily concentrated in the innermost city.⁵⁴ Before refrigerators became common, walking to a store was an almost daily necessity, but by the mid-1960s, half of Finnish homes had a refrigerator, and they were soon irreplaceable as the structure of retail services changed.⁵⁵ In the 1950s, there were more grocery stores than passenger cars in Finland, and grocery store chains constantly aimed to shorten the distance between consumers and stores by adding to the number of the stores. This development was reversed as stores started to move further away from the consumers, and the first supermarkets were opened outside the city centres in the 1970s.⁵⁶ In the late 1960s, pedestrians still dominated grocery and other everyday shopping,⁵⁷ but at the same time, urban and traffic planners were working towards the aim of building ‘functional’, decentralized cities, based on individual motorized transport.

Olavi Laisaari was the city architect of Turku from 1948 until 1960. He was devoted to the international ideal of building decentralized car-cities,⁵⁸ and the idea of transforming the historic, dense city of Turku into a motorized, decentralized city was presented in Laisaari’s 1952 city plan. From the late 1950s to the early 1970s, the city underwent an era of frantic demolition and building activity in order to make space for broader streets and car-parking. Almost two-thirds of previously existing buildings in the city centre were demolished and replaced.⁵⁹ At the same time, new housing areas were built further away from the city centre. Although the housing now spread over an unprecedentedly large area, the envisioned decentralization of the city’s other functions did not follow suit, leaving most inhabitants’ everyday destinations in the city separated by much greater distances than before.⁶⁰ The typically female mobility patterns of many short walking trips around the residential area were erased by the decentralized car-city planning which favoured long-distance motorized mobility. Women continued to walk, and their share of all pedestrians grew, with women becoming the largest group of pedestrians everywhere in the city, but they could not rely solely on walking anymore. In the 1960s

⁵²Laakso, *Turun kaupungin historia*, 227.

⁵³M. Kuisma, A. Komulainen, S. Siltala and T. Keskiarja, *Kapinallinen kauppa: Helsingin Osuuskauppa Elanto 1905–2015* (Porvoo, 2015), 143–4.

⁵⁴Laisaari, *Turun yleiskaava*, 88–9.

⁵⁵M. Pantzar, *Tulevaisuuden koti: arjen tarpeita keksimässä* (Helsinki, 2000), 42–3, 45, 49.

⁵⁶Kuisma, Komulainen, Siltala and Keskiarja, *Kapinallinen kauppa*, 143–4; T. Mauranen, ‘Autolla arkeen’, in *Suomalaisen arjen historia 4: Hyvinvoinnin Suomi* (Porvoo 2008), 184–97, at 193–5.

⁵⁷I am not aware of statistics from Finland, but in Sweden 58% of city dwellers did their grocery shopping on foot, 20% by bicycle and 13% by car. In the less-motorized Finland the share of car-use was presumably even lower. See Hagberg and Normark, ‘From basket to shopping bag’, 452–75.

⁵⁸R. Niskanen, *Ja Jumala loi kaupungin: kaavoittaja Olavi Laisaari ja modernismin opit* (Helsinki, 2010).

⁵⁹R. Lahtinen, *Turun puretut talot*, 5th printing, 1st added edn (Turku, 2013).

⁶⁰V. Laakso, ‘Nopean kaupungistumisen vuosikymmenet’, in E. Kuparinen (ed.), *Turun seitsemän vuosisataa* (Turku 1984), 266–94, at 276; M. Kivistö, ‘Kasvava katu. Autoliikenne ja modernisaatio Turussa’, in I. Vähäkangas (ed.), *Sata lasissa* (Turku, 2000), 91–103.

photographs, a large number of people, especially women with their bags and their children, can be seen waiting for the buses that departed from the main market square and brought people to and from the newly established suburbs.

Motorization did not favour women. Many of the same streets where women were a large majority of pedestrians in the 1950s were turned into multi-lane traffic corridors for cars by the 1970s. Finnish motorization was relatively low still in the 1950s but picked up speed in the 1960s. There were fewer than 4,000 cars in Turku in 1950, less than half of them passenger cars; 11,000 cars in 1960, but more than 40,000 in 1976, the majority of them passenger cars.⁶¹ Women were under-represented among the drivers of these cars, and in 1975 only about one third of new driving licences went to women.⁶² At the same time, the population of the city was growing rapidly in the post-war urbanization wave.⁶³ In the photographs, the 1970s stand out as different from all the preceding decades: passenger cars start, for the first time, to outnumber all the other groups of street users in some photographs and cars crowd many of the streets.

Later studies have shown that favouring car traffic leads to a scattering of different functions of a city that especially harms women in their mobility patterns because they typically combine different kinds of tasks. In contrast, environments favouring walking have been shown to work best for equal accessibility.⁶⁴ A striking feature, both in the photographs and in the statistics, is the limited amount of space given to pedestrians compared to their numbers. In a 1948 traffic count in Turku, pedestrians were more numerous than all the other modes together,⁶⁵ and in the 1976 zoning plan it was calculated that some 60 per cent of all trips in the city were carried out by foot or by bicycle.⁶⁶

As I have demonstrated above, female walking was still common, in spite of motorization. I argue that female walking was, on one hand, heavily ignored in theory and planning, and on the other hand crucial to the functioning of a motorized city in practice. Functionalist planning valued efficiency and speed, which meant that walking was to be minimized and motorization maximized.⁶⁷ However, women remained less motorized and used more public transport and walking for their mobility needs than men.⁶⁸ Although city structure and transport systems tend to be perceived as neutral, they were clearly based on the needs and experiences of especially one social group: middle-aged men with cars, also strongly represented by most of the traffic engineers and experts of the time.⁶⁹ Also the

⁶¹Laakso, 'Nopean kaupungistumisen vuosikymmenet', 276; T. Bergholm, 'Suomen autoistumisen yhteiskuntahistoriaa', in K. Toiskallio (ed.), *Viettelyksen vaunu: autoilukulttuurin muutos Suomessa* (Helsinki, 2001), 65–92, at 72 and 77.

⁶²R. Jalonen, 'Female curiosity towards automobile technology', *ICON*, 16 (2010), 74–91.

⁶³From 100,000 inhabitants in 1950, the population of Turku grew to more than 160,000 by 1975.

⁶⁴Martens, *Transport Justice*, 54–6.

⁶⁵Laisaari, *Turun yleiskaava*, 61.

⁶⁶Arkkitehtitoimisto Olli Kivinen, *Turun yleiskaava 1976* (Turku, 1978).

⁶⁷J. Hankonen, *Lähiöt ja tehokkuuden yhteiskunta: suunnittelujärjestelmän läpimurto suomalaisten asuntoalueiden rakentumisessa 1960-luvulla* (Tampere, 1994), 386.

⁶⁸J. Kallioinen, *Pyöräilyn institutionaalinen asema liikennesuunnittelussa* (Helsinki, 2002), 68.

⁶⁹M. Schalk, U. Gunnarsson-Östling and K. Bradley, 'Feminist futures and "other worlds": ecologies of critical spatial practice', in S. MacGregor (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment* (New York, 2017), 447–63; Schmucki, "'If I walked on my own'", 85.

desired free flow of motorized traffic proved impossible to achieve in old, densely built cities, even after large-scale demolitions, especially as decentralized housing brought more car-traffic into the city centre. When we place our focus on female walking, the failures of the car-city planning and the practical impossibility of its ideal of universal motorized efficiency become evident. In effect, walking women were filling in the cracks of a system that was based on the idea of full-scale personal motorization but had to function in a world that never would be fully motorized.

From the point of view of technological systems, pedestrians, and especially female pedestrians, have appeared as what Adele Clarke calls ‘implicated actors’ of transport and traffic systems: physically present and affected by the system, but ignored by those in power and not empirically explored.⁷⁰ Despite this systematic disregard, walking women can be seen as crucial actors who, with their everyday practices and software of their knowledge, make the frail technological system of the city infrastructure work, both in the pre-motorized era, for example in the case of water services, and in the post-motorized era. As Judith McGaw has argued, it is typical that such female technologies or practices remain invisible, because they are needed to cover and mask the frail and problematic nature of the system as a whole.⁷¹ Accordingly, when studying the ignored patterns and practices of female pedestrians, the picture of motorized traffic systems turns itself around and reveals the city as a system of walking women.

Conclusions

Urban female pedestrians appear as a doubly ignored group historically, as women’s history has often played only a minor role in the general historiographies of cities,⁷² and as walking as a mode of transport and mobility has been mostly ignored both in written histories of cities and in past planning of traffic systems. This article has used some 3,500 street photographs from the Finnish city of Turku, taken between the beginning of the 1890s and the end of the 1980s, to analyse practices of urban walking and their historical changes, both quantitatively and qualitatively. One method of analysis has been to prepare point maps of pedestrians, as well as of other modes of mobility, that are visible in the photographs. This method has revealed distinct patterns of gendered pedestrian mobility as well as gender-specific historical changes on the urban streets.

The quantitative analysis shows that already in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries women walked frequently in the city without male company. It also shows that female pedestrians outnumber male pedestrians in parts of the city, especially from the mid-twentieth century, and that during the 1970s they start to outnumber men all over the city, except on the leisure zone of the riverside. The data present female pedestrians as the most numerous and continuously large

⁷⁰A.E. Clarke, *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn* (Thousand Oaks, 2005), 46–8.

⁷¹J.A. McGaw, ‘Why feminine technologies matter’, in N.E. Lerman, R. Oldenziel and A.P. Mohun (eds.), *Gender and Technology: A Reader* (Baltimore, 2003), 16–32.

⁷²A. Lahtinen, S. Ojala and K. Vainio-Korhonen, *Naisten kaupunki: turkulaisten naisten historiaa* (Turku, 2010), 7–8.

group on the streets. Another quite basic, but at the same time striking, finding is that binary gender performance throughout the studied period was a constant prerequisite of walking on the street.

Opposed to the concentration on cultural imagery of walking, such as the figure of the flâneur or the idea of the city as a labyrinth of sexual danger, studying everyday pedestrian practices of the past reveals a rich and complicated net of urban relations and functions that rely on walking. Carrying of water and groceries stands out as one typically female pattern that on a very practical level has kept the city running. Quantitative historical study of pedestrians and their patterns of walking also shows that female pedestrians were a group that was especially negatively impacted by modern, car-centred traffic planning. At the same time, it also points out their role as those who have filled in the cracks of the fragile technological system of motorized urban transport, and who keep it running.

The historiography of both cities and transport has not dealt with female pedestrians to any great degree, leaving them in the position of an invisible force that is ubiquitous but unseen. I hope that the empirical and analytical discussion in this article can help to highlight the urgent need to consider gender in the history of urban mobility, as well as to study pedestrians more generally in urban history. The connection of gender and different mobility patterns continues strongly in our times, and study of its history might help to draw conclusions that contribute towards more equal present-day mobility solutions as well as more inclusive understandings of city spaces.