




WALK & TALK: EMERGING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS IN SOCIOLOGY

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ABSTRACT. This study examines the Walk & Talk method as an innovative approach to qualitative research, emphasizing its ability to capture rich, contextually grounded data through mobility and embodied experiences. By integrating walking interviews into fieldwork in Nepal, the method enhances data collection via seeding, feeding, and bridging processes. These processes facilitate reflective dialogue (seeding), provide deeper insights through physical engagement (feeding), and connect individual narratives to broader social and cultural contexts (bridging). The study illustrates how the Walk & Talk method shifts from inductive to abductive reasoning, uncovering new insights and theoretical connections in real-time. Fieldwork on spiritual practices, social relations, tourism management, and climate change adaptation demonstrates the method's effectiveness in exploring the intersections of place, identity, and social dynamics. The study highlights the method's potential for interdisciplinary applications in social anthropology, cultural sociology, and environmental studies, expanding qualitative research methodologies to explore intersectional identities and community resilience across diverse contexts.

Keywords: phenomenology, walk & talk, walking interviews, seeding-feeding-bridging, spatial sociology

INTRODUCTION

Sociological research provides a unique opportunity to engage with established theories and methods while exploring new paradigms and uncovering emerging social realities. Classical frameworks, such as those by Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, offer foundational tools for understanding societal structures and social phenomena (Giddens, 1984). However, evolving social contexts, including globalization, digitalization, and identity shifts, necessitate the development of new theoretical and methodological approaches (Lupton, 2015). This dynamic interaction between tradition and innovation enables sociologists to address contemporary challenges, ensuring that the discipline remains responsive to both historical and emerging social realities.

The Walk & Talk method, like Walking Interviews with specific focused respondent, an innovative qualitative research technique, aligns well with the broader objective of sociological inquiry to explore both established and emerging social realities. Traditional sociological methods often focus on stationary interviews, which can limit the depth of personal reflection and the connection to the environment. In contrast, the Walk & Talk method, by involving participants in a dynamic, mobile setting, offers a more immersive and embodied

experience. This method enables researchers to explore not only the personal and social narratives of participants but also how these narratives are shaped by specific spaces and environments (Kusenbach, 2003; Evans & Jones, 2011).

The Walk & Talk method not only aligns with the broader objectives of sociological inquiry but also connects to the field of spatial sociology, which examines how social life is shaped by space and place. Spatial sociology emphasizes the importance of understanding the social world through the lens of geographical and environmental contexts, and the Walk & Talk method provides a unique tool for exploring this relationship in real-time (Soja, 1996). By walking through meaningful environments, this method enables researchers to directly investigate how individuals perceive, navigate, and engage with their surroundings, offering valuable insights into the social construction of space.

In this context, the mobility of the Walk & Talk method reveals how social interactions and personal histories are intricately tied to physical spaces. Walking through neighborhoods, for instance, can reveal how individuals' identities, experiences, and memories are shaped by the spatial arrangements of their communities (Evans & Jones, 2011). These insights resonate with Lefebvre's (1991) concept of "social space," where the spatial practices of

individuals and groups are essential to understanding social relations. The Walk & Talk method, by facilitating a more embodied interaction with place, captures how space itself becomes an active component in shaping social realities.

Moreover, spatial sociology often explores how power dynamics and inequalities are embedded in spatial arrangements. This method, by reducing power imbalances between researcher and participant, creates an egalitarian space where the participant's lived experiences in relation to their environment can be discussed freely. This approach is particularly effective in urban sociology, environmental studies, and public health, where the relationship between mobility, place, and social structures plays a central role in understanding issues such as inequality, mental health, and community identity (Jones, 2017; Thrift, 2004). Thus, the Walk & Talk method is a powerful tool in spatial sociology, as it not only captures the interaction between individuals and their environments but also encourages the development of new theoretical perspectives that consider the role of space in shaping social life.

RELEVANCE: The Walk & Talk method has gained increasing relevance in social science research due to its capacity to capture rich, context-specific insights that are often overlooked in traditional, stationary interview formats. This growing interest can be attributed to the method's dynamic, embodied approach to data collection, which emphasizes mobility and physical engagement with the environment (Kusenbach, 2003; Evans & Jones, 2011). By incorporating movement, this method encourages more natural, fluid conversations, allowing participants to reflect spontaneously on their experiences and observations as they interact with meaningful spaces (Pranka, 2020). Such a conversational style is particularly advantageous in studying place-based phenomena, where the relationship between individuals and their surroundings plays a significant role in shaping social interactions, identities, and experiences.

For instance, in the study of urban spaces, rural landscapes, or areas with cultural or spiritual significance, walking with participants offers a deeper understanding of how people interpret and relate to the environments they inhabit. This method has proven especially useful in environmental or climate change research, where walking through affected areas provides researchers with firsthand insight into the tangible impacts on communities (Kusenbach, 2003). Moreover, the Walk & Talk method aligns with the growing focus in social science research on embodied experience, acknowledging that the body, movement, and spatial

interactions are integral to knowledge production and meaning-making (Thrift, 2004).

In participatory and action research, where understanding lived experience from the participant's perspective is key, the Walk & Talk method fosters deeper community engagement and trust (Jones, 2017). It creates a shared space of experience, which is difficult to replicate through more formal, structured interview methods. This approach underscores a broader trend in social science toward participatory, situated, and embodied research practices, making the Walk & Talk method a versatile tool across disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, urban studies, and environmental sciences. By prioritizing mobility, space, and social context, it offers a more holistic understanding of social phenomena (Evans & Jones, 2011).

The Walk & Talk method serves as a dynamic and innovative approach in qualitative sociology, facilitating the exploration of how individuals' lived experiences are shaped by both their embodied existence and the social spaces they navigate. Grounded in Standpoint Theory and Intersectionality Theory, the method offers a unique lens through which to examine how multiple axes of identity—such as race, gender, class, and ability—intersect and influence the ways people interact with their environments. These intersections, often invisible in more static or hierarchical research settings, are brought to the forefront through the embodied, relational nature of the Walk & Talk method.

Standpoint Theory (Harding, 1991; Smith, 1987) argues that knowledge is socially situated and that marginalized groups possess epistemic privilege—unique insights into social realities due to their lived experiences of oppression. This method embodies this perspective by prioritizing participants' voices and their lived realities. In the context of Walk & Talk, the physical act of walking through significant spaces with participants enables them to relate personal histories, memories, and reflections in real-time, tied to the places that have shaped them. Unlike traditional interviews, the mobility and interaction with the environment allow researchers to access knowledge that is deeply contextual, embodied, and shaped by power dynamics. This makes the method especially powerful in studies involving marginalized groups, as it facilitates a deeper understanding of the ways in which social power, identity, and place intersect.

Developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), Intersectionality Theory emphasizes that identity categories such as race, gender, sexuality, and class are not experienced separately, but in complex and interconnected ways. The Walk & Talk method aligns with intersectionality by allowing researchers to observe how multiple identity markers intersect

within specific spatial contexts. As participants walk through spaces that are meaningful to them, they provide insights into how their social identities influence their relationship to the environment and to other people. For example, the way a person experiences a neighborhood might differ depending on whether they are a Black man, a White woman, or an immigrant. The Walk & Talk method gives participants the agency to navigate these spaces while reflecting on how their identities affect their experience of those spaces, offering a more nuanced and holistic understanding of social life.

The Walk & Talk method also intersects with the concept of embodied knowledge—the idea that knowledge is not just cognitive but is deeply intertwined with the body and the physical world. Following the work of phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty (1962), this method acknowledges that physical movement and place are key to understanding the embodied experiences that shape individuals' social realities. Walking together allows for the simultaneous production of knowledge through both verbal and physical interactions, reinforcing the idea that space is not a neutral backdrop but a socially constructed and politically charged environment that influences how people experience the world (Lefebvre, 1991).

Through this embodied interaction with space, the Walk & Talk method challenges traditional, static research models by embracing mobility, agency, and the interconnectedness of social identity and place. As participants move through familiar or significant spaces, they are able to express how their identities, shaped by intersecting social categories, influence the way they experience and interpret their surroundings. This form of spatial practice reveals the complex interplay between the individual, their social position, and the spaces they occupy, making it an effective method for exploring social phenomena that are tied to place, power, and identity.

This method also addresses issues of power dynamics in research. By fostering a less hierarchical, more egalitarian interaction between researcher and participant, the method promotes a reflexive process where both parties are actively engaged in constructing knowledge. This dynamic resonates with Standpoint Theory's emphasis on the importance of the researcher's awareness of their position in relation to the participant, as well as with Intersectionality's focus on power imbalances that arise from multiple intersecting identities. Walking together offers a shared space for dialogue, making the research process less formal and more inclusive, thus providing a richer, more authentic understanding of the participant's lived experience.

Through its integration with Standpoint Theory and Intersectionality Theory, provides a

sociologically rich and nuanced approach to studying social life. By focusing on the intersectional, embodied, and spatial aspects of experience, it allows for a deeper exploration of how identity, power, and place intersect in shaping individual experiences and social interactions. The method's emphasis on mobility, participant agency, and embodied knowledge opens up new possibilities for understanding complex social realities, particularly those of marginalized groups. As social science continues to evolve, methods like Walk & Talk, which foreground the dynamic, situated nature of social knowledge, are invaluable in capturing the complexity and fluidity of human experience in a world that is constantly in motion.

The historical development of mobility-based methods in qualitative research, such as the "go-along" technique (Kusenbach, 2003) and walking interviews (Evans & Jones, 2011), marks a significant shift within social science methodologies. These approaches emerged as part of a broader move towards more participatory, contextually grounded methods that challenge the static and decontextualized nature of traditional qualitative research, such as structured interviews or focus groups. Traditional research methods often overlook the dynamic interplay between individuals and their physical environments, which can shape behaviors, perceptions, and social interactions in profound ways.

The "go-along" method, introduced by Kusenbach (2003), was a transformative development in ethnographic research. By introducing mobility as a central element of data collection, Kusenbach sought to transcend the limitations of traditional interview settings. In the "go-along" method, researchers accompany participants on their everyday walks, providing a more fluid and organic space for dialogue. This mobility allows participants to engage with their surroundings and express their thoughts in a contextually rich, real-world environment. Kusenbach's approach highlighted the significance of spatial and environmental factors in shaping social life, emphasizing how movement through physical space can yield valuable insights into social processes, identity formation, and power dynamics.

Evans and Jones (2011) extended Kusenbach's work by developing the walking interview method, which builds on the idea of integrating mobility to understand how individuals relate to and experience their environments. Their approach further underscores the importance of place in the construction of social behavior, arguing that walking interviews offer participants an opportunity to engage more deeply with their surroundings. This method encourages participants to reflect on

personal memories, experiences, and observations in relation to the spaces they inhabit, allowing researchers to uncover insights that might otherwise remain hidden in formal, static interviews. In this way, walking interviews embody a broader shift in qualitative research that emphasizes participant engagement and the recognition of the social and spatial complexity of lived experience (Pranka, 2020; Thrift, 2004).

The development of mobility-based methods is part of a wider sociological movement that challenges the methodological orthodoxy of traditional, non-contextualized research designs. These methods contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how social interactions, identities, and power dynamics are not only shaped by individual agency but are also deeply embedded in spatial and material contexts. They have gained traction in disciplines such as sociology, human geography, and anthropology, where they are used to explore how individuals' social lives are intertwined with the environments they navigate, providing a richer, more embodied understanding of human behavior.

The Walk & Talk method, as a further refinement of mobility-based techniques, offers a unique framework for exploring the intersectionality of social identities within specific physical spaces. Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), examines how different social identities—such as race, gender, class, and ability—interact to produce complex and multidimensional experiences of privilege, oppression, and power. When applied to the Walk & Talk method, intersectionality enables researchers to examine how multiple aspects of identity intersect and are activated in specific spatial contexts. This approach highlights the ways in which individuals' social realities are shaped by the simultaneous effects of different forms of identity and the environments they inhabit.

By incorporating intersectionality, the Walk & Talk method allows researchers to move beyond static, one-dimensional understandings of identity. Instead, it provides a framework for analyzing how identities are fluid and contingent, affected by both the person's social position and the spatial context they occupy. For example, walking through an urban environment may elicit vastly different interactions depending on an individual's gender, race, and class. These overlapping, situational identities can be better captured through the dynamic and contextual approach of walking interviews, which enable researchers to document how identity is enacted in everyday settings (Kusenbach, 2003; Evans & Jones, 2011).

Moreover, the Walk & Talk method allows for an embodied analysis of identity. Movement through space triggers sensory and emotional responses, revealing how social identities are lived and performed in specific locations. By combining the lens of intersectionality with phenomenology, which emphasizes subjective lived experience, and spatiality, which draws attention to the significance of place, this method deepens our understanding of how social realities are constructed in the interplay between the individual and the environment. This embodied approach, situated within both social and material contexts, offers a more holistic view of how individuals experience and navigate social life. The resulting data reflects the complexity of lived social realities, capturing the nuances of identity, agency, and power (Thrift, 2004; Crenshaw, 1989).

In summary, the Walk & Talk method, enriched by the application of intersectionality, provides a powerful sociological tool for understanding the intersection of social identities within physical environments. By emphasizing mobility, context, and the embodied nature of social experience, this approach offers insights that traditional qualitative methods might overlook. The Walk & Talk method allows researchers to explore the complexities of social identity and social behavior in a way that is grounded in both individual experience and the material conditions of space, contributing to a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of social life.

Applications Across Disciplines: The Walk & Talk method combines physical movement with qualitative research, offering valuable insights into how individuals interact with their environments. This approach emphasizes context, mobility, and embodied experience, making it effective across various academic fields:

1. **Rural Social Studies:** The method is used to explore the lived experiences of rural populations, particularly in agricultural practices and environmental changes. Kusenbach (2003) used walking interviews to uncover farmers' connections to the landscape, while in Nepal, the method helped study climate change adaptation through farmers' real-time experiences.
2. **Environmental Psychology:** Walking interviews have revealed how physical spaces affect psychological states and social interactions. Evans and Jones (2011) used the method to study the impact of urban landscapes on safety and community engagement, while it has also been used to examine the emotional effects of green spaces on mental health.
3. **Social Anthropology:** This method helps anthropologists understand the relationship between culture, identity, and space. Walking

interviews with the Manangba community in Nepal, for example, revealed how cultural practices are tied to physical locations, and how rituals in sacred spaces foster social bonding.

4. **Cultural Sociology:** In cultural sociology, walking interviews are used to study the relationship between space and social identity. Jones (2017) explored how memories of social movements are embodied in historical spaces, highlighting how cultural identity is shaped by the environments people inhabit.

The Walk & Talk method bridges theory and lived experience, offering holistic data across disciplines like rural social studies, environmental psychology, social anthropology, and cultural sociology. It emphasizes the dynamic relationship between people and space, shedding light on social behavior, identity, and cultural practices.

Gaps in traditional methods: The Walk & Talk method offers a sociologically innovative approach to qualitative research, addressing several limitations inherent in traditional methods. By contrasting traditional qualitative techniques with the Walk & Talk method, we can highlight how this emerging approach enriches the research process.

Traditional qualitative methods, such as structured interviews or focus groups, typically rely on controlled, often artificial settings that separate participants from the environments that shape their everyday social realities. While such settings provide structure, they can constrain participants' ability to spontaneously share experiences and may fail to capture the full social context of those experiences (Evans & Jones, 2011). These traditional methods isolate subjects from the physical spaces that influence their perceptions and behaviors, thus limiting the researcher's ability to understand the embodied relationship between people and the places they inhabit (Kusenbach, 2003).

METHOD

Research Design: The Walk & Talk method was chosen for this study due to its unique capacity to facilitate real-time, contextually grounded interactions between the researcher and participants. By integrating mobility with narrative inquiry, this method enables a deeper exploration of participants' lived experiences, particularly in environments where space and place play an integral role in shaping identities, social practices, and cultural values (Evans & Jones, 2011). This approach aligns with the study's objectives by allowing the researcher to engage directly with participants in the settings where their experiences are rooted, thus providing an immersive and holistic perspective.

The Walk & Talk method's participatory and reflexive nature is particularly suited to research that aims to capture not only what people say but also how they experience their surroundings and interact with the environment. Participants' embodied experiences become central to data collection, creating a dynamic and interactive process where both the researcher and participant contribute to the unfolding narrative (Kusenbach, 2003). This method encourages dialogue that is grounded in the context of the participant's immediate environment, fostering a more authentic and open exchange of ideas and insights.

Data Collection: Participant recruitment for the walking interviews was based on purposive sampling, ensuring that individuals with relevant experiences and knowledge were included. In this study, participants were chosen for their deep connection to the cultural or environmental landscapes being explored, such as spiritual leaders, community members, and practitioners. Each participant was invited to join the researcher in a walkthrough familiar areas, such as pilgrimage routes, farming landscapes, or historical sites, where their personal experiences could be explored in situ.

Walking interviews were conducted in various locations in Nepal, such as Upper Mustang, Upper Manang, Upper Gorkha and Karnali Province, from October 2014 to October 2024. The duration of each walk ranged from a few hours to several days, depending on the terrain and context. For instance, in the case of a walking interview with a climate-smart farm facilitator in 2024, the walk spanned four days, allowing for an in-depth exploration of local climate change adaptation strategies. Similarly, walking interviews with spiritual leaders were designed to align with pilgrimage routes, allowing participants to reflect on their experiences in relation to the sacred spaces they traversed.

The flow of interviews was conversational and responsive, with the researcher guiding the conversation while allowing participants to direct the narrative, based on their lived experiences. Walking alongside participants facilitated spontaneous moments of reflection, memory, and storytelling that would be difficult to capture in a traditional interview setting. This interaction was further enriched by the immediate context, whether it was a sacred landscape, a farming environment, or a historically significant site, all of which influenced the themes that emerged from the conversations.

Analytical framework for studying Walk & Talk data, focusing on qualitative research methods. Three key approaches—inductive, deductive, and abductive reasoning—are combined to enhance the richness and rigor of the analysis. **Inductive Approach:** Using grounded theory, themes and

patterns emerge organically from participants' narratives. This method emphasizes the importance of rooting insights in lived experiences, making it ideal for exploring unanticipated findings, such as emotional responses to specific environments (Charmaz, 2014). Deductive Approach: Predefined theoretical frameworks, like phenomenology, spatiality, and embodiment (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Thrift, 2004), guide the interpretation of data. This method connects participants' experiences to broader academic discourses, ensuring the findings align with established theories. Abductive Approach: This approach iteratively links empirical observations with theoretical constructs to generate new insights. For instance, unexpected data—such as how physical landscapes evoke embodied memories—can lead to refined theoretical understandings (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014).

These methods are unified by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which systematically identifies and organizes themes across narratives. This comprehensive framework enables researchers to explore complex, embodied phenomena like identity, space, and practice, offering a nuanced understanding of the interplay between personal experiences and sociocultural contexts.

To synthesize insights derived from multiple analytical approaches, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) provides a structured method for examining qualitative data, particularly in the context of Walk & Talk interviews. The process involves systematically identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns and themes, offering a cohesive way to analyze participants' narratives. Steps in Thematic Analysis:

1. Familiarization with Data: Researchers begin by reviewing transcripts and field notes, immersing themselves in the walking interview data to identify initial impressions.
2. Generating Initial Codes: Recurring ideas such as "spatial identity," "embodied memory," and "adaptive practices" are highlighted and systematically coded.
3. Collating Codes into Themes: Related codes are grouped into broader themes like *spiritual practices*, *environmental adaptation*, and *social inequality*.
4. Reviewing Themes: Themes are examined in light of theoretical frameworks (deductive reasoning) and emergent data patterns (inductive reasoning).
5. Defining and Naming Themes: Each theme is clearly articulated to reflect the dynamic interplay between space, identity, and practice, incorporating empirical findings and theoretical insights.

The integration of inductive, deductive, and abductive reasoning forms a comprehensive analytical framework for the Walk & Talk method, enriching its application in qualitative research. Inductive reasoning allows themes to emerge organically from participants' lived experiences, capturing the nuances of their reflections during walking interviews and grounding the findings in real-world contexts (Charmaz, 2014). Deductive reasoning situates these findings within established theoretical paradigms, such as spatiality, embodiment, and intersectionality, thereby aligning them with broader academic discourses (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Crenshaw, 1991). Abductive reasoning facilitates the generation of new theoretical insights by identifying unexpected patterns in the data, such as how movement and memory interplay to reveal connections between spatial experiences and identity (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). By combining these approaches, this framework enhances the rigor, depth, and contextual relevance of qualitative analysis, demonstrating the Walk & Talk method's potential to uncover complex, embodied social phenomena and deepen understanding of the relationship between people, space, and practice.

The protocol for conducting a walking interview involves a methodical yet adaptable process designed to optimize participant engagement and leverage the contextual richness of physical spaces. The process begins with participant selection through purposeful sampling, ensuring the inclusion of individuals whose experiences and insights align with the research focus. For instance, a study on climate change adaptation in Karnali Province, Nepal, recruited participants with direct knowledge of farming practices and community resilience, reflecting Kusenbach's (2003) emphasis on the importance of targeted sampling for data depth and relevance.

Pre-interview preparation involves briefing participants on the objectives and methodology of the study, securing informed consent, and addressing ethical concerns such as confidentiality and voluntary participation. This stage is crucial in establishing trust and ensuring participants' comfort with the research process. During the walking interview, participants traverse spaces meaningful to their lived experiences, fostering fluid discussions influenced by their environment. The spatial context enriches the data as participants naturally draw connections between their surroundings and their narratives, aligning with Evans and Jones's (2011) observation that walking interviews encourage dynamic, context-driven interactions.

Data collection transitions into a qualitative analytical phase, often employing thematic analysis to identify patterns related to environmental,

cultural, or social dimensions. This approach captures the embodied and contextual nature of participants' experiences, connecting individual narratives to broader social phenomena (Kusenbach, 2003). For example, discussions during walking interviews in Upper Mustang on spiritual practices highlighted the interplay between physical landscapes and cultural identity, showcasing the method's capacity to uncover nuanced insights.

By integrating mobility, spatial context, and participatory engagement, the Walk & Talk method transcends the limitations of stationary interviews. Its flexibility and depth enable researchers to explore diverse topics—ranging from environmental adaptation to cultural practices—while fostering a deeper understanding of the relationship between individuals, their environment, and social realities. This approach underscores the method's value as an innovative tool in qualitative research, offering rich, place-based data that traditional methodologies often overlook.

The Walk & Talk method offers an innovative approach to qualitative research, addressing several key gaps in traditional methods. By comparing traditional qualitative methods and Walk & Talk, we can highlight how this emerging technique enhances the research process.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Gaps in Traditional Qualitative Methods and the Walk & Talk Methods

Traditional Qualitative Methods	Walk & Talk Method	How Walk & Talk Addresses the Gap
Controlled, Static Settings	Engages participants in natural, dynamic environments (Evans & Jones, 2011)	Facilitates spontaneous reflection within real-world contexts, thereby enhancing the contextual relevance of data.
Isolation from the Physical Environment	Incorporates physical surroundings into the interview process (Kusenbach, 2003)	Enables participants to recall and reflect on experiences directly tied to their environmental context.
Limited Exploration of Embodied Experiences	Captures non-verbal cues such as body language, tone, and physical responses (Thrift, 2004)	Provides a more comprehensive understanding of participants' emotional and psychological states, enriching the data.
Hierarchical Researcher-	Encourages egalitarian interaction and	Reduces power imbalances by allowing participants to guide the

Participant Dynamic	mutual exchange.	flow of conversation, fostering more equitable interactions.
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source: Evans & Jones, 2011; Kusenbach, 2003; Thrift, 2004.

This table 1 highlights the differences between traditional qualitative methods and the Walk & Talk approach while explaining how the latter addresses the limitations of the former.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Walk & Talk method is a qualitative research approach that integrates physical movement with conversational interviews to delve deeply into participants' lived experiences and contextual perceptions. This methodology was applied innovatively by the researcher in October 2014 during a study on the spiritual connections among Hindu, Buddhist, and Bon traditions in Upper Mustang, Nepal. Accompanied by Sita Lama, a spiritual leader, the researcher embarked on a journey to the sacred site of Damodar Kund.

This walking interview, lasting an entire day and night, created a unique, immersive framework for exploring spiritual themes. The method allowed for dynamic, real-time interactions where the sacred landscape itself became a participatory element in the dialogue. As the journey unfolded, the narratives of the spiritual leader were shaped by the surrounding geography, illustrating how physical spaces and spiritual beliefs are deeply interwoven. This extended, embodied engagement enabled a richer understanding of the spiritual traditions and their connections to place, highlighting the method's ability to capture the interplay between environment, movement, and cultural meaning.

In June 2019, the researcher utilized the Walk & Talk method to explore the Makpa marriage system within the Manangba community of Upper Manang Valley, Nepal. This method enabled a nuanced and context-specific examination of how individuals navigate complex social dynamics and identity constructs within a specific cultural and geographical setting. Accompanied by Birkha Bahadur Gharti, a Makpa practitioner, the researcher engaged in a walking interview to Tanki Manang, providing an immersive space for in-depth conversations about the participant's experiences as an outsider son-in-law in the community.

This walking interview approach revealed important insights into how Makpa individuals experience and interpret their roles within the intersection of cultural expectations, social inequalities, and the specific sociopolitical structures of the Himalayan region. The dynamic and grounded conversations during the walk allowed for the

participant to share personal narratives deeply intertwined with the immediate context of the environment, demonstrating the interconnections between place, identity, and societal roles.

The Walk & Talk method proved to be particularly effective in revealing the complexities of social inequities within the intimate, hierarchical frameworks of the Manangba community. This approach also illuminated the participant's intersectional experiences, highlighting the ways in which personal identity is shaped by broader societal structures. The method thus offered a powerful lens to examine lived experiences within a cultural setting where social roles are fluid and deeply embedded in the physical landscape.

In October 2022, the Walk & Talk method was employed in Upper Gorkha, Nepal, to explore the spiritual and social significance of Shakya recognition within Himalayan Buddhist communities. The researcher, accompanied by Thille Dhorje, a community leader, embarked on a walking journey to Tsum Valley, engaging in dynamic and immersive conversations that shed light on the complexities of Shakya identity and its social function. This walking interaction provided an opportunity to examine the intersection of personal identity, community cohesion, and environmental factors.

The study focused particularly on the *Ahimsa Sheel* tradition, a practice of nonviolence that has been preserved for centuries within these communities. By walking through the spiritual and historical landscapes of the region, the participant shared narratives that illustrated how these nonviolent principles are woven into the fabric of daily life and collective identity. The discussions highlighted how traditions like *Ahimsa Sheel* continue to thrive amid broader social, cultural, and environmental forces.

This fieldwork emphasizes the Walk & Talk method's effectiveness in uncovering complex spiritual and cultural themes. It allows researchers to gain deep insights into how practices such as *Ahimsa Sheel* are not only maintained but also adapt and resonate with the intersectional realities of life within the Chhekampra community. The approach highlights how the method can provide an enriched understanding of traditions within their lived and geographical contexts.

In October 2022, the researcher employed the Walk & Talk method during a return journey from Tsum Valley to Gorkha Bazaar in Upper Gorkha, Nepal, to examine perspectives on mountain tourism management. Accompanied by Hari Pande, a trekking guide, and his group of tourists, the researcher engaged in walking interviews that offered rich insights into the complexities of tourism

in the region. This approach, which contrasts with traditional, stationary interviews, allowed for conversations in dynamic, real-world spaces that were personally and communally significant.

As the group walked, participants spontaneously reflected on their experiences over the past decade of tourism practice in the Himalayas. The informal setting enabled them to share memories and provide in-depth commentary on various challenges, such as coordination between local pressure groups and government units, infrastructural gaps, and concerns over environmental sustainability and the cultural impact of tourism. These narratives revealed not only structural issues but also the on-the-ground realities of crisis management in the tourism sector, highlighting the tensions between development, preservation, and community well-being.

The physical act of walking through the mountain landscapes triggered immediate observations and vivid storytelling, connecting participants' insights directly to the spaces where tourism practices were both celebrated and contested. This method allowed for an authentic exploration of how individuals relate to their surroundings and navigate the dynamic pressures of tourism, offering a richer understanding of the socio-environmental dimensions of mountain tourism.

This fieldwork demonstrated the utility of the Walk & Talk method in eliciting in-depth, contextually grounded insights into the challenges and opportunities within mountain tourism management. It provided a nuanced understanding of the participants' relationship with physical space, local governance, and collective efforts to sustain tourism amidst evolving pressures and crises.

In October 2023, the researcher conducted fieldwork at the Jagannath and Malika Temples in Myagdi, Nepal, employing the Walk & Talk method to explore the spiritual dimensions of Himalayan traditions. Over a three-day pilgrimage journey (Qora or parikrama), the researcher was joined by Kulraj Chalise, a spiritual researcher. This immersive engagement allowed for an in-depth exploration of Rishi-Krishi traditions, focusing on Sage Vashishtha's perspective on social stability (social statics) and Sage Vishwamitra's emphasis on social transformation (social dynamics).

During the walk, Chalise shared philosophical insights into the concepts of *vritti* (engagement in worldly duties) and *nivritta* (withdrawal from material entanglements), which form the foundational duality in Himalayan spiritual and social practices. These discussions highlighted the intricate balance between active participation in community life and contemplative detachment, reflecting how these philosophies guide not just

individual behavior but also the collective spiritual and agricultural practices under the Rishi-Krishi framework.

The dynamic nature of the pilgrimage walk added layers of depth to the conversation, as the physical act of walking through culturally and spiritually significant spaces encouraged a reflective and spontaneous sharing of ideas. This method not only allowed for a richer understanding of the cultural interplay between agriculture and spirituality but also contextualized ancient philosophies in modern settings, illustrating their relevance in contemporary Himalayan life.

In October 2024, a field study in Karnali Province, Nepal, employed the Walk & Talk method to investigate farmers' adaptability to climate change. Over four days, the researcher collaborated with Bishnu Dhakal, a climate-smart farm facilitator whose expertise provided valuable insights into community-based adaptation practices. Dhakal detailed strategies such as the five-cell matrix of seed selection and the conservation of rare crop varieties—methods vital for enhancing agricultural resilience amid unpredictable climatic changes.

Dhakal's contributions shed light on the socio-cultural dimensions of climate change, revealing how local agricultural communities perceive and respond to its multifaceted impacts. His narrative highlighted innovative community-driven initiatives, such as the integration of traditional farming techniques with adaptive practices tailored to emerging climate conditions. These efforts underscore the critical role of community-led actions in mitigating risks, promoting biodiversity, and ensuring long-term food security. Through this dynamic and participatory method, the Walk & Talk approach facilitated a rich understanding of the intersection between local knowledge systems and sustainable agricultural adaptation strategies.

Here is the table that organizes the findings from the case studies and fieldwork:

Table 2: Case Studies and Findings Using the Walk & Talk Method

Fieldwork Time and Area	Research Focus	Key Findings
October 2014: Spiritual Connections, Upper Mustang	Spiritual connections in Hindu, Buddhist, and Bon traditions	The landscape played a central role in shaping spiritual narratives, enhancing understanding of traditions.
June 2019: Makpa Marriage System, Upper Manang Valley	Social dynamics within the Makpa marriage system	Revealed how social roles and identity are shaped by the environment and cultural expectations.

October 2022: Shakya Recognition, Upper Gorkha	Spiritual and social significance of Shakya recognition in Buddhist communities	Highlighted the connection between nonviolent practices and the environment in shaping community life.
October 2022: Mountain Tourism, Upper Gorkha	Perspectives on tourism management in the Himalayas	Provided grounded insights on tourism challenges, such as sustainability and cultural impacts.
October 2023: Himalayan Traditions, Myagdi	Rishi-Krishi traditions in Himalayan spirituality	Explored the balance between community engagement and spiritual detachment in daily practices.
October 2024: Climate Change Adaptation, Karnali	Farmers' adaptability to climate change	Revealed community-driven adaptation strategies integrating traditional knowledge and sustainable farming.

This table presents a case-study-specific summary of how the Walk & Talk method was applied in various fieldwork settings, highlighting the key findings and insights derived from the immersive, dynamic nature of the method.

The Walk & Talk method has proven to be an effective qualitative research tool, offering rich, contextually grounded insights across various regions of Nepal. This method allowed researchers to explore not only participants' thoughts but also their embodied experiences within specific cultural and physical environments.

- 1. Place and Narrative:** The method revealed how physical spaces, like sacred landscapes in Upper Mustang, shape participants' spiritual and cultural narratives. For example, walking through the Damodar Kund area brought out deeper reflections on spirituality and identity, which would be less vivid in a traditional interview setting.
- 2. Embodied Experience:** Walking interviews helped capture participants' cognitive and emotional responses to the environment, enriching their reflections on topics like Buddhist nonviolence in Tsum Valley. The physical movement triggered memories and emotions that were closely tied to the land.
- 3. Community and Culture:** The method provided deeper insights into local cultural dynamics, like those related to mountain tourism in Gorkha or climate-smart farming practices in Karnali. Walking through these environments allowed participants to reflect on real-time socio-political and environmental issues, offering a nuanced understanding of complex local contexts.
- 4. Lessons Learned:** The Walk & Talk method enhances the researcher-participant relationship,

fostering trust and a less formal atmosphere. It is versatile, applicable in various contexts (spiritual, environmental, and social), and reveals how place, mobility, and cultural identity intersect in shaping lived experiences.

In summary, the Walk & Talk method provides a holistic, immersive approach to qualitative research by blending physical movement with deep cultural exploration, offering researchers a powerful way to uncover and document lived experiences.

The Walk & Talk method offers a distinctive approach to qualitative research, providing a dynamic and contextually rich environment for data collection. This method, which combines physical movement with interviews, allows researchers to gather insights while participants engage with the landscape, offering an immersive experience. However, like any research method, the Walk & Talk approach presents both strengths and limitations, which must be critically assessed.

Strengths of the Walk & Talk Method

1. **Contextual Richness and Situated Knowledge:** One of the primary strengths of the Walk & Talk method is its ability to link participants' narratives with the physical environment. By conducting interviews in spaces that are significant to the participants, the researcher gains access to a deeper, more authentic understanding of the participants' lived experiences. This approach aligns with Kusenbach's (2003) emphasis on the importance of place in interviews, where the space becomes integral to the data collected. Participants naturally reflect on their surroundings, providing insights that would be difficult to capture in traditional, stationary interviews.
2. **Enhanced Participant Engagement:** The physical act of walking can help break down formal barriers between the researcher and the participant, fostering a more relaxed and open atmosphere for conversation. As Evans and Jones (2011) highlight, walking interviews promote a more fluid and dynamic interaction, which encourages participants to share their thoughts in a more personal and candid manner. This greater comfort can lead to richer data, particularly when discussing sensitive or complex topics, as participants may feel less constrained by the formality of a traditional interview setting.
3. **Immersion and Reflexivity:** Walking interviews allow researchers to engage in a process of reflexivity, as the environment itself can shape and influence the conversations. By physically participating in the context of the study, the researcher is able to gain a first-hand understanding of the space, which can enhance the interpretation of the data. This immersion is

particularly beneficial in studies related to environmental, cultural, or spiritual topics, where the landscape plays a central role in shaping participants' identities and practices.

4. **Flexibility and Adaptability:** The Walk & Talk method can be adapted to a wide range of research contexts, from social and environmental studies to cultural and spiritual investigations. This versatility allows researchers to apply it to diverse fields, such as climate change adaptation (Karnali Province, Nepal) or the study of spiritual traditions (Upper Mustang), as highlighted in previous fieldwork examples. The method's flexibility allows it to be customized to suit different research objectives and settings, making it a valuable tool in qualitative research.

Limitations of the Walk & Talk Method

1. **Logistical and Practical Challenges:** While the Walk & Talk method offers many advantages, it also presents logistical challenges, particularly in remote or rugged environments. Ensuring that both the researcher and participant can physically navigate the terrain safely and comfortably can be difficult, particularly in areas with harsh weather conditions or inaccessible landscapes. Furthermore, maintaining the quality of the conversation while walking—especially in noisy or crowded environments—can pose challenges for recording and transcription.
2. **Risk of Overemphasizing the Physical Environment:** Another potential limitation of the method is the risk of overemphasizing the physical environment at the expense of other factors that may influence participants' experiences. The focus on space and place may unintentionally lead researchers to neglect other critical aspects, such as social dynamics, personal histories, or internal cognitive processes. While the landscape is important, it is essential to balance it with other contextual elements that shape participants' narratives.
3. **Data Interpretation Challenges:** The integration of movement with interviews can sometimes complicate the process of data analysis. The physical act of walking may introduce distractions, making it more difficult for both the researcher and the participant to focus solely on the conversation. Additionally, the rich, place-based data gathered through walking interviews may require more nuanced interpretative frameworks, as the interplay between the environment and the individual's responses can be complex and multifaceted. As a result, researchers must be mindful of how they interpret and categorize these interactions.
4. **Participant Bias and Safety Concerns:** While walking may reduce formality and enhance

openness, there is also the risk that the movement could lead to selective or biased narratives. Participants may share information based on their comfort with the environment or the specific locations chosen for the walk, which might limit the range of topics discussed. Moreover, safety concerns may arise, especially when conducting interviews in isolated or potentially dangerous locations. This underscores the need for careful planning and risk management when using the Walk & Talk method in certain settings.

In conclusion, The Walk & Talk method presents a unique and effective approach to qualitative research by combining physical movement with conversational interviews. Its strengths lie in its ability to generate contextually rich data, enhance participant engagement, and foster reflexive, immersive interactions. However, the method also has its limitations, particularly in terms of logistical challenges, potential biases in data collection, and the complexities involved in data interpretation. Despite these limitations, when used thoughtfully and strategically, the Walk & Talk method can provide valuable insights into participants' lived experiences, especially in studies that require a deep understanding of place, identity, and social dynamics. Researchers must balance the method's advantages with its inherent challenges to maximize its potential in qualitative inquiry.

CONCLUSION

The Walk & Talk method proves to be a transformative approach to qualitative research, offering rich, nuanced insights into participants' lived experiences by integrating movement, context, and conversation. Its ability to connect personal narratives with physical spaces enhances the depth of data, as shown in studies like those conducted in Upper Mustang and Upper Manang, where the surrounding landscapes shaped participants' reflections on spirituality and identity. The embodied experience of walking facilitates a deeper exploration of cognitive and emotional responses, capturing the complexities of social dynamics, such as those seen in climate-smart farming in Karnali and mountain tourism management in Gorkha.

Moreover, the method fosters a more egalitarian researcher-participant relationship, promoting mutual reflection and authenticity, as observed in fieldwork across diverse cultural and environmental contexts. By bridging individual experiences with broader social and environmental factors, the Walk & Talk method allows for a comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena, whether in spiritual practices, climate change adaptation, or local governance. Its adaptability

across various domains underscores its value in capturing the interconnections between people, place, and culture, making it an indispensable tool for qualitative research.

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