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Weeds, wildflowers, and White privilege: Why recognizing nature's cultural content is key to ethnically inclusive urban greenspaces

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ABSTRACT

Many studies provide evidence of health and well-being benefits gained from contact with nature. In the United Kingdom, people who claim Black, Asian and UK minority ethnic (UKBAME) backgrounds are less likely to have a garden, or live near quality greenspace, and are often under-represented as park users, compared with White British people. Placemakers in the UK predominantly claim White British ethnicity. We find cultural biases support unfair advantage for White British people in provision of, and access to healthy nature in London. We propose insufficient attention is given to the cultural content of nature and find that inequality is sustained by White privilege in design or management, even in "best practice" exemplars. We propose action to increase equity in access to healthy nature in cities, responding to variation we find in Viability, Interest and perceived Healthfulness of greenspaces in London for people along lines of ethnicity, race and religion.

Introduction

The UK government's 10 yearly Census asks people to identify themselves according to a list of suggested ethnicities, religions, and other demographic characteristics (ONS, 2022). Some of the Census "ethnicity" categories arguably align with a shared history, heritage language, heritage nationality or region of heritage origin that could inform a cultural identity (Hall, 2021). Others are pan-ethnic to the scale of whole continents, and all contain a racializing element (Appendix A). Government agencies, local government and others collect and publish information using these Census categories, to monitor equality in provision of publicly funded services or in impact of policies that must be delivered equitably under the UK Equality Act 2010, irrespective of protected characteristics like ethnicity, age, or religion (UK Government, 2010). People are generally familiar with the Census categories and provide this kind of equalities information frequently.

Greenspaces, like London's parks, are mostly a publicly funded service and legally required under equalities legislation to be equally beneficial to all. UK national and local data indicate benefit is not being derived equally from public parks in London, or elsewhere in the UK across a range of characteristics, including users' ethnicity. One in five Londoners

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do not have a garden, and it is for this reason that Londoners are found to be especially reliant on parks for nature engagement (Groundwork, 2021). In England, people claiming Black ethnicities are nearly four times as likely as people claiming White ethnicities to have no access to outdoor space at home (ONS, 2020). However, annual surveys by government agency Natural England (Allen & Balfour, 2014; Hunt et al., 2016; Natural England, 2019) show that visits to nature spaces outside the home, including to parks and other urban greenspaces, are made far more frequently by people from White British ethnicity with middle and higher income than by people claiming the UK Census "high level" ethnicity categories, Black, Asian and other UK minority ethnic background (ONS, 2022). In this paper, we abbreviate these "high level" categories to UKBAME. This acronym intends to reflect that these are categories used in the UK Census, the people who claim them are mostly British, and that a "minority" within a UK context is not a minority within other populations.

User counting in UK parks often shows under-representation of people who claim some UKBAME backgrounds as users, compared with catchment demography (CABE Space, 2010a; Snaith, 2015). In East London's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, a multi-award winning publicly funded landscape valorized as "best practice" for design, management and inclusive design for example, the managing body's user survey found only 34% of park users claimed UKBAME compared with 55% of residents living in surrounding Boroughs (LLDC, 2019; Nomis ONS, 2022).

There are many health benefits to gain from using urban greenspace irrespective of people's individual characteristics (Mitchell & Popham, 2008), and people have been found to value access to greenspace near their home similarly across all the largest UK ethnic groups (CABE Space, 2010a)—so why these differences in use?

We argue that greenspaces are culturally produced. We find many examples of "best practice" for greenspace design and management that normalize, and privilege culturally situated preferences for nature engagement that our research and other studies find most often associated in the UK with White British ethnicity. Placemakers in the UK—the landscape architects, architects, planners, developers, ecologists, council officers, greenspace and place managers, and allied professionals who fund, shape, permit and manage greenspaces designated for people's use and benefit (Barry & Agyeman, 2020)—are predominantly of White British ethnicity, and university educated, by people like themselves (Norrie, 2017).

We argue structural Whiteness in UK placemaking supports a failure to engage equitably with other cultural voices, norms, and experiences. We assert this is a form of White privilege (Pulido, 2000, 2015; Stuart et al., 2012), a largely unconsciously sustained advantage for people of White British ethnicity in greenspace provision and management that plays an important role in maintaining inequality in access to nature that can benefit health.

Publicly funded bodies such as Natural England, and many other agencies do seek to address "barriers" that might be limiting green space use by underrepresented groups (Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2018) but we find limited recognition that forms of nature engagement most often associated with White British people might be culturally arbitrary (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), could be challenged as a universal ideal, or that alternate views and practices may have equal intrinsic value. Pierre Bourdieu describes how, if we are immersed in the social field that has formed us with people who share our world view, it becomes easy to imagine

our ideas are universally applicable, when all around there is validation of our thoughts: "It is because this world has produced me, because it has produced the categories of thought that I apply to it, that it appears to me as self-evident" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 128).

When White British people's patterns of park use, or preferences and norms for engaging with nature are imagined as a universally ideal standard, under-representation of people claiming UKBAME might be framed as due to their ignorance, a deviance to be corrected, a result of supposed "disconnection" from natural environments, or "lack of environmental knowledge" (Friel & Evison, 2013). These constructions tend to locate cause and fault with the audience, rather than questioning the quality of the offer, its fit with alternate understandings of and preferences for nature engagement, or for differences in wider social relations (Birch et al., 2020; Finney, 2014; Fletcher, 2017).

Our paper starts with a brief overview of how nature in cities can benefit health. We review how culturally situated preferences for configuration of a nature space have been shown to influence the health benefits or disbenefits to be gained from it and discuss how ambiguity in the term *nature* itself facilitates misunderstanding and misrepresentation of academic research into the configurations of nature that can benefit health.

Our empirical research draws on focus group and survey findings from populations living near to parks in East and South London with different UK Census ethnicities.

Through thematic analysis, we develop and propose a conceptual framework for understanding decision-making about greenspace use/nature access based on three attributes of greenspaces: Viability, Interest, and perceived Healthfulness. We show how Viability, Interest and Healthfulness attributes of greenspaces vary for our participants across race, ethnicity and religion, all sociocultural characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010 (UK Government, 2010).

Potential for change toward greater equality depends not only on revealing privilege but also in providing information or direction on how to do something about it (Stuart et al., 2012). Our concluding discussion explores how the framework of Viability, Interest and Healthfulness might be used as a tool, to inform placemaking in practice and education, enabling reflection on and challenge to cultural biases, as well as recognition of the cultural content in nature.

Passive and interactive: Nature's health and well-being benefits in urban contexts

Nature in cities has been shown to provide a healthier human environment in different ways. In this paper, we make a distinction between "passive" health benefits from urban nature, gained irrespective of our behavior or beliefs, and "interactive" health benefits, which are gained when we consciously and positively interact with urban nature, for example, by choosing to spend time in a local park.

Passive health benefits gained from urban nature by city residents typically arise from environmental regulation. Plants, rivers or greenspaces in cities reduce urban overheating (Doick & Hutchings, 2013), street trees and shrubs can have some positive impact on air quality (Air Quality Expert Group, 2018), and biodiversity ensures urban greening has resilience to climate change or disease (Oliver et al., 2015).

Passive health benefits are generally only gained within close proximity (Zupancic et al., 2015). In 2010, the government advisory body Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE, now absorbed within the UK Design Council) produced a comprehensive study of green space provision in the UK (CABE Space, 2010b) which showed that the amount of green space available close to home varied by ethnicity, with advantage for people claiming White British backgrounds, compared with people claiming UKBAME, represented in Figure 1. In areas where 40% or more of residents claimed UKBAME, there was 11 times less green space than areas where more than 60% of residents claimed White British ethnic identity (CABE Space, 2010b). More recently, Friends of the Earth found people claiming UKBAME are almost three times as likely as people claiming White ethnicities to live in areas deprived of green space (Friends of the Earth, 2020). Action to address unequal distribution of urban greenspace is urgently needed in the UK to provide equitable access to passive health benefits and equitable viability of interaction with greenspaces for health.

While proximity increases viability of interaction, it does not guarantee interactive health benefits can be gained. Interactive health benefits are derived by active participants, for example people choosing to exercise or socialize outdoors, visiting or viewing a greenspace as a place of stress reduction, or "restoration" (Hartig, 2007; Roe et al., 2016; Van den Berg et al., 2007; Wood et al., 2018). These benefits have been found to depend on whether we perceive available "nature" positively, and whether we choose or don't choose to interact (Hitchings, 2013).

Green space in UK Areas with 40% or more residents claiming British Black, British Asian or UK minority ethnicity.

Green space in UK Areas with 60% or more residents claiming White British ethnicity.
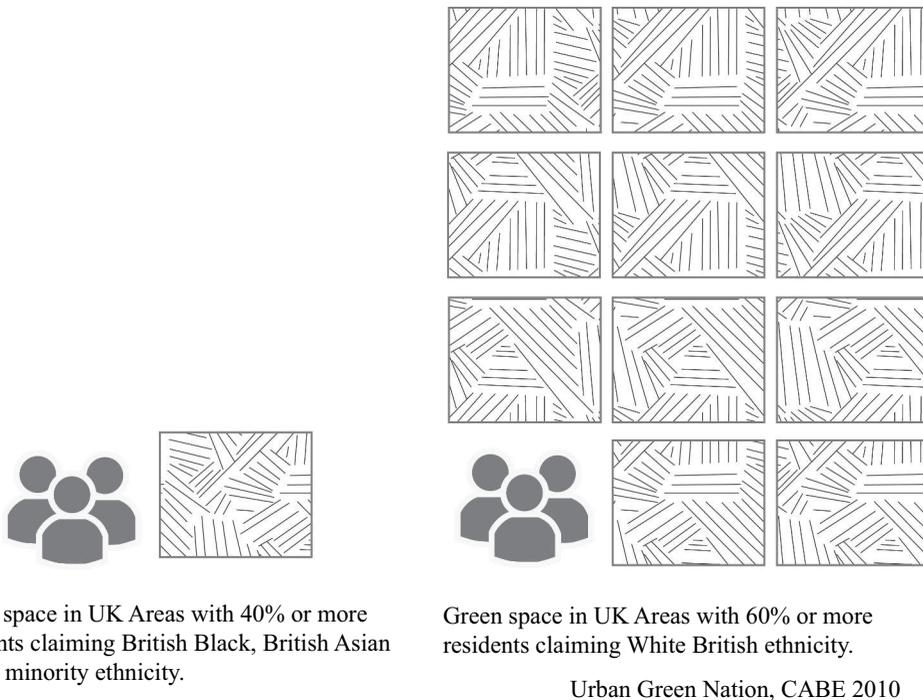
Urban Green Nation, CABE 2010

Figure 1. Variation in available greenspace for UK areas with greater than 40% residents claiming UKBAME, compared with available greenspace for areas with greater than 60% White British residents (CABE Space, 2010b).

Does everyone gain the same interactive benefits from "nature" in all configurations?

Placemakers in London (and other UK cities) interested in community views about greenspace designs will often hear from people who say, "I don't like nature" (Jorgensen, 2008). Sarah is a Hackney resident who said exactly this during the focus group research. She claims a Black British Caribbean ethnicity from the UK Census categories. She is, in her words, "not a 'nature' person." She doesn't find much to interest her in London's country parks or nature reserves. She describes a strong dislike for animals she associates with UK urban nature, especially rats, and foxes—which isn't irrational if we consider hygiene. She also doesn't enjoy isolation in large outdoor spaces, where she feels she may be unable to get help, where anything might happen, that her life may be threatened. Again, her aversion to this kind of experience is clearly linked to health preservation, a common factor for many women (Milligan, 2007). Sarah lives by Walthamstow Marshes (Figure 2), a marshland landscape which she doesn't find visually attractive, and feels is unsafe. She will take indirect routes to and from her home, just avoid this space at significant inconvenience to herself.

Walthamstow Marshes is an "ecocentric" site of Special Scientific Interest, part of London's Lea Valley Regional Park. It lies 2 miles north of the Olympic Park and just over 5 miles northeast of St Paul's Cathedral. It is valued and protected for its habitat and biodiversity.

Ecocentric greenspaces are those designed and/or managed to prioritize ecology over people. Typically grasses grow long, and are cut infrequently, other plants are rarely trimmed or trained. There tend to be few facilities, few surfaced paths, and very limited visual supervision. Depending on your point of view, ecocentric landscapes might be characterized as being full of either weeds or wildflowers.

In some social settings Sarah might be made to feel unusual for disliking this kind of space, or even be told she's got it wrong. In an East London focus group formed of women claiming the same UK Census ethnicity as Sarah, her view that Walthamstow Marshes was

Figure 2. Walthamstow Marshes, London, winter 2023.

Figure 3. The North Park, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, London, summer 2014 (year of opening).

uninteresting, unsafe, dirty, and unhygienic was enthusiastically supported by other participants. Several in the group expressed a view that the marshland and connected waterways didn't offer what they wanted from urban greenspace at all. There was little to do there apart from walking around, looking at a landscape holding little visual appeal for them. They were very familiar with the place, lived close by, had been taken there by schools, but were not attracted to it.

Walthamstow Marshes will certainly help defend air quality near Sarah's home, protects biodiversity, and helps regulate her neighborhood's temperature- it delivers many passive health benefits—but for Sarah, although its use is viable, it doesn't provide the interactive health benefits she seeks in greenspace. It holds no interest, she doesn't think it is attractive, being there induces stress, and visiting or picturing this place is not beneficial to her self-reported well-being. She doesn't like this configuration of nature, and she is far from alone in this.

For people with some forms of cultural capital (and an absence of fear), ecocentric greenspaces, and marginal urban spaces of "spontaneous" nature regeneration which resemble them, can evoke a specific sense of freedom. They can be valued through scientific, romantic, nostalgic, psychogeographic, or even "radical architectonic" lenses (Gandy, 2013). In landscape preference research, ecocentric greenspace is most frequently (though not exclusively) framed positively by participants claiming White Anglo-European ethnicities, and more negatively by research participants claiming a number of different minoritized ethnicities (Herzog et al., 2000; Hitchmough & Dunnett, 2008; Jorgensen, 2008; McEachan et al., 2018; Snaith, 2015; South et al., 2018; Van den Berg et al., 2007; Wolch & Byrne, 2009). Ecocentric landscapes, spontaneous and managed, are also found to have socio-culturally narrow user profiles, within and outside the UK, their audience dominated by people of White university educated backgrounds (Jorgensen, 2008; Van den Berg et al., 2007).

The Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is within 2 miles of all the East London focus groups informing this paper, in an area where in 2011 and in 2021 more than 55% of people claimed UKBAME. The ecocentric design style of its North Park (Figure 3) has won many

Figure 4. The South Park, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, London, summer 2014 (year of opening).

industry accolades and is widely promoted as the future direction for urban park design (LLDC, 2022). As described above, the visitor counts for the whole park shows 34% of users claim UKBAME backgrounds, however the more anthropocentric South Park (Figure 4) was found to attract an audience likely to claim close to catchment ethnic representation while the ecocentric North Park was found to have far greater underrepresentation of users likely to claim UKBAME and only half the number of users of South Park overall (Snaith, 2015).

What is "nature," and what kinds of nature engagement does research say are good for health?

Nature is a contested term (McNaghtan & Urry, 1998). The possibility of separation conceptual or otherwise between cultural and natural is increasingly challenged through recognition that in the Anthropocene the "human and nonhuman are always already entangled" (Srinivasan, 2019). We argue however, that in everyday use in the UK, popular understandings of nature still predominantly uphold a nature/culture duality (Birch et al., 2020). "In its commonest and most fundamental sense, the term 'nature' refers to everything which is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity" (Soper, 1995, p. 15).

We argue that this everyday understanding of "nature" differs substantially from how the term is used in academic research into nature's health benefits. Studies supporting nature's benefits to health include benefits derived from farming, gardening (Bragg & Atkins, 2016), highly mediated experiences in man-made environments, suburban landscapes, urban parks, potted plants, photographs, simulated skies, videos, paintings and even textiles (Grinde & Grindal Patil, 2009). Roger Ulrich's influential "View through a window" study defined a natural setting as a view including foliage from a small group of trees in the grounds of a suburban hospital. Impacts of the setting were only tested when trees were in leaf (Ulrich, 1984). Rachel and Stephen Kaplan's landscape preference studies (S. Kaplan, 1987; S. Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) described scenes as "natural" because they predominantly

contain plants, rather than buildings, but the plants can be obviously introduced and arranged by humans, include non-native species, and horticultural varieties that only exist through human action. The Kaplans claimed to provide evidence of a universal, instinctive, and biologically driven preference for "nature" but downplay evidence of learned rather than instinctive tastes, and cultural variation in landscape preferences (Herzog et al., 2000; R. Kaplan & Herbert, 1987; R. Kaplan & Talbot, 1988). Jorgensen (2011) describes a paradoxical position in such "scenic aesthetics" research, identifying preferences for both spectacular wildernesses, and for heavily maintained urban landscapes. There is no evidence in this work for a universal instinctive preference for ecocentric nature (Jorgensen, 2011).

The very broad definition of nature used in academic study readily allows for misunderstanding and misrepresentation of findings. Despite the variety of "natures" found to engender positive health outcomes, media imagery used when reporting such studies in the UK tends toward Anglo-European Romantic visions, and ecocentric scenes—nature as floral meadows, woods and mountains; away from other people and urban life; with little visible infrastructure to support use (BBC, 2021; Stoppard, 2020) privileging what we argue are dominant White British preferences for nature engagement.

Some might claim Sarah is "disconnected from nature" (Fletcher, 2017) because her preference for greenspace is generally for landscapes evidently produced or mediated by human action. However, Sarah enjoys many kinds of nature engagement compatible with academic use of the term. She relaxes often in her garden which she finds restorative, she found Niagara Falls beautiful, especially when lit at night, and she also enjoys the feel of wind on her face. All are versions of nature that academic research shows to be good for human health.

The kind of urban nature on offer matters for Sarah's health, and for the many who share her outlook. Disliked nature spaces are predictors of poorer health overall for people claiming some UK minority ethnicities (Roe et al., 2016), can induce fear (Milligan, 2007) and be harmful to "restoration" (Gaterslaben & Andrews, 2013). Sites of spontaneous urban nature (Gandy, 2016) have been shown to have measurable adverse impacts on mental health for some urban populations, adverse impacts that are remedied by their transformation to overtly managed landscape (South et al., 2018).

It may be that the culturally situated preferences and health impacts of different configurations of nature space are not being drawn out within professional placemaking contexts for instrumental reasons, because resources for investment in UK greenspace are dwindling (Nam & Dempsey, 2019), and advocacy is more persuasive when benefits appear to be derived by everyone (Hitchings, 2013).

As the example of London's Olympic Park shows, even when user counts demonstrate significant underrepresentation of much of the catchment population, and a failure to deliver benefits equitably to communities along ethnic lines, awards still follow (LLDC, 2022). It is professionally unproblematic for White university educated designers to prioritize their culturally situated preferences, to overlook, trivialize, denigrate, and even commend "educating out" alternate cultural preferences for nature engagement, for those who might aspire to more sociable, activated, or overtly horticultural landscapes (Hitchmough & Dunnett, 2008; Hopkins & Askew, 2012; Moore, 2014; Snaith, 2015).

Importantly however, our thematic analysis explores factors influencing use of greenspace by people claiming UKBAME beyond stylistic preference. While research shows

ecocentric landscape is negatively perceived by research participants claiming a variety of different minoritized ethnicities, this is not a universal finding for all participants or for all minoritized ethnicities. Across different focus groups included in our study, formed within different parts of London, we found all participants claiming British Asian Pakistani ethnicity spoke positively about ecocentric landscapes. They expressed a desire to visit local ecocentric spaces, including nearby nature reserves, as well as favorably describing trips to tourist destinations central to Romanticism (Williams, 1975) like the Lake District, Snowdonia, or the Swiss Alps. Their viewpoint was not generally shared by participants claiming British Asian Bangladeshi ethnicity, indicating support for the theoretical framework that heritage origin could inform aspects of cultural value and use of greenspaces (Hall, 2021). However, people claiming British Asian Pakistani identities are also under-represented in many ecocentric UK greenspaces, including Lea Valley marshes and the North Park of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (Snaith, 2015).

Our paper addresses this apparent contradiction between preference and use, and again shows how culturally situated White British preferences and practices are limiting greenspace access for people for reasons associated with religion and ethnicity, contrary to the Equality Act (UK Government, 2010).

Empirical fieldwork methods

We draw on two separate pieces of fieldwork, undertaken with communities in London in 2014 and 2017. Our primary research method is a thematic analysis of semi-structured and structured conversations with Londoners about greenspaces (Bryman, 2008). We have used transcripts from six East London focus groups brought together for a study completed in 2014. This is supplemented by thematically analyzed data from responses to open-ended questions from a published survey undertaken in Croydon (Tyrens UK, 2017). Both sources are part of larger studies.

From thematic analysis of 2014 focus group transcripts, we identify a model for understanding factors that can make a difference for who gains health benefits from a greenspace. We use the additional data from Croydon, to further support our claims for the model's wider applicability.

The methodology used in each case is described below.

East London focus groups

Between June and September 2018, we undertook thematic analysis (Bryman, 2008) of focus group transcripts from East London communities forming part of a mixed methods doctoral thesis (Snaith, 2015). The transcripts were from six focus groups, each composed of between 4 and 10 participants living in the catchment surrounding the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, East London. All were single gender. Five groups were composed of participants identifying as women, who either had children or grandchildren, one group was composed of participants identifying as young men. Most groups had a majority of participants claiming a UK Census ethno-racial category that might arguably represent a cultural background (Hall, 2021) and that comprised more than 10% of the population in electoral wards in the catchment area of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. In the Census, ethnic categories are

between two and ten words in length (Appendix A) but have been simplified here reflecting participants' claimed identity to: Black British Caribbean, British Asian Bangladeshi, British Asian Pakistani, and White British. Two groups had mixed composition by ethnicity—both mixed groups were comprised of people claiming the two British Asian ethnic groupings listed. One group of British Somalians was also convened, although this is not a Census category.

Our initial thematic analysis explored participants' discussion of healthy and appealing nature using word clouds, to communicate key words used most frequently. We had coded for what was good, and what was unappealing for participants claiming UKBAME, for references to safety, or perceived health benefit or disbenefit to try to explore what might be wanted beyond White British participants' desires for greenspaces. Some of the word clouds generated through this process are illustrated in Figures 5–7 and 9. Subsequent reflection on this primary analysis led us to identify the three key attributes, Viability, Interest and Healthfulness. These attributes then framed a further thematic analysis, collated by focus group and by participants' claimed ethnicity, described in detail below. In this second thematic analysis, all participants and groups are included. The number of individual contributions coded to specific themes was tabulated to provide a frequency, which is expressed as a simple percentage of all coded remarks within that group. The frequencies against each coding were compared across the different groups, and by participant ethnicity, to try to highlight the differences and similarities in discussions of park space across the groups.

Values range between 0% and 19% for remarks coded against any theme in any group, where 19% is the most frequent, and 0 indicates no remarks made in a particular group were coded under that theme.

Figure 5. Appealing nature for participants claiming Black, Asian and UK minority ethnicity (UKBAME). Word cloud generated from thematic analysis of East London focus groups.

Figure 6. Unappealing nature for participants claiming Black, Asian and UK minority ethnicity (UKBAME). Word cloud generated from thematic analysis of East London focus groups.

Figure 7. Interest in nature for participants claiming UKBAME. Word cloud generated from thematic analysis of East London focus groups.

Croydon parks survey

The Croydon data is from a face-to-face survey undertaken with 305 participants published in outputs from a professional landscape architecture consultancy and Equalities Impact Assessment for the London Borough of Croydon, in 2017 (Tyrens UK, 2017). More than 50% of residents of London Borough of Croydon claimed UKBAME identities in 2011, a proportion that had grown to over 60% in 2021 (ONS, 2022). The data has a larger sample than the focus groups, equal gender balance and was drawn from a wider range of ages, offering an opportunity to triangulate findings (Bryman, 2008) and to explore other aspects

of difference in need or preference in a different spatial context. The data represented is a thematic analysis (Bryman, 2008) of responses, with simple percentages illustrated for two open-ended questions. The report states the survey was conducted in retail centers and at transit stops as well as in a neighborhood park, so including people in the locality who may not frequently use the park, as well as its existing users.

Demographic information based on UK Census categories had been collected from participants who wished to provide it. In the report, claimed ethnicity has been combined and presented by three of the Census's "high level" (ONS, 2022) racializing categories Black ethnicities, White ethnicities, and Asian ethnicities. According to UK Census data at the time of the study, most people who claimed British Asian ethnicities living in this part of Croydon claimed British Asian Indian ethnicity, and the most claimed White ethnicity was White British. There were similar numbers of people claiming British African or British Caribbean ethnicities.

Including findings aggregated by the UK Census's racializing "high level" categories in a discussion of cultural preferences for nature, is open to the criticism of conflating "race" and "ethnicity" (Gomez, 1999). Acknowledging this valid limitation, the differences that emerged in aggregated views were, we felt, striking, and worthy of representation. We also believe the finding here indicates an area for further investigation.

Findings—nature, culture, and White privilege: Experiences of urban greenspace for people claiming different ethnicity, religion, and race in London

We find that participants' decisions to use, or not use urban greenspaces depend on the interplay of three attributes of greenspaces that emerged from thematic analysis: The first is its "Viability," whether it is feasible for them to visit the greenspace. The second attribute is its "Interest," whether the space offers the facilities or qualities preferred. The third is its perceived "Healthfulness," whether a visit to the space is conceived as likely to bring health benefit.

We discuss how perceptions and experience of these attributes of greenspaces vary in relation to participants claimed ethnic identity, religion, experiences of racism and other unequal social power relationships.

Viability

Viability themed remarks relate to whether participants consider it feasible to make use of a greenspace for social, religious, or cultural, reasons (will it risk any contravention of rules, doctrine, or morality), and for physical or logistical reasons (will it require travel, or have necessary infrastructure required to support use).

We coded transcripts within the theme of Viability under seven thematic sub-themes: Desired space (i) is available nearby, (ii) is available far, (iii) is not available; use is limited (iv) by dogs, (v) by users, (vi) by weather, (vii) by infrastructure.

For White British participants, a remark with coding "Desired space is available nearby" had a frequency of 19%, the highest frequency of any theme coded in the transcripts. Although all focus group participants lived within 10 minutes' walk of the Lea Valley Regional Park, there was significant variation in perceived viability of using its greenspaces for health and well-being. Viewed as Viable and high quality

by all White British participants, the Lea Valley was not seen as Viable, or was considered of low quality by most participants claiming another UK Census ethnicity.

Frequency of remarks under the coding "What I want is available nearby" for participants of other focus groups varied between 2% for participants claiming Black British Caribbean identity and 8% for participants claiming British Somalian identity.

All focus groups had remarks coded "Desired space is available far" to a similar frequency. This coding included memories of beautiful landscapes and experiences of nature on holiday, as well as visits to greenspaces within London which required travel.

Those claiming British Asian Pakistani, British Somali or British Asian Bangladeshi ethnicity, all of whom were of Muslim faith, made remarks which were coded "Desired space is not available" more frequently than participants claiming either Black British Caribbean or White British ethnicity.

The major limiting issue for most Muslim participants across different groups was potential for contact with dogs off the leash. In Sunni interpretation of Hadith, and in Shiite Orthodoxy there are religious reasons why contact with dogs should be avoided (Fortuny, 2014). One British Somali participant explained that for many Muslims, the saliva of a dog is considered unclean. If dogs sniffed or licked them, or their children, they were then required to wash their clothing seven times to be clean before praying. As prayers are called five times each day, unwanted interaction with dogs was a significant logistical issue. British Asian Pakistani participants in two geographically separated focus groups spoke very positively about "wild" or ecocentric spaces for their scenic quality, and the potential for interaction with UK wildlife, however, park regulations for all ecocentric greenspace known by these participants permitted seemingly unlimited dog exercise off the leash, reducing Viability on grounds of religion.

Placemaking "best practice" advocacy (Woolley & Lowe, 2013) for removal of railings around children's play areas was reducing Viability within neighborhood greenspaces too. The participants had welcomed railings as providing some protection against unleashed dogs. A fuller exploration of the impact of dogs on the experience of greenspace for many participants claiming UKBAME is below.

Some limitation of use from other users' attitudes or behaviors was coded under Viability. This included user behaviors that might be characterized as "off putting" but not frightening. Frightening encounters were coded under the theme of Healthfulness.

Limitations described by participants under this Viability coding varied, including: social stigma for one young man wanting to enjoy flowers; suspicion directed toward adult males remaining near children's play spaces; concerns expressed about other park users swearing, drinking too much, or behaving "immodestly" in space shared with impressionable children; a feeling that the particular green space (North Park at the Olympic Park) was "too poshy," and therefore unlikely to welcome the noisy or boisterous group activity that this participant enjoyed in urban parks.

Muslim participants had the highest frequency of remarks coded under "Viability: use limited by users," with British Somalians coding frequency being 13% and other participants claiming UKBAME coding frequency between 5% and 7%. For participants claiming White British ethnicity the coding was only 1%. These topics of discussion were often followed in groups with Muslim participants by a wish for nearby regulated or controlled access garden-like spaces, where there might be no dogs, where there would be wardens,

and where there would be regulation of behavior, or occasionally some opportunity for single gender activity outside.

Weather was raised as a factor limiting Viability of greenspace use most frequently by Black British Caribbean participants (4%). Season had some limiting impact for British Somalian and British Asian Bangladeshi participants, but weather wasn't mentioned as a total barrier to use by either British Asian Pakistani or White British participants.

Inadequate infrastructure needed to support use, such as surfaced paths, sociable seating, or fencing on play areas was not raised by White British participants but was allocated coding frequencies of between 2% (British Somalian) and 7% (Black British Caribbean) in the other groups.

Interest

Interest relates to whether the greenspace offers the uses or attractions a potential user might seek. The idea that different styles of greenspace design and management hold interest for people with different characteristics has been explored above and elsewhere (CABE Space, 2010a; Rishbeth, 2004; Roe et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2018). Within the focus groups, two noticeable divergences in the characteristics of interesting spaces were observed between participants' claiming White British ethnicity, and discussions in other groups.

For the White British participants "scenic quality" of landscapes as a point of Interest was coded at a relative frequency of 12%, twice the relative frequency for British Asian Pakistanis, and three times more frequently than for British Somalians, supporting claims of naturalized ocularcentrism, prioritizing views and scenery in Anglo-European nature engagement practices (Macpherson, 2017). Interest in "expansive space," where participants made references to seeking or enjoying spaces that felt very large and remote from urban or town life, was coded to a noticeably higher relative frequency in the group of White British participants than for participants in other groups. This offers support to our claim that media imagery accompanying reporting of nature's benefits for health privileges greenspace preferences of White British people.

The coding "Exercise self" was much more frequent in discussions with participants claiming Black British Caribbean and White British ethnicities than for other groups. A limitation for the Muslim women who "covered" when using mixed gender public spaces meant any use for exercise was less Viable for these participants on religious grounds, and discussion of exercise outside, which included female participants' experiences of cycling and playing basketball, often led into comments coded in Viability under "Desired space is not available."

The other key Interests in using greenspace were broadly similar across all the groups, with "Children's activity" being the most frequently coded Interest, alongside relaxing/ enjoying time with family and friends. Activities and interests were used in our preliminary thematic analysis to generate the word cloud, illustrated in Figure 7.

Survey information gathered in Croydon provides additional evidence of some socio-cultural variation in Interest. Findings are illustrated in Figure 8. The figure uses a spider diagram representative of the percentage of respondents from the overall total of participants in that group, who provided answers to the question "What do you like a lot and what do you do in your favorite parks?" The first answer given by participants was coded into seven thematic headings: (i) walk, (ii) walk the dog, (iii)
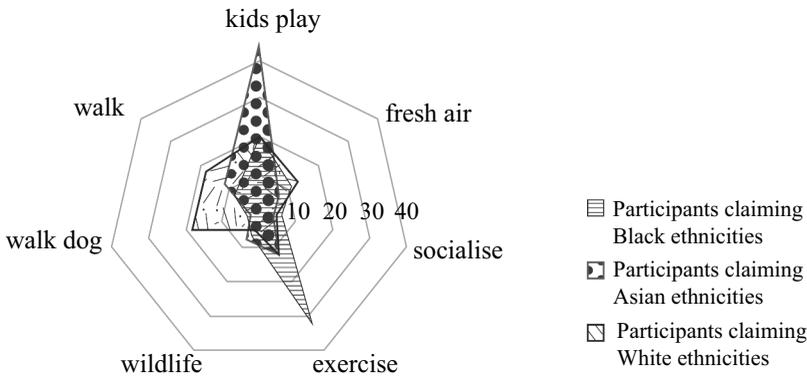
Figure 8. Reason to go to Croydon's parks: Relative weightings, for participants claiming Black ethnicities (Black British 26, Black British African 18, Black British Caribbean 28), Asian ethnicities (British Asian 13, British Asian Indian 8, British Asian Bangladeshi 1, other Asian ethnicity 1), White ethnicities (White British 33, White Irish 5, White other 14) Croydon, 2017.
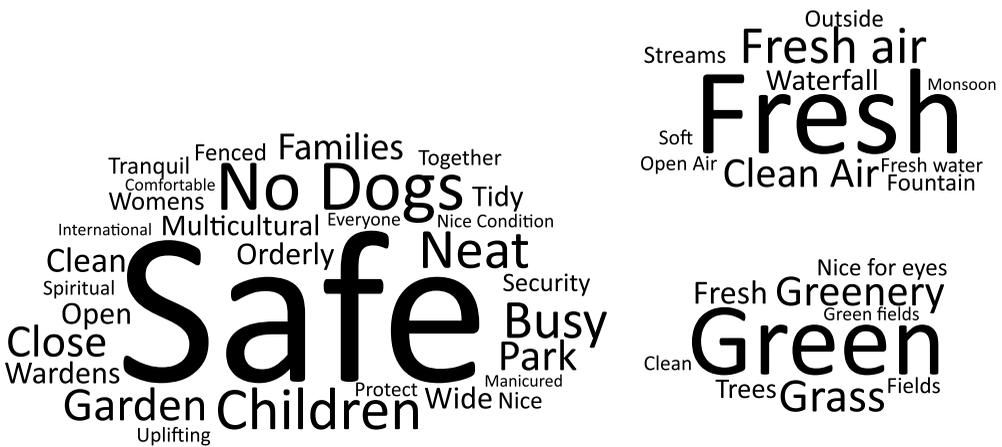

Figure 9. Healthful nature for participants claiming UKBAME. Word clouds generated from thematic analysis of East London focus groups.

fresh air, (iv) socialize, (v) kid's play, (vi) exercise (a category for responses that included reference to sports or fitness activities, other than walking), (vii) wildlife (responses that include reference to wanting to engage with or view plants and flowers as well as animals, birds, and insects).

The findings in Croydon show some similarity across all participants. For example, irrespective of how participants are racialized, very similar percentages of participants visit parks hoping to engage with "wildlife"—plants, flowers, birds, or other non-domesticated animals. We believe this adds to evidence that "disconnection from nature" is not correlated with ethnicity, and not influencing decisions to use or not use park spaces (Birch et al., 2020).

There are also differences that emerge in the primary Interest of participants, when responses are distributed by the racializing "high level" Census ethnicities (ONS, 2022).

The most frequent reason for park visits for participants claiming Asian ethnicities is for children's play, with 45% of respondents providing this as their main reason for park visits. The next most frequent answer for participants claiming Asian ethnicities was either to walk, or to exercise (12%). For participants claiming a White ethnicity, children's play was also the most frequent reason to visit a park, provided by 20% of respondents, but walking (18%) and walking the dog (18%) were almost equally frequent. For participants claiming Black ethnicities, the most frequent answer coding given was exercise, at 32% of respondents, followed by visiting for children's play at 20%. It is notable how few participants in Croydon racialized as either Black or Asian through their choice of Census-derived ethnic identity were visiting parks to walk dogs (3% and 2% respectively), though this was one of the most frequent reasons for participants racialized as White to visit Croydon's parks.

These emergent patterns may indicate perhaps the practices considered most legitimate, most motivating, or most expressive of an identity, when individuals make use of Croydon's public greenspace for leisure. Survey data does not tell us why we found what we did. The data sample illustrated is not very large, and intersectionality, particularly with age had an impact (the sample of participants claiming Black ethnicities was generally younger). However, the pattern of responses across near one thousand participants reported from face-to-face surveys across six parks in Croydon in the wider masterplan study were found to echo these findings (Croydon Council, 2017).

These results indicate that provision of infrastructure, and the management of space in support of different interests is likely to influence how appealing any greenspace might be, and how frequently particular audiences might use it. A space with few or no formal play facilities is likely to be less frequently visited than one with a varied play offer by those participants who go to greenspaces for children's play. A greenspace that offers limited infrastructure, one without surfaced paths for example, would not support some interests well, for example if your preference were for a wheeled activity like skating, scooting, or cycling, which works better on surfaced paths. It would however be well suited to walking or walking dogs, the primary interests most often claimed in our survey by participants racialized as White through their choice of Census-derived ethnic identity.

Healthfulness

The "healthfulness" of a greenspace relates to potential user's perception of whether it will be beneficial, or harmful to their health or well-being. The East London focus groups' discussions were coded for 12 attributes of a greenspace's perceived Healthfulness, some were positive, some negative: (i) danger from animals, (ii) danger of personal harm from people, (iii) danger of harm to children, (iv) risk of injury from place or plants, (iv) good visibility and sightlines, (v) green, fresh or refreshing, (vi) clean, (vii) brown or dead vegetation, (viii) dirty or unhygienic, (ix) highly maintained, (x) protected or regulated.

Comments coded as "danger from animals" included fear of stinging insects, concerns for disease carried by for example rats, pigeons and foxes, and fear of attack by dogs. Unleashed dogs were feared by several participants and many participants' children were frightened by dogs too. Danger from animals was most frequently mentioned in the Black British Caribbean focus group, but there were comments coded under this theme by participants in all groups, except the group of participants claiming White British ethnicity.

The group of White British participants made few comments that were coded in any category under Healthfulness, and two of the three codes under which remarks were recorded had to be raised by the facilitator using prompts for discussion. Comments that arose through spontaneous discussion for White British participants coded under Healthfulness were all related to fear of "personal harm" from other people in park space —these female participants had all experienced fear of personal attack when alone in what felt like unregulated greenspaces.

All groups made some remarks coded under "Good visibility and sightlines," connecting good visibility and safety in London's outdoor space, supporting findings regarding configurations of nature that fail to be restorative and induce fear (Gaterslaben & Andrews, 2013; Milligan, 2007). These comments were often made in connection with remarks coded "danger of harm" either to participants, or to their children. The group of participants claiming White British ethnicity had no comments coded regarding their children's safety, where in other groups many participants expressed concern for children's health: from cars, from physical attack by other young people, of child abduction or sexually motivated assault. Participants who claimed British Asian Bangladeshi ethnicity made more comments coded "harm to children" than other participants, with a frequency of 5% of coded remarks. Concern for child abduction was frequently connected to dislike of spaces, including play spaces, with poor visibility from tall or dense vegetation. White British participants constructed the experience of tall vegetation in play space as providing the opportunity for children to explore, a view echoed in "best practice" guidance by advocates for natural play (Royal Horticultural Society, 2019). Three women in a mixed group with participants who claimed either British Asian Pakistani or British Asian Bangladeshi ethnic identity discussed exploration as the design concept for a play space close to them in Three Mills Park, but these parents were very conflicted between concern for child safety and their children's opportunity for exploration there.

British Asian Bangladeshi and British Asian Pakistani participants made the most frequent references to finding greater regulation of park space beneficial for well-being, for example by the presence of wardens, or gate controls on entry, as at formal outdoor centers or children's play parks. Other comments coded under "protected or regulated" included participants' favoring adult supervision for children's use of outdoor spaces, even those spaces immediately on the doorstep outside the home.

British Asian Bangladeshi and British Asian Pakistani participants reported they did not feel able to influence behavior of other people in their neighborhoods or in most greenspaces, who were generally represented as outside of their social sphere. There were several discussions of purposeful physical and verbal attacks on them or their children by other users in parks and streets near their homes, and many representations of racism or xenophobia impacting on participants' use of space. Some participants talked about preferring spaces that were more "international" where they felt greater cultural variation was accepted. Participants of color and especially Muslim participants of color described being criticized for their clothing, being accused of being terrorists or benefit (welfare) cheats as they moved around the city and being stared at and whispered about in the countryside. As one participant describes, her everyday experiences outside the home were tainted by

prejudice, "I think that's what it is for me. I go anywhere and anywhere, just people hating Muslims."

Linked to these conversations by British Asian Bangladeshi participants was a frequent reference to "highly maintained" landscapes and more overtly horticultural style as being more beneficial for well-being. Seven percent of remarks by participants claiming this ethnicity were coded under the "highly maintained" theme, but no participants from other ethnicities made any remarks coded under it. Figure 9 illustrates word clouds derived from thematic analysis for aspects of greenspace coded as healthful from discussion by participants claiming UKBAME in the focus groups. There were frequent references to the importance of greenness and freshness as desirable healthful attributes of the best park spaces by British Asian Bangladeshi participants, an attribute that was described as absent in winter landscapes where vegetation was described as brown or dead. Two participants who claimed British Asian Bangladeshi ethnicity in separate groups said they did not like nature. One referred to an image of an ecocentric wildflower meadow as recalling a depressing derelict site near his home which he strongly disliked. CABE's Community Green study's finding that participants claiming British Asian Bangladeshi ethnicity did not agree with participants of other ethnicities about park quality in a mixed ethnicity group they formed to "objectively" assess the quality of greenspaces (CABE Space, 2010a) may indicate the strongly held and distinctive views about greenspace we found expressed by people claiming this ethnicity in our focus groups might be culturally situated, and more widely shared. The difference in perception of Healthful attractive greenspace between British Asian Bangladeshi participants and British Asian Pakistani participants in the groups was marked, resulting in some strong disagreement in the East London mixed ethnicity focus groups.

Unleashed dogs and White privilege in London's greenspaces

Concern over unleashed dogs and dog fouling in London's greenspaces was an issue for some members of all groups. For most of the Muslim participants, remarks were coded under Viability, due to religious restriction on contact (Fortuny, 2014). For others, who feared dogs or who did not want to encounter dog feces, remarks were coded under Healthfulness.

British Asian Pakistani participants took family walks or cycle rides in nearby country park spaces on the edge of Epping Forest, but their enjoyment was severely constrained by the large numbers of uncontrolled dogs, and the amount of dog waste they encountered.

A British Somali participant described how constant interaction with dogs off the leash had removed all her enjoyment of London parks, "I do go to the park. I don't like it, but I do go, for my kids. They need to go. They need to be physically active, exercise and fresh air. I wouldn't enjoy it though."

The lack of dog controls in East London's Victoria Park (Figure 10) was also cited as the major limiting factor for its use by all Muslim participants in the focus groups. Only the children's play areas, at the heart of Victoria Park have any restrictions on access or requirement for leash control of dogs (Tower Hamlets Council, 2022). Muslim participants in four different focus groups recounted very stressful experiences in Victoria Park involving unwanted interaction with dogs off the leash. One participant described going to Victoria Park as "like going to hell."

Figure 10. Victoria Park, London, winter 2023.

Victoria Park is a large 213-acre (86-hectare) park, opened in the 19th century, managed by London Borough of Tower Hamlets. In UK Census 2011, the most frequent ethnicity claimed in Tower Hamlets wards adjacent to Victoria Park was British Asian Bangladeshi, and more than 50% of residents in those wards claimed Muslim religion. The ward level statistics from the 2021 Census are not yet available, but at Borough level, the numbers of people claiming British Asian Bangladeshi ethnicity grew from over 81,000 in 2011, to over 107,000 in 2021, while numbers of people claiming White British ethnicity fell from 79,000 to 71,000 over the same time period. Muslim remains the most frequent religious identity claimed in the Borough by a large margin.

Victoria Park was and is a Green Flag award-winning park. Green Flag awards are intended to reward parks that are "equally accessible to all" with "appropriate provision for the community" (Green Flag Award, 2022).

Representations from these focus group participants indicate a significant section of the community may feel excluded from using this greenspace through inequitable management decisions, and user statistics show significant underrepresentation of UKBAME users relative to the park catchment (Snaith, 2015). In the Croydon survey (Tyrens UK, 2017) participants were asked if there was anything they disliked about Croydon's parks, and in a follow-up question whether they would be put off from visiting because of this dislike. Dog feces were identified most frequently by participants of all ethnic groups as their top dislike, but participants who claimed Black ethnicities were more than twice as likely to say they would be put-off from visiting a park by their dislike compared with participants claiming White ethnicities. Dog ownership and walking the dog were found in Croydon to be most frequently associated with a White ethnic identity.

A failure of public bodies in London to provide appropriate greenspaces for people of all religions, and ethnicities in publicly funded parks appears to contravene the requirements of the UK Equality Act (UK Government, 2010). That these parks can win accolades for inclusion like Green Flag awards, when so many of the surrounding population are poorly served by them is hard to understand as anything other than White privilege, an unequal

environment produced by "naturalized" spatial practices of the socially dominant group (Pulido, 2000, 2015).

Towards equitable nature spaces for health: Recommendations for policy, management, and design

In this paper, we have argued structural Whiteness in UK placemaking is resulting in failure to recognize the cultural content of "nature" and greenspaces. UK placemakers are failing to respond to identifiable differences in Viability, Interest, and perceived Healthfulness of greenspace for people claiming UKBAME. Inequality is sustained by design or management, even in "best practice" exemplars and greenspaces awarded for inclusive practice.

Cultural, subcultural, or other social group effects on behavior and belief are not universal; however, we find evidence that some ethnic identities included in the UK Census may map onto cultural differences in ways that include beliefs about family, public space, and society, about how people best interact with nature and greenspace. Our findings indicate cultural differences are influencing how people understand and can benefit from urban greenspace. Subcultural expressions of identity, for example youth cultures, will also impact on preferred activity in public spaces. Religion influences our views on acceptable practices, and behaviors. Demographic factors, such as how we are racialized can influence collective experiences and individual encounters in public space. All these influences intersect. We are not seeking to essentialize individuals, but are concerned with addressing disadvantage, and recognizing variation in need or preference, in ways that reasonably could, and should according to UK law, be responded to in terms of policy, design and management of spaces in public ownership and control.

We have argued everyday understandings of nature in the UK still uphold a nature/culture dichotomy, and that ecocentric and Romantic landscape is widely represented as intrinsically valuable and healthful leisure space. People whose nature engagement preferences are for more horticultural or sociable experiences in alternate configurations of nature are framed as "disconnected," somehow failing.

Solutions proposed arising from "disconnection" narratives often aim to stimulate Interest by increasing familiarity or understanding of valorized nature spaces, particularly through supported access for children and young people. Policies intended to influence children could be interpreted as an effort to undermine values that parents might seek to instill. An equalities perspective requires recognizing and valuing difference and providing equitably in ways that respond to it (Agyeman & Erickson, 2012).

Action to increase use through addressing Interest alone is not enough, as the Interest in ecocentric spaces shown by our British Pakistani participants illustrates, because Interest will interact with Viability and perceived Healthfulness to determine use.

Where greenspace Interest exists, but perceived Viability and Healthfulness is limited, for example by experiences of racism, supported access can be beneficial (Cronin de Chavez et al., 2019). Supported access through collective action, for example through the work of groups such as "Black Girls Hike" can provide shared confidence for people to enjoy greenspaces.

Where Viability and perceived Healthfulness are in place, adding infrastructure that widens Interest can transform user demography (Roberts et al., 2018). The word cloud in

Figure 5 illustrates the likely appeal for people claiming UKBAME of greenspace that allows for relaxing with family, and food. These activities were popular with all participants and may be accommodated in gardens of private homes where space allows, but for many Londoners in small homes lacking gardens, such social events can only be accommodated affordably in public outdoor spaces. The "Day Field" managed by Newham Council at Debden House, Epping Forest is a mown, dog-controlled field, within a publicly managed camping ground set in statutorily protected biodiverse mature woodland. It is accessible by public transport from across London and served by public toilet facilities shared with the adjacent camping fields. In this warden regulated and well-maintained space, the local authority provides barbecue stands that day visitors can pay to drive a car right up to, where friends and family can join them, picnic all day and play music in a safe, green, ecologically rich natural setting. The Day Field provides visibly greater diversity in its user demography than other parts of the forest.

At Burgess Park in South London, and in the East Village at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, free-to-use picnic spaces with barbecue stands and drop off vehicle access near public transport, provide facilities for sociable gatherings, adjacent to ecocentric meadow areas. In good weather, these again are visibly well-used attractions for people likely to claim White and UKBAME, who stay and enjoy friendship or family interaction and contact with nature for extended periods of time.

For the most Viable spaces close to home, we have been able to identify several design and management factors influencing Interest and perceived Healthfulness and therefore use, through focus groups and survey findings above. In many parks, there is little infrastructure to support Interest beyond taking a walk. There is diminishing provision of horticultural variety, a feature that has been linked to increased self-reported well-being (Wood et al., 2018). Often sport facilities require payment, likely to limit use for people with lower incomes most, affecting many who claim UKBAME through structural inequality. Even with constrained budgets, public bodies could do more to target intervention across a strategic portfolio of parks, using tools like Equalities Impact Assessment and catchment population data to identify gaps in provision (Snaith, 2018).

Perceived Healthfulness of Viable greenspace in London is widely impacted through under-provision of dog-free or dog-controlled areas, and trends to remove fencing from urban park play spaces are reducing protection from dogs still further.

At the North Park in London's Olympic Park, there are dog controls, good supervision by parks staff, well maintained (if ecocentric) planting, surfaced paths, and formal play facilities. Our findings highlighted that stylistically North Park might appeal to more people living nearby who claim British Asian Pakistani ethnicity, yet the audience for this space is far from representative, as discussed. The importance of visibility across play spaces to perceived Healthfulness, especially for the East London participants claiming British Asian ethnicities, may be of importance here. The Croydon survey found that for British Asian participants, children's play was the most important reason to visit a park. The playground in the North Park offers limited visibility due to planting design, with no seats that have good visibility across any distance. In the South Park, where visibility across play space is good, and seating strategically located, a user profile more representative of catchment demography is evident (Snaith, 2015).

Co-design and participative design processes have been shown to support increased use of greenspaces by groups that have been previously under-represented (Roberts et al., 2018).

Meaningful engagement means working with potential users to identify their preferences and being open to diverse thinking. Commissioning diverse organizations to lead engagement activity, especially those already working in a locality, can widen participant demography. Covering participants' expenses can result in more inclusive participation than expecting residents to take part solely through any perceived value for them in what they might gain.

The Croydon study (Tyrens UK, 2017) from which survey information was drawn shows the value of engaging with people beyond the boundaries of greenspaces being investigated in reaching people for whom the existing management or design is insufficient. Tracking whether representative participation has been part of policy development and being able to disaggregate data associated with any protected characteristic is key to ensuring that diversity in need is not overlooked—we note for example the differences between British Asian Bangladeshi, and British Asian Pakistani participants' preferences for greenspace expressed in the focus groups, that might have been missed under a single British Asian category.

Placemakers can also cater for different needs and preferences in smaller scale planting for urban spaces: street trees, vertical greening, green roofs, balcony or garden spaces for horticulture, courtyards and outdoor rooms can and should prioritize diversity.

There is no "one size fits all" of healthy nature, and our cultural framing of nature, whether we see weeds or wildflowers, will in part influence the benefit we find there. Cultural differences in the Viability, Interest and perceived Healthfulness of greenspaces exist, and this must be recognized and responded to in policymaking, in design and management. Human variation should be as significant for spatial designers, policymakers or managers, as other aspects of specificity of place.

Ultimately, we must seek cultural and demographic diversity in placemaking professions, and resist deferring to White privilege or locating fault with marginalized people, if we truly want to ensure equitable access to healthy nature for diverse urban populations.

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Appendix A. UK Census ethnicity

"Since 1991, the census for England and Wales has included a question about ethnic group. The ethnic group question has two stages. Firstly, a person identifies through one of the five … high-level ethnic groups … Secondly, a person identifies through one of the 19 available response options, which include categories with write-in response options" (ONS, 2022).

UK Census High Level Ethnic Groups	UK Census 19 Ethnic Response Options
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	
	Bangladeshi
	Chinese
	Indian
	Pakistani
	Other Asian
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	
	African
	Caribbean
	Other Black
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	
	White and Asian
	White and Black African
	White and Black Caribbean
	Other Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups
White	
	English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British
	Irish
	Gypsy or Irish Traveler
	Roma
	Other White
Other ethnic group	
	Arab
	Any other ethnic group

(ONS, 2022).