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Imagining the urban other: Place, abjection, and public views of risk

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Abstract
This paper examines the relationship between individual feelings of aversion, fear, and disgust of city spaces and broader systems of cognitive urban zoning. We analyze interviews conducted in four distinct urban areas of Ottawa, Canada, working with an open-ended method to learn about how urban individuals understand the concept of "risk." We identify fear of crime as a central risk perceived by the respondents and observe how they construct boundaries between themselves and perceived "risky" zones, occurrences, and bodies. Drawing from Kristeva's theory of abjection, we trace a semiotic system of Othering in the respondents' narratives, examining the symbolic cleansing that occurs when respondents attempt to differentiate themselves from what they perceive as encroaching Otherness. With focus on claims about four distinct neighbourhoods, we argue that risk in the city is configured through physical and imaginative mobilities, through which inhabitants construct boundaries and attempts to cleanse or purify "risky" spaces. We conclude that the sense of abjection and/or the experience of aversion is a way that fear is mapped onto cities. This research shows how city spaces are zoned through fear-based semiotic systems. We also raise questions about the relationship between these semiotic systems and actual tangible threats in these spaces.

Keywords: risk; cities; abjection; emotions; self; place attachment

Résumé
Cet article examine la relation entre les sentiments individuels d'aversion, de peur et de dégoût des espaces urbains et les systèmes de zonage urbain cognitif. Nous analysons des entretiens menés dans quatre zones urbaines distinctes d'Ottawa (Canada) en utilisant une méthodologie ouverte pour enquêter sur la façon dont les citadins comprennent le concept de « risque ». Nous identifions la peur du crime comme un risque central perçu par les répondants et observons comment ils établissent des périmètres entre eux et les zones, évènement et corps perçus comme « à risque ». En nous inspirant de la théorie de l'abjection de Kristeva, nous retraçons un système sémiotique d'altérité dans les récits des répondants, examinant le 'nettoyage symbolique' qui se produit lorsque les répondants tentent de se différencier de ce qu'ils perçoivent comme une altérité envahissante. En nous concentrant sur les revendications concernant quatre quartiers distincts, nous soutenons que le risque dans la ville est configuré à travers des mobilités physiques et imaginatives, à traves lesquelles les habitants construisent des périmètres et tentent de nettoyer ou de purifier des espaces « à risque ». Nous concluons que le sentiment d'abjection et/ou l'expérience de l'aversion est une façon dont la peur est cartographiée sur les villes. Cette recherche montre comment les espaces urbains sont zonés

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à travers des systèmes sémiotiques fondés sur la peur. Nous soulevons également des questions sur la relation entre ces systèmes sémiotiques et les menaces tangibles réelles dans ces espaces

Mots-clés : perception du risque; Ottawa; sens des lieux; attachement à un lieu; abjection

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Introduction

Fear of crime is a central topic in both urban studies and criminology. Much fear of crime literature has stressed the importance of moving toward local, nuanced understandings of the everyday role of fear of crime (Francis et al. 2017; Girling, Loader, and Sparks 2000). Researchers are also developing a more refined understanding of public reactions to deviance and crime by comparing these transgressions to other risks like disease and economic loss (Krulichová 2019; Tulloch and Lupton 2003), and by looking at the networks of media and lay communication that shape public perceptions of deviance (Armbrost 2017; Pain and Smith 2016). These developments push the fear of crime literature into conversation with other disciplines such as communications studies and cultural studies, opening up a broader toolkit of concepts including risk and mobilities.

Contributing to academic work on fear of crime and risk in the city, we analyze interviews conducted with people living in four neighbourhoods of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, to explore how they use mutable risk heuristics to construct themselves and the places they live in comparison to Other people and places in the city. We interview individuals from four distinct neighbourhoods or urban zones in Ottawa, Ontario, exploring how risk can be mapped onto an urban space and the way that emotional responses and understandings of zones, occurrences, people, and even objects, can contribute to this system. To assess how these knowledges are formed, it is necessary to understand the multiple ways that people learn about urban risk (Lupton and Tulloch 2002) and how spatial dimensions of urban living impact this knowledge. Notably, human perception of risk in cities often arises from a combination of political narratives, which Pain (2000) calls "fear discourses," individual experiences, cultural identity, experiences of sex and gender, spatial location within the city, and media influences.

Wilton (1998) notes that people define themselves in relation to what they interpret as 'their place' and their attachment to that place. Place attachment entails not only identification with place but a corresponding construction of risky urban places (Tulumello 2015; Watson 2013). Moving around shapes how people understand risk. Yet media also informs the way people comprehend many zones of the city, including places only a few blocks away (Jones and Dantzler 2021). Physical mobility and imaginative mobility (e.g. media, political narratives) can transform individual understandings of certain areas of the city (Skelton 2013). Access to and the proliferation of imaginative mobility (media with televisual or textual capacity, but also gossip and rumours) shapes senses of risk and also contributes to systems of understanding that label certain spaces as abject and "Other." Working from an understanding of city spaces being mapped this way—through media representations, word-of-mouth, and both physical and imaginative mobility, as well as their basis within existing social hierarchies—we analyze interviews, unpacking the ways risk is conceptualized on an individual level, so as to contribute to an understanding of the systems of urban zoning at play. The point of this method it to integrate previously researched understandings of place attachment, risk perception, and mobilities to explore how physical and imaginative mobilities influence processes of self and group formation in cities, and how these processes contribute to a shared urban understanding of "risky" and "safe" spaces.

Conducting a qualitative study on risk perception and place attachment hinges on an assessment of the feeling of fear. This kind of analysis can be complicated by the fact that people define fear differently, as well as the fact that some individuals may be more willing to admit to feelings of fear based on socialization factors including gender, culture, class, and race (Madriz 1997, 43–44). Esther Madriz (1997, 43) questions the complexity of defining fear, writing: "is it concern, worry, awareness, preoccupation, disquietude, apprehension, panic, terror? Do these emotions reflect different levels or dimensions of fear?" In our study, we work with an open-ended understanding of fear as a process that includes a multitude of similar, yet distinct emotions. We focus on feelings of aversion or disgust, that serve to "Other" certain urban spaces and people, while at the same time drawing opposing borders around those people and spaces who are considered "safe," "clean" and "trustworthy." Our choice to focus on this emotion arose

from a process of questioning participants about "risk" and "fear," after which we noticed that longer narratives discussed by participants hinged on aversion or disgust.

Theoretically, we decided it would be fruitful to put these narratives in conversation with Julia Kristeva's (1982) work on abjection, to understand how these individual emotional reactions may perpetuate systems of urban Othering. Though we conducted our analysis with a sense of certain systems of Othering that we might find—including racist and classist boundaries that tend to be drawn between certain areas—we analyzed the interviews systematically, identifying instances of aversion or disgust and then reading them to identify exactly how Othering, and how attaching the self in place occurs in these instances. Gold and Revill (2003) suggest that structural inequalities, unequal power distribution and disputes over territory results in a process of Othering that renders "fear as an arena of conflict" that should be conceived "as an activity, practice and process, rather than an object" (p. 34). Working with this definition of fear as an "arena of conflict" and as a process rather than a fixed emotional state, we explore instances where participants suggest relationships to risk and fear that hinge on aversion and disgust, working to explore how these emotions erect boundaries between certain zones and groups.

Research has suggested that senses of danger have been projected from white affluent communities onto poor, Non-white communities, which has contributed to both conceptual mapping of cities (nature of media reporting in certain areas) as well as phenomena such as over-policing in majority Black and Indigenous neighbourhoods and "white flight" from city centres to suburbs (Stjohn and Healdmoore 1995). In our analysis of findings, we remain grounded in an understanding of the broader system of city zoning inflicted by white communities and white media outlets onto people of colour and their communities. At the same time, we explore the individual emotions and reactions of participants in our study, particularly as they relate to aversion and disgust, suggesting that a process of abjecting occurs on many levels and within many communities, contributing to a language of "danger" and "risk" that appears strikingly similar across age, gender, race, and class lines.

Tracing this system of urban abjecting, we asked whether systems of whiteness, colonial logic, and patriarchy were reflected in statements about personal safety or comfort by urban individuals. We found that participants in all the neighbourhoods, regardless of identity factors, conceived of risk as an "Other" that crept up around them. Similarly, both individuals from affluent and lower-income neighbourhoods attributed risk to certain spaces and occurrences, including underpasses, walkways, needles, "hooligans" and sex workers. A few times, white participants made disparaging comments about race and belonging. However, the majority of the time negative assumptions about the presence of racialized people in certain urban spaces was replaced by discussions of items and occurrences that are considered "undesirable." Throughout our analysis we trace a "semiotic risk language" that tends not to be explicitly racialized, but which is imbued with racialized and gendered assumptions about individuals and city life. What our research contributes to previous works on fear, risk, and cities, is an analysis of the way individual feelings of aversion contribute to broad systems of cognitive urban zoning based on colonial and patriarchal ideologies, and the way this zoning is articulated through a language-system about "unsavoury" objects, occurrences, and characters.

First, we define the concepts of place attachment, mobilities, risk and abjection. After a note on research methods, we analyze interviews in relation to our participants' senses of physical and imaginative mobilities (their own, and that of others). Then, we demonstrate the relevance Kristeva's theory of abjection in the ways people talk about attachment to places and their desire not to be associated with Others. In the discussion, we assess what this research means for literatures on fear of crime, place attachment, and risk.

Literature review and conceptual framework

Place attachment and risk perception in the city

Many authors have argued the self cannot be separated from attachment to certain places (Pollini 2005; Stedman 2003; Gustafson 2001; Hummon 1992). Place attachment and where people feel safe is influenced by the physical landscape and social semiotics of place (Stedman 2003). We understand place as a multitude of intersecting areas, including the city as a whole, separate neighbourhoods within the city, and distinct locations within neighbourhoods. As Gustafson (2001, 668) suggests, place can range significantly in scale, from "rooms, home settings, and neighbourhoods to nations or even continents (p. 668)." The home plays a key role in respondent attachment to place, as do specific areas that respondents observe within their communities (Lupton and Tulloch 2001). A sense of attachment to place might come from a relationship to a house or other material objects, and can be mediated by temporal-biographical life stage, gender, ability, and race.

A significant factor impacting place attachment is perception of risk. Risk sometimes causes people to feel tense in areas that they are otherwise attached, other times (especially when the risk is considered distant) it affirms their attachments to "safe" places. In urban settings, where we focus our study, risk perception is deeply related to notions of crime (Girling et al. 2000), formed by decades of national discourse about crime prevention, policing, and by the general suburbanization of Canadian cities. Risk perception refers to judgments people make when they evaluate any potentially hazardous activity. The experience of risk is always subjectively constructed (Walklate 1999), but is also informed by broader systems that forward associations between certain bodies/spaces and risk (Lupton and Tulloch 2002).

When people talk about 'crime' they are often referring to place and their attachment to that place as well as a broader sense of risk (Francis et al. 2017; Chadee et al. 2007; Girling et al. 2000). In talk about crime, there is a link between place and the prospect of incurring harm. People will endure risk because of attachment to and a desire to stay in a place (Billing 2006). The attachment to some area derives from emotions involved in associating the self with a specific place. In our study, respondents inferred a complex relationship between risk, place attachment, and mobility. This is reflected in literature on movement and place in the city. Using a roots/routes model, Gustafon (2001) complicates prior assumptions that place attachment occurs only in spaces of permanent residence (p. 668), suggesting that in an increasingly mobile society, "temporary forms of mobility (e.g. travel for leisure or work) should also be considered" when discussing place attachment. Though previous models have seen mobility and attachment as mutually exclusive, Gustafson suggests that an important aspect of place is the way people move through Cartesian space and 'make a place of it' through experience. Incorporating this "routes" sense of place helps us theorize the way that mobility plays a key role in place attachments in the modern city. Physical mobility refers to moving through place physically, as in perambulating to a park or crossing a border. People also move through the world imaginatively, which refers to being transported elsewhere through representations, which can include media as well as word of mouth (Szerszynski and Urry 2006, 126). Media representations of place are a key means by which neighbourhoods become Othered or known as crime objects (Girling et al. 2000, 11). Together, imaginative and physical mobilities converge to reveal how society cognitively maps urban spaces.

Abject places and abjection

Kristeva (1982) posits that the abject and abjection, generally referring to what is repulsive or the experience of being repulsed, is a key component of subjectivity-formation. She shows how the self cannot fully distinguish itself from other subjects and objects, as it depends on them for mental and material life. However, the recognition of hybridity of self with other subjects disturbs self-identity and symbolic boundaries. Abjection is a process of expulsion that both forms and disturbs identity, by drawing attention to the necessity of the Other to construct the self. What is abject is placed in a permanent state of expulsion that simultaneously constructs the self and threatens its borders. Kristeva writes, "what is abject . . . the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (p. 2). This process not only throws the boundaries of the self and Other into question but creates the perception of vulnerability by blurring inside and outside. Abjection is both the disavowal of the Other and an acknowledgment of its constant threat to "one's own and clean self" (p. 65).

Ritual purification of the abject is a mechanism of self-formation that occurs on systemic and geographic levels. Who or what becomes experienced as abject is contingent on dominant cultural codes (Monahan 2017; Wilton 1998) as well as on location. Certain areas in cities and those who inhabit those areas come to be constituted as abject through processes of self and group formation in relation to place (Tulumello 2015). In this framework, just as the self is imagined as clean, the Other is imagined as dirty and dangerous. Homeless and drug-reliant bodies but also alleys and tent cities are often treated in this way (Gerrard and Farrugia 2015), as abject and to be avoided.

We employ Kristeva's sense of the abject to further explore our respondents' understanding of city geographies by drawing borders between self and Other, and to theorize the semiotics of urban abjection and crime that urban dwellers employ when discussing risk and safety. Constructing the self, in Kristeva's theory, can only happen through a process of expelling the Other. In some cases, individuals in our study were only separated from people, spaces, and occurrences that they considered abject by the walls of their homes, however even these small distances contributed to a trend of drawing boundaries between safe and "Othered" spaces. Kristeva uses the language of "clean" and "dirty" to discuss abjection, and we acknowledge that when applied to urban zoning, this language certainly draws upon racist associations between non-white populations (in Canada, specifically Indigenous people) and abjection or dirtiness. Kristeva's word choice illuminates the way that these archaic associations continue to proliferate through

society—albeit in different terms. Perceptions of urban risk, both individual and systemic, are conceived in terms of "dirtiness" and "uncleanness," which, now being articulated through de-racialized language (which we will later explore in depth), actually reinscribes racist zoning of cities. This separation between the "dirty" and the "clean" can occur, we suggest, at both an individual and a group level, and within affluent, impoverished, white, and non-white communities, though it is generally projected from economically and racially advantaged communities onto others. The purpose of this reading is not to place pre-determined understandings of systemic Othering onto respondent stories, but to ask whether individual senses of risk are consistent with these systems, which we conclude, they are. We then consider the identity factors of our participants to see whether abjecting occurs in a variety of levels within a number of different urban communities. Navigating our conclusions about these personal reactions and their implications, we conclude that a semi-consistent language of risk and fear is visible. Whether this language is a result of or a determiner of media and systemic representations of certain zones remains in question. The purpose of employing Kristeva's theory is to interrogate the way Othering occurs on an individual level, rather than to prove the existence of urban Othering (which we are assuming exists, and is imbued with assumptions about race, gender, and belonging).

Methodological considerations

This research was conducted in Ottawa, Ontario, the capital city of Canada. With a population of almost 1,300,000 when the entire metropolitan census area is accounted for, Ottawa is located approximately 400 km northeast of Toronto and 200 km southwest of Montreal. Like other capital cities, there is a large civil servant presence in Ottawa, and a thriving tourism sector. The Parliament buildings, a popular tourist attraction, overlook downtown and are visible from many points in the city as well as from across the river in Gatineau, Quebec. Ottawa is a bilingual city, with Francophone communities more congregated in the eastern and northern segments of the city, and Anglophones congregated more in the suburbs of the south and west. This examination is an illustrative case study. An illustrative case study allows for one site or city to be explored in more depth and does not exclude comparison to other sites or cities. This research also occurred before the trucker convoy of 2022, which clearly deserves academic attention in the risk and fear of crime genre of research. Of the 21 interview respondents, 12 identified as women and nine identified as men. Four identified as Indigenous, one identified as Black, and the remainder (16) identified as white. The mean age was 41, and all had at least a grade 12 education. Four respondents had children, and nine respondents had partners. Three identified as queer, and nine identified as religious. Given our focus on economic divides in the city, it is notable that only four of the participants reported having a known joint family income of over $55,000 per year. From this, and the fact that only five of the nine participants identified as non-white, we build our analysis with an understanding that the majority of the participants are from white, working class backgrounds.

The different areas in Ottawa in which the first author conducted interviews (Old Ottawa South, Glebe, Centretown and Vanier) are proximate, covering 24 km^2 in total. The Glebe and Old Ottawa South are posh and expensive areas of the city to live, while Centertown and Vanier are problematized due to higher rates of poverty, though this is slowly changing due to gentrification (see Figure #1). #1 is the area of the Glebe and Old Ottawa South, #2 Centertown, #3 refers to Rideau Street and the Rideau Centre, and #4 to Vanier. Rideau and Vanier are areas problematized in local media for being 'grungy' and undesirable.

The research used open-ended interviews with participants to investigate their reactions to risk, defined as perceived sources of possible harm. The open-ended approach affirmed the prominence of narratives related to crime as signifiers of risk for urban individuals. We investigated: 1. Which risks do people decide are important to them, and how do they decide this? 2. What institutional and cultural forces influence peoples' understandings of risk? 3. What are the ties among risks, fear, and place? During interviews, when we asked respondents about what risks they are aware of, we often received replies that were hypothetical. Respondents often said "I know a lot of people are scared of X or Y". Since we are interested in people's narratives about their own lives, we maneuvered the interviews toward articulated experiences, away from secondhand stories. We prompted them to discuss their own lives by asking "when was the last time you felt worried, could be about anything". The personal stories they shared, and the meanings that these events had for the respondents, were often tied to particular places. We identified prominent narratives within each interview that could be investigated to uncover how respondents understood fear and risk. After identifying these prominent narratives, we conducted close readings and had discussions about their meanings as well as the type of theory that might be best applied to them. A qualitative approach of this kind runs the risk of not representing the

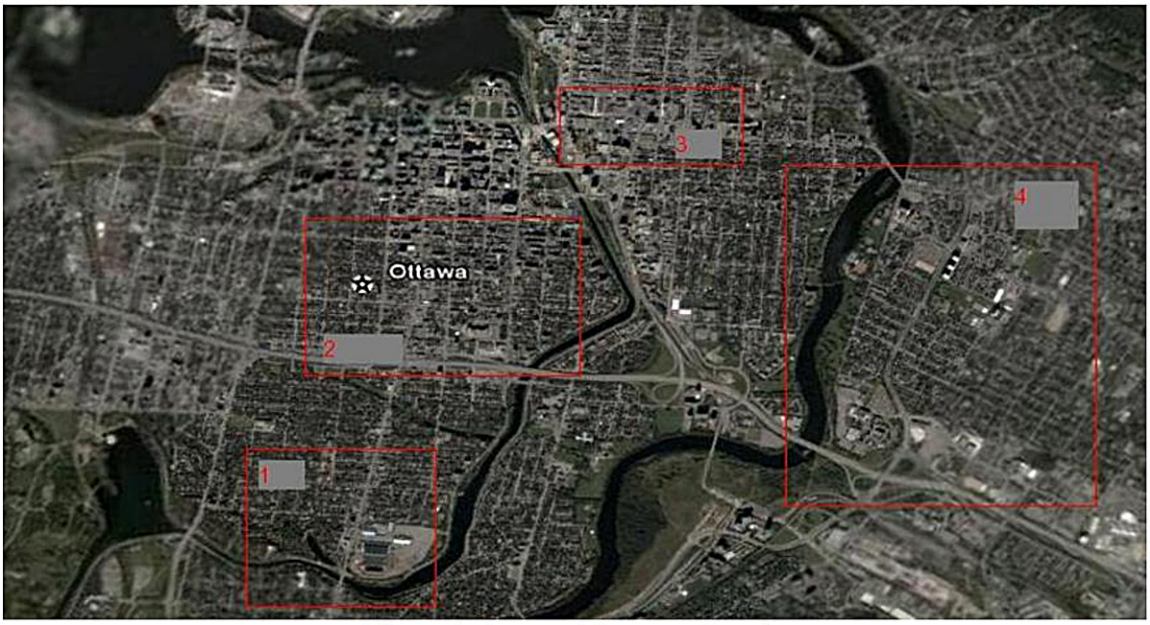

Figure 1
Areas of Ottawa, Canada

body of participants and their experiences equally. Still, as we discuss in the conclusion, there are several components of this study that deserve further quantitative and/or qualitative research.

Findings and analysis

Place attachment

As Billig (2006) puts it, place attachment is always emotional for the subjects who share attachment to that place. Place attachment in any city usually involves regard for a home, a neighbourhood and/or a particular set of people who a subject interacts with. Experiences of security and vulnerability usually occur at a bodily level when defending a sense of self or home (Wilton 1998). One respondent spoke about how her apartment made her feel secure, which lead to a level of attachment despite it being small and largely uncomfortable.

> L: I do not like my apartment much because it is small. In this current apartment and in the previous one I have not felt that comfortable in my own home. I am not sure why. But I also tend to feel a sense of security there, especially coming back to it at supper time, I stay in during the evening unless I have things to do. I look forward to getting back, even though I do not like the apartment much. It is in some ways a haven. Being in my own home makes me feel secure.

A sense of home is only one dimension of place. This next respondent became attached to her current place of living after years of moving around because of the range of services provided in a short distance:

> INTERVIEWER: How do you feel living in the Golden Triangle [the south eastern part of Centretown]?
>
> V: This area, I like it. It is quiet, it is nice. I have gotten to know a few close friends. I know them. They are female. I stick with them. I like it a lot. I am close to everything. I am diabetic and have osteoarthritis so I have a hard time getting around. But I come here to the park a lot and just sit here, especially in the summer time, just sit here, go to the diner or the coffee shop. This is by far the best I have lived in. I have moved around a lot, because of boyfriends. This is the best of all. I find it is quiet. I am close to everything. Churches, eateries, bars. I have lived in Vanier, lower town, the west end, Hull, Aylmer, Bank

street, almost everywhere.

In this quote, place attachment is connected to physical mobility. The subject's feeling of being-in-place in the Golden Triangle is contingent on comparisons she has made after living in other neighbourhoods. More than the part of the city, it is her building and relations there that help:

> INTERVIEWER: What is it like in your building?
>
> V: It is pretty cool. It is quiet. I get along with everyone. There are a lot of activities. We sit in the lounge, the women and some older men, and we talk about our grandkids or the next activity we will do. They have been pretty supportive for me. I came back and I had the cracked rib and they came to the door and helped me, went to get me groceries at the store, bringing me little meals cause I am diabetic, they are a great gang. It is the best building I have lived in. Everyone watches out for each other. I have had days when I sat and cried, not even knowing what it is about, and they are there, they do not even need to know what happened they are just there for me.

This next respondent felt secure and attached to Old Ottawa South and the Glebe because it is the only place she had ever lived until moving away from home:

> M: I thought it was great. I love Old Ottawa South. Lived with my folks. When I was younger, I did not feel any risk. I felt really comfortable.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Walking around at night?
>
> M: I am not very nervous around here at night. I am not usually alone when I walk around at night, which has something to do with it. If I am alone I go from A to B and it turns out fine.

This person felt discomfort when she moved down to the Golden Triangle, despite living right beside the police station there: "M: It is all the bars and drunk people and you never know what they are going to do." Her comments illustrate that movement, though affirming and enlightening in some cases (as with respondent V), can also cause discomfort. Moving from neighbourhoods traditionally characterized as safe (like Old Ottawa South and the Glebe) to ones that are considered less safe (like the Golden Triangle) can create uncomfortable proximities to spaces, individuals, and occurrences that are commonly considered dangerous. The way she points to "bars and drunk people" as a synonym for crime shows how when borders are transgressed and people move between spaces with varying degrees of comfort, they often contribute to and validate systems of Othering.

Place attachment and risk perception

Perception of risk in the city is pervasive, though who or what is constituted as the risk depends on many factors. As mentioned, the perception of risk is generally related to the uneasy experience of physically moving through the city and specific temporalities (also see Brand et al. 2015), as this next narrative of a young woman who lived in Centreville demonstrates:

> C: Even tonight, when I was walking back from my parents' house to here. I was cutting through the church. It is very dark, and not usually a lot of people. There was this one guy who was behind me. I caught myself looking over my shoulder, just to see how close the person was getting to me… I find that I am constantly looking around, watching, before I open the door to my apartment, looking around. … At the same time, I wish I did not have to be. I wish I could just walk home and not worry about the person who is walking close behind me.

There is a gendered dimension to these experiences of walking in the city (Loukaitou-Sideris 2006; Pain 2001; Koskela 1997) impacting how people map or understand risky city spaces. Attachment to place acts as a comparative measure for judging other parts of the city and assessing whether they are risky or not. These assessments can

sometimes be grounded in real crime statistics and rates, but also often result from a fear of the unknown. In this sense, some respondents who lived in stereotypically unsafe areas like Centretown, expressed feelings of safety and attachment to areas that others considered to be unsafe. This phenomenon is complicated by the fact that although citizens often have a generalized understanding of where neighborhoods borders lie, there are not necessarily strict lines between zones, and some cover large spaces with several different areas within them. Centretown, for example, is large, with many blocks some people might never venture to. Some individuals who venture through it have a different sense of place and risk in certain parts of it than others, despite living geographically nearby. This respondent lived close to a park approximately in the middle of Centretown, far from the Golden Triangle:

> G: Up Sommerset. I like it. But there is a park by my place, it fills up with certain people, I call them hooligans. The hooligans are shit-disturbers. You get a lot of these hooligans, who sit in the park, and as soon as the beer store opens they start drinking in the park. Panhandling, you can only make so much money, but they end up spending it on beer. These guys, they drink one or two, and then they turn into bastards, harass people. … And last year you started to get the police coming in on bicycles, so they can sneak in from all angles, and the other thing, I started calling the police too because it was getting out of hand. A different group of people started to come in there. These new people, I call them crackerjacks, crackheads, they started coming in, and they are really fighting and I found syringes in the park. … I found more syringes near the end of the summer being thrown on the ground, and that is when it changed from the heavy alcoholics to the crackheads.

Notably, the respondent does not directly problematize the park itself. He enjoys the park and wants to spend more time there. Instead, it is the mobility, and the unpredictability of the "hooligans," that seems to initiate respondent G's distasteful response, and his perception of them as others. It is his own physical mobility that allows him to encounter these individuals, and makes it possible for him to consider certain activities, including drinking, panhandling, and presumably hard drug use, risky. Evidently, mobility can both contribute to feelings of differentiation between the self and others, and also it can elicit feelings of fear (especially when it is the others who are mobile). Later in the interview the respondent spoke of his own history with drugs and alcohol, and so likely the way he others the "hooligans" has something to do with his own experiences. In light of Kristeva's theory of abjection, wherein the self must repel what is other to sediment a sense of "one's own clean self" (p. 53), this response is fascinating. This respondent's constitution of the Others as abject is partially because their behaviour is contiguous to his own past. As Kristeva writes, "from its place of banishment the abject does not cease challenging its master" (p. 2), positing abjection as a state that must be constantly controlled and regulated. In the case of Respondent V, experiencing this encounter with individuals who likely represent something from his past compels him to regulate his environment and reach out to police, in an attempt to "purify" the area. Even though the respondent's intention was not to problematize the park itself, this process of abjection results in a general attribution of fear and unsafety to this space.

Another respondent also living in Centertown reported being disturbed by the park. This respondent, also a middle-aged white male like respondent G, had a similar narrative to report:

> P: We moved down here four years ago, and it was something we did not really notice at that time. But in the last few years there are burnt spoons, teaspoons on the street. Our apartment balcony faces onto the back of a parking lot and at night time the hookers try to use it as a place to work. But they also use it to hit up, smoke up. Sometimes when I go out the backdoor to work in the morning, last summer I would be up early for work, there are occasionally syringes and stuff in the parking lot. That is not cool if you step on it. It bothers me because I am a neat person and I do not like when people throw stuff out on the street.

In this case, the presence of what the respondent considers abject objects and individuals—burnt spoons, syringes, and "hookers"—disrupts his sense of self and place, forcing him to confront his own interrelatedness with those subjects and objects. For Innes (2004, 341), "physical and social disorders only rarely pose an objective threat to security. Rather, their significance lies in how they encode messages about levels of unwanted risk and social control in an area". Other than the one mention of harassment by respondent G (which is a general statement rather than a specific experience), the indicators of risk that both of these respondents identify are marked as abject objects simply

for existing, rather than for their direct impact on the subjects. Substance abuse, as one marker of crime, leaves traces of uncleanliness on city spaces, in the form of garbage, syringes, cans etc. Although respondent P did mention fear of stepping on a needle, both respondents emphasized discomfort with the visual uncleanliness in these public spaces over any actual physical threat. Respondent P immediately referred back to his own personal qualities ("I am a neat person") as a way of indicating his separation, and differentiation from the "unsafe" factors he was discussing. There is a disconnect in the way that these individuals understood questions about "risk," responding with an emphasis on the self in comparison to others, and with thoughts about visual uncleanliness. This tells us that repulsion, though not always directly related to the feeling of fear, is deeply encoded in cultural assumptions about safety and risk. Rather than emphasizing real dangers or fears, these respondents discussed gross or repulsive objects/occurrences, which seemed more threatening to their senses of self/self-perceptions than to their persons on any physical level.

Another respondent, making a comparison between Ottawa and London (UK), drew a direct connection between the maintenance of public spaces and the safety of a city:

> S: People tend to look after the area more here. In the UK, there is more graffiti, more run down homes, more squatters, derelict buildings, there is no police presence, you do not see police walking around or in their cars, whereas you see police here all the time, a lot of police… You walk in a more protective and huddled way. You do not engage in talk on the streets or the buses. Especially where I lived in the east end of London, it is common to be knifed for absolutely no reason. That could be the case here but I am not aware of it, and people are not as defensive here as they would be in London.

Graffiti, run-down homes, squatters, and derelict buildings all earn their place in the semiotic language of urban abjection that individuals employ to ascertain risk levels. Respondent S, who identified as a woman, also brings up the police, suggesting that their presence induces feelings of safety. According to this logic, indicators of urban abjection designate crime, while cleanliness and police mean safety. These associations are constructs, and they vary from person-to-person. However, stereotypical associations between "gross" urban environments and fear, and between police and safety, proliferated through the dominant logic of the participants of this study. We recognize that with a qualitative analysis, especially with respondents who are majority white (14 out of the 18 participants identified as White) the scope of identifying this this trend is limited. The BIPOC participants did not express the same sentiments about police and safety. However, the BIPOC participants, some living in lower income neighbourhoods, articulated logics of abjection and urban cleanliness when asked about risk and fear that were consistent with the white participants. We find this consistency indicative of a system of urban zoning in which individuals—both near and far to sources of perceived risk—are enrolled in and contribute to shoring up preconceived ideas about safety and danger.

Abject places and risk

Word of mouth heuristics of risk are common communicators of risk, perhaps even more common than mass media (El-Zein et al. 2006; Chadee and Ditton 2005). The media coverage and narrative proliferation about certain "high-risk" spaces contributes to the development of semiotic languages of risk, and broad systemic understandings of those places as abject. The main place in the city that respondents perceived as risky was Vanier. For some, this perception was based on physical experiences such as living in it or passing through it. Others had experienced it only imaginatively, however, all had a congruent sense of the space as undesirable and ridden with crime. One respondent, a middle-aged Indigenous woman, who had lived in Vanier explained:

> V: Vanier. It is wicked and bad. Drug dealers, on Montreal road, hookers all over. You sit outside … on a bench, and a hooker will come up and say 'excuse me bitch, you are in my territory, go hook at the end of the road'. And I say 'excuse me bitch, I may not look all that great but I am not a hooker girl. Do not go there'. Dealers at night, dealing right on the road, lots of fights. Big drug deals. Beatings. I have seen hookers getting beaten by pimps, and drug deals, and one person ratting another person out cause they would not do cocaine with them, it is awful. I wish it would all just stop.

Another respondent, a young white woman, who had been there over a decade described:

> J: I do not like Vanier. I grew up in this city. It is where people who first arrive go because rents are cheaper. So there is a lot of immigrants. It is also an area where there has always been a lot of crime. I had a friend who lived in Vanier and she would tell me that she would find needles, that there are prostitutes around on the corners. It is a place where you do not feel comfortable. I would not go there, not at night. I know the housing projects because my sister lived in one. I do not even like going in there during the day.

As with the respondents who described the park in Centretown, these respondents drew on common signifiers for crime, including prostitution, drug deals, abuse, and needles on the ground. Respondent V's comments are unique insofar as she describes witnessing instances of actual violence ("I have seen hookers getting beaten up by pimps" and "lots of fights") and seems to express concern about these incidents. Respondent J, on the other hand, makes a vague disparaging comment about immigrants, and describes "prostitutes" as though they are objects, equivalently distasteful to look at as the needles on the ground.

There are obvious distinctions between the way these two respondents discussed Vanier, which likely have to do with their racial positioning. However, what remains consistent about these comments is the respondents' impetus to separate themselves from what they perceive as the otherness around them. Respondent V's story of mistaken identity (being mistaken for a sex worker) and her adamant assertion that "I am not a hooker girl. Do not go there" is especially interesting, illustrating how individuals existing within abject spaces also make efforts to distinguish themselves from their surroundings. Although respondent V is possibly sympathetic to the situation that the sex workers in Vanier are in, the idea that she is one of them is something that is repulsive to her, that she must reject in order to maintain a firm sense of her own safety and identity. This is similar to Respondent G's comments about the park in Centre Town, indicating that the needles, which reminded himself of his own past that involved substance abuse, were threatening items, encroaching on the clean identity that he had been creating for himself. In the case of respondent V, the "hooker" who mistook her for another sex-worker on her territory, is the encroaching identity. Signifiers of the abject are not dangerous based on the real harms they could inflict, but instead because of what they may say about the self. Even respondents who lived in these upmost "abject" neighbourhoods in the Ottawa were engaged in extensive attempts to distinguish themselves from their surroundings. In these efforts of distinguishing, the language of urban abjection is developed and actualized.

One respondent indicated awareness of the symbolic nature of risk associations. When asked about the Rideau market, another highly problematized space in Ottawa, he responded:

> L: A lot of rough characters, a lot of down and outs, it seems very scuzzie. I have to go to the Rideau Centre or places around there sometimes and I really do not like going to that area just for the atmosphere. I do not feel a sense of threat but I do not like seeing people hanging around who are having problems or dealing drugs or are acting in an obnoxious way. I like to keep my mind more positive. That drags me down. But I have not had a personal negative experience in that area.

Respondent L exposes the way that moments of urban distaste might actually indicate deeper contingent relationship between human emotions their surroundings. Being surrounded by the urban abject causes this respondent to feel dragged down—or as Kristeva would say, it "draws [him] toward the place where meaning collapses" (p. 2). In Kristeva's theory, abjection is not simply an object, but is "something rejected from which one does not part" (p. 4). Abjection has historically been associated with a number of things, including vomit, corpses, and as Kristeva writes, "what disturbs identity, system, order." However, here we are focused on the state of expulsion as an inherent part of urban zoning. Kristeva writes, "there are lives not sustained by desire, as desire is always for object. Such lives are based on exclusion" (p. 6). We can extrapolate and say that there are systems of othering that are not defined by desire, but by exclusion. This may seem obvious, however, exploring the way that individuals contribute to building an urban semiotics of abjection, we can see how principles of exclusion and repulsion are essential for urban individuals to maintain a sense of their "own and clean self" (p. 53).

Another important insight that arises from the application of this framework to urban risk assessments, is the idea that risk, and the urban abject, are simultaneously undesirable and also necessary for understanding the self and

opposing ideals of safety and health. As Kristeva writes, abjection "does not radically cut off the subject from that which threatens it" (p. 9) but rather that "abjection is above all ambiguity" (p. 9). Abjection describes the experience of the collapse of meaning, when the self fears the Other within. Cleansing the abject is never complete, not from syringes, "hookers," or "hooligans;" these occurrences and objects—or better yet—symbols, remain necessary for systems that delineate "goodness," safety, and health. What we aim to show with this analysis is that "abjecting" is constantly happening, and the urban abject is frequently being located by city dwellers as a way to understand their place in the city. While doing this, citizens are involved in an expulsion of certain individuals and occurrences that are seen as undesirable. The semiotic indicators of risk are not necessarily dangerous in their own right but are dangerous insofar as they challenge normative understandings of personhood, safety, and health. What is important about our application of Kristeva's theory to these interviews, then, is the symbolic and emotional nature of abjection, which draws attention to the way that city zoning and the othering hinges on establishing associations between selfhood and cleanliness or "rightness", rather than senses of risk and fear that are necessarily justified. Like abjection, fear and risk are symbolic. As England and Simon (2010) write, "personal, emotional paths of individuals" contribute to the establishment of "fear discourses," and to the maintenance of boundaries between "deviance and belonging, order and disorder that are instrumental to the ways in which cities are built" (p. 204).

Imaginative mobility, and specifically imaginative aversion, indicates the pressing and potent way that "fear discourses" impact citizens and the way they, in turn, project stereotypical and uninformed senses of certain zones. Respondent X, a middle-aged white woman, had never been to Vanier, but expressed her firm disinterest in this area just the same:

> INTERVIEWER: What is it about Vanier?
>
> X: It is just that there is not much there to interest me. You do hear about violence and stuff like that. I would not consider myself afraid. I would just prefer not to go there.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Where do you hear about those things?
>
> X: I hear about it in the *Ottawa Citizen*. Drug raids and street violence. It is not a lot. It is not New York. But for Ottawa that is where I would have the most concern.

Having never physically travelled to Vanier, the respondent instead had acquired information about it through the major city newspaper and friends.

Another respondent, a middle aged white man, discussed the Rideau mall in The Market area primarily in terms of imaginative mobility and without direct experience:

> B: Through media I have been made aware of certain parts of town. An unsafe part of town is the market after a certain hour. The wee hours of the morning seem to be problematic down there. That is an area of town I go to but I tend not to be down there during the night… Rideau street, it would probably be a less than comfortable place at certain hours of the day, by reputation.

Despite not having any consistent contact with the Rideau area or any people from there, the respondent constitutes the area as problematic. These distanced responses almost read as more objective, rational, and detached than the responses by individuals who do or have lived in Vanier or other problematized city spaces. Though we are arguing that abjection elicits an emotionally charged response, it is possible that the salience of this emotion is diluted by distance. Abjection is likely an experience that is more common for individuals living in or physically interacting with problematized zones, drawing boundaries between the self and the abject Other that seems to be encroaching. The detached disinterest expressed by wealthier, white individuals (who live in Centretown) is possibly a re-iteration of the initial points of contact we drew attention to earlier, synthesized through imaginative mobilities. Here we show the way that "fear discourses" are formed, the ways they are propelled, and the ways they persist. Next, we examine how they become imbued with profiling and racial assumptions.

Fear and social hierarchies

We have so far explored how the respondents living in problematized areas assessed certain occurrences, objects, and people as part of a cannon of urban abjection including syringes, people panhandling, sex workers, and derelict buildings, and how this language is adopted by distanced/detached individuals who propel these systems of urban zoning. However, an important point remains, which is that these semiotics of urban abjection are conceived in human terms, based on existing social hierarchies. Assumptions about both gender and race are essential to the way this language about risk and aversion has developed.

One male respondent, who does not feel unsafe in the Glebe, expressed fear for his female partner, whom he considered to be more at risk:

> J: I cannot think of a situation where I felt unsafe in the Glebe. I am male so I do not tend to worry about being attacked. My girlfriend who lives with me here some of the time, she is living in Sudbury a bit this year, she will not go running alone on the canal, or will try to avoid it, especially at night, but for myself I do not feel threatened by anything in the Glebe at all.

His perception of security in the Glebe was mediated by gender position, which involved altruistic fear (Warr 1992) for his partner when she was running on the canal paths. Another respondent, a woman, expressed worry about bike paths, explaining:

> S: The only place I would be careful about is cycling along the cycling paths. The thing I have been told is that the murder of that young woman took place on one of the more remote cycle paths, so I would be cautious of that. So when I go cycling I go with someone and avoid going alone.

Secluded cycling paths and the underpass near the Rideau Centre came up as suspicious places, and more dangerous for women than for men. Through imaginative mobility, such as media and word-of-mouth, certain zones such as underpasses and cycling paths become canonized as dangerous for women specifically, but more broadly for anyone who is not a cisgender man.

Risk and abjection are also conceived in racial terms. In North America the abject is often perceived as non-white (Stjohn and Healdmoore 1995). One respondent, who is an Indigenous woman, worked in Vanier told us Vanier is known as "the Little Reserve". "There are a lot of Aboriginal people in Vanier and a lot of stereotypes get associated with that area," she told us, adding: "it is the stereotypes around Vanier that make it seem so risky". Another respondent, a white woman from Old Ottawa South, who had been to a popular theatre in the area decoded a sense of danger based on racial assumptions:

> J: I went down to By-Towne theatre, and I walked in behind the theatre, we were parking my daughter's car, and there was a spot in there that reminded me of a New York ghetto. I felt totally unwelcome. As we walked through I do not think there was anyone who was in there who was white. There was garbage everywhere. I felt unsafe there. I think part of it is that at my age, because I will be 60, I know you have to judge by what people see. 'There is an old woman, let's take her down,' or something like that. That is why I felt unsafe. Not because I thought less of the people around there, I just thought that is what they would see me as. They perceive me, immediately, as a target.

Like the syringes, run-down buildings, and in this case, garbage, this respondent perceives the 'non-white' faces to be a semiotic indicator of risk. Her comments also raise ideas about the way that discourses around gender and race intersect in conversations about safety.

This respondent believes that because of her age and her race she will stand out and be perceived as a target in the area surrounding the By-Towne theatre. Her observations here are indicative of long-standing assumptions about the purity of white femininity, and of people of colour (specifically men of colour) as threats (Pain 2001; Stjohn and Healdmoore 1995). The respondent's sense of self is challenged by the presence of people who appear unlike her, and she responds by conceiving of them as threats. As in our discussion of urban othering and "abjecting," this respondent draws a boundary between herself and perceived others to maintain firm grounding in her own sense of self. Here, people of colour are constituted as the abject group, which is not something that happens by chance, but according to

pre-existing systems of white supremacy. As much as urban abjection can be traced in terms of individual reactions to "gross" objects, like needles, it has its roots in repulsion or aversion towards subjugated groups including BIPOC, gender diverse persons, and sex workers. The "semiotics" we have traced could be called avoidance tactics, in which people place blame for fear on objects, while (sometimes barely) disguising their racism, sexism, and classism. In other ways, the objects themselves do truly become problematized, and start to play into the system as a whole, in which root causes become nebulous, but aversion and expulsion remain distinct and clear.

Though aversion to certain neighbourhood and zones sometimes stems directly from cases of victimization, more often than not it is based on a sense of someone's place in a social hierarchy and their resulting relationship to a temporal-geographic community (Girling et al. 2000, 84; Krulichová 2019), as seen with respondent J. Language about risk and fear is often formed through the terms of protecting women, and in particular, white women. Because of the way risk is racialized, zones like underpasses and cycling passes, where potential "random" attacks could occur become general problematized in the urban psyche as high-risk zones. The artificiality of this system of zoning becomes clear through tangible conversations about risks, such as the risk of gender-based violence. For individuals living in abusive partnerships or households, for example, the home is more likely a site of abuse than an underpass (Sweet and Ortiz Escalante 2010; Meth 2003). This contradiction sheds light on the fact that when asked about urban risk, respondents immediately referred to stereotypical notions of "crime," forgoing the nuances of gender disparity, social class, and racial dynamics, among other things. "Crime" (which is in many ways a fear discourse) is usually located in areas such as Rideau and Vanier, and associated it with specific occurrences (such as loitering, drug abuse), objects (such and needles, garbage) and people (such as sex workers, "hooligans," and non-white people). This semiotic zoning of the city frequently appears in the way people talk about specific urban areas, though often disconnected from its racist and classist roots.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper has traced networks through with urban individuals and communities become attached to places, perceive and react to mobility (their own and that of others), and produce notions of the self and the Other. Analyzing interviews conducted in four distinct urban areas of Ottawa, Canada, and bringing together literatures on place attachment, risk perception, and mobilities, we have observed an important relationship between mobility and risk/fear, and a tendency (in respondents) to attempt to attach the self in place to ward off perceived risk factors in the city. We use Kristeva's theory of abjection as a way to unpack how our respondents expressed aversion to certain sites, occurrences, people and objects, exploring how this emotional response has its roots in a drive to fix the self in place. We contribute to existing literatures on place attachment by exploring how aversion and abjection reveal the very human desire to distinguish the self from certain objects and occurrences in the city, and it is through this differentiation that the self becomes attached certain places, and that certain objects and areas become canonized as unclean or risky.

In light of this, we have examined how city boundaries are drawn based on existing social hierarchies. The purpose of this observation is not to create a parallel between the Othering that privileged communities inflict on low-income or marginalized communities and the internalized racism, classism (etc.) that exists within those communities, but to show how the process of self-regulation exists along both of these planes. Exploring purification of the self through Kristeva's theory of abjection, we are able to unpack both racially charged comments coming from privileged respondents living in affluent areas and concerns about safety coming from likely less-privileged respondents. This brings us to another conclusion, which is that respondents associated their notions of risk with the experience or perception or mobility. Whether it is through the mobility of transient folks passing through less-affluent parts of Centretown, or the mobility of someone who feels they do not visually belong in Vanier walking through a parking lot, mobility seems to beget risk. In response to these perceived risks, respondents attempted to erect borders between themselves and the "others" around them. Mobility and threatening motion seems, then, to be a catalyst for the aversion-responses and the creation of the semiotic language of risk we have been discussing.

Further research on the tangibility of risk is certainly needed within the field. Our study took an open-ended approach, allowing respondents to contribute their own understanding of "risk" with the purpose of uncovering the way risk is conceived and zoned in Ottawa, Ontario in a broader sense. This approach showed that risk is disproportionally associated with crime, and more specifically, with signifiers of crime such as derelict buildings, garbage, needles, sex workers and transient communities. Working from this starting point allowed us to demonstrate the way perceptions of risk are often less to do with tangible danger than they are to do with poverty and distress. More

comparative quantitative and qualitative research on the relationship between risk perception and actual risks is also needed.

One of the main drawbacks of our study is that our respondents were disproportionally white, which likely impacted the semiotic language of risk we traced and our corresponding conclusions. If we had interviewed a pool of respondents from Vanier who identified as BIPOC, for example, we may have observed different notions of risk and safety. It could be argued that this paper is about the way risk, expulsion, and aversion are constructed through white urban logics, and white supremacy. However, since the non-white and low-income participants who did participate in the study discussed risk in a manner that was relatively consistent with the more affluent and privileged participants, it seems to suggest the existence of a system of cognitive urban zoning and a semiotic language of risk that has some semblance of uniformity across class and racial lines.

Urban experiences of risk can by no means be reduced to the homogenous system of semiotic zoning and denoting of risk signifiers that we have identified. The semiotic system is just one predominant mode of understanding urban risk that was identified in the responses from participants, which can be quite easily traced back to media representations and common narratives like that of the symbolic assailant (Skolnick 1966), associations between BIPOC individuals and crime, and discourses and histories that seek to protect the integrity of white women. Uncovering this particular "risk-language" is helpful in decoding assumptions and fears commonly associated with certain people and spaces and in exploring the way social hierarchies are sustained and propelled through practices of locating urban risk.

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