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Contesting city safety - exploring (un)safety and objects of risk from multiple viewpoints

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to engage theoretically with city safety and fear by combining insights from intersectional theories of risk with post-structuralist theories of emotion. We argue that the performative feelings of fear and safety need to be disentangled from hegemonic discourses in order to illuminate who the imagined subjects are that comprise the so-called 'everyone' for whom safety agents intend to create safe cities. Our analysis is based on group and individual interviews with a total of 39 informants, including police officers, municipal safety agents, university students, LGBTQ community members, immigrants, wheelchair users, elders and alcohol users. The results show how current norms and risks are linked, and why they must always be understood within the framework of existing power structures.

Introduction

On a Swedish municipal website offering information about the municipality's general work toward a safer community, the headline reads: "It is a human right to feel safe no matter who or where you are" (Sundsvall kommun 2020), indicating that subjective feelings now form a site for innovation in spatial politics and city planning. However, if one continues to read the article, it becomes clear that this statement is far from reality, as recent local safety and surveys on fear of crime report a higher degree of unsafety[1] than a couple of years ago (Elefalk 2018). This is not an exceptional case among Swedish cities; during the last few years, there has been both an expansion of interest toward and an increased focus on safety in city planning, parallel to the reports of increased feelings of unsafety from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet [Brå] 2016, 2017).

While considering "safety" as an emotional status and a human right for everyone who enters a city, it is also necessary to determine the meaning of this concept and what this orientation toward safety might entail. Through such calls in community planning, safety is repeated and transformed into a fixation—a kind of political objective that has gained a life of its own. Hutta (2009, p. 254) calls this objective a new *dispositif* of safety emerging from the formation of a regime of power that operates by staging binaries of "safety" and "fear" in governmental practices, thus creating the grounds for safety agents, safekeeping practices and policies, as well as targeting the sources of fear, or risks, that are assumed to be threatening this safety.

In the Swedish political discourse, safety has historically been related primarily to uncertain social and economic conditions; when the debate on fear of crime was introduced in the 1980s, however, safety was widened and redefined (Hermansson 2018). The concept of safety [*trygghet*], as well as its negative counterpart, unsafety [*otrygghet*], is closely linked in today's Swedish context to crime and fear of crime, a link that has become a more and more central point of departure for politicians and policymakers not only in criminal justice policies (Andersson 2010; Heber 2011; Sahlin 2010) but also city planning. Through the expansion of neoliberalism, security has become part of the safety discourse, and the politics of control has taken a much bigger part in safety work (Thörn 2011). The neoliberalisation of safety has caused the state to entrust more and more safety work to local and private actors, as well as to individuals. This change makes Swedish municipalities quite free to organise their safety work as is best suited to the local context, but moves them further away from the social and economic safety that was central earlier in the Swedish welfare state (Andersson 2010; Denney 2008; Hermansson 2018).

The aim of the Swedish national crime prevention programme Together Against Crime [*Tillsammans mot brott*] is to decrease the crime rate and increase the public's feelings of safety, teaming together the politics of criminal justice and urban planning. Compared to fear, the term "safety" is more multi-faceted and diffuse in what it includes; even so, following Hutta's (2009) argument, safety is often contrasted with fear (of crime), thus excluding many potential sources of unsafety that fall outside the normative governmental understanding of safety as order and lack of crime. In many Swedish municipalities, this is further reinforced by the recruitment of professional actors [*trygghetssamordnare*] that are responsible for coordinating local safety work and increasing public safety.

Against this background, it seems relevant to examine the ways in which strategic safety work does or does not relate to the contours of feelings of (un)safety among different population groups. For example, who are the imagined subjects comprising the so-called 'everyone' for whom safety agents intend to create safe cities, and what are the risk objects that threaten this call? Studies on fear of crime have shown that some groups of people, such as young men, ethnic minorities, homeless people, or those with mental illness, tend to be constructed more as sources of danger than others (see Pain 2000 for a review).

Following the arguments of Listerborn (2016) who call for the inclusion of various experiences of fear in public space, the aim of the present article is to theoretically engage with feelings of safety and fear from multiple viewpoints to re-politicise and further enrich contemporary discussions of safety. Drawing from theories of risk and emotion, we will explore the ways in which hegemonic discourses are negotiated and how they mobilise subjective expressions of fear and safety (cf. Ahmed 2006). The following sections begin with a presentation of the context of this study, which follows with a presentation of related research and an outline of the analytical framework. Thereafter, we will introduce the material underlying the analyses and, finally, provide some concluding remarks.

Dispositif of safety: research context

> The fact that new forms of exclusion and control are articulated through the concepts of safety and fear is not only an effect of the generalised 'concerns about personal safety' but also announces a change regarding urban planning as well as the relations between governmental actors and subjects (Hutta 2009, 254).

In the opening quote above, Hutta (2009) takes inspiration from Foucault (1980) to discuss the physical, administrative, juridical, institutional and knowledge/discursive measurements of safety as a *dispositif*, comprised of both discursive and non-discursive elements, such as institutions, architecture, regulatory decisions and laws. Safety discourses and the *dispositif* of safety are embedded within arguments for monitoring and controlling places and people through, for example, camera surveillance, increased resources for police and security guards and exclusive

design or hostile architecture (Edin 2017; Möllerström 2011; Thörn 2011). Safety, therefore, is not only a personal feeling but also, when linked to human rights, a socially constructed problem and a principle for the governing of public spaces, deeply entangled with complex relations of power in the public arena (Frois 2011).

Today, urban planning and safety work have become closely intertwined, thus framing subjective feelings of (un)safety as a governmental issue that must be handled on a political level—often by creating order in the spatial environment. The ambition to produce safety or reduce unsafety is often encourages the production of safekeeping and risk management strategies in which safety is often synonymous with the absence of activities and groups that are considered 'disorders' within the desired cityscape, upon which control measures aimed at blocking or removing these groups and activities are introduced as safety strategies (Fanghanel 2016; Koskela 2000; Thörn 2011).

Within these politics of space, the power that is exercised and articulated through the concept of safety is linked to a discursive regime permeated with hegemonic norms and power relations through which questions of safety are essentialised and embodied in a way that legitimises the political control of public spaces through different safety measurements, which in turn regulate who is given a place within public space. In city streets, this can manifest in the exclusion of homeless people, beggars and other socially peripheral groups viewed as posing a risk of reducing the population's feelings of safety in the city, whereupon such vulnerable groups are 'eradicated' from the urban environment in the name of safety (Edin 2017; Thörn 2011). It is also sometimes the case that women's perceived fear and unsafety are used to reinforce arguments for increased control and surveillance regulating access to public spaces (Koskela 1999, 2000; Listerborn 2015, 2016; Minton 2006). As, for example in the study of Sager and Mulinari (2018) who illuminates how the concept of safety, in the rhetoric of racist right wing politics, can serve to connect discourses of fear with ideologies of hate.

In this way, safety also functions as a political tool—one that is more easily employed by some than others. Regarding the aforementioned question about the composition of the imagined 'everyone' whose fear becomes the catalyst for safety policies, Listerborn (2016, p. 252) argues that "the notion of 'women' often is limited to white, middle-class women living in urban areas". This proposition also creates a hegemonic sense of safety while the fear and unsafety experienced by people outside this privileged category are excluded from the (un)safety narrative and, thereby, the safety work. We believe, therefore, that contemporary understandings of safety need to be contested through perspectives that consider the power structures that shape, structure and regulate the public spaces that are reproduced and reinforced through the production of space and its configuration.

Objects of risk: analytical entry points

The *dispositif* of safety could, in this context, be understood as a system that produces a specific mode of knowledge about public space and a particular way of being a subject within that space (cf. Foucault 1980). When state agents are responsible for implementing and strategically working to increase safety in public spaces, they are also taking part in producing the framing of spaces as safe or unsafe. When they name some 'objects' as risky or frightening and others as needing to be safeguarded, they are at the same time either integrating these objects (and/or subjects) as part of this public space or not. This normalising act often takes place along contemporary hierarchies of power—the production is performative precisely because it initiates the individual into the subjected status of not being included in the notion of 'everybody' (cf. Butler 1993, 121).

To critically engage with safety and fear from multiple viewpoints and to enrich our understanding of how they relate to hegemonic discourses, the present research combines an

intersectional analysis of risk objects with Sara Ahmed's (2004) poststructuralist phenomeno-logical view of emotions. In this framework, feelings of (un)safety and fear are not understood only as emotional statuses perceived by the subject, but we must also understand the social and economic circumstances attached to these insecurities and how social and material circumstan-ces might appear as emotions in individuals (Ahmed 2006, 107). Similarly, intersectional analyses of risk objects do not aim to define different types of risks and groups as isolated processes but to think about how risks, subjects and objects are created and changed in relation to each other due to the structures of power in a particular setting (Giritli Nygren et al. 2020; Lupton 2013).

In exploring understandings of unsafety and fear, an intersectional analysis of objects of risk could also overcome the division in previous research regarding whether unsafety should be understood in relation to the physical environment (Valentine 1989) or to the social and political power relations that permeate the public space (Hollander 2001; Pain 2000). Objects attached to feelings of fear could then be viewed as having both physical and social characteristics. Such an approach allows for the opportunity to incorporate the material world, including objects, place and space, into our understandings of embodiment and subjectivity; thus, public spaces are reflective of societal power structures. Under this definition, an 'object of fear' refers to any kind of physical, cultural, or social artefact that can be singled out, delineated and discussed, or else an intangible representation of culture, such as a nationalist ideology, or a social behaviour, such as intoxication (see also Giritli Nygren et al. 2015b). Therefore, to bring these two dimensions— the physical and the social—together, the present research addresses both the fear *of* space and the fear *in* space, proposing that feelings of unsafety in public spaces can be understood from both their physical layouts and the relationships of power that occur within them (also see Löw 2006; 2013; Listerborn 2002).

The ways in which safety and fear continually articulate discursive and affective lines of exclu-sion in public spaces are also invoking boundaries of belonging and denial (see also Ahmed 2004; Fanghanel 2016). While exploring gendered, aged and sexualised 'geographies' of fear, urban researchers have noted that fear of the city is often related to discourses surrounding those who not conform to hegemonic norms (Giritli Nygren et al. 2015a). There is a complex web of interrelations between individuals' various positions in society, which together influence how and why they perceive certain objects as safe or unsafe, as well as how these objects come to be associated with different emotions, such as excitement or fear. In Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenology, the term 'orientation' is central; that is, the starting point and direction of one's body in a room amid available objects can be understood as the body's spatial orientation, and its attraction toward certain objects over others is governed by its lived experiences (Ahmed 2006, 2). The ways in which certain emotions, such as abject feelings or fear, are tied to different objects requires our analysis to attend to the processes of movement and attachment, as well as of 'sticking together' that causes these emotional affects to become attached to particular objects (Ahmed 2006; also see Lupton 2013). In her study, Ahmed (2003) demonstrates this through the way the figures of the 'asylum seeker' and the 'international terrorist' work to con-struct certain bodies as sources of fear toward 'others', thus turning the asylum seeker into an object of risk through the process of sticking together. This process might also have consequen-ces for the ways in which different social groups are able to rhetorically express their own dis-comfort as fear, as this fear does not, in Ahmed's parlance, 'stick' to dominant bodies, particularly not as objects of fear, in urban safety policies (2003).

Such analyses can be used to disentangle the performative feelings of fear and safety from hegemonic discourses, thereby mobilising and upholding other formations of power. Research on fear and unsafety in public spaces as a form of gendered oppression, without critical exami-nations of other power structures, contributes to the erasure of ethnicity, class, sexuality and other hierarchical power relations among women (Kern 2005; see also Bondi and Rose 2003). Therefore, fear and safety in the city must be understood through the intersections of privilege and oppression that design and regulate access to public spaces.

Method

The present study was conducted in the city of Sundsvall, a medium-sized city with around 59,000 inhabitants in the urban area (SCB 2018) located in the northern part of Sweden, in the county of Västernorrland. Out of Sweden's ten million inhabitants, 12% live in the northern region, which is dominated by rural areas, villages and smaller cities like Sundsvall. Sundsvall is a relatively segregated city, in regard of class and ethnicity, with relatively large socioeconomic inequalities between residential areas as a consequence (Sundsvalls kommun 2019). Statistically speaking, and compared with other European countries, Sweden is generally perceived as a safe country to live in (Westfelt 2009; van Kesteren et al. 2000; van Dijk 2007; also Brottsförebygganderådet (Brå), 2019), and on a national level—especially in comparison with similar cities—Sundsvall is perceived as one of the safer cities (Elefalk 2019).

The organisation of local city safety in Sweden is the municipality's responsibility, and municipalities are free to organise it the way that works best for them. In the municipality of Sundsvall, the organisation of safety work is divided into 14 different geographical areas, each with their own working group of safety agents, including the central city (Sundsvalls kommun 2020). The purpose of having safety groups is to involve local residents with the municipality's safety work and to establish a dialogue through meetings and 'safety walks' with the public to map (un)safety experiences in a given area. The city centre safety group consists of police officers, staff at youth recreation centres, headmasters, teachers, local entrepreneurs and representatives from different organisations located in the city centre, who's assignment are to, from their professional roles, discuss and produce concrete proposals for changes in the physical environment and safeguarding measures against the background of meetings with local residents and safety walks (Sundsvalls kommun 2020). The safety groups do, however, lack the mandate to make decisions about these measures and efforts, instead that have to be decided by the local politicians.

The material informing the present analysis consists of nine group interviews and two individual interviews with police officers, lasting from 45 minutes to two hours. The group interviews were conducted with a total of 39 informants, including police officers, municipal safety agents from the city centre safety group and representatives of different interest groups. By including actors involved the city's strategic safety work—here represented by police officers and safety agents—this analysis includes an additional perspective on objects of risk that illustrates how norms and power relations affect, interact with, and are portrayed in the discourse surrounding organised safety work.

We position ourselves within a growing body of critical and feminist studies of risk, power and inequality (see for example Giritli Nygren et al. 2020 for a review). From this perspective, relations of power and hegemony are of central importance for perceptions of place in relation to risk and safety, but also questions about who has the ability to appropriate space, and who has not. This means that we take a stance grounded in the materialist phenomenology of risk, taking the standpoint of people positioned outside or at the margins of the strategic safety discourse, but at the same time we do not forget the significance of also investigating the perspectives of those who may implement safety as a political tool. This choice is because, without the investigation of the 'centre', the norms of spatial politics will continue to be taken for granted and continue to reinforce spatial inequalities. It was therefore of great importance to include perspectives of citizens who are differently positioned within the public space, thus allowing for examinations of the ways in which objects of risks and (un)safety are negotiated, managed and eradicated between and within groups, as well as how these objects relate to public safety discourses. We therefore focused on recruiting people from various associations and interest groups whose members are often ignored, excluded or underrepresented in the municipality's strategic safety work. When we were to recruit groups for the study, we had the seven statutory grounds of discrimination (sex/gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, and age) as a starting point, as the municipality must take these

Table 1. Informant overview.

Interview(s)	Meetings (n)	Males (n)	Females (n)	Total informants (n)
Police officers	3	4	–	4
Safety agents	1	4	4	8
Student union representatives	2	5	5	10
PRO (the local association for Swedish National Pensioners Organisation)	1	3	4	7
RFSL (LGBTQ rights organisation)	1	–	2	2
SFI (Swedish for foreigners) school	1	2	1	3
Soup kitchen visitors	1	2	1	3
DHR (Disability, human rights association)	1	2	–	2
Totals (n)	**11**	**22**	**17**	**39**

into account in all their work. Nevertheless, we also made sure that we came in contact with people in the margins of society due to homelessness and/or substance abuse, as that is a group that often is excluded from public spaces, and not heard in the process of city development and safety work. See the table below for an informant overview (Table 1).

Focus group interviews were used to get a deeper understanding of how the informants identify themselves as belonging to the interest groups we contacted. This approach can be identified, in line with Choo and Ferree (2010), as a group-centred intersectional study; it begins from the perspective of a particular group and theorises the objects of risk they identify in relation to the objects of risk that the safety agents direct their work toward. Putting objects of risk in the foreground during the analysis, we are also able to move beyond the interview groupings and thereby analyse the fluidity of risk and identity. Since our aim is directed toward disentangling the performative feelings of fear from hegemonic discourses, we have used extracts from different interviews to illustrate their commonalities and, primarily, their differences. To do so, we show what objects of risk are not recognised by the safety agents rather than disclosing the intersectional identities of our informants.

Each interview began with a brief presentation of the study, followed by information about ethical considerations and the informants' rights. The group interviews were facilitated by a semi-structured guide and were recorded and transcribed, opening with the questions "What does the word 'risk' mean to you?" and "What does 'safety/unsafety' mean to you?" The informants were thus encouraged to discuss what safety and risk meant to them, as we did not have an established definition going into the interviews, and instead was given meaning based on how they emerged in the empirical material. We then followed up with questions related to the informants' (un)safety experiences in the city centre, the places that they experience as 'safe' or 'unsafe', the factors that affect their experiences of public spaces, how they distinguish 'safe' from 'unsafe' places and how they deal with their perceived risks. Since both of us live and work in Sundsvall, we knew of and were familiar with the different places the informants brought up in the interviews. Something we experienced as positive since the informants could focus on sharing their experiences instead of explaining where different places are located and what they look like.

Although we consider this method the most appropriate for this study, it is not without its shortcomings. The main problem with group interviews of any kind is that norms may develop within the groups, which can limit what can and cannot be said (Giritli Nygren et al. 2015b). We therefore kept the groups separate in the interviews as a way to ensure that the different perspectives within the interest groups were represented in the final empirical material and so as

not to elide non-comprising perspectives that might have been lost by mixing the groups, and by encouraging the informants to hold open discussions and establishing a relaxed atmosphere during the interviews.

To analyse the collected data, we use a thematic analysis technique (Braun and Clarke 2017). This enables the examination of the informants' own perceptions of risks and (un)safety without losing their negotiations and implementations of these concepts in the process. The analysis was initiated by reading all the interview transcriptions several times to gain a sense of the whole picture, before reading each transcription more carefully. During these readings, we made minor marks on the text in the form of supplementary words or underlining words, sentences and phrases that were perceived as relevant to the study. Through this process, the interviews were incrementally broken down to provide material that could be analysed in service of the research aim. The following sections are structured according to our analysis, which focused on different objects of risk and how the informants discuss, perceive and manage these objects.

Results and discussion

In this section, we present the results from the interview analysis, starting with a brief overview of the general results that in many ways mirrored what previous research has shown regarding risks and public space(s). We will also show the different meanings ascribed to the key concepts of this article, risk and (un)safety, by the informants. We will then continue with a presentation of the *dispositif* of safety as framed by the safety agents before we turn to the analysis of the group interviews and the perceived subjects of 'everybody'.

As expected the concepts of risk and unsafety in our study differ significantly depending on who is asked and their social and economic position in society. In our attempt to disentangle the performative feelings of fear and safety from hegemonic discourses the interesting result is not that they differ, but how they differ and why they sometimes do not. Risk and unsafety could pertain to both accessibility in the physical environment, like cobblestone, glacial streets or high curbs, and hegemonic norms of whiteness and heterosexuality. A common trait for these 'objects' is that they are perceived as external factors and/or phenomena outside the individual's control. In relation to this, the way the representatives from different interest groups discussed safety on a general level did not significantly differ. Each mentioned as an answer to the initial question 'what causes feelings of safety' objects of safety that were usually quite detached from the city, often related to life stability, economic security and the presence of family and friends. When we asked explicitly for objects of safety relating to the city and public space, the informants, as in many other studies, highlighted the importance of the presence of people in general, the police and daylight (Jacobs 1961; Listerborn 2002; Pain 1997; Valentine 1992, 1989).

The objects of risk/fear that cause the informants to feel unsafe varied both between and within interviews and were often connected to individuals' multifaceted social positions that affect how they relate to the city. However, there were of course also similarities. For example, some specific places were turned into abstract signifiers of risk(s) tied to narratives of violence and fear, such as dark tunnels, parks and alleys, not seldom rife with references to media reports, television and films. These places, or objects of risks, are turned into what Ahmed (2003, p. 391) calls "sticky signs" that allow other objects of risk, like (some) men, homeless people, and drug or alcohol addicts, to stick to them – that is, to become associated with them. This phenomenon seems to affect everybody, regardless of social position, as the spaces considered 'unsafe' in this regard were the same in every interview, even when some informants felt that the fear did not have a direct impact on them or their everyday lives:

> Generally, you feel safe in the city, but at the same time, when trying to name a safe place in the city, I do not think there are that many. It's mostly like this: I feel safe when there are more people and I am not alone, but it's often so empty everywhere. So, when I think about it, there may not be a place where you can really feel safe. (Extract from interview with students' representatives, female group)

These risks also shape the individuals' movement in and around public spaces. This can also be understood through the term "orientation", as described by Ahmed (2006), which refers to the lived experiences of the body causing one to orient oneself toward certain objects over others. The informants expressed many times how their feelings of unsafety and fear motivated them to develop strategies for avoiding objects of risk, typically by distancing themselves from the source. This also conforms to previous research that has shown how this avoidance is a typical strategy for women to cope with the perceived risk of sexual abuse and violence in public space, as well as for elders and homosexual men and women (Kirby and Hay 1997; Pain 1997, 2000; Stanko 1990). We will discuss what consequences this might have for the 'publicity' of public space within a safety discourse later.

The dispositif of safety through safety agents: a question of in/exclusion

In cases of feeling unsafe within public spaces, the physical and social dimensions of the space must be considered. The physical environment consists of symbolic constructions that interact with, shape and create space and our relationship with it, thus becoming a frame for the power structures that dictate social relations and our individual experiences within a space (Listerborn 2002). As stated earlier, the *dispositif* of safety is understood as a system that produces a specific mode of knowledge about public space and a particular way of being a subject within that space. Within this system are the organised safety agents who, through their work, take part in the production of the understanding of safe or unsafe spaces.

During our meetings with safety agents, it became clear that much of their work orients itself around a binary understanding of a safety/order and unsafety/disorder dichotomy (see Hutta 2009). To plan and structure their work, they mainly turn to previous local safety surveys and crime statistics, in which the city bus station hub has been cited as the most unsafe place in the city centre, focusing much of their attention to that particular place.

The bus station hub was mentioned in most of the group interviews as a problematic and unsafe space, as it has become a local haven for drug and alcohol users, beggars and people on the social and economic periphery of society. These groups were considered producers of disorder and were targeted as objects of risk that need to be eradicated from public space to achieve the safe city for which the agents are striving. This one-sided focus on the hub as an unsafe area frames it, turning it into what Ahmed (2003, p. 391) calls a "sticky sign," making it "stuck" together with criminal activity. These narratives of unsafety and dangerousness, also propagated by local news report and media, create distance between conscientious citizens and those causing disorder and hostility within the city, making people turn away from groups and places that are stuck together with them (Ahmed 2003; see also Fanghanel 2016). By constructing this unsafety narrative and positioning homeless people and drug users as objects of risk, cementation of the order-producing-group and the disorder-producing-group takes place. It implicitly directs the focus toward the monitoring and controlling of places and people, legitimating actions like eviction by police or security guards, as well as different kinds of hostile designs in the name of safety (for 'everyone') without offering alternatives like social support or activities (cf. Möllerström 2011; Thörn 2011).

The people, who in some cases do not have a home or a place to stay, have nowhere to go or to turn, other than another 'public' place, still risking being evicted for causing disorder and unsafety merely for showing up, as one of the informants stated:

> Today you cannot even walk around town without getting a fine.
>
> (Extract from the soup kitchen interview)

Being targeted as a threat to public safety, and thereby being on the receiving end of different safekeeping practices aimed at enhancing public safety, is strongly associated with feelings

of unsafety among those who are constructed as 'risk objects' and do not conform to the desired cityscape, as put forward by one of the interviewees at the soup kitchen:

> When the police show up, chaos always arrives. It can be calm and peaceful, but then they provoke and argue with people, causing arguments and fights. They do it consciously.
>
> (Extract from the soup kitchen interview)

This treatment of socially disadvantaged groups is not unique to Sundsvall, as shown by, for example, Thörn (2011), Edin (2017), Davis (1990), Smith (1996) and Mitchell (2003), to mention a few, all of whom have written about the vengeful public policies against these groups. Understood through revanchism (Smith 1996), the militarisation of public space (Davis 1990) or soft policies of exclusion (Thörn 2011), these exclusion practices have in common a one-sided focus on crime and disorder.

The knowledge of (un)safety produced via the *dispositif* of safety is performed in the way safety work is organised and carried out. As the safety work is organised via the dichotomies of safety/order and unsafety/disorder, feelings of unsafety expressed through spatial politics and deriving from underlying relations of power, like the normativity of heterosexuality and whiteness, are concealed, even though they are most clearly present in the construction of objects (or sources) of risk, as shown above. Thus, the normativity of space is reinforced.

Not comprising the subject of 'everybody': the spatial politics of norms

Listening to the safety agents, crime and vagrants seemed to be the greatest problems causing unsafety in Sundsvall, whereupon the main object of risk they organise their work around is constructed based on that understanding. Following their reasoning, the imagined subjects needing to be safeguarded are those included in the notion of 'everybody' in their call for safety, those who are considered part of the public space. As shown in the previous section, unsafe places like the bus station hub are, through safety discourses, turned into a sticky sign (Ahmed 2003) that sticks to the (disorder-producing) groups and activities associated with these spaces, making them a threat against public safety and thereby not part of the public space.

However, this depoliticised understanding of safety reinforces the normativity of space, whereupon non-norm-conforming subjects' bodily experiences of unsafety are not included in the *dispositif* of safety. Thus, the main object of risk they organise their work around stands in contrast to how people in Sundsvall speak about public (un)safety, even though everybody seems to agree the bus station was the most worrying place in the interviews. The bus station hub was considered unsafe due to the clientele and activities that it was associated with, but the place itself was considered safe, as illustrated in the quotes below:

> The bus station is the people that hang out there. The hub is not a bad place itself, but there are always junkies there.
>
> Exactly, it is the clientele that gives you this sense of unsafety. Although most of them are harmless, they create a sense of insecurity and unpredictability. Because if you look at the place as such, then there is nothing about it that is frightening; it is open and well lit. The bus sheds have lights and such, so it's not a question of the environment.
>
> (Extracts from the interview with representatives from the association for pensioners)

Thus, as we will discuss below, the singling out of the hub demonstrates how feelings of unsafety derive from underlying relations of power and is not directly related to the unsafety of the hub itself, which falls outside the safety agents' understanding of unsafety.

People who are experiencing difficulties getting around and having physical access to public space associate the feeling of unsafety with not being included in the environmental and physical formation of space. Dispossession due to the physical environment and one's individual health and age were central aspects of this, as one elderly woman stated in the following quote:

> Risks to us, who are old, are slippery sidewalks and unshovelled streets, crossings and bus stops. There is a risk of having to stand on a wall of snow that is about seven to eight decimetres high when you get off the bus when they have not ploughed the stop.
>
> (Extract from the interview with the association for pensioners)

Stairs, narrow passages, and cobblestones all become objects of risk associated with exclusion when one is not able to move around unrestricted and is thereby prevented from using public spaces. These objects of risk become material formations of a planning discourse deriving from a hegemonic conception and norm of able bodies that move unhindered throughout the city centre, as illustrated below:

> The city is safe at first glance, but it becomes unsafe when you try to get around. There are a lot of cobblestones and old buildings that are inaccessible to a wheelchair.
>
> Yes, there are a lot of old buildings, and they're quite the obstacle if you have a wheelchair. Just thinking about if you want to go to a restaurant— I do not frequent them now—but if you want to go, you will not be able to get into at least half of them.
>
> (Extracts from the interview with representatives from the human rights association)

While accessibility issues related to physical objects and environments arise as an important safety factor, a different kind of restriction, related to a sense of belonging and the ability to claim space, was also emphasised in the interviews. Previous analyses of risk in public spaces have illustrated3 that the constructions of specific risk objects by the majority may fail to recognise that some risks are embedded in the everyday lives of those who do not conform to hegemonic norms (Giritli Nygren et al. 2015b; Listerborn 2015, 2016).

These risks are often linked to one's body and identity and the underlying norms that configure the discursive and symbolic dimension of a space and regulate who passes as part of it and who is seen as an outsider or intruder. In our interviews, people who fail to conform or in some way challenge hegemonic norms often brought up this aspect of risk. An example that highlighted this issue and illustrated the fluidity of risks originating in somatic norms like heteronormativity was the process of 'coming out', which was always associated with risks, regardless of whether it occupied public or private space:

> Risk means quite a lot to people on the LGBTQ spectrum. This is something that you take seriously because you do not know which people will be accepting or not; it could be a family member or any stranger who makes you feel insecure and unsafe.
>
> (Extract from interview with representatives from LGTBQ rights association)

Similar to the acceptance of sexual orientation (and identity) as central to feelings of safety, feelings of belonging and the ability for a non-white body to claim space within white-coded public spaces is a central condition for safety. This threat of whiteness does not necessarily originate in a fear of hate crimes, as in acts (or threats) of violence and/or harassment explicitly, but more so in subtle acts and notions of being unwelcome through the symbolic construction of space or the orientation of the normative (white) body around and toward the non-white body. Specific objects of risk mentioned by the informants who have experienced racialisation were thus related to the possibilities of being part of public space (and society) being met with a general reluctance to accept people of different origins, complicating the integration process:

> It is so important for us to know how this society works; we do not know how Swedish people think, what they like or how they are like. This you have to learn.
>
> But you meet quite a few people who do not want to have contact with you at all.
>
> (Extract from interview with pupils at the Swedish for foreigners' school)

This can be understood through the lens of Ahmed's notion of whiteness, articulated when she, with reference to Nirmal Puwar (2004), discusses how "white bodies become somatic norms

within spaces and how non-white bodies can feel 'out of place' within those spaces" (Ahmed 2012, p. 38).

The case with these groups should be seen in light of the statements of Leslie Kern (2005), who argues that we must understand feelings of safety and belonging as being based on the opportunity to distance ourselves from risks, such as violence and exclusion, which arises from social and economic privilege, such as gender, whiteness, heterosexuality, and certain classes.

The safety produced by accessibility, belonging and acceptance – as well as the fears produced by the lack thereof – were not something the safety agents mentioned at all, nor the police. We see this as a consequence of the ways in which both safety agents and police are caught in the crime/fear of crime or order/disorder frame, thus being unable to consider aspects of safety falling outside this frame as objects for the organised and strategic safety work.

The double nature of masculinity

An aspect of safety that was heavily emphasised by all the interviewees when the discussions turned to potential threats posed by other people was the risk posed by the presence of unknown men, particularly groups of young men. For most of the female informants, their fears of men were usually related to sexual harassment and violence, while the male informants' fears of other men related to assault and robbery. With reference to Ahmed (2003, 2006), this can be understood as a process of "sticking together", through which violent masculinity constructs nearly all male bodies as potential threats. The fear of men also correlates with other types of risk objects, such as heteronormativity:

> I think it's really difficult to walk past boys, like teenagers. I feel very uncomfortable and unsafe then, so I usually try to avoid it, even during the day.

> (Extract from interview with representatives from LGTBQ rights association)

The above quote was expressed by a non-binary informant, describing how the informant tried to avoid exposure to the repressive regime of (hetero)normativity via the jeering of young men. In this case, the objects of risk that produce feelings of unsafety represent a kind of "sticking together" between repressive normativity and young men. Although it was noted that women might also perpetuate such behaviour, the informant repeatedly associated feelings of unsafety with the presence of men.

This association was not unique to this informant; when talking about other humans as a danger or risk, the person portrayed was always of male gender, and the male body was used as a synonym for (hegemonic) masculinity, meaning that all male bodies became a potential threat and something the informants had to manage in some way. Violent masculinity as an object of risk, and the strategies to manage it, are negotiated by the informants in relation to the performative practices of femininity and masculinity (see also Hollander 2001).

The female informants, on the one hand, offered a variety of strategies for evading (male-perpetuated) violence in public space, emphasising avoiding risks by changing behaviours or movement patterns.

The male informants, on the other hand, tried to use their own masculine traits to appear tough and unafraid as a preventative strategy against other men, thereby emphasising their own masculinity as an expression of strength and invulnerability, as mentioned in the following quote:

> Sometimes, when I go by myself […] if I see suspicious people […] I try to bring myself up and look strong while I pass. I'm quite big. Normally, I may be walking while bowed, like this, but then I stretch my back and get tall. Trying to look a bit tougher so nobody dares to mess with me. (Extract from focus group with student representatives male group)

This double nature of masculinity—where it becomes a symbol for danger and a (potential) threat while, at the same time, offering a protective measure against other (unknown) men

(masculinities)—becomes evident in the male informants' personal approach to and understanding of their own masculinity (e.g., Day 2001; Sandberg and Tollefsen 2010; Valentine 1990). These informants described how they adjust their appearances and uses of space depending on whom they meet, showing reflexivity toward their own male-coded bodies. In meetings with women, they would try to seem like a 'good guy' and not a threat, to help the women they encountered feel safe, illustrating their understanding of how the image and construction of masculinity define the male stranger as a (potential) threat and is reflected onto themselves. For example, two informants commented upon their own (potentially dangerous) masculinity:

> Sometimes I can feel, if I walk by, or if I go behind or if I meet a girl on the street, that she feels unsafe and then I strive to look as harmless as possible. Of course, she could not know [if I am dangerous or not]. (Extract from focus group with student representatives male group)

> Yes, and sometimes you take a small detour, just for her.

> (Extract from focus group with student representatives, male group)

> Valentine (1992) argues that the male stranger is a potential threat, while the male partner is a potential protector, which was brought forward as a safety strategy by the female interviewee at the soup kitchen:

> I would never go to Navet [the bus station hub] during the night. If you are out during the night you have to comfort yourself with having a big, strong man with you.

> (Extract from the soup kitchen interview)

The problem with violent masculinity as an object of fear, especially among women, was known, but considered too abstract for the safety agents to instil specific safety measures against, other than by trying to inform women that the risk of rape in public spaces is low and changing the physical environment by installing street lightning and removing thickets. They thereby place the responsibility to claim public space on women—to depoliticise the underlying hegemonic norms ascribing public space to men and norms making men think they are entitled to women's bodies. The sticking together effect, present in many of the other focus group interviews, through which violent masculinity constructed nearly all men (male bodies) as potential threats, was not present among the safety agents. Instead, they discussed men identified as criminals, drug users and homeless – women within these groups were never mentioned – as threats to public safety, directing their safety measures toward these groups. Within the security practices performed by safety agents, violent masculinity as an object of risk thus does not stick to (all) men but is instead stuck to groups that are targets of their already ongoing safekeeping practices and not conforming to the societal hegemonic norms. Therefore, whoever becomes the target of safekeeping practices should be understood as a manifestation of structural inequalities, in which *some* groups (of men) will be identified as potential offenders more often than others.

The discrepancies shown in this section concerning identifying objects of risk and including a variety of risk objects in community safety work follows this argument, and shows that naming some 'objects' as risky and others as needing to be safeguarded is part of a process of regulating which objects (and/or subjects) are to be considered part of public space and, by extension, the subject of 'everyone'.

Conclusion

In this article, we have discussed the question of who is included in 'everyone'—the group for whom safety agents intend to create safe cities—and what the risk objects are that threaten the call for safety, as well as how city safety is perceived from different viewpoints. The police officers and safety agents, here representing the *dispositif* of safety, identified risks and risk objects through statistics, including crime rates and scales of how safe or unsafe people feel in the public space, and their strategies for risk management focus on crime, substance abuse and groups

or activities that create disorder in the public space. Through this process, they reproduce hegemonic norms and structures within society as well as neglect experiences of unsafety caused by extraneous factors and underlying power relations, such as ethnicity, sexuality, gender and physical ability, thereby assigning the public space to the majority group. These results show how current norms and risks are linked, and why they must always be understood within the framework of existing power structures. Bodies that do not conform to the desired cityscape are denied access, which has a disorienting effect on the individual (Ahmed 2006, 24). The non-white, queer or in other ways underprivileged individual might feel as though they must explain and even defend their presence within spaces for the privileged in a way that, for example, the white, cis-gendered individual does not. This kind of repressive homogeneity, along with its related actions, such as hate crimes, discrimination and exclusion, can then be understood as a risk object.

By excluding or ignoring these dimensions in safety strategies or in the identification of risk objects, these risks are perpetuated within safety work. As Ahmed (2003, 388–389) states, certain bodies are constituted as "the other" as a means to preserve distance between "them" and "us", which becomes part of the safety strategy toward, for example, "taking back the bus station" and making it a place for everyone (else). This means that safety work may intend to eradicate or move a certain group by implementing measures of control within the public space. Through news reports and public safety discourses, groups are defined as "the other" such as addicts and homeless people, thereby turning them into objects of risk that the majority want to distance themselves from. This demonstrates how feelings of fear and unsafety become intertwined in the processes by which class, gender and race are constructed, as well as how safety as a policy and a political objective becomes a governmental practice in the control of spaces.

As Hutta (2009) suggests, the *dispositif* of safety constitutes a governmental regime that frames and regulates individuals' subjective relationships with spaces. As shown in the present analysis, discussions about sources of safety, such as financial stability, family and friends and quality of life indicate that safety must also be understood in relation to an individual's financial and social stability (see also Stanko 1990, 16)—aspects that are not at all present in the discourse surrounding the "human right to feel safe no matter who or where you are" (Sundsvall kommun 2020). When branching out from public fears or objects of risk, measures that fixate on safety are disconnected from the resources that seem to produce feelings of safety. What is therefore presented as work for safe public spaces appears in fact to be security work in the classic, criminal policy and political sense.

Therefore, it is highly important for safety actors, policymakers and political actors to broaden their perspectives on risk and safety, thereby re-politicising and enriching contemporary discussions on safety and making public space – and the imagined subjects of 'everyone' – more inclusive.

Disclosure statement

Note

1. Unsafety is, in the context of city safety in Sweden, equivalent to the term fear of crime, but includes more experiences of public space than just the fear (of crime), such as comfortableness [*trivsel*] and might also include insecurity.

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