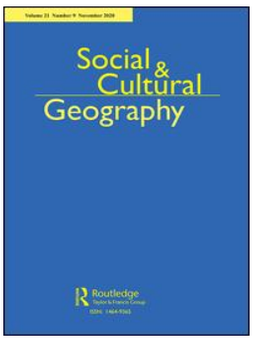
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Title	Disability, hostility and everyday geographies of un/safety
Authors	Edwards, Claire;Maxwell, Nicola
Publication date	2021-07-14
Original Citation	Edwards, C. and Maxwell, N. (2021) 'Disability, hostility and everyday geographies of un/safety', Social and Cultural Geography, 24(1), pp.157-174. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2021.1950823
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.1080/14649365.2021.1950823
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Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/11764

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Social & Cultural Geography

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rscg20

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To cite this article: Claire Edwards & Nicola Maxwell (2021): Disability, hostility and everyday geographies of un/safety, Social & Cultural Geography, DOI: 10.1080/14649365.2021.1950823

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2021.1950823

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SOCIAL & CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY
https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2021.1950823

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Disability, hostility and everyday geographies of un/safety

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ABSTRACT

This paper connects relational theorising within geographies of disability and geographies of fear of violent crime (FOVC) to explore how disabled people navigate fear and experience of hostility in their everyday lives in Ireland. Drawing on a two year qualitative study with people with a range of impairments, we explore the human and non-human components of assemblages – in particular, encounters with others, assistive supports and 'objects' of disability, and the physical environment – that give rise to diverse affectual and sensory geographies of un/safety. Disabled people have multiple understandings of un/safety that are contingent, embodied and emplaced, and have highly developed spatial strategies which they deploy as they navigate and respond to fears about hostility in different temporal-spatial contexts. We suggest that relational thinking has the potential to unfix binary assumptions about spaces as safe or unsafe, and to challenge dominant constructions of disabled subjectivities as inherently vulnerable. This includes expanding our attention beyond the public sphere as a site where most fear of violent crime is situated and recognising the agentic potential of disabled people as they negotiate and (re)author safety in space.

Este artículo conecta la teorización relacional dentro de las geografías de la discapacidad y las geografías del miedo a los delitos violentos (FOVC, siglas en inglés) para explorar cómo las personas discapacitadas navegan por el miedo y la experiencia de la hostilidad en su vida cotidiana en Irlanda. Basándonos en un estudio cualitativo de dos años con personas con una variedad de discapacidades, exploramos los componentes humanos y no humanos de los ensamblajes, en particular, los encuentros con otros, los apoyos de asistencia y los 'objetos' de la discapacidad, y el entorno físico, que abren diversas geografías afectivas y sensoriales de la inseguridad. Las personas discapacitadas tienen múltiples entendimientos de inseguridad que son contingentes, incorporados y emplazados, y tienen estrategias espaciales altamente desarrolladas que despliegan mientras navegan y responden a los temores sobre la hostilidad en diferentes contextos espacio-temporales. Sugerimos que el pensamiento relacional tiene el potencial de deshacer los supuestos binarios sobre los espacios como seguros o inseguros, y desafiar las construcciones dominantes de subjetividades discapacitadas como inherentemente vulnerables. Esto incluye expandir nuestra

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 19 June 2020
Accepted 22 April 2021

KEYWORDS
Disability; hostility; un/safety; relational geographies; fear of crime; Ireland; Discapacidad; hostilidad y geografías cotidianas de la inseguridad; Handicap; hostilité et géographies quotidiennes de l'insécurité et de la sécurité

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atención más allá de la esfera pública como un sitio donde se ubica la mayor parte del miedo al crimen violento y reconocer la agencia potencial de las personas discapacitadas mientras negocian y (re) escriben la seguridad en el espacio.

Palabras clave: discapacidad, hostilidad, in/seguridad, geografías relacionales, miedo al crimen, Irlanda

Cet article connecte les théorisations relationnelles au sein de la géographie du handicap et de la géographie de la peur du crime violent (aussi appelé FOVC en anglais) pour explorer la manière dont les personnes en situation de handicap traversent les peurs et les expériences d'hostilité dans leurs vies quotidiennes en Irlande. En nous appuyant sur une étude qualitative de deux ans avec des personnes en diverses situations de handicaps, nous explorons les éléments d'assemblages humains et non-humains, en particulier les rencontres avec les autres, les soutiens et les « objets » d'assistance pour les handicaps, et l'environnement physique, qui donnent lieu à une variété de géographies affectives et sensorielles de l'insécurité et de la sécurité. Les personnes en situation de handicap ont des interprétations multiples de l'insécurité et de la sécurité qui sont dépendantes, concrètes et mises en place. Elles ont également des stratégies spatiales très développées qu'elles déploient quand elles traversent et répondent à leurs peurs concernant l'hostilité dans des contextes temporels et spatiaux différents. Nous suggérons que le raisonnement relationnel a le potentiel de démonter les hypothèses binaires relatives aux espaces et qui les définissent comme dangereux ou non, et de remettre en question les constructions dominantes des subjectivités qui conçoivent les personnes en situation de handicap comme étant fondamentalement vulnérables. Cela inclut l'élargissement de notre attention au-delà de la sphère publique en tant que lieu où se trouve la majorité de la peur du crime violent, et l'admission du potentiel d'agentivité des personnes en situation de handicap tandis qu'elles négocient et (re-)créent une sécurité spatiale.

Mots clefs: handicap, hostilité, insécurité, sécurité, géographie relationnelle, peur du crime, Irlande

Introduction

In recent years there has been growing recognition of the disproportionate violence and hostility experienced by disabled people. A World Health Organisation review published in 2012 found that both disabled children and adults are more likely to experience violence than their able-bodied counterparts due to widespread discrimination and stigmatisation (Hughes et al., 2012). Similarly, supra-national organisations such as the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, and nation states are increasingly recognising the experience of hate crime amongst disabled people (Hall, 2018; Roulstone & Mason-Bish, 2013; Taylor, 2017).While understanding disabled people's experience and fear of violence and hostility is arguably an interdisciplinary concern, it is notable that much of the work has developed outside the arena of geography, in disciplines such as public health, disability studies, sociology, and criminology (Hollomotz, 2012; Mikton et al., 2014; Sherry, 2010). This work has been vital in exploring why disabled people are at greater risk of violence and understanding criminal justice responses to disablist hate crime. However, it tells us less about the broader effects of hostility and harassment in how disabled people

navigate their everyday lives, or how embodied concerns about un/safety and hostility are bound up with the production of space and situated space-based identities.

A small, but burgeoning, literature is beginning to address this geographical lacuna by exploring the socio-spatial meaning and experience of hate, harassment, safety and fear, amongst disabled people (Hall, 2019; Hall & Bates, 2019; McClimens et al., 2014; Power & Bartlett, 2018a). Ever since Pain's (1997,2000) seminal work on the geographies of women's fear of violent crime (FOVC), geographers have highlighted the complexity of the experience and fear of violence as an interaction between power relations, space and social identities (see also Koskela, 1997; Panelli et al., 2004; Valentine, 1989). Fear and safety have been shown to reflect gendered (and other) power relations and attitudes that construct certain bodies as inherently vulnerable or 'out of place' (Kitchin, 1998), and certain spaces as 'safe' or 'risky'.

More recently, geographers have used a relational lens to explore how fear of crime and hostility, and safety, can be understood as the product of assemblages which (re) configure material, social and discursive relations between bodies and environments in a continual process of becoming (Brands & Schwanen, 2014; Brands et al., 2015; Hall & Bates, 2019). Describing fear of crime as 'an *event* that emerges from the on-going assembling of associations among humans and non-humans, material and discursive elements', Brands et al. (2015, p. 441) point to the need to explore the contingent, embodied and affectual experience of everyday un\safety in place, experiences which are always ambiguous and emergent. These analyses have the potential to challenge categorical definitions such as hate crime which, as Hall and Bates (2019, p. 100) note, often become narrowly focused on 'individual victimization' at the expense of exploring the situated, socio-spatial contexts and dynamics of such events.

In this paper, we seek to make an empirically-grounded contribution to geographical literature which foregrounds relational understandings of disability and hostility, and fear of crime, by drawing on findings from a qualitative study exploring disabled people's everyday geographies of un/safety in Ireland. Following relational thinking, we use the term un/safety to explore the idea that being and feeling un/safe reflects a configuration of multiple elements – including physical environments, temporal contexts, prior socialization and experiences, as well as societal discourses around disability – which are in constant flux and render boundaries between safety and unsafety porous and unstable. In this paper, we focus particularly on how distinguishing and encountering others, relations with inanimate objects, and physical environments all shape participants' sensory experiences of un/safety. By drawing attention to the complex interplay between particularities of place and disabled people's multiple subjectivities, we suggest that a relational lens has the potential to trouble static assumptions about particular spaces as safe or unsafe, and challenge dominant cultural scripts which construct disabled people as inherently vulnerable and at risk in their everyday lives.

Thinking disability and un/safety relationally

The association of disability with dependence and vulnerability remains a dominant trope in the socio-cultural imagination of Western societies (Gibson, 2006; Shildrick, 2000). It is perhaps unsurprising then that discussions of disabled people's safety have often focused around protection from risk and harm, which as Botterill et al. (2019) note, has also

characterized analyses of young people's everyday in/securities (see also Pain, 2006; Valentine, 1997). State and societal paternalism, with its roots in the medicalization of disability, have arguably affected the way in which we understand and respond to potential hostility and un/safety in disabled people's lives. For example, Roulstone et al. (2011) note that the labelling of incidents of hostility and violence against disabled people as abuse, rather than crimes, often means that they have been denied access to justice through the criminal justice system in the same way as other citizens.

Writers in the sub-discipline of geographies of disability have sought to challenge medicalized, paternalistic understandings of disability, by recognizing disability as an embodied experience co-produced in and through space at the confluence of individual experiences of impairment, and social relations and attitudes (Chouinard et al., 2010; Hall & Wilton, 2017; Imrie & Edwards, 2007; Stephens et al., 2015). In conceptualizing the body as both a material, biological entity and a social and cultural construct upon which societal norms and values are inscribed and enacted, geographies of disability have demonstrated how diverse bodies exist in, experience, and create lived knowledges about the environment and space, and how socio-political relations serve to create spaces which exclude bodies deemed to be less than normal (Bell et al., 2019; Chouinard et al., 2010; Edwards & Imrie, 2003). Most recently, Hall and Wilton (2017) have turned to non-representational theory to propose a relational geography of disability which recognizes the experience of impairment and disability as an on-going process of becoming, generated through embodied, affectual practices grounded in the particularities of time and place. Key to such understandings is a focus on the assemblage, which 'allows that different combinations and environments surface different qualities of human identity and experience, in ways that are negotiated in situ, not predetermined, nor rigidly tied to a priori distinctions between public and private' (Stephens et al., 2015, p. 200). Assemblage thinking directs attention towards the multiple elements and qualities of place, including cultural norms about how to behave or move, human and non-human relations, and physical environments that give rise to emergent disabled subjectivities, and to the continuing (re)production of bodily capacities and capabilities.

Geographers' engagement with relational ideas has led to a rich vein of work which explores the situated, multi-sensory, dynamics of impairment in place (Bell et al., 2019; Hall & Bates, 2019; Macpherson, 2009; Power & Bartlett, 2018a; Worth, 2013). This work provides important insights into disabled people's complex affectual encounters with diverse spaces, from feelings of unease and anxiety in responding to the stigmatizing attitudes of others in public space, to the strategies they deploy to engender 'spatial confidence' (Koskela, 1997) and resilience through everyday '(micro)abilities' (Porcelli et al., 2014; see also Worth, 2013; Wong, 2018). However, with the exception of Hall (2019), few have turned their attention explicitly to how issues of un/safety in terms of FOVC or hostility might play a role in assemblages of impairment and disability.

While recognizing that un/safety is a nebulous and slippery term, we concur with Brands and Schwanen (2014, p. 77) in stating that it [safety] 'is best understood as a transient and situational process between the person and the particularities of place', felt in and through the body. Thinking about un/safety relationally offers the potential to capture the multiplicity of material and socio-cultural elements that are constantly (re) configured in spatio-temporal contexts to produce different affectual states that 'may change into one another in a non-linear fashion'(p. 77), and which exceed institutional or

policy definitions that identify and fix certain categories of people ('victims of crime', for example). In this paper, therefore, we understand un/safety as not just about specific happenings or incidents of hostility or harassment, but about broader affectual responses to, and negotiations with place, which may emerge out of relationships with others, comfort, access or lack of, in the built environment, as well as memories, previous experiences and spatial habits. Socialisation has been shown to be important in this regard. Echoing the concerns of feminist geographers, many disabled people have been taught by protective others to avoid particular spaces or places, or to engage in risk-averse spatial practices, while societal discourses continue to marginalize disabled people in multiple spatio-temporal contexts (Hall & Wilton, 2017). This arguably has the effect of reinforcing ideas of stranger danger in public spaces, taking the spotlight away from experiences of un/safety in the private sphere of the home (Pain, 2014a, 2014b), and abuse that has been shown to be perpetrated by those close to disabled people, including carers and family members (Thomas, 2011).

As a dynamic, interconnected, and always on-going *process*, un/safety opens up the possibility of bringing into view spaces heretofore hidden in debates about disability and community safety, and eschews the bifurcation of places as safe or unsafe. While it is important not to dismiss the exclusionary attitudes and practices which repeatedly frame socio-cultural discourses about disabled people, there is nothing inevitable about the ways in which disabled people experience spaces as exclusionary or inclusionary, safe or unsafe (Hall & Wilton, 2017). Rather, we have to attend to how particularities of place are bound up in disabled people's capacity to act or otherwise, including the potential to develop resistive and proactive strategies as they negotiate the lived experience of un/safety (Botterill et al., 2019).

The rest of the paper offers an empirical analysis of how disabled people in Ireland define and encounter un/safety in their daily lives. By drawing on the narratives of people with a range of impairments, we foreground the diverse, multi-sensorial experiences with un/safety in place which have been relatively understudied in both geographies of disability and geographies of fear of violent crime (FOVC). We offer a relational perspective as a potential corrective foil to criminological discourses which focus on disabled people's victimhood and reductive responses to community safety, by highlighting the complexities and ambiguities of un/safety as it is (self)–defined and negotiated by disabled people.

Methodology

This paper presents material from a two year (2017–2019) qualitative study entitled *Disability and the Creation of Safe(r)space* (Edwards & Maxwell, 2019), which explored the impact of un/safety on the everyday lives of disabled people in Ireland. The study had four objectives: to explore how disabled people construct and experience un/safety in the context of hostility and harassment in different types of spaces; to investigate how national and local socio-political contexts are implicated in disabled people's experiences of un/safety; to explore the notion of safe/r space as a conceptual category in thinking about the relationship between social identity, space, and harassment and hostility; and to utilise disabled people's knowledges to develop responses aimed at promoting safety in the community. The project was designed around three interconnected phases. Phase 1

involved interviews with policymakers and disability organisations, to scope out the national policy context around disability, hostility and community safety. Phase 2 involved in-depth case study work in three locations across Ireland, with both disabled people and local practitioners working in the area of disability and community safety. Phase 3 comprised networking and dissemination activities: this included hosting local events bringing together disabled people, community organisations, and the Gardaí[1], to explore responses to the issues raised by the research.

This paper is concerned with the project's first objective, and reports on research conducted with disabled people in Phase 2. Phase 2 case study areas were selected on the basis of their differing socio-spatial characteristics, and included one rural area, one large town with a rural hinterland, and an inner city area of a large urban centre. In order to capture a range of experiences, we sought a purposive sample of people with mobility, visual, and hearing impairments, and intellectual disability (ID). In total, 54 disabled people participated in the study across the three areas. We recruited participants by approaching local disability organisations and statutory service providers in each area, who were asked to distribute an advert to their members. Many of the local organisations we approached were impairment-specific, and in several cases, a member of the research team visited the group to explain about what participation in the research would involve. Relevant supports were put in place to ensure appropriate access and facilitate informed consent: this included using sign language interpreters where appropriate, and ensuring all information sheets and consent forms were available in a range of formats, including large print and EasyRead. Ethical approval for the project was sought and received through the University College Cork Social Research Ethics Committee.

In seeking to capture the diversity of sensory and emotional experiences of un/safety, we were concerned to develop a flexible methodological approach to the research. Participants were initially offered the opportunity to take part in one-to-one interviews or focus groups. Many people opted to be interviewed (30 people took part in individual interviews: nine were people with visual impairments (VI), seven with mobility impairments (MI), thirteen with ID and one person with acquired brain injury). Interviews took place at a venue of the participant's choosing, including their home, or in spaces such as cafes or hotel lobbies, and lasted between one and two hours.

Twenty four participants opted to take part in focus groups. This occurred after initial visits to two specific organisations – an advocacy group representing people with ID, and a Deaf and hard of hearing group – where the members of these groups decided they would prefer to talk about these issues in a focus group setting. One of the reasons for this was pragmatic; in both situations, the focus group participants met at appointed times weekly in a busy city centre location and, given logistics such as travel, suggested we use their allotted meeting time for a focus group. For people with ID, an additional factor expressed was a sense of comfort in a specific group setting with a support worker in attendance. Focus groups covered similar topics to the interviews (which included understandings of safety, places they perceived to be safe and unsafe, strategies to navigate safety), but participants were understandably less willing to talk about personal experiences of un/safety and hostility than in one-to-one interviews. All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were returned to interviewees for checking, including one Braille transcript.

A number of participants in each area also took part in 'go-along' interviews (Bell et al., 2019; Carpiano, 2009). 'Go-along' interviews offer the opportunity to explore more dynamic and fine-grained encounters with/in place – to experience auditory cues, visual signals, tactile environments, human and non-human interactions – that comprise people's heterogenous embodied negotiations with un/safety. The go-along interview was offered as a second interview to all 'sit-down' interview participants. However, only eight people chose to take part; four were people with VI, one with a MI, and three with ID. For these interviews, we accompanied participants on routes of their choosing, and to spaces which they perceived as significant in terms of their experiences and narratives of un/safety: this included public spaces such as city centres, their local neighbourhood in shops, and at transport hubs.

Our discussions 'on the move' were guided by the places that participants brought us to, and often involved stopping at particular points – at a pub for a cup of tea, for example, – where conversation was easier, with less attention and concentration engaged with the embodied act of navigating. Indeed, our experiences, including the relatively limited number of participants who wanted to take part in a go-along interview, have led us to reflect on the potential of utilising mobile methods which as Castrodale notes (2018), can be driven by (able-bodied) researchers' assumptions and interests (see also Parent, 2016). The vagaries of the weather and challenges of finding appropriate times during people's everyday routines, for example, were expressed reasons for our participants not wishing to take part in go-along interviews. It is notable also that while we suggested that participants might wish to take photographs of spaces prior to sit-down interviews and focus groups, and provided disposable cameras to do so, this was only taken up by a very small number of interviewees. On reflection, this may not be surprising given many participants' heightened awareness of what Castrodale (2018 p. 45) refers to as the 'biomedical, pathologising gaze' experienced in public spaces.

In terms of the participants' profiles, while there were an equal number of men and women, two-thirds of participants were aged over 40. All participants were living in the community, either alone, with family members or in the case of people with ID, in supported living arrangements. The majority of participants were not in work, and many of those living in urban areas lived in social or rented housing: like many disabled people, their lives were often shaped by dynamics of economic insecurity and uncertainty. Finally, it is important to note that while we were not seeking to engage only with people who had experienced hostility or harassment, a number of participants had experienced some kind of event, or multiple events, in their lives, ranging from on-going micro-aggressions such as verbal abuse in public spaces, to more serious incidents including theft, having items thrown at them, physical assault, and harassment within the private sphere of the home, including domestic violence. Being aware that such experiences could emerge in the interview process, we were very concerned to plan for such potential sensitivities. We sought from the outset to ensure that interviews were undertaken in a 'safe space' chosen by the participant, and were cognizant of giving participants the *time* to discuss difficult experiences, to move at the participants' pace, and not to rush. We made it very clear that participants were under no obligation to disclose specific events, and that we would stop the interview if they were distressed, or indeed, wished to withdraw from the process.

In terms of data analysis, NVivo was utilized to organize and thematically analyse all the interview and focus group data, based on cross-cutting patterns and relationships (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). This included how participants spoke about safety; how they made sense of fear and safety in their encounters with others, and the role of assistive technologies and the physical infrastructure in their embodied encounters with places and spaces. Analysis was an iterative process which involved moving between our research questions, codes emerging inductively from the data, and broader themes in the literature around constructions of un/safety. Working on the transcripts collaboratively, we were able to discuss and check our understandings of different codes and themes, and challenge each other's assumptions about meanings inscribed in participants' narratives.

Exploring disabled people's everyday experiences of un/safety

The complexity of articulating what un/safety is, or feels like, as a sensory embodied state was very evident in our participants' narratives. Echoing Brands and Schwanen's (2014, p. 68) assertion that embodied feelings of un/safety are 'difficult to put into words in their own terms', participants articulated a range of metaphors to explain what safety meant as a positive, embodied state. For some, the idea was closely aligned with a sense of psychosocial and emotional security enacted in different places (Botterill et al., 2019). Martina (chronic health condition and MI), for example, stated,

> I suppose being able to sleep at night. As regards where I'm living, not to feel under any kind of threat . . . Safety is being able to trust people. It's surrounding yourself with people you can trust.

Having experienced domestic violence, Martina's narrative was underpinned by a heightened awareness of the risk posed by non-trusted others and expressed ambiguity about home as a space of comfort and safety. Rose (MI), who uses a wheelchair and lives in a rural area, also articulated safety in relation to others, but rather as a *lack of reliance* or dependency. Relating safety to positive feelings of autonomy and independence, she said:

> I can access the street from my house on my own weird independent way, right? I would feel unsafe . . . if I wasn't able to do that because then I would be dependent on somebody else to give me a sense of security and safety.

The everyday act of navigating the built environment also emerged repeatedly in understandings and feelings of un/safety. Echoing studies exploring VI (visually impaired) young people's barriers to independence (Middleton & Byles, 2019), Conor (VI) stated

> Okay, so safety, it's secure, it's like clothing, if I can use that word. You're protected. Being able to walk home from the bus stop for ten minutes without getting injured . . . That's what I feel safe is . . . .I'm talking about being able to get from A to B in one piece unscathed.

Others described safety in relation to their routinised spatial practices. Robert (VI), for example, stated 'For me, I suppose it's about having a routine. You know, I suppose going areas that I feel are safe'. Areas that were safe had diverse meanings for our participants. For Robert, who frequently travelled by bus from his rural small town into the nearby city, it was the urban centre, with its navigational aids such as traffic signals and people he

could ask for assistance, that engendered feelings of safety. The city was also the site of his social networks, where he would regularly meet his friends in the library and particular cafes. For others, safe spaces were most strongly connected with the security of the domestic sphere, where people were surrounded by 'trusted others', or a familiarity and comfort with their environment.

What becomes apparent from participants' accounts, then, are the multiple connections and relationships that give meaning to disabled people's encounters with un/safety in place. Feelings of safety were described as produced in relational contexts – in the assemblage of trusted or non-trusted others, physical environments and places, and even in relation to specific objects (for example, wheelchairs or white canes) – while negotiations of safety were always on-going and time-space specific. In the following sections, we explore in more depth some of the specific elements of assemblages which were foregrounded by disabled people in their negotiation of un/safety. These include the significance of encounters and relationships with others, the role of adaptive supports or 'physical artifacts of disability' (Watts Belser, 2016, p. 6), and the configuration of the physical environment, which intertwine in complex ways to shape everyday geographies of un/safety.

Encountering and distinguishing others

Disabled people's sensory and emotional encounters with space have been shown to be intimately intertwined with their relations with others. Worth (2013, p. 579), for example, notes VI young people's reliance on friends, and their strategy of 'only moving through public space when they could be accompanied' (see also Porcelli et al., 2014). Similarly, Middleton and Byles (2019, p. 80) point to the significance of 'interactions and exchanges' in people with VI's spatial knowledge and navigation of specific places. These interactions suggest a renewed need to consider disabled people's mobility less in terms of autonomous independence, but rather as shaped by a complex nexus of *interdependencies* between people, technologies, and environments.

Encounters and relationships with others were a central theme in participants' narratives of un/safety. Many people spoke about the importance of the presence of trusted people in making them feel safer in both public and home spaces. Participants described going out only when accompanied by friends, family members or personal assistants, and visiting places where they knew they would be welcomed. Máire (ID), who lives in a suburban housing estate, for example, stated: 'Well, I go walking myself around the estate as well but in the early evening, yeah. But the neighbours are really nice, though'. Others spoke about the importance of 'becoming known' (Wiesel & Bigby, 2014) in their local community as a way of feeling safe, by getting to know staff in the same local shops. As Conor (VI) said: 'You know … because [supermarket chain] … are very helpful on the five to eight items that you're looking for. They can tell me the special offers or not that are on'. For Conor, routinised and repeat encounters in shops and other spaces were significant in building forms of recognition and belonging in the community (Hall & Bates, 2019; Power & Bartlett, 2018b; Wiesel & Bigby, 2014).

Many participants articulated feeling uneasy when people were absent from particular spaces. For Carol (VI) who lives alone, this included her suburban housing estate which emptied out during the day as people commuted to work; she also avoided deserted

spaces when out walking, or times of day when she knew there would be few people around. Eimear (ID) who lived in a rural town, also described feeling fearful in spaces when walking into the town centre due to an absence of people: 'I remember walking up on my own before . . . and I just get a bit nervous of going up and down . . . even if it's in the day, because there's very few people around. But there's lots of cars going by'. Many participants therefore identified deserted spaces, such as alleyways, parks or particular streets, as core to feelings of being unsafe.

There was a clear recognition amongst participants of the need to distinguish between un/trusted others, whether in home or public spaces. Challenging ideas about home as a site of safety and sanctuary (Imrie, 2004; Pain, 2014a), Mary, a Deaf woman who uses Irish Sign Language noted: 'Trust is an issue . . . Say builders know we're deaf, they know where we live, and maybe they could break in at night while we're sleeping because, you know, they know we're deaf". Molly (ID) also recounted how she distinguished between encounters with others in her rural town:

> I only say hello to people that I know. I don't talk to strangers or nothing. And if we're walking down the street and the binman might say hello, I don't know the binman. I know the postman because he arrives into my house for bills.

While many participants associated safety with peopled places, they also described operating a vigilance around those who could be potential threats (Hall & Bates, 2019). For some, this fear coalesced around large crowds in night time spaces, reflecting broader societal discourses in which city centre night time spaces are constructed as sites of risk and disorder (Brands & Schwanen, 2014; Wong, 2018). As David (ID) said: 'Because we used to go to the nightclubs at one time and we stopped it because there were just too many people outside hanging around and then going in. And then you could be beaten up'. Robert (VI) also recounted feeling uncomfortable around the bus station at night, when returning home from the city to his rural town: 'I don't like hanging around there too long . . . you've homeless people – I suppose I'm a target really, you know when they see the cane'. Echoing Brands et al.'s (2015, p. 452) observations about feelings of unsafety revolving around the 'mobilization of stereotypes', several of our participants described feeling unease in the context of encountering those who were homeless, or drug addicts, in public spaces.

Disabled people described diverse interactions with strangers in public spaces, ranging from positive through to outwardly hostile. However, an overriding theme in their narratives was the continuing pervasiveness of societal attitudes which construct disabled subjectivities in terms of vulnerability, or disabled people as 'out of place' in specific spaces (Kitchin, 1998; Porcelli et al., 2014). Aoife (MI), who uses a wheelchair, spoke about the inappropriate stares and sexual questioning she received in nightclubs, which led her to feel uneasy in such venues. Similarly, and reflecting paternalistic attitudes from concerned others, Martin (VI), who lives in an inner city location and had experienced several incidents of hostility near his home, had been advised by the Gardaí to not go out by himself at night. As he said, 'Now, if you're a woman that would not be tolerated because it's our streets but the idea is that what are blind people doing out by themselves anyway?" As evidenced in Martin's narrative, the problem of un/safety here becomes constructed as one of individual behaviours, in which the disabled person is 'compelled to take responsibility' (Botterill et al., 2019, p. 481) for their actions in order to keep safe.

In responding to potential threats, many participants described proactively engaging in what we might term *safety work*: that is, developing routinised, planned, spatial practices as a way of negotiating feelings of un/safety in their everyday lives. For Conor, who had experienced mobile phones being stolen from him in the city, this involved strategies to minimize being conspicuous in public space, or as Worth (2013, p. 580) refers to it, the process of 'concealment': 'Be out of sight, out of mind. Don't use iPhones on the street to ring people . . . go into a coffee shop, pay two quid for a coffee, or just sit down for a few minutes'. For many disabled people, then, negotiating un/safety involved an ongoing checking and management of self (McClimens et al., 2014).

Assistive supports and the objects of disability

Recent poststructuralist theorizing within critical disability studies has sought to decentre the disabled, dependent subject, and 're-conceptualize dependency as connectivity, an active potential for connecting across multiple dimensions' (Gibson, 2006, p188; Shildrick, 2000). Gibson's (2006) work, in particular, draws attention to the complex relationships between disabled people, and the physical objects and technologies associated with disability, including wheelchairs, white canes, and other assistive devices, in the production of disabled subjectivities. Recognising that 'disability brings people into intimate relations with material things' (Watts Belser, 2016, p. 6), many of our participants reflected on how objects and technologies mediated their sensory and affectual experiences of un/safety in place. It was notable that many participants recognized the potential of particular assistive supports to be markers of vulnerability, making them more visible in public space (Wong, 2018; Worth, 2013). As Rose (MI) stated:

> Well, if you're in a wheelchair, I mean it's just I suppose self-reliance and self-preservation, because naturally – well, most people with a disability do things differently and maybe at a slower pace than anyone else. So you're not going to be able to run ten times to a mile when somebody comes up, you know.

As in Worth's (2013) study of VI young people, Martin spoke about how he had avoided using a white cane for a long time when out in public:

> I was walking without it for ages because of just the stigma. That's the most difficult thing, like waving a flag saying "avoid me, avoid me" or I've got leprosy . . . the white stick, it's a public advertisement that you know, watch out!

Robert, too, stated 'I don't use it [white cane] in [local town]. I just don't feel comfortable. But I have no other choice when I get to the city because I'm on my own and I suppose it makes people aware of my situation'. Our VI participants in particular reflected on the different affectual and embodied encounters of un/safety based on using inanimate (white canes, mobile phones) and animate (guide dogs) assistive supports. Describing his experience using a guide dog, who lives in a rural area stated:

> It's a feedback loop thing, because you have to be a bit more positive to work a dog, because if you're unsure of yourself, you're not going to work a dog properly at all . . . once you've got a dog you've got much more reason to feel safe and happy and confident.

For many participants, then, assistive supports and devices were intimately bound up with complex, and often ambiguous, affectual responses to un/safety in space, including how

they mediated encounters with others. Reflecting Wong's (2018, p. 89) assertion that the visibility afforded by an assistive device such as a white cane is a 'double edged sword', Robert's narrative points to the juxtaposition between the cane being an important marker in situations where he may require assistance from the public on the one hand, but also an object with the potential to attract hostility and unwanted attention, on the other.

While assistive supports could make people feel more secure in certain environments, in some cases, our participants reported how objects associated with disability had been used against them in acts of hostility. Martina, for example, described incidents of domestic violence where her ex-husband would pour the contents of the dehumidifier, necessary for her chronic asthma, over her head, as the home became a site of 'everyday terrorism' (Pain, 2014b). Indeed, Martina's experience leads us to query once again how home spaces, and their associated material objects, are intimately bound up with experiences of un/safety and in/security (Müller, 2020; Williams, 2002). Conor also spoke about the significance of his white cane in an incident of domestic hostility: 'I had a few issues with antisocial behaviour. . . . I would have had people put their hands in my door, take out my cane, break it . . . Breaking canes is kind of past the pint of no return. That's personal'. Conor's reflection here exemplifies the connectivities that exist between the disabled body and adaptive technologies. In a context where 'the self is uncontained by the material body' (Gibson, 2006, p. 194), the white cane is not just an assistive device. Rather, in an extension and transgression of bodily boundaries, it becomes part of Conor himself, intimately bound up in his affectual and corporeal experience of hostility.

Where participants had previously experienced hostility, or felt uneasy in particular spaces, assistive supports and technologies were also utilized to develop practices of 'pre-emptive self securitisation' (Botterill et al., 2019, p. 472). Pre-empting the potential for theft in public spaces, for example, Aoife spoke about ensuring she did not have bags hanging off her wheelchair; Carol described the practice of talking to her guide dog if she felt there was someone following her, to make them aware she knew they were there. Both Martin and Conor described wearing bodycams when out in public space as a deterrent to those who might be hostile towards them. Conor also used his bodycam to record experiences of inaccessible and unsafe environments in the city centre, placing his films on social media platforms. As mechanisms of engendering 'spatial confidence' (Koskela, 1997), such acts can also be read as having a resistive potential, foregrounding disabled people's agency in occupying spaces from which they have frequently been excluded (Middleton & Byles, 2019; Wong, 2018).

Navigating the physical environment

As a reflection of disablist values, inaccessible environments continue to circumscribe disabled people's access to multiple spaces, in the public and domestic sphere (Hall & Wilton, 2017; Imrie & Edwards, 2007). However, while access is often framed as a technical issue in policy contexts, our study highlighted the very real affectual consequences of in/accessible environments, which impacted upon how un/safe people felt in different spaces. People referred to a range of issues in the built environment that contributed to feelings of discomfort and anxiety: this included road crossings that were difficult to navigate, a lack of audible signals, poor street lighting, and street furniture and parked

cars that presented obstacles. Robert (VI), for example, explained his anxiety around road crossings:

> It's making sure all the audible signals work to let me know when it's safe to cross. Like there's a lot around the city that don't work, so before I get there I'm like God, I hope there's someone around that I can ask to cross because it makes me feel really nervous.

Participants who were Deaf or hard of hearing described the fear of being taken by surprise by cars coming up behind them in street spaces, while some people who used wheelchairs described feeling unsafe as they had to travel on the road due to inaccessible pavements. Marian (MI), who lived in a small flat in a busy inner city area marked by socio-economic deprivation, described how inaccessibility led to her experiencing verbal abuse when out in her wheelchair: 'Like when I'm on the road, yeah, I'd get beeps – "You f***ing – " you know what I mean? – "You dope" – there's a lot of places where I can't get up on paths'. People with VI also described feelings of insecurity that could result from disorientating aspects of the physical environment. Highlighting the significance of walls as physical markers to assist with navigation, for example, many people discussed the difficulties of navigating large shopping centres and open spaces. As Deirdre who lives alone in a city centre and uses a guide dog, said, 'I steer clear of plazas because to me they are just massive areas with no sense of knowing where I am'.

While some participants described avoiding large shopping centres, for others they were a space of comfort and security. Aoife described her local shopping centre as a safe space because it is was enclosed and easy to navigate in her wheelchair. She articulated access not just in terms of physical environment – the ability of a café or restaurant to accommodate her wheelchair, for example, – but also by affectual encounters of welcome by staff. Robert similarly described this experience of welcome, stating, 'There's a bar we go to and they know a few of us in there. So they say 'Oh your particular spot is not free . . . we'll bring you down to the end of the bar where there's a seat'.

Particpants' narratives demonstrate the interconnections that exist between the materiality of environments, objects and bodies, to create moments of comfort, but also of anxiety for disabled people as they navigate everyday spaces. These interconnections become particularly visible in the following account from Martin of navigating the streetscape near his home with his white cane. Recounting the incident as we walked, he stated:

> I was just about to cross the road walking east . . . and it was something straight forward, it works as a shared space and the traffic generally slows down. I carefully negotiated it . . . before coming up to the crossing, I hear these voices behind me shouting "watch out, watch out, watch out, don't cross, watch out" so I hesitated and then I hear them laughing, and then I go to do it again and then I heard these girls across the road laughing . . . When I'm walking along the street, people can't talk to me. I can't answer them back. I have to concentrate 100% on getting from A to B safely.

We can see in Martin's narrative how a coalescing of a number of elements, including the challenging configuration of the physical environment, Martin's bodily comportment and concentration in using the cane, and the presence of untrusted others, generates, in this moment, an assemblage of unsafety, exacerbating feelings of anxiety. Negative encounters such as these leave an affectual imprint: they lead some people to change their use of space, to develop strategies of self-surveillance, and above all, to

create detailed local knowledge of the nuances of different places. However, neither are these encounters, and the assemblages that give rise to them, inevitable or fixed. Disabled people are not necessarily 'victims', just as certain spaces do not have a pre-given 'un/safe-ness'. In Martin's narrative, for example, we do not see someone who articulates feeling inherently unsafe; rather, he continues to navigate this particular junction on a daily basis, albeit exercising a level of alertness or caution. We concur with Hall and Bates (2019, p. 109) therefore in suggesting that assemblages of un/safety have to be understood in terms of 'a dynamic unfolding or emergence of encounters and experiences'. This 'unfolding' requires us to be both cognizant of the socio-spatial exclusion that disabled people face, but also of their potential for agentic, 'generative' (Botterill et al., 2019, p. 474) practices as they (re)negotiate un/safety in space.

Conclusions

Disabled people's experiences of fear and safety have been marked largely by their absence in both geographies of disability and FOVC, albeit with some limited exceptions (Hall, 2019; Hall & Bates, 2019; Pain, 2000). This paper has sought to address this lacuna by illuminating the everyday social relations, objects and material environments which give rise to disabled people's socio-spatial experiences of fear and safety. Our research demonstrates the complexities inherent in defining safety, and the multiple meanings ascribed to it by disabled people. While policy discourses frequently reinforce 'vulnerable' disabled subjectivities by framing safety in terms of protection from risk, participants linked safety to notions of autonomy and independence, and to a familiarity and comfort with particular spaces and places in terms of both social connectedness and physical accessibility. Their understandings draw attention to the on-going interaction between safety as it is felt at the level of the corporeal, the affectual, and wider social and physical environments (Stephens et al., 2015).

We suggest that relational theorizing enables an interrogation of un/safety as an emergent process that is contingent, embodied and emplaced (Brands & Schwanen, 2014). We have shown how moments of un/safety can emerge out of physical environments that offer more or less opportunities for participation; the presence or lack of social networks; of trusted or untrusted others; of particular objects associated with disability; and specific temporal dynamics. Within this context, our research causes us to reflect on disabled people's capacity for agency as they assemble safety in the context of broader discriminatory socio-political relations. Following Hall and Bates (2019), we recognise that relational thinking can sometimes appear to diminish the existence of societal structures and power relations that are bound up in emergent assemblages. Within disabled people's accounts, it is hard to avoid the practices and discourses of socio-spatial marginalization which become evident in everyday social encounters and navigation of space. Disabled people's narratives of mobility and movement, in particular, were often described as stilted, tense or restricted. Participants described going out only with a specific purpose in mind, with a route or event planned; as a response to the 'negative self-awareness' (Porcelli et al., 2014, p. 873) generated by the disabling gaze of others in public space, they often engaged in bodily practices that sought to conceal or normalize their impairment.

One can read these narratives as a reflection of the spatio-temporal dynamics of ableist spaces which have the potential to limit agency by failing to 'take into account … experiences of slowness, collision, unpredictability, tension or pain' (Middleton & Byles, 2019, p. 76) which may characterize disabled people's daily mobilities. However, in dealing with the emergent, fluid and often unexpected nature of un/safety, it is also evident that disabled people consciously develop strategies to (re)author space and assemble safety in diverse ways. This includes acquiring detailed local spatio-temporal knowledges, visiting venues where they are known, and forging social networks and interactions to support them in navigating different spaces safely. In some cases, they also pro-actively prepare for potential incidents of hostility, as Martin and Conor's wearing of Go-Pro cameras bears witness to. Whilst heeding Botterill et al.'s (2019, p. 481) caution that 'the appearance of agency through pro-active resistance should not be read as uncompromised', we recognize the potential in these small acts to challenge, resist and complicate dominant understandings of disabled people's safety grounded in risk and protection.

More broadly, we suggest that relational insights are significant because they open up debates about how those who are charged with addressing FOVC and promoting community safety – including the Gardaí and planners – develop policy responses, as well as how we understand what 'safe/r space' (The Roestone Collective, 2014) might mean for disabled people As Brands and Schwanen (2014) note, dominant responses to FOVC based around surveillance, including CCTV, lighting, police presence, and making environmental adaptations to 'design out crime', need to be approached critically, and do not always have the intended consequence of promoting greater senses of security. Our research suggests that disabled people's encounters with fear and safety cannot simply be addressed by alterations to the physical environment or greater surveillance. Rather, they are bound up in broader social relations and networks, including the social connectedness that people feel to an area, local knowledges, broader public attitudes towards disability, as well as the physical and economic resources that individuals have to enact strategies of safety. This suggests that policymakers may need to look beyond technicist approaches to addressing FOVC by recognising the intertwined dynamics which may hold the potential for disabled people to 'produce safety for themselves' (Brands & Schwanen, 2014, p. 77).

Our research also points to the need to think beyond dichotomies of public/private space in terms of academic and policy debates about FOVC and un/safety. There were no uniform safe or unsafe spaces cited by disabled people in our study, and while many participants articulated a fear of deserted spaces and an absence of people in public space, others described the home as a space of discomfort and fear for reasons including domestic violence, inaccessible housing or the threat of intruders. Strategies to promote community safety and prevent crime – to securitize urban space, for example, – all too often place their focus on the public sphere (Tulumello, 2017), while as Hall (2019, p. 251) notes in the context of disability hate crime, attention has tended to focus on random acts of victimization perpetrated by the '"hateful" "stranger"'. In advancing understanding of spatialities of un/safety, however, it is apparent that we need to look at the situated socio-spatial relations which give rise to particular places and spaces being felt as safe or unsafe. Crucially, this means expanding our attention to the private sphere of the home as a site of un/safety, and those interior worlds most hidden from view in debates about hostility and FOVC (Pain, 2014b). Disabled people have frequently been excluded from debates

about violence, hostility and coercion within the home space, and yet it is vital that we recognize the multiplicity of microspaces – including the meanings and materialities of home – that constitute their everyday lived experiences and geographies of un/safety.

Note

(1) The Gardaí (An Garda Síochána) is Ireland's national police force.

Acknowledgments

We want to sincerely thank all the participants who took part in the study, for sharing their experiences and giving generously of their time. Thank you also to three anonymous referees for their very insightful comments. The research was funded by the Irish Research Council's Research for Policy and Society Scheme (2016).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Irish Research Council [Research for Policy and Society Scheme 2016].

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