Negotiating landscapes of (un)safety: atmospheres and ambivalence in female students' everyday geographies

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Introduction

The connection between university life and interpersonal – and especially sexual – abuse and violence has come under scrutiny in recent years. High-profile sexual assault cases in the US and the UK, and the media furore around, for instance, the #MeToo movement, have drawn attention to the scale and pervasiveness of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence directed at women, and there has been a rise in attention paid to student experiences of hate, violence, and abuse, and questions of student safety over the past decade (see, for example, Bartos, 2020; Bovill and White, 2020; Fedina et al, 2018; NUS, 2010, 2011/2012). Consequently, experiences of and possible responses to interpersonal violence and abuse on campuses have risen high on university agenda, and the geographies of hate and violence in students' experiences of university, the environments of university campuses, and their surroundings have become particularly topical issues.

This comes at a time in which discourses of hate – within and without the academy – have become critical battlegrounds for myriad, and often conflicting, social and political projects; particularly concerning hate-crime legislation and the social groups protected under it. The England and Wales

Crown Prosecution Service's definition of hate-crime is based on criminal behaviour 'motivated by hostility or prejudice'. While the presence of hate (or some form of prejudice) as a motivating factor

may qualitatively distinguish such behaviours from more prosaic offences, such understandings are constrained. Placing emphasis on the individual psychology of a perpetrator and focusing on hate as an (individual) motivator can downplay the significance of the structural conditions through which individuals and groups come to be (perceived as) 'hated' in the first place. For many, the most significant factor of hate-crimes is that they constitute attacks on the 'identity' of the target: as a (perceived) member of a particular group, rather than as an individual (Garland and Chakraborti, 2012; Gerstenfeld, 2010); more broadly as attacks on the idea of 'difference' itself (Chakraborti and Garland, 2012). Consequently, they are seen to 'transmit a message not just to the immediate victim but also to the victim's wider community that their behaviour, cultural norms or presence will not be tolerated' (Garland and Chakraborti, 2012: 40). Hate as a motivating factor can therefore be seen to reflect prevailing, or even dominant attitudes within society (Perry, 2009), and hate-crime legislation, rather than being primarily a legal tool, can be better understood symbolically (Mason, 2014), as an act of atonement by the state for institutionalized discriminatory behaviours against the protected characteristics (see Donovan et al, 2018). As such even if hate-crime is mired in definitional and procedural obstacles on a practical level for criminal justice, it can nevertheless play a significant boundary maintenance role: asserting the social value of difference and diversity in general, and of particular social groups specifically.

The question of the inclusion of misogyny – hate directed at women as a sex class – within hate-crime legislation is complex (Gill and Mason-Bish, 2013; Mason-Bish, 2012; Mason-Bish and Duggan, 2020, and the chapter by Vera-Gray and Fileborn in this collection) and compounded among other things by difficulties of definition and conceptualization (Garland, 2011; Garland and Chakraborti, 2012), problematic notions of 'vulnerability' (Chakraborti and Garland, 2012), and the 'politics of reporting' of hate incidents (Clayton et al, 2016). Nevertheless, the omission of women as a protected category under hate-crime legislation arguably indicates the lowly position of women within the hierarchy of victimhood and the pervasive and deep-rooted nature of misogyny within society. This casts light on the significance of the (albeit contested) intersection between hate and violence and abuse against

women that forms a background of everyday misogyny, often explicitly sexual in character, which is a fundamental part of female students' everyday experiences.

Reflecting on data from an online survey exploring students' experiences of interpersonal violence on and off-campus while attending Northfacing University[i] in the North of England, this chapter considers how landscapes of (un)safety feature in female students' experiences of, and strategies to avoid – predominantly sexual – harassment, abuse, and violence. While there are certain places and features within the urban landscape regularly regarded as either 'safe' or, more pertinently, 'unsafe', their identification as such is contingent; indicating a complex, and often ambivalent relationship between the experience of, and responses to, urban landscapes. It is argued that urban landscapes are experienced not only in relation to the material characteristics of certain features of the urban environments but also to the ways in which these material aspects are brought together with social, emotional, and affective aspects – including understandings of everyday misogyny – and coalesce to form 'atmospheres', which are implicated in female students' everyday experiences and negotiations of their urban landscapes.

These issues speak to broader concerns regarding changes in urban landscapes associated with neoliberal urbanism, and the significance of the creation, or staging, of atmospheres (Bille et al, 2015) as part of the production of experiential spaces of consumption in postindustrial capitalism, which in turn have important implications for (especially young women's) experiences of urban landscapes, and how fear, safety, hatred, and violence become implicated in everyday negotiations of urban spaces.

The chapter begins with a discussion about urban spaces as hostile and/or safe spaces, as material as well as emotional and affective spaces, and as conducive of atmospheres of safety and risk. This is followed by a brief account of the study from which the data are drawn before developing a discussion using snippets of insight from students' accounts to argue that atmosphere is a crucial lens through which to understand female students' experiences of their urban environments, and that their

negotiations in responding to these atmospheres underscores the ambivalence of urban landscapes and the ways in which they are experienced. The final section reflects on how female students' accounts of their urban landscapes cast light upon the ways in which hate, fear, and safety relate to the atmospheres of urban landscapes and the changes to these landscapes brought about by postindustrial capitalism and neoliberal urbanism.

Encounter, atmosphere and urban landscapes

Intensity and diversity of experience have always been central to the urban. The idealized image of cities as sites of potential, experience, and freedom deriving from the heterogeneity of social interactions has long influenced the popular imagination. In quite fundamental ways, cities are sites of *encounter* (Valentine, 2008, 2013; Watson, 2006) where differences are thrown together and negotiated, and it is through everyday encounters and negotiations that urban life is carried out.

While the significance of the size, heterogeneity, and density of urban populations for the nature of the associations between people within cities has been recognized since Aristotle, it was with the rise of modern industrial cities that the character of the urban came under particular scrutiny. Early urban theorists quickly made the connection between the characteristics of the urban environment and the emotional sphere, or *Lebenswelt*, of city-dwellers. For Simmel (1971: 325), it was the 'intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli' that characterized the modern city. This intensity and saturation of encounter and its emotional content was captured in Benjamin's vertiginous exploration of urban life (Benjamin, 1999), wherein the fleeting experience of urban landscapes and their material components provided a revealing glimpse into the conditions and consequences of modernity. It was characteristic of what Wirth (1938) called the urban 'way of life' that urban encounters 'may indeed be face to face, but they are nevertheless impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental' (Wirth, 1938: 12). Simmel (1971) argued that in order to protect against the 'onslaught' of myriad urban encounters, it was necessary that urbanites

treat city life with indifference by developing a 'blasé attitude'. This was essentially an 'intellectualistic quality'; a response to the rationalization of urban life and the 'relentless matter-of-factness and its rationally calculated economic egoism' (1971: 326) that characterized urban encounters. Understood in this sense, the city is not simply a place, but 'a particular form of human association', 'mode of life' (Wirth, 1938: 4-5), or 'way of seeing' (Miles, 2010: 24) and ordering human relations and interactions. The arrangement of landscapes, like the production of maps, thereby becomes an ordering principle which gives meaning to spatial and social relations by setting spatial agenda which become fixed in place.

Sennett (2000) has suggested that 21st century postindustrial cities are characterized by 'mutual indifference', and urban life underpinned by a bleak, uncaring form of civility. But civility, especially in this sense, often serves as a mask for hostility (Valentine, 2008); and deep resentment and prejudice can underlie the indifference of everyday encounters. Moreover, for many, particularly those – like women – who are clearly recognizable as members of typically vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, urban landscapes are not sites of 'mutual indifference', but are often characterized by everyday acts of hostility, hatred, and violence.

Thrift (2005: 140) has spoken of 'a misanthropic thread [that] runs through the modern city'. Far from existing together harmoniously, the manifold combinations of material, social, cultural, and psychological factors that make up cities, produce conflict and contradiction, and 'urban experiences,' as Thrift (2005: 140) has it, 'are the result of juxtapositions which are, in some sense, dysfunctional, which jar and scrape and rend.' Feminist geography particularly has long recognized these contradictions and juxtapositions, especially in establishing the link between urban landscapes and experiences of hate and fear – especially of interpersonal and sexual abuse and violence. A wealth of research has demonstrated how the fear of violence and abuse – especially sexual violence and abuse perpetrated by male strangers – has a powerful influence on women's access to and use of public urban spaces in general (for example Beebeejaun, 2017; Bondi and Rose, 2003; Fluri and Piedalue,

2017; Koskela, 1999; Vera-Gray, 2018), and university campuses in particular (Day, 1999; King, 2009). Women's movements through urban landscapes are not a free choice determined by unhindered preference, but 'the product of social power relations' (Koskela, 1999: 112). 'Women's decisions concerning the route they choose and places they go to,' as Koskela (1999: 112) put it, 'are modified by the threat of violence' in complex and nuanced everyday practices by which women trade freedom for safety (Vera-Gray, 2018) against a background of misogynistic language, verbal harassment, and the 'lower-level' sexual victimization described by Mason-Bish and Duggan (2020: 128ff). Such everyday hostility, rather than being events or behaviours experienced *within* urban landscapes, become, albeit in varied forms and to varying extents, ubiquitous features of those landscapes themselves; intertwined with female students' everyday experiences and spatial negotiations. Datta (2016: 179) has drawn attention to the geography of this everyday misanthropy by identifying what she calls 'genderscapes of hate', in which hate and violence against women become 'an integral factor in the process of place making, creating a lived space where such violence is itself normalized'. Emphasizing the relationality of such geographies of hate, Hall and Bates (2019: 101) have crucially argued that 'hatescapes' such as those created by the role of gendered hate and violence in urban placemaking 'can be understood not as individual and isolated, nor as inevitable features of particular sites and spaces, but rather as the ongoing outcome of relations and contexts'.

Recent years have seen increased appreciation of the importance of emotional or affective dimensions to urban encounters. It is recognized that the 'intangible feelings that can overlay particular spaces at particular times' (Lucherini and Hanks, 2020: 100) play a key role in how landscapes are experienced, and that the 'thickness' of emotional or affective geographies has significant implications for enabling or constraining human agency (de Backer and Pavoni, 2018; Thibaud, 2011). In particular, the idea of 'atmosphere' has been deployed as a way of conceptualizing the combination of material, social, and emotional and affective character of places (Anderson, 2009; Bille at al, 2015; Edensor, 2012; Edensor and Sumartojo, 2015; Sørenson, 2014). Böhme (1993) has explored the idea of atmosphere in terms of aesthetics, arguing that atmosphere is that quality that lies 'in-between' the qualities of material

objects and environments and the 'human states' of consciousness and emotion – including hate and fear – through which those environments are known and judged, and by which they are related. The importance of atmosphere for the changing landscapes of postindustrial cities has been noted in recent work (for example Adams et al, 2020; Gandy, 2017; Jones et al, 2017), which has highlighted how urban atmospheres 'appear from an interplay between different human and non-human elements, including buildings, sites, landmarks, landscapes and so on', which 'shape individuals' feelings, behaviours and perceptions as they interact with their surroundings' (Adams et al, 2020: 309). Urban atmospheres, as Gandy (2017: 357) has described, 'are both experienced and created: they encompass extant features of emotional and material life as well as its staging or manipulation', which, as Bille et al (2015) have pointed out, are often associated with neoliberal urban redevelopment projects seeking to create not only material environments but also atmospheres of individualism and consumption.

Understood in this way, the concept of atmosphere acknowledges the importance of the emotional and affective aspects of the experience of places, while remaining anchored to material actuality, and offers potential insight into how the changing and contested urban landscapes contribute to the encounters and experiences which comprise female students' everyday geographies.

Researching students' geographies

In 2016 an online survey was sent to all undergraduate and postgraduate students studying on campus at the post-92 civic-style Northfacing University in 'Northtown', a formerly industrial city in the north of England. The university is spread over two campuses across the city. Student accommodation is located around the city in four university-operated and three private sites, all separate to campus locations and intermingled with either residential or commercial properties. Most students attending the university come from the surrounding region (although there are significant populations of

international students), and many do not live in student accommodation but either elsewhere in the city or within commuting distance.

The survey aimed to capture the prevalence and the nature of interpersonal violence and abuse (hereafter IVA) (measured across general categories of verbal abuse and bullying, physical abuse and violence, sexual abuse and violence, and stalking and online harassment and abuse) experienced by students on and off campus during their time as students. The survey was carried out in consultation with a steering group of university community stakeholders and students studying a third-year gender and violence module who acted as critical friends. The research was approved by the University Research Ethics Committee.

The survey received 1,034 usable responses from undergraduate and postgraduate students across all faculties of the university (approximately 10 percent of the total student population). The proportions of female and male students (67 and 33 percent respectively) were broadly consistent with the wider student population (59 percent female and 41 percent male) although male students were slightly underrepresented.

The principal findings of this research are reported elsewhere (Roberts et al, 2019, 2020), but were consonant with previous research (for instance Barbaret et al, 2004; Kavanaugh, 2013; ONS, 2018) indicating that young female students were more likely to report having experienced verbal sexual harassment and physical sexual assault than male students, and to believe that they were targeted because of their sex. Verbal sexual harassment was the most common form of abuse and experienced everywhere but most frequently on campus. The most prevalent form of physical sexual abuse was unwanted sexual contact – typically opportunistic assaults in public places, especially clubs and bars - (see also Fedina et al, 2018), although rarer instances of sustained and violent assaults on campus and in private spaces were reported. Female students were significantly more likely to report feeling unsafe both on campus and in the broader urban environment than their male counterparts, and the influence of spatial and temporal context exerted a stronger influence on these feelings of (un)safety

for female students. Much smaller numbers of both male and female students from black, Asian, and Arab backgrounds reported experiences of verbal racial abuse.

In addition to exploring prevalence and patterns of IVA, the survey contained a range of open questions exploring students' experiences of IVA and perceptions of safety on campus and in the broader urban environment. In their responses to these questions, a number of respondents provided information about the impact of their experiences and perceptions of IVA on their attitudes and behaviours while navigating their urban environments, which cast light on complex and ambivalent processes of everyday negotiations concerning the atmospheres of urban landscapes.

While overall engagement with the survey broadly reflected the demographics of the university population, the accounts regarding experiences and perceptions of IVA that emerged from this research were of a type. While accounts from Black and Asian female students, lesbian, gay and bisexual students, as well as those reporting some form of disability were represented, the accounts belonged primarily to young, white, heterosexual female students. While ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability are implicated here, and suggest a complex relationship regarding marginality (for a discussion of which see Roberts et al, 2019), and will likely generate important variations in experience and response to IVA, the most significant predictor of experiencing IVA – and sexual violence and abuse in particular – was being female, and the focus of the present discussion reflects this.

Students' everyday negotiations of urban landscapes

Encounters with, and the perceived threat, of hate, fear, and violence feature frequently in female students' experiences of urban landscapes. These 'landscapes of (un)safety' result from their everyday (re)assessment of urban environments, but are also shaped by broader discourses informed by media portrayals, shared accounts of experiences of hate, abuse, and violence, and previous experiences of (un)safe landscapes and encounters (Roberts et al, 2020). 'Every social space,' Lefebvre argued, 'is the

outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents, signifying and non-signifying, perceived and directly experienced, practical and theoretical' (1991: 110). Navigating the landscape of such spaces involves making practical sense of these contributing currents, and experiences and perceptions of (un)safety are notable contributors to this process of sense-making, particularly for female students. This is not a straightforward matter of identifying certain spaces or features as either 'safe' or 'unsafe'; rather, it involves the (re)assessment of a range of varying and interacting features contributing to the perception of 'unsafe' landscapes (Nasar and Fisher, 1992) as they are encountered.

While there are noticeable patterns in female students' constructions of these landscapes, the locations and conditions they typically feature, and their responses to these (un)safe landscapes (Roberts et al, 2019, 2020), on a deeper level, there is also considerable ambivalence and contradiction (Karner and Parker, 2010). Rather than undermining the regularities in these constructions, however, the argument made here is that these ambivalences speak to more fundamental aspects of how hate, fear, and safety feature in female students' experiences of their urban environments by drawing attention to the role of atmospheres in the experience of urban landscapes, and of everyday spatial negotiations in their (re)production.

Ambivalent atmospheres of (un)safety

'Hotspots' of unsafety - such as underpasses, public transport, 24-hour access buildings, and bars and clubs - featured frequently in students' accounts, but were identified as 'unsafe' under particular circumstances (typically during darkness, in the presence of potentially dangerous others, or when female students were themselves alone); which is to say, when such locations were experienced as possessing a particular atmosphere. As one student described:

> I feel unsafe in the underpass where [the public transport link] is, on the way to [riverbank] campus, during the day but especially at night when there's not a lot of people around. (20, White British, heterosexual)

Or, as another neatly summarized, the city is unsafe:

> where it is dark and empty. (23, Bangladeshi, heterosexual)

This was not a question of fixed or static conditions, however, but of contingency. Places that were sometimes feared and avoided – such as spaces between university buildings or the spaces where public transport is accessed – were at other times viewed as safe, or safely negotiated by travelling in groups, or, in yet other circumstances became key features in safety strategies.

The ambivalence between crowded and desolate spaces is especially striking in this regard. Empty spaces are associated with vulnerability and exposure (Fileborn, 2016; Nasar and Fisher, 1992). However, unsurprisingly, crowded public and leisure spaces such as bars and clubs – commonly acknowledged sites of the unwanted sexual harassment that comprises the majority of everyday low-level sexual abuses to which women are subjected (Fedina et al, 2018; Fileborn, 2016) – are also frequently cited as 'unsafe' locations, even as they were simultaneously locations of enjoyment and sociability. While isolation was commonly reported as a significant contributing factor to unsafe atmospheres, for other students, such perceptions were the result of the presence of (generally unfamiliar and potentially threatening) others. As one student remarked:

> At times when I have felt unsafe, it is usually due to large groups of people who are passing through the area rather than the area itself. (23, White British, heterosexual)

This is even the case, as the following student made clear, on dedicated 'student nights', which, despite crowds of fellow students, and the safety of friendship groups, are often identified as unsafe environments:

> I feel safe when I am with a group of friends. I feel safe in the city centre during student nights, because there are policemen. (23, other White background, heterosexual)

For many female students, therefore, the presence or absence of these atmospheres can be alleviated by the presence of friends or others:

> I feel unsafe when I am alone but if I'm with friends, then I know I have a fighting chance of not being put in much danger that night. (18, White British, sexuality not reported)

Such ambivalence was also found in relation to university buildings and campus sites, where safety is contingent on time of day, darkness, and isolation, and can be both refuge and a site of exposure, depending on whether other students are present, or whether the buildings are (or are seen to be) secure:

> I generally feel safe inside the buildings and on site, but walking home or to [public transport] stations especially in the late afternoon/evenings, I feel particularly unsafe around […] campus (22, White British, lesbian)

> I feel safer in university buildings that are familiar to me […] however in the evening or out of term time the absence of undergraduate students and staff members taking leave makes the building empty and intimidating. (28, White British, heterosexual)

Temporality is a key dimension to the experience of urban atmospheres. While the predictable variations of daylight are a well-documented and common element in female students' experience of urban atmospheres, it is frequently the 'unpredictability' of specific places, especially at night, that contributes to their (un)safe atmospheres:

> I feel incredibly safe within the university grounds, i.e. in the library or language lab and will happily stay here till late at night; however, I will never walk home in the dark or late at night, just because you never know what will happen. (23, White British, heterosexual)

This unpredictability typically relates to unfamiliar people (often 'drunks') whose presence significantly alters the atmosphere of places, rendering the otherwise familiar unknowable and risky:

> I feel particularly unsafe whilst using the trains at night as they are always filled with drunken people that are unpredictable. (21, White British, heterosexual)

The wider urban environment, of course, is subject to a greater variety of change, and the 'unpredictable' character of urban environments became a notable feature in their atmospheres:

> I find that it's a bit unsafe when there's a [football] match and everyone is going to town to have a drink. Usually I will avoid these areas or not go out at all. Same goes every Friday and Saturday night, and Wednesday night when it's the student's night out. (23, Asian, heterosexual)

The ambivalences contained in these 'differential notions of safety' (England and Simon, 2010: 203) are not at all novel or exceptional; rather, they reinforce, but go beyond, the accepted understanding

that spaces are differently constructed during day and night-time (Valentine, 2001), or when busy or 'desolate' (Nasar and Fisher, 1992). This suggests a more complex, active, and ambivalent, process of experiencing urban landscapes of safety, hate, and fear, in which clear distinctions between 'safe' and 'unsafe' spaces are less relevant. Instead, atmosphere plays a key role in female students' assessment of the blurring of boundaries that is characteristic of postindustrial society and its spatial expression (Läpple et al, 2010). Yet atmospheres, by virtue of their position 'in-between' the material and the emotional, subject and object, absences and presences, are in their very nature ambivalent, ambiguous, and contradictory (Anderson, 2009; Bille et al, 2015; Böhme, 1993) which means that, for female students, urban landscapes are, in a certain sense, forever uncertain and contingent.

Everyday negotiations of ambivalent landscapes

The ambivalence of atmospheres affects the ways in which urban landscapes are experienced and understood by female students however they are not passive in their reception of such atmospheres but play an active role in their construction. It is in the embodied act of movement – the spatial negotiations that make up much of what Vera-Grey and Kelly (2020) call 'safety work' – that the effects of urban atmospheres on female students' geographies is evident. For many female students, experiences of urban atmospheres are incorporated into their everyday routines, becoming spatial material for the practice of agency in which they respond to and 'modify and co-create' these atmospheres (Edensor and Sumartojo, 2015: 253).

Students respond to their experiences of unsafety in a variety of ways; typically, either avoiding urban spaces entirely, or making more specific renegotiations in their everyday routines:

> I have been stalked by men, especially older men especially during my first year as I did not know people so I often walked alone […] it was traumatic to the point that I restricted myself from going out. (21, Black/Black British, heterosexual)

The ambivalence and contingency of these atmospheres – that is, their propensity to shift and be (re)constituted depending on the time of day, presence of others (strangers or companions), and so on – means that in many instances the actual atmosphere of a place cannot be known (at least not with certainty) in advance, but only in, or close to, the moment of encounter. Previous experience and knowledge of, or presumptions about, the atmosphere of particular places is often enough to alter female students' movements to avoid such places (Nasar and Fisher, 1992; Roberts, 2019; Roberts et al, 2020), resulting in many locations being generally avoided (for instance by not going into the city on Friday or Saturday evenings, or avoiding particular car parks and underpasses). However, the ambivalence of some atmospheres (including campus sites, university buildings, and spaces in the night-time economy) mean that they can be experienced as safe, even desirable, and therefore sought intentionally. Also, these spaces, and others (such as public transport) are sometimes simply unavoidable features of students' daily routines. Consequently, many landscapes and atmospheres must be negotiated in more contingent, ad hoc ways, which generate varied and nuanced everyday negotiations and contribute to equally subtle and complex geographies. For instance, as one student remarked:

> I often ensure I walk home with friends or check as I am leaving a, after a night out that no 'suspicious' or drunk people are walking in the same direction. (22, White British, heterosexual)

Living with contingency and navigating urban landscapes can involve multiple reconfigurations of planned and unplanned routes:

> So there are some area's I'd rather not walk down [when it's dark] where I would in the day. I'd normally find a longer more lit way to my destination. (20, White British, bisexual)

The paths taken by female students in negotiating (un)safe landscapes, then, are spatial expressions, or 'pedestrian speech acts' (de Certeau, 1984: 97), which contribute to the 'rhetoric' of (un)safe landscapes. When female students negotiate their urban landscapes to avoid or mitigate the threat of sexual harassment and violence they interact dialectically with these landscapes, both appropriating the landscape in their own everyday strategies to negotiate the ambivalent terrain of (un)safety, and 'acting out' the social relations that underpin the creation of these landscapes, atmospheres and their interpretations. By acting in response to the atmospheres of the urban environment, namely, in this case, that 'thread of misanthropy' (Thrift, 2005) which normalizes misogyny and sexual hostility toward women in public spaces, female students are editing, adding to, and developing these atmospheres. By being a part of and moving through urban landscapes, female students' responses to (un)safe landscapes contribute to both the 'script' of those places and to their atmospheres: places avoided by female students can become 'male only' spaces as a consequence, while, simultaneously, the paths female students do take become those innovative spatial 'turns of phrase' (Certeau 1984) creating spaces, and 'shortcuts' which *are* used by female students, rewriting a shifting landscape of (un)safety. This negotiation between landscape and pedestrian – plot and character – is made all the clearer when these choices are not freely made, but – as in conversations in which certain words, topics, or attitudes are 'out of bounds' – are carried out within an historical and social context of previous experience of, and discourses surrounding, the 'gender/hatescapes' (Datta, 2016; Hall and Bates, 2019) of hate and violence (Roberts et al, 2020; Valentine, 1992) that influence and censor certain movements.

Landscapes of (un)safety and neoliberal urbanism

Atmospheres, as Bille et al (2015: 34) point out, 'do not merely exist as simultaneity of human beings and material culture,' but 'are susceptible to how the material environment changes, to changing human values and cultural premises'. As Edensor and Sumartojo (2015: 257) suggest, 'responses to atmospheres are contingent upon the historical and cultural contexts that condition their effects'. It follows that just as Benjamin (1999) read the consequences of modernity in his meanderings through the surrealism of the Paris Arcades, the everyday negotiations female students undertake in navigating their (unsafe) landscapes are influenced by, and cast light upon, more general elements of postindustrial urban life and the significance therein of urban atmospheres.

Simmel's prognosis for untreated modern urbanism was emotional indifference, and the depersonalization and rationalization of urban encounter. The spatial expression of modern capitalism generated a need to intellectualize the urban landscape: to treat it as a practical (and particularly economic) problem: a puzzle to be solved; a map to be negotiated. The strategies employed by female students in dealing with (un)safety are a testament to this practicality. The variety and intensity of stimuli Simmel saw as the cause of the blasé attitude, however, has only increased over the century since his analysis, and is further compounded by the blurring of social and especially spatial boundaries which features so prominently in postindustrial urban configurations (Miles, 2010; Sennett, 2000).

This has significant impact on the construction of the material and atmospheric landscapes of cities with multiple consequences for female students' everyday geographies. Firstly, urban landscapes are increasingly uncertain. Peck et al (2009: 56) have argued contemporary cities are subject to an open-ended process of 'creative destruction', which generates the need for continual redevelopment and renewal in order to realize and administrate new forms of capital. A major consequence of this is the reordering and reforming of borders and boundaries, and the (re)production of urban atmospheres (Adams et al, 2020; Jones et al, 2017). This is not only in the uses of urban space (between, for example, commercial and residential), but also between the public and the private, work and leisure, and the ways in which they manifest spatially and come to feature in people's everyday experiences

and encounters with urban landscapes (Läpple et al, 2010). In a city like Northtown, this extends to the university landscape, as university spaces are typically not separated spatially from the wider urban landscapes, but irregularly interspersed and intermingled with other public, private, commercial and residential spaces, with the consequence that female students are frequently required to move across, and between, different spaces and atmospheres.

These effects are exacerbated by fact that the layout, materiality, and atmospheres of urban landscapes are increasingly geared to promote movement around and between sites of consumption. As Miles (2010) has remarked, places to *stop* and remain still within cities are decreasing, and urban landscapes are increasingly designed as spaces of transition, to be inhabited fleetingly and consumed *en passant*. Moreover, as Hall and Bates (2019: 106) point out, many 'havens' and 'moorings', which offer respite and defence against the enforced mobility of the city, are outside in parks and green spaces – the kinds of public places often identified by female students as 'unsafe' – or else 'part of private spaces of consumption, where lingering is not encouraged'. The consequences of the blurring of boundaries and the promotion of movement impacts female students' everyday negotiations in various ways, but are particularly true of the urban commercial centres typically the epicentre of the night-time economy, which are associated with experiences of unsafety and sexual violence, as well as being, for many female students, an integral aspect of university social life.

While a regular turnover of bars and venues supports the night-time economy of Northtown city-centre, it is also steadily diminishing as development moves from the centre and toward the seafront. While this may, in time, reduce the dominance of the night-time economy in city-centre public spaces, it leaves in its wake an archipelago of abandoned, unused spaces and often derelict buildings across the city-centre, which further interrupt the regularity of the landscape and introduce new pockets of unsafety. Moreover, the relocation of the bars and restaurants from the city centre, and so also the main campus area and accommodation blocks, increases the need for female students to travel across the city to participate in the night-time economy. To travel by foot from the city centre to the seafront

involves crossing various uses of space, and a significant number of typically – and notoriously – unsafe features like underpasses, poorly-lit and empty spaces, as well as spaces of prolonged exposure to passers-by. Public transport options are limited and, where they are available, involve exchanging one uncertain environment for another. All of which are subject to increased uncertainty at night or if travelling alone.

In addition to the increased movement between uncertain urban landscapes, the construction, or staging (Bille et al, 2015) of urban atmospheres has become a deliberate strategy in the commodification of space and place (Hudson, 2015). The 'creative destruction' and reconstruction (Peck et al, 2009) by which landscapes are continually made valuable also relies on the (re)construction of emotional attachment to, or engagement with, place (Adams et al, 2020; Jones et al, 2017). Urban landscapes are designed to engage the senses and elicit an emotional response from those moving through them. Consequently, *to feel* the urban landscape becomes an economic imperative. There is a sense in which female students' encounters with the atmospheres of postindustrial urban landscapes can be seen as Simmel's blasé attitude in overdrive: where it is impossible to be *sensitive* to all aspects of the atmospheres of urban landscapes and equally impossible to be *insensitive* to them. As consumers, female students are encouraged not only to consume *in* urban spaces, but to consume those spaces, to appreciate them aesthetically, emotionally; that is, to experience their atmospheres. When this coincides with the experience of the atmospheres as unsafe, or as sites of hate or abuse, as is often the case for female students, the proliferation and staging of atmospheres, combined with their continual reconstruction, can be seen to contribute to their experience as landscapes of (un)safety.

Conclusion

Cities have always been sites and sources of encounter. For female students, urban environments are very often characterized by everyday misogyny and the experience and threat of interpersonal and

especially sexual violence. Female students' everyday experiences of urban landscapes can be understood as practical negotiations of ambivalent atmospheres of (un)safety. While there is regularity and stability, these atmospheres are subject to contingent, and consequently uncertain, conditions and interpretations. These atmospheres generate correspondingly ambivalent and uncertain responses in female students' everyday negotiations, which do not simply reflect urban landscapes, but are instrumental in (re)producing the atmospheres through which these landscapes are experienced.

This casts light on the utility of the concept of hate for understanding female students' everyday experiences of urban atmospheres. While landscapes cannot 'hate', and only in an extreme and strained sense could be considered 'hateful', their material construction and cultural or symbolic character can contribute to atmospheres which can be experienced and recognized by female students as threatening, (un)safe, and conducive of the background misogyny that makes the threat of sexual violence and abuse a frequent concern in urban spaces. While these experiences are anchored to particular places at particular times, they are also influenced by broader perceptions, experiences, and (often political) discourses. In this regard, the idea that any given individual encountered may be motivated by hate towards women is of less consequence than the overriding impression, which pervades the atmospheres of much urban space (and is reinforced by symbolic statements such as the omission of women from hate-crime legislation), that such atmospheres are commonplace (for some, even desirable) that women's safety in public spaces is not a concern, that they are not valued as a social group, that misogyny is acceptable. This is reflected in the lack of consideration for or consultation with women about their perceptions of safety in the continued (re)design of urban spaces.

The transformations to urban environments brought about by postindustrial society are implicated in these landscapes and atmospheres: specifically, those intended to encourage and exploit the emotional character of landscapes and their atmospheres. The staging of urban atmospheres feeds

into landscapes of (un)safety by altering the material environment into increasingly private, closed-off spaces where the kinds of public and social environments that can encourage female presence, or through which female students can confidently travel, become difficult or impossible. Such landscapes exacerbate the ambivalence and uncertainty of female students' negotiations, promoting continuous movement through urban spaces, which not only increases the frequency and variety of (potentially dangerous) encounters, but also, by generating a constant sense of movement, change, renewal, serves to reinforce the experience of urban landscapes as fleeting, unstable, and uncertain, feeding into the unpredictability of urban atmospheres, and placing renewed demands on female students to reinterpret and renegotiate their everyday landscapes.

While much of this speaks to the general experience of women in urban spaces, female students are also a particular and heterogeneous group, and the specific context of the university and city are significant. The students at Northfacing University faced different kinds of landscapes and different atmospheres and negotiations to female students attending more wholly contained campus universities, or institutions in 'university cities' where distinctions between campus and 'city' are perhaps less stark and atmospheres less unstable. Experiences of university landscapes are also influenced by the liminality of female students' relationships to those environments. Whether a student is a native resident of the city or a newcomer; if they reside in student or private accommodation, or commute to university (particularly by public transport); as well the added dimensions of ethnicity, disability, and sexuality, can all contribute to the ways in which the landscapes are encountered, understood, and negotiated. Further research could explore the relative importance of these and other dimensions in female students' experiences of and negotiations with urban atmospheres and their impacts on feelings of (un)safety, and would benefit from methods which could both conceptualize and access empirically the contingencies involved in female students' practical everyday negotiations.

The ambivalence and contingency of atmospheres and their negotiation poses challenges for simple responses to addressing female students' safety concerns on and around university campuses by providing increased lighting, or more frequent transport, for instance, particularly where the boundaries of university campuses (as with Northfacing University) blur into the broader urban environment. Universities and other stakeholders (such as police, transport, venues) have a role to play, but these issues are entangled with the 'mutual indifference', 'misanthropy', and conflicts and contradictions inherent in the character of cities, and exacerbated in particular ways by their postindustrial (re)development.

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[i] This, like 'Northtown', is a pseudonym.