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Hot times, hot places. Youths' risk perceptions and risk management in Chicago and Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

Many young people in low-income neighbourhoods are considered to be at risk of poor social outcomes and of becoming victims of violence and crime. This exploratory study focuses on how young people perceive risk and navigate their environment in two low-income, multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, one in Rotterdam and one in Chicago. We conducted in-depth interviews and mental mapping exercises with young people aged 14–19 in both sites. We found that neighbourhoods matter because they expose young people to certain kinds of risks, but also that their responses were shaped by their perceptions and interpretations of these risks. Moreover, we illustrate the dynamic and interactive nature of these processes of risk perception and management by discussing the ways in which different groups occupy and use, or travel through, public space at different times of the day. We argue that risk in disadvantaged neighbourhoods is not a static dimension in young people's lives but rather emerges from an ongoing and complex interaction between perception, interpretation and response that can be seen as a kind of boundary work.

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Introduction

Many youths in low-income neighbourhoods are at risk of poor social outcomes and of becoming victims of violence and criminality. Several studies in the United States and Europe have examined how the neighbourhood context in which a young person grows up is related to issues like victimization, behavioural problems, low levels of education and low aspirations (Kauppinen 2007; Sykes and Musterd 2011; White and Green 2011). Moreover, in the last few years, an increasing number of studies has paid attention to youths' own perceptions of neighbourhood risk and how they deal with these risks (Evans 2002; Cobbina, Miller, and Brunson 2008; Robinson 2009). Most of these studies, however, adopt general assumptions about risk and risk management and tend to overlook the complex and interactive nature of risk perceptions and management in the everyday lives of young people. Recent scholarship on youth gangs has convincingly argued for

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more situated accounts of gang involvement (Sanchez-Jankowski 2003; Brotherton and Barrios 2004; Hallsworth and Young 2008) and we will extend this line of reasoning to include perceptions of risk and risk management and how they develop in different national and cultural contexts (Fraser 2013).

Thus, this study explores the risk perceptions and risk management strategies of young people (14–19 years old) in two low-income, multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, one in Rotterdam and one in Chicago. In doing so, we aim to illustrate the variation and interactional nature of these processes in different neighbourhoods. Our study focuses on two principal questions: (1) How do youths perceive and manage risks in their low-income neighbourhood? and, (2) How do contextual differences influence the dynamics of risk management?

We first discuss existing theories of neighbourhood risk and risk management strategies. We then pay attention to theories of boundary work and relational approaches. After that we outline the methods and data upon which our analysis is based and describe the two neighbourhoods – Feijenoord in Rotterdam and Rogers Park in Chicago – that provide the empirical contexts for the study. We then examine youths' perceptions of neighbourhood spaces as places of risk and safety in each context, and provide an analysis of the complexity of risk management strategies they apply in those contexts.

Neighbourhood risk and risk management strategies

A large body of research on neighbourhood effects has shown that living in high-poverty neighbourhoods can lead to a range of social problems such as high-risk behaviours (Ingoldsby and Shaw 2002; Oberwittler 2004), social exclusion (Rankin and Quane 2000; Brännström 2004) and exposure to crime and violence (Sampson and Lauritsen 1990; Van Wilsem, Wittebrood, and De Graaf 2006). Moreover, in the last couple of years scholars have increasingly focused on the ways in which young people manage this risk. Anderson's (1999) writings on 'the code of the street', for example, show how young people manage the risks they encounter in the street, for example through the focus on respect and personal status. Along the same lines, Holligan (2015) finds that a behavioural code is evident in Scotland sharing characteristics with Anderson's code of the street, despite differences in terms of chronology and cultural setting. Moreover, Sandberg (2008) uses the term street capital to describe the language, street-smarts and bodily capital that people can use to navigate their deprived neighbourhood and experiences of marginality in the context of Norway. Cahill (2000) adopts a more spatial approach when using the term 'street literacy' to describe the ways in which young people understand the world and construct their identities through interaction and experience in the environment. The 'capital' in Cahill's account can be seen as 'informal local knowledge, grounded in personal experiences and passed down in the form of rules, boundaries set by parents, neighbourhood folklore, and kids' collective wisdom' (252). But because people who live in the same neighbourhood are not uniform in how they respond to their environment, young people growing up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods may have a range of different options or cultural scripts to choose from. For example, Harding (2010) argues that young people's decision of whether to join a gang or focus on their education is shaped in large part by their situated assessment of the perceived benefits and consequences of these options. This argument would suggest between-neighbourhood, but also within neighbourhood, differences in risk perception and risk

management strategies. For example, while differences in neighbourhood structural characteristics such as ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, high residential turnover and high levels of violence can lead to different levels of violent and delinquent behaviour among young people (Harding 2010; Kingston, Huizinga, and Elliott 2009) a handful of studies also indicate the possibility of differences in risk management strategies *within* neighbourhoods. These differences are perceptively captured by Anderson's (1999) description of the contrasting orientations among young people growing up in the same disadvantaged neighbourhood in Philadelphia. While a 'street orientation' would lead young people to embrace violence as the only plausible response to threats, a 'decent orientation' allowed for multiple and non-violent conflict resolution strategies. In addition to different orientations there may also be gendered differences in the ways in which young people respond to risk. But as Mitchell et al. (2010) argue, the generally held perception of young men as active risk takers and young women as more risk-averse maybe too simplistic. While some young women carefully manage their socio-spatial behaviour to avoid everyday aspects of risk, Green and Singleton (2006) show that there are also significant contextual differences within and between groups of women. While these studies begin to complicate the implicit notion of neighbourhood risk as a static and unidirectional influence by emphasizing the different ways in which young people growing up in the same neighbourhood may respond to the same risks, this paper expands these insights to incorporate a dynamic and interactional dimension into the process of risk perception and management. Using the concept of boundary work we argue that the risk management strategies of one group of young people may shape the perceptions and responses of other groups in the neighbourhood.

Boundary work and risk management

In this study we argue that the risk management strategies of young people should be seen as a form of boundary work, or the construction and reconstruction of symbolic boundaries. Lamont and Molnar (2002, 168) define symbolic boundaries as 'conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space'. The formation of these boundaries is not a one-way process. Boundaries are always constructed in relation to the other, and should thus be seen as a process of negotiation (Jenkins 1996). Researchers increasingly emphasize the importance of 'boundary work' rather than seeing boundaries as something static.

Paasi (1998), for instance, argues that boundaries should not be seen as fixed lines, but as processes existing in socio-cultural action. The construction of communities and their boundaries happens through narratives or 'stories' that provide people with a means to order and interpret their everyday experiences. Based on this line of literature we conceptualize boundaries as having three important characteristics: (1) they are relational: they define us against them; (2) they create, reproduce and change hierarchies between groups of people, and thus partly determine the trajectory of individuals in society through allocation of resources and (3) they are socially constructed. These boundaries are not fixed but rather continuously negotiated, managed and re-negotiated. Examining boundaries allows us to capture the dynamic and interactive dimensions of risk perception and risk management among young people growing up in deprived neighbourhoods in Rotterdam and Chicago.

In this paper, we foreground the importance of individual negotiations and strategies as well as the role of the 'other' in the production of boundaries between dangerous and non-dangerous places and people. We differentiate between two dynamic and intertwined types of boundary work: through spatial strategies and through social strategies. Spatial strategies refer to the distinction of certain places and spaces in different categories (for example, safe and unsafe areas). Social strategies consist of practices that attempt to maintain social relations, define membership and regulate norms of behaviours. We will illustrate how young people in Feijenoord and Rogers Park adopt these spatial and social strategies and how these can be seen as a form of boundary work.

Context and methods

In this study we selected two neighbourhoods that have similar socioeconomic and ethnic compositions and a similar built environment, but are embedded in different national and city contexts: Rogers Park in Chicago and Feijenoord in Rotterdam.

Neighbourhood selection

We first selected Feijenoord, as it was already included in a larger study on youths in low-income neighbourhoods in the Netherlands (see Visser, Bolt, and Van Kempen 2015). Feijenoord is one of the most deprived areas of Rotterdam, and of the Netherlands as a whole, and as such is an appropriate location to investigate risk management strategies. We then selected Rogers Park, as the two neighbourhoods are comparable on a number of factors (see Table 1)[1]:

Table 1. Core characteristics of the case studies.

	Feijenoord	Rotterdam		Rogers Park	Chicago
Population	72,297	618,279		54,991	2,695,598
Per capita income	$14,150	$16,800		$24,248	$27,940
Households below the poverty level[a]	22%	15%		23%	19%
Unemployment	23%	15%		7.9%	12%
Ethnic diversity					
Dutch	17%	54%	*White*	38%	32%
Turkish	19%	8%	*Black*	26%	32%
Surinamese	11%	9%	*Hispanic*	24%	29%
Moroccan	10%	6%	*Asian*	6%	5%
Antillean/Aruban	4%	3%			
Owner occupation	14%	34%		19%	50%
Crime rates (per 1000 inhabitants)					
Criminal damage	9.57			7.82	
Battery/assault	5.91			2.64	
Homicide	0.06			0.07	
Narcotics	2.49			5.50	
Robbery	2.16			2.47	
Sexual assault		0.22[b]		0.35	

Sources: Feijenoord district (2010); GGD Rotterdam Rijnmond (2010); Municipality of Rotterdam (2012, 2013); Statistics Netherlands (2013); Chicago Police Department (2010); US Census Bureau (2010a, 2010b); Chicago Tribune (2014).

[a]The poverty line in the Netherlands is a gross income of US$1325 per month for single people and US$2475 for a couple with two children (Statistics Netherlands 2009). In the United States, the poverty threshold for a single person is a gross annual income of US$11,490 (US$957.50 per month); for a family group of four, including two children, it is US$23,550 ($1962.50 per month) (US Census Bureau 2010c).

[b]Only data available on city average. Total number of sex crimes (which includes but is not limited to sexual assault) is not significantly higher in Feijenoord than it is in the rest of Rotterdam.

(1) *Socioeconomic composition.* Both neighbourhoods have comparable average incomes and a comparable percentage of people living below the poverty line. The unemployment rate, however, is higher in Feijenoord.
(2) *Ethnic diversity and residential turnover.* Both neighbourhoods have a high level of ethnic diversity. Encountering people from other ethnic groups may lead to distrust and increased anonymity among residents (Putnam 2007). The relatively high level of residential turnover in Rogers Park may even further amplify these dynamics.
(3) *Built environment.* In both neighbourhoods, multi-unit apartment buildings predominate and the percentage of owner occupation is relatively low. Characteristics of the built environment such as semi-public staircases in many apartment buildings provide youths and others with ample opportunity for informal socializing and potential engagement in anti-social behaviour. Signs of such behaviour in the form of litter, graffiti and vandalism is ever present in both neighbourhoods.
(4) *Crime rates.* The official crime rates for the two neighbourhoods are similar. Despite the recognition that official crime rates are not to be confused with the incidence of crime, these figures provide a sense for the potential perception of risk among young people in these sites.

Selection of respondents and methods

The focus of the research was on youths aged 14–19 years. The lower age limit coincides with the transition from primary to secondary school which usually marks a change in action spaces and parental management strategies. This transition can have an important effect on youths' social contacts and leisure activities. In the Netherlands, secondary school starts at 12; in the United States most students enrol in secondary school at age 14. We chose 14 as the lower age limit in order to ensure the comparability of youths in the two contexts. We set the upper limit at 19, as in the Netherlands the majority of youths are still at school until this age. Around the age of 19, many youths finish secondary school or secondary vocational education and are likely to enter both the housing and the labour market. We used the same upper limit in Chicago to ensure the comparability.

In Feijenoord, we recruited respondents through community organizations, secondary schools and snowball sampling. In Rogers Park, we selected respondents through community organizations, the park district and snowball sampling. We began by identifying key stakeholders such as teachers and youth workers, then recruited through these key stakeholders by means of flyers and multiple site visits. In Feijenoord, we conducted 25 interviews between January and August 2013; in Rogers Park, we conducted 30 interviews between September and December 2013. The respondents were diverse in terms of gender, ethnic background and age.

During the in-depth interviews, we asked the youths about their neighbourhood experiences, their socio-spatial practices, who they met in different settings, their perceptions of risk and resources, and how participation in these settings influenced their lives. We also asked them to visualize their socio-spatial practices through a mental mapping exercise. Respondents were asked to draw a map of important neighbourhood settings and the interviewer used this process to probe into their experience of these settings. Most of the interviews were conducted individually but on four occasions respondents

requested a group interview with two or three friends. Interviews were conducted in Dutch and English, lasted 45–90 minutes, were transcribed in their entirety and then coded and analysed using NVivo qualitative software. General patterns and themes that emerged during the first stage of the analysis were further refined during subsequent rounds of coding. Respondents were assigned pseudonyms in order to protect their identities. Finally, fieldwork included observations of both neighbourhoods, attendance at meetings in youth centres, and informal conversations with residents, community workers and teachers.

It is important to note several limitations to our study. First, our ability to generalize findings to non-observed cases, such as other youths growing up in Feijenoord and Rogers Park or elsewhere is compounded by the specifics of our respondent sample. Second, we are unable to elaborate the extent to which neighbourhood risk perceptions and responses of our respondents may change over time or how they might differ for different age groups in these two neighbourhoods. Despite these limitations, however, we are confident that our findings shed new light on the interactive and even interdependent nature of the perception and management of risk among different groups of young people growing up in these two sites.

The neighbourhoods

Feijenoord

The easiest way to get to Feijenoord is to catch a tram or take the tube to the southern part of the city. En route, one passes the Erasmus Bridge, which connects the north and south sides of the city across the river Meuse. While on the tram, the population of the neighbourhoods through which one travels slowly changes from white Dutch people to a mix of people from non-western backgrounds. What stands out in Feijenoord are the many ethnic shops interspersed with international chains like KFC and McDonald's on the main shopping street; the large square (Afrikaanderplein) where the weekly multiethnic market is held; and the Essalam mosque, the largest in Europe, reflecting the size of the area's Muslim population. A number of these places were also highlighted in the mental maps of the neighbourhood created by our respondents. The area has a large number of community and youth centres, which organize activities for youths.

At first sight, the area looks nice, particularly compared to deprived urban neighbourhoods in the United States. It is well connected to other parts of the city and it accommodates a lot of shops and services. Nevertheless, Feijenoord does not have a favourable reputation. The area has considerable crime problems, such as drug dealing, robberies and nuisance from groups of boys. Feijenoord has one group of youths that could be described as a 'criminal gang', involved in burglary and drug-related crimes (RTV Rijnmond 2014). Moreover, there are a number of other groups that are regarded as troublesome youth groups (engaged in petty crimes, vandalism and harassment) that can be a source of perceived risks. Social life in Feijenoord is fragmented. Although it is characterized by tight networks among people from similar ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, there is anonymity and distrust among residents from different backgrounds (Pinkster and Droogleever Fortuijn 2009). The area is densely populated by Dutch standards and has limited green space. The housing stock is largely social housing, of low quality and with small and overcrowded apartments. The open staircases of multi-family

housing blocks make it easy for people to 'hang around' without being seen, which intensifies the safety problems in the area.

Rogers Park

Rogers Park is located in the far northeast corner of Chicago. It, too, is easily reached by public transport. If one takes a Red Line train north to Loyola, Morse, Jarvis or Howard Street, one passes Loyola University, which is one of the neighbourhood's most important institutions. Further into the neighbourhood, to the west, is Clark Street, one of the main shopping corridors with mainly Mexican food shops and retail. To the east is the beach and Lake Michigan, where the park district offers a wide range of activities during the summer. A number of these locations also emerged on the mental maps of the youths.

The population of Rogers Park is mixed. Groups of African-American boys hang out near the Howard 'El' station, groups of Latina girls walk back from Sullivan High School or the Chicago Math and Science Academy charter school, and diverse groups of parents wait to pick up their children from the primary school on Morse Street. The diverse ethnic composition also contributes to a rather fragmented social life, as people tend to form networks within their own ethnic group. Rogers Park is often referred to by both outsiders and residents as a very diverse community in which poverty and crime are linked to gang activity; an audit in 2012 (Main 2012) identified 17 gang factions and 249 active gang members in the neighbourhood.

Rogers Park has a relatively comprehensive range of community and youth centres offering all kinds of activities for youths. In contrast to those in Feijenoord, these centres feature prominently in youths' mental maps, but are often segregated by ethnicity. The area is characterized by more green space, such as parks and the beach, compared to Feijenoord. The role of green space in perceptions of safety is ambiguous, however. Although it is considered beneficial for the health and wellbeing of people, it may facilitate crime by providing a hiding place for perpetrators and may conceal criminal activity.

Youths' perceptions of risk

In both neighbourhoods young people defined risk primarily in terms of the prospects of getting hurt. Places like train stations and some street corners were considered 'hot' (dangerous) because of the groups of people who congregated there and the types of behaviours they engaged in. Other places, such as parks, were considered unsafe because of the absence of people. The designation of danger, however, was not only the result of an assessment of the risk of victimization in these places but also the likelihood of encounters with 'bad' peers. For boys, 'bad' peers were mostly associated with delinquency, gang membership and drug use, whereas for girls it was generally tied to inappropriate modes of conduct, such as going to clubs, associating with boys and early sexual initiation.

These different definitions of 'bad' peers were reinforced by gender-specific differences in risk perceptions. Among girls in both neighbourhoods the perception of threat was closely tied to stranger-danger and the risk of sexual victimization, often signalled by the presence of groups of older boys in public spaces. This dynamic is highlighted in the following quote by Vivian (16, Surinamese, Feijenoord):

> There is a small park over there, and there are usually youths [mostly boys] hanging out there. I really don't like walking past it. I usually take another route. They smoke and if you pass them they start shouting at you.

Kaylee (15, African-American) expressed a similar concern in reference to the Howard Area in Rogers Park:

> Like, when I'm walking on Howard and Paulina, I am so scared because I see like a whole bunch of people on the street, like, smoking [crack] and shouting comments at you, like 'Hey girl, come here!' and I feel really scared. When I walk past there, I have to put 9-1-1 [police dispatch number] on my speed dial.

Kaylee and Vivian's perceptions of risk and danger in their neighbourhood are reflective of what Popkin and colleagues (2010) termed 'female fear', which refers to a set of gender-specific threats to girls growing up in high-poverty neighbourhoods, such as an ever-present level of harassment, the danger of early and high-risk sexual behaviour.

For boys, on the other hand, the perception of risk was primarily associated with the threat of physical violence. Here we see more significant differences between the two neighbourhoods. In contrast to Feijenoord, territoriality and violence associated with gang activity was much more important in shaping the risk perceptions of boys in Rogers Park. For example, Jamal (14, African-American) – who used to be affiliated with a gang – told us: 'I can't go up on Howard. It's too dangerous over there.' While this perception was more prevalent in the accounts of gang-involved youths such as Jamal, it also affected non-involved boys, due to the personalized nature of gang-related violence. As Sichling and Roth (2016) noted, risk of victimization was the result of being seen with known gang members regardless of one's own actual membership. Although young people were able to identify gang boundaries and territories in the neighbourhood, this dynamic was amplified by the fact that membership was not denoted by colours, insignia and ethnicity but rather was a matter of personal knowledge of gang-involved youths. As Jamal explained:

> Farwell and Howard [different fractions of the same gang named after the streets they hang out on] are rivals, so there's a lot of gang-related issues with that … You don't wanna get in that mix. So if you have friends from Howard and you have friends from Farwell, don't mention it. You know you might end up getting shot.

As a result many boys in Rogers Park expressed a deep sense of distrust towards others and strangers and that they 'always had to watch their back'. Jamal explained that 'If I even step on Howard, somebody will go "What you is? What you from?"'

Although some boys in Feijenoord reported the risk of getting involved in physical altercations in their neighbourhood, avoidance of particular places was more the result of a sense of discomfort than fear. Hicham (16, Moroccan) for example explains: 'I don't like to walk at this place [train station]. It isn't very light over there and I feel I don't have good oversight. […] I don't feel unsafe, but it just doesn't feel comfortable.' While a sense of caution resonates from Hicham's description, the perceptions of risk among boys in Feijenoord were to a lesser extent the result of territoriality and gang boundaries when compared to their counterparts in Rogers Park. This may in part be due to the different severity of potential violence in each neighbourhood. It is important to note that, perhaps as a result of the diversity in both neighbourhoods, race and ethnicity did not seem to influence the risk perceptions among our respondents.

Social and spatial boundary work

Based on their perceptions the youths in our study constructed cognitive geographies of risk and safety of their respective neighbourhood and developed strategies to minimize the likelihood of victimization. These strategies to navigate risk differed for boys and girls and were mostly aimed at avoidance or protection.

Avoidance strategies

The objective of avoidance was to stay clear of particular places or situations that were perceived to be risky or dangerous. Although this strategy was by far the most common response to risk perceptions among boys and girls in both sites, there were important site-specific nuances. Most importantly, while avoidance appeared to be similarly important for girls in both sites, it seemed less important a strategy for boys in Feijenoord compared to their peers in Rogers Park. The following quote by Alyssa (16, Dutch-Antillean) from Feijenoord illustrates the strategies the majority of girls in both sites used to avoid risk.

> Sometimes, when I have to go home and it's dark, instead [of taking the bus and walking the shortest route] I take the tram and I quickly enter my street … I'd rather not take that other street. In the afternoon or morning I do, but not in the early morning when it's still dark. I'd rather not walk alone over there.

These strategies most often included the use of busy main roads, or alternative forms of transportation and conscious efforts to avoid being outside at night. Although the overall types of risks and the responses to them were similar among girls in both neighbourhoods, the perceived spatial reach of these threats differed. This difference became apparent in the mental maps drawn by girls in Rogers Park and Feijenoord. For example, similar to Meryem's (16, Turkish) map (Figure 1), most girls in Feijenoord, when asked to draw their neighbourhood and include the areas they felt were unsafe, identified specific places such as parks and the train station which they tried to avoid. The main reasons for avoiding these places were poor lighting and the presence of groups of boys or men.

By contrast, many of their counterparts in Rogers Park, like Tina (16, Nigerian), identified an entire area as a no-go zone. In her rendering of Rogers Park (Figure 2). Tina circled the area between Howard Street and Farwell Avenue which takes up the centre of the neighbourhood and marked it with the word 'don't' to indicate that this section was to be avoided at all times. Although this area was not part of the territory of a local gang, it was the buffer between two rivalling fractions of the same gang (Gangster Disciples) and as a result was the site of the majority of recent gang-related violence in the neighbourhood (see Sichling and Roth 2016).

Thus, while girls in both sites identified places that were considered unsafe, the main difference that emerged in these maps was that a majority of the girls in Rogers Park considered an entire sub-neighbourhood to be dangerous. These differences in the perception of the spatial reach of risk in turn shaped the kinds of avoidance patterns adopted by girls in each site. While girls like Meryem in Feijenoord mostly tried to avoid certain 'hot' places (such as train stations) during 'hot' times (e.g. night time) most girls in Rogers Park like Tina felt like they had to avoid entire sections of their neighbourhood at all times.

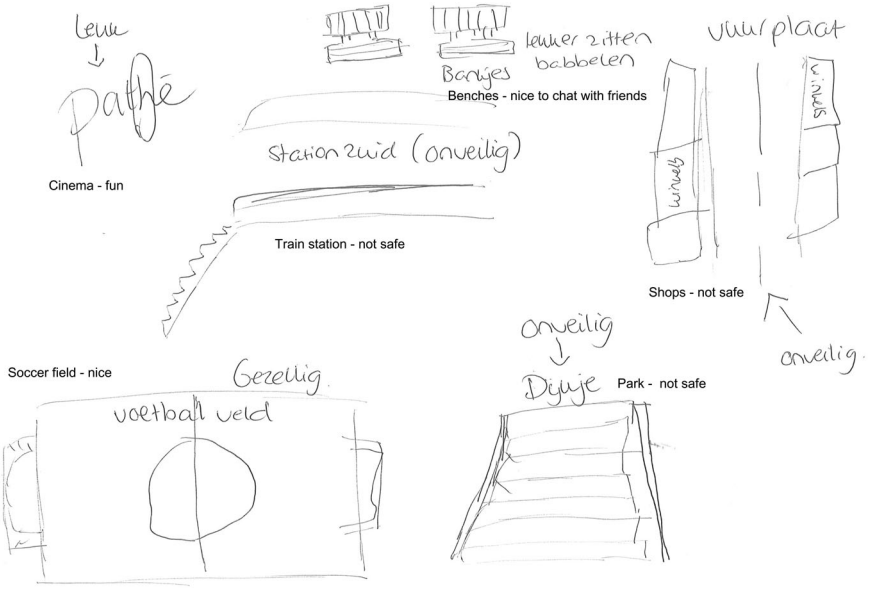

Figure 1. Mental map drawn by Meryem (Feijenoord).

These patterns of boundary drawing were even more pronounced in the accounts of the boys in Rogers Park. Similar to the girls, the boys in Rogers Park clearly identified places that were considered unsafe. The majority of the boys in Rogers Park (whether or not gang-affiliated) said that they avoided at least one location in their neighbourhood and that they 'don't come outside for no reason' and 'only go places where they are meant

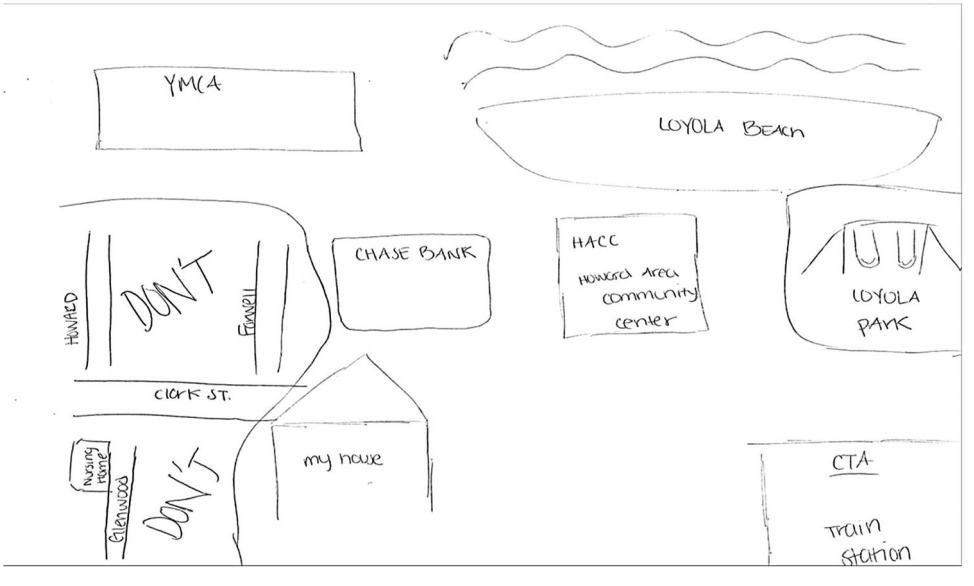

Figure 2. Mental map drawn by Tina (Rogers Park).

to be going'. Tyrell (18, African-American), explained that: 'I know it's bad out, if you're at the wrong place at the wrong time. I try to stay in the crib [home]. I try not to be outside.' In his mental map (Figure 3), Otis (18, African-American) from Rogers Park, highlighted the different gang dynamics in the neighbourhood:

> The MOE's, it's like they're the big kids. They help. They don't destroy. MOE's, they're helpful. They put you on the right path. If someone just try to mess up the vibe there, that's good, 'cause if they're there, they'll protect you no matter what, but the BDs, they love to start trouble. The GDs, they just like to lay low. Like 'I'm neutral. I don't want to get in with none of it.' It's a lot.

At the same time he also identified places he considered to be safe, such as school, work and his home.

But it is important to note that these boundaries between safe and dangerous places were not always unambiguous. Perhaps because of the personalized nature of gang membership in Rogers Park, many of our respondents indicated that they knew people who were involved in gangs and that the threat of violence, at least in part, was contingent on the particular context. Izaak (16, African-American) elaborated on this dynamic where 'Each corner, there's a different gang and the all go to one school. […] In school they act like friends […] and then outside they fight a lot'. The vagueness of these boundaries coupled with the severe danger of crossing them amplified the need for youths in Rogers Park to stay clear of entire areas of the neighbourhood or remain inside the home at all times.

In Feijenoord, by contrast, none of the boys mentioned that they felt restricted to their home or their own street. This sentiment was aptly captured by Mitchell (18, Dutch/Surinamese) in the following quote:

> I think there are some places that are perceived as unsafe by outsiders, but there is no place where I feel unsafe. Absolutely not … People get scared and don't want to go to some places, but I don't have any problem with that. I can walk anywhere.

Figure 3. Mental map of Otis (Rogers Park).

In short, the accounts and maps of our respondents showed that for girls and boys in Rogers Park, territoriality closely tied to the perception of gang boundaries and conflict was much more important for shaping their perceptions of risk and their strategies to manage it compared to their peers in Feijenoord. But since perceptions of dangerous places was closely tied to groups of people and their behaviour, avoidance strategies in both sites included evading people as well as places. Most of our respondents echoed Hicham's (16, Moroccan) description of this dynamic in Feijenoord:

> Your friends can influence you in certain ways. That's why you have to choose your friends carefully. You can think this is my friend, but one day he could make jokes with you and the other day he could play the 'tough guy' and then you'll get into trouble.

In both neighbourhoods choosing the 'right' friends was important and similar to Helina (16, Ethiopian) from Rogers Park, our respondents clearly differentiated between their own attitudes and behaviours and that of 'others':

> I don't know, but like also at my school there are a lot of people who are interested in drugs and alcohol and smoking and going to clubs and getting fake IDs and having sex, and I'm just, like, no. That's not for me. I'm just trying to have regular good old fun, clean fun. I'm not interested in any of that stuff.

In short, avoidance in Rogers Park and Feijenoord included places as well as people. Youths in both sites identified groups of others based on their pubic behaviour and tried to steer away from the places they congregated. While these general patterns were similar, there was also important variation. Most notably, the perception of risk among boys and girls in Rogers Park was closely related to the social and spatial organization of gang-related violence and its potential effects. While the threat of physical harm differed, the perceived danger of victimization in both sites led young people to adopt protective strategies in addition to avoidance.

Protective strategies

Protective strategies among our respondents were generally aimed at either reducing the likelihood of victimization or at increasing their ability to withstand it. Almost all girls in our study reported travelling in groups as the most frequent protective strategy, mostly in response to the perceived threat of sexual harassment. Anuli (17, Nigerian, Rogers Park) for example explained, that:

> My mum always told me to walk in a group with friends, just in case something might happen or somebody tries to grab me or anything like that. She said: 'Either two or three in a group or something, don't ever walk by yourself.'

Although most boys in both sites also mentioned traveling in groups as a common strategy, its benefit was mostly seen in an increased chance of being able to withstand potential attacks from other gangs or groups of boys. In Feijenoord as well as in Rogers Park boys articulated a heightened sense of awareness for the presence of other boys who were unfamiliar or from other areas in the neighbourhood because such encounters almost always included the possibility of ensuing violence (see Sichling and Roth 2016). Kaleb (15, Turkish), for instance, told us about the first time he went to a public square close to his house shortly after moving to this part of Feijenoord and '[…] fought 4

times or so with the boys over there'. He explained this as some form of character test, which can lead many young men growing up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to project a tough image of themselves in order to avoid victimization (see also Anderson 1999; Day 2001). But at the same time, the protections of a group also translated into a set of obligations to the group. Otis (18, African-American) recalled how his friends engaged in a fight with another group in Rogers Park that had attacked his cousin's brother earlier: 'It wasn't our fault. It was their fault that they did it. They was picking on us. So we went over there and we ain't have no trouble with them no more ever since then'. While such encounters to protect boundaries and maintain status and respect were common experiences for boys in both neighbourhoods, in Rogers Park, however, they were potentially far more violent than in Feijenoord.

Relationality of social and spatial boundaries

In the previous section we showed how young people in both neighbourhoods constructed social and spatial boundaries between safe and unsafe areas and groups of people and adopted strategies to navigate their environment accordingly. In addition to this, our findings illustrate the interaction between the risk management strategies of boys and girls which in turn affected perceptions of risk. Processes of risk perception and management are not simply unidirectional behavioural responses to static notions of danger or threat but rather have to be seen as a dynamic and interdependent negotiation of different uses of public space by various groups. While both, boys and girls in Feijenoord and Rogers Park adopted strength-in-numbers strategies to safeguard them from perceived threats of victimization, it was precisely the presence of groups of boys in public spaces that was perceived as a threat by girls and other groups of boys. Moreover, although the overall protective strategies of young people in both neighbourhoods included avoidance and traveling in groups, their effect on risk perception was different for boys and girls. These findings illustrate that young people growing up in the same neighbourhood may differ in the ways in which they identify and locate risk and also that the ways in which they respond may in turn affect other group's perceptions of safety and danger.

It is important to note, however, that despite the similarity in mechanisms of risk perception and protective responses, there were variations in the degree of territoriality and violence, between Rogers Park and Feijenoord that resulted in distinct cognitive landscapes of risk. Territoriality is important in both neighbourhoods, but it manifested itself differently. In Feijenoord it mainly took the form of boys socializing in the street and claiming a small piece of public space, such as a street corner. In Rogers Park, territoriality emerged from groups claiming larger areas, and using more violence when doing so. These differences mattered in shaping the everyday experiences of the young people in our study not least because of the potentially more severe violence in Rogers Park.

Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the risk perceptions and risk management of young people in two low-income, multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, in Rotterdam and Chicago. We

found that neighbourhoods matter because they provided the social and spatial setting in which perceptions of, and responses to, risk emerged through everyday interactions and encounters. The young people in our study viewed risk and danger as the likelihood of victimization or physical harm. While boys in both neighbourhoods considered violence as the main threat, girls across sites interpreted danged primarily in terms of sexual harassment. These perceptions shaped the localization of risk through the delineation of places and people associated with dangerous or anti-social behaviours. The resulting landscapes of risk informed the responses of young people in both neighbourhoods. While avoidance and protection were common risk management strategies among our respondents in Chicago and Rotterdam, we also found important site-specific variations of these general patterns. The main difference closely related to differences in the spatial and social organization of violence in both neighbourhoods. In Rogers Park the risk of exposure to gang-related violence led boys and girls alike to avoid large areas in the neighbourhood that were considered to be too dangerous. While boys in Feijenoord reported instances of violent altercations as well, these sporadic incidents did not have the same spatial implications as for their peers in Rogers Park. These differences in territoriality were reflected in variations of strategic and behavioural responses to perceptions of risk. Boys and girls in both neighbourhoods employed avoidance of places and people and protective measures such as traveling in groups as the primary strategies to manage the risk of victimization. But among boys in Rogers Park we found a strong sense of mistrust for others and for strangers in particular, which was a direct result of the risk of exposure to gang-related violence regardless of one's own membership. In contrast to our male respondents in Feijenoord, this omnipresent danger led many boys in Rogers Park to avoid being outside altogether.

Aside from these variations in risk perception and management, our findings also highlight the interactional nature of these mechanisms. That is, one group's response to danger and the threat of victimization may in turn be seen as a potential risk by another group. These findings indicate that neighbourhood risk to young people's wellbeing is not a simple and unidirectional dimension, derived, for example, from its level of deprivation, but instead emerges from a complex interaction between spatial and social organization, perception and response that result in different landscapes of danger. Furthermore, the risk management of youths should be seen as a dialectical process of support and constraint that is situated within the particular environmental, social and cultural settings of young people's everyday lives. In light of the exploratory nature of this study, future research on differences in the dynamic interactions between risk perceptions and risk management in different neighbourhoods, cities and countries is needed in order to further elaborate our findings and deepen our understanding of variations in the forms of territoriality.

Finally, our study shows that we should not only focus on the young people causing trouble (the street kids) but also have to pay attention to the young people that have to coexist with the street culture and associated risks in their neighbourhoods. This paper has given an impression of their experiences of having to deal with neighbourhood risk. Policymakers and youth workers should invest in enabling these young people to live their lives as normal as possible, allowing them to navigate their neighbourhood safely, reducing their feeling of marginalization, and allow them to find other ways to retain their self-respect rather than having to switch to the street culture.

Note

1. It has to be noted that there is a difference in the relative position of Feijenoord and Rogers Park compared to the city average. Whereas both neighbourhoods have similar objective characteristics, Feijenoord is considered one of the worst areas in Rotterdam, whereas Rogers Park scores generally slightly below the city average. One of the consequences of this could be that Feijenoord might be more influenced by negative influences of relative deprivation (see Van Ham et al. 2012) than Rogers Park.

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