EXPLORING MILITARY PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR CHILDREN'S OUTDOOR RISKY PLAY

MICHELLE BAUER

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Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Ottawa

Table of Contents

Abstract

Parents' perspectives on their children's outdoor risky play (ORP) can influence their engagement in it and the risk-navigation strategies they adopt. Until now, the perspectives of parents who regularly navigate threats to their safety, such as military members in combat arms occupations (CAOs) in the Canadian Armed Forces, and who have second-hand information on war and combat, such as female partners of members in CAOs, have been excluded from research. Conducting research with members in CAOs and their female partners can provide important understanding for experiences with risk, danger, injury, traditional gender roles, and ORP perspectives. I thus recruited and conducted semi-structured interviews with military members in CAOs (female = 1, male = 6) in the Canadian Armed Forces and 16 female partners of members actively serving in CAOs. Individuals could participate if they had a child in the 4-12 age range. I selected this age range for the study due to it being important for children's adoption of safety strategies.

I addressed three questions in stand-alone papers in my thesis: 1) "Do experiences in the military influence members' in CAOs perspectives on their children's ORP?"; 2) "What are military mothers' perspectives on their children's outdoor risky play and how may these perspectives be shaped by their military experiences?"; and 3) "How do gender expectations for female partners of members in CAOs influence their perspectives on children's ORP?" I used risk and sociocultural theory to inform my approach to research questions 1 and 2 and conducted a reflexive thematic analysis. The results of my study addressing research question 1 were twofold: 1) Members in CAOs believe ORP provides children with opportunities that challenge excessive safety restrictions promoted in Canadian society; and (2) the work experiences of members in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces influenced their distinction between children's

ORP and dangerous play-related injuries. In response to research question 2, I found that female partners believed (1) ORP in close physical proximity to strangers and cars is dangerous for children; (2) ORP should not result in children experiencing serious injuries; and (3) outdoor risky play can teach children to assess and manage risks. I employed poststructural feminist theory, feminist methodologies, and critical discourse analysis to address question 3. My results were twofold: (1) Military mothers resist discursively produced pressures to subscribe to overprotective parenting during their children's ORP; and (2) traditional gender discourses in Canadian society shape military mothers' feelings of responsibility for their children's ORP safety. The results from my research suggest that exposure to information on war and combat can influence parents' perspectives on their children's ORP. Further, they suggest that societal values, such as gender role expectations and pressure on mothers to engage in overprotective parenting, can influence parents' fears for their children's safety and the ORP they encourage and restrict.

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my parents Michel Bauer and Darlene Bennett. Their support, love, and encouragement of my academic goals have never faltered. My father, a hard-working, joyous, and spiritual man, taught me that philosophy and laughter are inextricably part of scientific endeavors. My mother, a cancer survivor and fiercely brilliant child psychologist, taught me that to succeed, resiliency and courage are necessary even when faced with adversary. The culmination of my work is a result of their teachings, insight, and guidance, and my own unwavering desire to make them proud.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Play is an instrumental part of children's development. It can offer them opportunities to interact with their physical environments in ways that are exciting to them and positively foster their mental, social, and physical development (Brussoni et al., 2015; Little & Wyver, 2008). It can provide them with opportunities to challenge themselves and push their boundaries (Brussoni et al., 2015), and promote family bonding (Ginsburg, 2007). In fact, it is so essential to children's overall healthful development that it is listed by the United Nations as a fundamental right of a child (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, 2021).

Children's outdoor play is especially beneficial for providing them with opportunities to interact with their natural (e.g., forests and green spaces) environments, where they can learn about flora and fauna and foster their curiosity (Gurholt et al., 2016), and built (e.g., driveways and playgrounds) environments, where they can have more space to engage in physical activity compared to indoors (Gray et al., 2015). Children's outdoor play is defined as their self-directed interactions with their outdoor environments that promote opportunities to develop physical, mental, and social capabilities (Casey, 2007). To this end, children's outdoor play results in opportunities for children to engage in activities that are self-guided and foster happiness and excitement (Casey, 2007). Importantly, outdoor play is shaped through cultural beliefs (Gaskins, 2014). In Canada specifically, researchers have examined how dominant cultural beliefs, such as the beliefs that parents are responsible for their children's safety, children should not experience any injuries, and children's outdoor play involving risk-taking should be restricted, influence parents' perspectives on outdoor play-related topics (Bauer et al., 2021; Brussoni et al., 2015).

A subset of outdoor play, children's outdoor risky play (ORP) consists of six categories: play at great heights (e.g., climbing a tall tree), with potentially dangerous tools (e.g., using hammers and nails), in close physical proximity to potentially dangerous elements (e.g., playing

near fire or on ice), at great speeds (e.g., running down a hill), where children can get lost or disappear (e.g., playing hide-and-seek in the forest), and rough-and-tumble play (e.g., play fighting with stick swords) (Bundy et al., 2009; Sandseter, 2007). ORP can provide children with experiences that strengthen their risk management and assessment skills (Brussoni & Olsen, 2011; Christensen & Mikkelsen, 2008), motivate them to interact with peers, and be physically active (Brussoni et al., 2015). Despite these benefits, increases in societal risk-aversion and parental concerns for their children's safety in developed nations have partially contributed to restrictions on ORP opportunities for children (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). Researchers now fear that children may be in jeopardy of becoming risk-naïve adults who are incapable of successfully assessing and navigating risks in their environments (Ball et al., 2019; Little & Wyver, 2011). In response, researchers and educators are examining ways to provide balanced opportunities for children to engage in ORP and mitigate potential serious threats to their safety. They believe that by examining parents' perspectives on children's ORP, they can improve their understanding of how parents conceptualize it, and they can promote it in a way that meets the needs of diverse populations (Bauer et al., 2021; Brussoni et al., 2013; Sandseter, 2007).

The perspectives of military members in combat arms occupations (CAOs) in the Canadian Armed Forces and female partners of members in CAOs have yet to be considered in ORP scholarship. Military members in combat arms occupations serve in the Canadian Army, are specialized in combat and equipment management, and, when necessary, engage with enemy units (National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces [NDCAF], 2018d). Military members in combat arms occupations can include infantry soldiers and officers, gunners, armoured soldiers, and artillery officers (NDCAF, 2018d). Infantry soldiers are experts at operating various weapons (e.g., hand grenades, medium and heavy machine guns, and anti-tank weapons) and are

trained to serve in all terrain (NDCAF, 2018g). They typically specialize in commanding and leading units, strategizing, and planning operations, which can occur indoors (NDCAF, 2018f). Gunners are accustomed to long bouts of duty requiring knowledge of indirect fire, surveillance, and target acquisition (NDCAF, 2018e). Armoured soldiers are skilled at operating armored fighting vehicles and have knowledge of operating communication devices and weapons associated with tanks and reconnaissance vehicles (NDCAF, 2018b). Armoured officers provide direct-fire support to troops from vehicles specialized for combat and commonly use sensors and equipment to trace the enemy combatants (NDCAF, 2018a). Artillery officers have expertise with various weapon systems (e.g., laser range finders, fire control computers, field guns and rockets) and provide in-direct fire support, while armour officers provide direct support when in combat from armoured fighting vehicles (e.g., Leopard main battle tank, Coyote surveillance vehicle, and Light Utility Vehicle) (NDCAF, 2018c).

Military members who actively serve in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces are subjected to regimented and regulated routines, physical and mental training, and deployment and engagement in war zones (Febbraro, 2003), and they must navigate dangerous environments where failure to account for potential threats to themselves and others can result in death or permanent injury (Park, 2011). Further, they can exercise risk-taking as a means for survival in war, where their ability to take risks can mean they can support their comrades and fulfill mission duties (Government of Canada, 2019). Their female partners can have second-hand knowledge of combat, lone parent if their partners are away for training purposes or deployed (Manser, 2018), and be societally pressured in military and Canadian culture to be “good” mothers by sacrificing their physical and mental resources to prioritize their family (Skomorovsky, 2016). Fathers’ perspectives on masculinity and injury (Bauer & Giles, 2019a)

and mothers' perspectives on injury (Little, 2015) influence their perspectives on their children's ORP. It is thus reasonable to believe that military members and their female partners may have perspectives on ORP that are shaped by the traditional gendered culture and strict masculine and feminine socialization processes in military communities (Hinojosa, 2010).

Members' experiences in the Canadian Armed Forces, such as engaging in high-stakes risk-taking during war, may shape their perspectives of ORP for their children, including what activities they permit or forbid. For female partners of members, it is possible that their ORP perspectives may be influenced by engaging in lone parenting while their partners are away, the traditional roles that are expected of female partners from Canadian Armed Forces society (Lane, 2017), and second-hand information on war and combat from communications with their partners who actively serve in CAOs. My dissertation makes a timely contribution to scholarly knowledge on ORP as I explored the overarching question, "What are military members' and their female partners' perspectives on their 4- to 12-year-old children's ORP?" This question was addressed in three sub-questions, each of which informed a publishable paper: 1) "How do experiences in the military influence parents' in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces perspectives on their children's ORP?" (Chapter 2); 2) "What are female partners' of members in CAOs perspectives of ORP for their children?" (Chapter 3); and 3) "How do gender expectations for female partners of members in CAOs influence their perspectives on children's ORP?" (Chapter 4).

In this introductory chapter, I review literature in the area of ORP, parenting, and the Canadian Armed Forces. Further, I discuss the epistemology, theories, methodology, methods, and analysis I used for this dissertation.

Review of Literature

In developed nations, there can be a culture of anxiety towards children's risk-taking outdoors: adults can be fearful that children will be injured or harmed during play (Little, 2015), and that they will be unable to prevent injury or harm from occurring (Drianda & Kinoshita, 2011). They can perceive the physical environment as consisting of a multitude of threats to children's safety: a stranger could take an unsupervised child away from parents (Francis et al., 2017), a distracted driver could hit a child playing near the street (Drianda & Kinoshita, 2011), and children playing outdoors in inner-cities could be exposed to gang-related violence (Weir et al., 2006). Although there is certainly a need to ensure children are not seriously injured, such as experiencing concussions or broken bones (Bauer et al., 2020), amputations or third degree burns (Pike et al., 2017), research has demonstrated that adults' fears can, at times, be an emotional and unfounded response to children's interactions with their physical environment. For example, researchers in Australia offered school-aged children loose parts (i.e., parts that do not necessarily have a purpose and can attach and detach), such as car tires and boxes, in school yards (Bundy et al., 2009). After 11 weeks, the researchers found that while there were no recorded incidents of children experiencing injury, educators believed the risk of injury increased, and they felt anxiety towards the children's interactions with the parts.

The increases in adult risk anxiety towards children's ORP is hardly surprising. Over the past five decades, media have been increasingly saturated with calls to protect children through the showcasing of "stranger-danger" and missing children (Kitzinger, 2002). Further, there have been calls for educators to restrict children's ORP during recess and lunchtime under threat of litigation (McFarland & Laird, 2018), and there have been concerns from parents that they will be reprimanded if their children are injured while in their care (Bauer et al., 2019b). In fact, emotional responses to children's injuries are a main driver for initiatives attempting to reduce

the likelihood of injuries and restrict risk (Gill, 2007; Wadda, 2018). For example, as a result of media advocating for playground reform to keep children safe, over a ten-year period, the English government spent 200-300 million Euro to replace hard playground terrain with softer terrain, an initiative that resulted in a likelihood of 1 to 2 children not experiencing a fatal injury (Ball, 2004). In comparison, during this period, 1,300 children were killed and 40,000 experienced serious injuries as a result of being hit by a car outdoors – injuries that may have been prevented by the installment of more playgrounds to reduce children's travel (Gill, 2007). In fact, adults' fears of children being injured on playgrounds persist despite evidence that children are approximately as likely to be injured on playgrounds as they are playing inside the home (Ball, 2007).

The rise of restrictions to children's ORP is a pressing public health concern: societal risk aversion is partially responsible for the shift in children's physical activity and sedentary behaviours. Children are more likely than ever before to engage in sedentary behaviours such as watching TV or surfing the internet (Saunders et al., 2014), play in structured and adult-supervised activities that do not offer the opportunity for unstructured risk-taking and independence (Messner, 2009), and play closer to home (Fyhri et al., 2011). The consequences of these behaviours may contribute to children's increased obesity rates (Baur, 2002), poorer social development (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011), greater rates of childhood depression (Gray, 2011), and decreases in physical literacy (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). Problematically, approximately 1 in 7 children and youth in Canada is obese (Rao et al., 2016), and 1.2 million children and youth are affected by mental illnesses that can include experiencing depressive symptoms (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2021). In response to restrictions to ORP, public health and child play researchers have been encouraging parents and society more broadly

to consider the importance of children's play in free, unstructured, and risky environments to develop resiliency, safety strategies, physical literacy, and to potentially mitigate the likelihood of experiencing obesity and symptoms of poor mental health (Brussoni et al., 2015; Gray, 2013). Further, researchers have been working with parents to understand their perspectives on their children's ORP.

Parents' Perspectives on ORP

Parents play a key role in supporting and encouraging opportunities for children to engage in ORP. Parents influence their children's adoption of safety strategies, how children approach and navigate risky activity and environments, and the play activities in which their children engage (Brussoni et al., 2015). Further, parenting is a gendered space in which parents feel pressure to subscribe to the values and actions that are discursively produced as normal for their gender (e.g., mothers as being nurturing and fathers as stoic) (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2003). Due to nurturing children commonly being societally perceived as a traditionally feminine and not masculine activity (Doucet, 2018), the majority of ORP-related research has examined mothers' perspectives. Research has illustrated that mothers tend to encourage their children's ORP and children's play in natural environments with opportunities for physical exertion (Little, 2015); however, traffic, environmental hazards (e.g., steep driveways), and fear of their children experiencing injury and being kidnapped can influence the ORP in which mothers allow their children to engage (Little, 2015).

Over the past five decades, researchers have argued for the need to include fathers and a diversification of parental perspectives on ORP in scholarly work (Bauer & Giles, 2019a, 2019b; Brussoni et al., 2013; Brussoni & Olsen, 2011, 2013; Creighton et al., 2015). Brussoni et al. (2013) conducted a study on 16 fathers' perspectives on masculinities, childhood injury, and

fatherhood, in Vancouver, Canada, and found that fathers felt that children should be introduced to risk-related activity to help bolster confidence and self-esteem. In their study with 12 single, stay-at-home, and gay fathers in Québec and Ontario, Canada, Bauer and Giles (2019a) found that these fathers set boundaries around their children's ORP and taught them about potential hazards and dangers in the environment. In a similar study, they found that fathers felt societal pressure to keep their children safe (Bauer & Giles, 2019b). Fathers, similar to mothers, can believe that children should engage in ORP, but they fear potential negative repercussions (e.g., having their child taken away) and public scrutiny if their children are injured while engaged in ORP that they supported (Bauer & Giles, 2019b).

Despite the acknowledgement that a diversity of perspectives is necessary in ORP research, historically, the perspectives of parents who navigate risk on a more frequent basis have been excluded from ORP research. This is problematic for two reasons: (1) ORP perspectives may be shaped by experiences with injury and risk-taking; and (2) ORP perspectives can be shaped by gender discourses and societal value systems (Brussoni et al., 2013). It is thus reasonable to believe that military members in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces and the female partners of these members may have different perspectives on their children's ORP compared to civilian parents.

Military Families and ORP Research

Currently, there are 63,269 Regular Force (i.e., full-time) military members in Canada (Manser, 2018). This research brings the health of a population of people – military families in the Canadian Armed Forces – to the forefront of discussion. Population health researchers are especially attuned to the interrelated conditions that influence a population's health status and consequentially suggest strategies to reduce harm for these populations (Young, 2004). Military

members in CAOs and their female partners may provide new insights into how injury experiences and family responsibilities due to military life influence military parents' perspectives on ORP. This research thus makes a timely contribution to scholarly knowledge on ORP by centring the perspectives of military members in CAOs and their female partners.

It is widely acknowledged that appropriate military family resources are needed to ensure the health and support of this population (Manser, 2018). Nevertheless, Manser (2018) found that two-thirds of Canadian military spouses do not believe that the Canadian Armed Forces provides appropriate resources (e.g., doctors, mental health facilities) for military families. There is, thus, a pressing need to ameliorate Canadian Armed Forces resources so that military families will find them appropriate and useful. Studies exploring military parents' perspectives on their children's ORP can contribute to improving family resources in three main ways: (1) inform safety initiatives and injury prevention materials to better accommodate and represent military families' lifestyle and health needs; (2) publish research findings that can be accessed by researchers to inform their work with military families; and (3) help military families make informed decisions about their children's engagement in ORP. Further, research on this topic has the potential to make a strong contribution to the field of population health.

Theoretical Framework

Theories are needed in qualitative research to inform research questions, help researchers choose appropriate ways of analyzing data, and illuminate potential influences on participants' responses to questions (Reeves et al., 2008). It is thus important to choose the most appropriate theory to guide one's research process. For my research, I selected two theories: For research questions 1 and 2, I chose risk and sociocultural theory; for question 3, I chose poststructural feminist theory.

Risk and Sociocultural Theory

Lupton (1999) articulated risk and sociocultural theory as a postmodern framework for understanding the social processes involved in the constructions of risk and hazard perceptions. Risk and sociocultural theory addresses the negotiations people face between perceived threat of harm and strategies for navigating risks, dangers, and "rationalization of fear and anxiety" (Lupton, 1999, p. 101). It is especially useful in exploring parents' perspectives on risk and children's engagement in ORP.

According to risk and sociocultural theorists, childhood is discursive, situational, and structural (Jackson & Scott, 1999). The discursive production of childhood involves agents (e.g., parents) positing that they have expertise on childhood and thus acting as gatekeepers to the production of what a "normal" childhood should be. When childhood is situational, meaning attributed to childhood is negotiated through social interactions and experiences. The structural aspects of childhood involve sociological relations being organized and influenced by risk phenomena (Jackson & Scott, 1999). Those who take-up risk and sociocultural theory posit that normalizing childhood as a time of vulnerability and need is a pervasive belief that contributes to parental concerns for risk. Risk and sociocultural theorists challenge the perception of children as "radically other" (Lupton, 1999, p. 96) and address the agency that children have in their risk-taking decisions.

This theory can be used to draw attention to the increasing value on individualization occurring in the 21st century "risk-averse" North American society in which parents feel responsible for keeping themselves and their families safe and removing all perceived threat to children's well-being (Messner, 2009). Further, risk and sociocultural theorists posit that childhood is socially constructed and increasingly perceived by parents as special (Lupton,

1999); this produces parents' need to protect children from the outside world of hazards and risks, as adults in general believe that it is their duty to protect children from danger. For my dissertation, risk and sociocultural theory was well suited to answer research questions 1 and 2. For research question 3, I used poststructural feminism, to examine gendered relations of power.

Poststructural Feminist Theory

Poststructural feminist theorists examine meaning generation through language, power relations, and the discursive field, as they relate to social relationships and sociocultural influences on perspectives (Weedon, 1988). Poststructural feminist theory can be used to decentre dominant discourses that serve to oppress and subjugate populations of people. According to poststructural feminist thought, language is derived from the historical period, culture, and society in which an individual lives, and it is considered to be a site where consciousness and identity are developed (Weedon, 1988). Power relations are viewed as influencing behavioural and societal norms and perpetuating or challenging dominant discourses surrounding what to expect from someone in a social setting (Barkty, 1988; Markula, 2003; Pringle, 2005). Poststructural feminist theory is especially useful in studies in which researchers are concerned with gendered relations of power.

The military is discursively shaped by and shapes traditional gender expectations for military members and, most importantly for Chapter 4, their female partners. A dominant discourse within the discursive field pertaining to the Canadian Armed Forces is that female partnership to male members is traditionally performed through fulfilling household and child-rearing roles and participating in community events (Lane, 2017). These roles are discursively produced as being less important than members' direct duties related to combat and warfare (Lane, 2017). I used poststructural feminist theory to examine discourses about ORP, military

families, injury, and partnerships to better understand how gender may influence female partners' understandings of ORP and pressures female partners may face to be overprotective parents.

Feminist Methodologies

Feminist methodologies are helpful in exploring the gendered processes of social life (Landman, 2006). In the past, feminist methodologies were primarily used when conducting research with women; however, they are now recognized as excellent tools to illuminate male perspectives on gender-related topics (Gardiner, 2004; Silverstein, 1996). Feminist methodologists are interested in examining how participants' perspectives illustrate and relate to their experiences, the social processes that shape participants' experiences, and they consider positions of authority in knowledge production (i.e., who has access to the resulting knowledge and who is informed by it?) (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Further, a central tenet of feminist methodologies is the need for accountability in research that includes, for example, reflecting on who is responsible for ethical considerations, and what the benefits and consequences of the research are for the target populations (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002).

Some researchers have voiced their concern that feminist methodologists prioritize gender over more important issues that are not gender-related (Hammersley, 1992). Following Bjarnegård and Melander (2011), I argue that the prioritization of gender is a strength and not a weakness of feminist methodologies, as reflecting on the influence of gender in social contexts can provide researchers with much needed insight into inequality, inequity, and subjugation in all social realms including the family. In the Canadian Armed Forces, the perspectives of females are often subjugated in favour of males, and the patriarchal structure of CAOs consists of the prioritization of traditional gender roles (Lane, 2017). In this dissertation, I used feminist

methodologies to understand the influences of gender in relation to participants' family roles and traditional masculine culture in military contexts (Bjarnegård, & Melander, 2011).

Methods

Out of the 63,269 Regular Force military members in Canada, 56% are married or in a common-law relationship and 47% have children (Manser, 2018). Further, 21% of Regular Forces members have at least one child between the ages of 6 and 12. According to Manser (2018), a Regular Forces member in Canada with a child aged 6 to 12 is typically male (85%); aged 35-39 (33%); in a married or common-law relationship (86%); and has served for 11-15 years (30%). As I am not a military member, to recruit participants, I largely relied on connections through my sponsor (a requirement for research with the Canadian Armed Forces) from Military Family Services, Laurie Ogilvie, who emailed recruitment posters to various Military Family Service Departments in Canada.

Representatives from the Canadian Armed Forces Bases Kingston (Ontario), Petawawa (Ontario), Gagetown (New Brunswick), and Edmonton (Alberta) supported the research by disseminating the recruitment material to their members through email and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook community pages). The Canadian Forces Base in Petawawa generously invited me to a community day event to promote the study and have recruitment posters available at a desk for interested members to pick up. Thus, on March 12th, 2020, I met with Dr. Olga Rancine at the Family Centre on base in Petawawa. After speaking with her team and gaining their insight for recruitment, such as how to approach individuals at the community event, Olga graciously set up a booth for me in the middle of the community hall on base. The event held at the community centre that day was the annual party for children born in the past year. Many of the attending members brought their families with them, including their

partner/spouse and other children. Further, next to my recruitment booth, children attended the daycare programs in various rooms, and throughout the day parents were present to deliver to and pick-up their children from the programs. I was able to speak with many interested participants and learn more about their experiences in the military; however, no parents I spoke with or who took a recruitment poster followed up with me to participate in the study.

I also asked individuals in my life with social ties to the military (i.e., two military spouses I knew) and participants to assist in recruitment through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling consists of a few people being contacted and participating in the study who then refer other potential participants they know who meet the inclusion for the study to researchers (Handcock & Gile, 2011). This process of referral continues as each wave of participants participates in the study until the required number of participants is met (Handcock & Gile, 2011). A limitation of snowball sampling is that the sample may become homogenous because of recruitment bias (i.e., the probability that the participant will recruit like-minded or similar people to themselves). I was able to partially overcome this by starting the snowballing from a number of unconnected individuals to improve the likelihood that I had a broader array of perspectives. The two females partnered with actively serving members in CAOs who I know personally participated in the research and referred their spouses, who also participated. I recruited three female participants partnered with a member in CAOs through snowball sampling (Handcock & Gile, 2011), and I recruited the remainder of the female partners through the dissemination of materials on social media platforms. Disseminating posters and speaking with individuals on-base in Petawawa did not result in the recruitment of participants.

Ethics

I received research ethics board approval from both the DND/CAF Social Science Research Review Board (#1832/19F) and the Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa (H-06-19-4343) for this research. Due to the fact that I was conducting research with active military members, I had to pay special attention to several aspects of the ethics process. For example, it was essential for me to remove or change any information provided by participants specifically relating to their deployment in certain regions of the world or that identified them (e.g., family names, specific occupations). I changed any potentially identifying information to a pseudonym (e.g., the name of a participant's son was changed to a generic non-identifier such as "my son") or omitted the information. Due to the sensitive nature of some of my research questions, I took pains to make it clear that participants could skip any question to which they did not want to respond and that they were free to stop the interview at any time.

Participant Information

In order to participate in the semi-structured interviews used to address research question 1, I required participants to (1) hold a combat arms occupation in the Canadian Armed Forces at the time of study recruitment; and (2) have at least one child aged 4-12. The 4- to 12-year-old age range was selected because this is a time where children learn to cognitively appraise risk and dangers in their environment (Hargreaves & Davies, 1996; Sandseter et al., 2021), and where they begin to independently navigate challenging situations from which they develop safety strategies (Lavrysen et al., 2017). Specifically, children aged 4-6 begin to learn these strategies in social and outdoor environments (Cardon et al., 2008) and 6-12-year-olds learn how to avoid and manage injury experiences (Van Mechelen, & Verhagen, 2005). To answer research question 1, I recruited 6 men and 1 woman in CAOs. For participant characteristics, including pseudonyms; numbers, ages, and sex of children; provinces of residence at the time of the interview,

ethnicities, and type of interviews, please see Table 1. Some individuals had partners who participated in a separate interview; thus, partner pseudonyms are also provided.

Table 1. *Participant Characteristics.*

Pseudonym	**Children (c = children, f = female, b = boy, mo = month old)**	**Province**	**Self-Identified Ethnicity**	**Interview Type**
Tyler (Partner: Holly)	3c: 6b, 18b, 18b	Ontario	European-Canadian	Virtual
Jasper	2c: 4g (deaf), 6g	Ontario	European-Canadian	In-Person
Paul (Partner: Helene)	4c: 3b, 5b, 7b, 9b	Ontario	Bulgarian-Canadian	In-Person
Sam (Partner: Jolianne)	2c: 2g, 6b	Ontario	European-Canadian	Virtual
Louis (Partner: Kelly)	2c: 3b, 8g (deafness)	Ontario	Chinese-Canadian	In-Person
Bryan (Partner: Alisha)	2c: 1b, 4g	Ontario	European-Canadian	Virtual
Shelley	3c: 7b, 7b 10g	Ontario	European-Canadian	Virtual

While I tried to recruit more women for participation in the study, it was unsurprising that only one participated. According to the Government of Canada (2021), only approximately 16% of regular force members in the Canadian Armed Forces are women, with even fewer (no statistics are provided by the Canadian Armed Forces) in CAOs.

Participants met three recruitment criteria to participate in the semi-structured interview used to address questions 2 and 3: (1) They identified as female and had a partner (male or female) actively serving in a CAO in the Canadian Armed Forces at the time of study recruitment; (2) they had a partner who was away from home for training or deployment

purposes for at least one month in the past two years (due to the nature of the examination reflecting mothering roles while partners are away from home); and (3) they had at least one child aged 4-12 at the time of the study. To address research questions 2 and 3, I recruited 16 female partners. For participant characteristics, see Table 2.

Table 2. *Participant Characteristics*.

Pseudonym	**Children (c = children, f= female, b = boy, mo = month old)**	**Province**	**Self-Identified Ethnicity**	**Interview Type**
Anna	3c: 11b (Autism Spectrum), 14g, 17b	Alberta	European-Canadian	Virtual
Lillianne	3c: 10b, 10b, 8g	Ontario	European-Canadian	Virtual
Brigitte	1c: 5b	Ontario	European-Canadian	Virtual
Hannah	1c: 4b (Speech Challenges)	Québec	European-Canadian	Virtual
Holly (Partner: Tyler)	1c: 6b	Ontario	European-Canadian	In-Person
Sierra	2c: 5b, 7g	Ontario	European-Canadian	Virtual
Marie-Claire	2c: 5g,7b (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)	Ontario	European-Canadian	In-Person
Helene (Partner: Paul)	4c: 3b,5b,7b, 9b (Autism Spectrum Disorder)	Ontario	-	Virtual
Jolianne (Partner: Sam)	2c: 2g,6b	Ontario	Chinese-Canadian	Virtual
Gabriella	1c:7g (Autism Spectrum Disorder)	Ontario	German-Canadian	Virtual
Katie	3c: 8b, 5b, 6mog	Ontario	-	Virtual

Nicoli	1c: 5b	Ontario	European-Canadian	Virtual
Shelly	3c: 7b, 7g, 10b	Ontario	-	Virtual
Alisha (Partner: Bryan)	2c: 1b, 4g	Ontario	European-Canadian	Virtual
Kelly (Partner: Louis)	2c: 3b, 8g (deafness)	Ontario	European-Canadian	Virtual
Pauline	2c: 13g, 11g	New Brunswick	-	Virtual

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews are non-standardized tools used to explore issues and questions pertaining to specific topics (Kajornboon, 2005), and they have been used in qualitative research exploring military members' perspectives on a multitude of topics (Hale, 2008, 2012; Koenig et al., 2014; McCartney, 2010). An interview guide is used, but the interviewer can change the order and content of the questions depending on the discussion between the interviewer and the participant (Kajornboon, 2005). Although semi-structured interviews lack the freedom of unstructured interviews, the flexible structure allows the researcher and participants to feel as though the responses and discussion relate to the topic at hand while also providing the space for probing discussion (Kajornboon, 2005). From September 2018 to March 2020, I conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant and offered them the option of participating face-to-face (i.e., in person) or over a virtual platform (e.g., Zoom).

An increasing number of researchers use the internet as a means of communication due to the fact that it is a cost-effective alternative to the transportation needed for face-to-face interviews, is easy to use, better ensures participant and researcher comfort and safety, and is not as imposing on the participant (Hanna, 2012). Further, due to the possibility of including video, the virtual platforms offered a visual form of communication that is better able to garner the

same benefits of face-to-face interviews (Hanna, 2012). I offered participants the option of participating in semi-structured interviews in-person or over virtual in case participants were unable to participate in person (e.g., lived far away) or felt uncomfortable participating in a face-to-face interview (Hanna, 2012).

To ensure trustworthiness and quality throughout the research process, I used member checking: After I completed an interview, each participant received a copy of the transcript that I transcribed verbatim. I asked participants to tell me if any information should be changed or omitted (Harper & Cole, 2012). Only one participant changed a sentence of the transcript. Their reason for doing so was to more clearly articulate that they agreed with something.

Analyses

I used two different forms of analysis for this research. For research questions 1 and 2, I used reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to centre understandings of how social relationships and experiences influence risk perspectives. For research question 3, I used critical discourse analysis (Willig, 2003), as this form of analysis is useful in enabling researchers to centre gendered perspectives.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is an accessible form of analysis that is helpful in "examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). It is used in reporting themes (i.e., patterned responses of meaning within research) that are identified from research results (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used reflexive thematic analysis, an updated version of thematic analysis, in my research to answer research questions 1 and 2 to gain insight into the "sociocultural

contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85).

To conduct the reflexive thematic analysis, I first followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. First, I familiarized myself with the data (e.g., reading and re-reading the transcripts to understand the patterns of meaning generated through language and experience). Second, I generated initial codes after reflecting on each paper question, including what concerns parents had concerning their children's ORP and if they felt ORP could be beneficial for children to experience. Third, I searched for themes, such as how female partners' fears for children's safety during their ORP reflected their worry that strangers may abduct their children. Fourth, I reviewed these themes to understand how they related/did not relate to one another, and to understand how they related to the research question more broadly. Fifth, I defined and named themes after reflecting on the shared meaning in the experiences articulated in the data (e.g., ORP as play in close physical proximity to strangers and cars). Sixth, I produced the report and revisited each paper manuscript multiple times to, for example, understand the congruence between studies in relation to the broader research question.

To employ reflexivity throughout my analyses, I ensured that my reflections on the data did not simply consist of categorizing participants' experiences and perspectives without understanding how they related to broader literature on the topic of ORP and the military (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Thus, I employed reflexivity as a "continual internal dialogue" (Berger, 2013, p. 220) to critically evaluate how participants' perspectives on ORP related to their diverse experiences in CAOs and in military and Canadian culture more broadly. Further, I constantly reflected on my positionality in my research that consisted of self-evaluating my own assumptions and beliefs concerning the research and understanding how these assumptions and

beliefs, as well as my interactions with participants and their perspectives, shaped the research (Berger, 2013). For example, I evaluated how my own assumptions towards play and safety in general may influence the codes I defined. As a self-identified woman from a non-military household, I knew when I started this research that I would need to reflect on my beliefs. I had three main assumptions related to ORP and the Canadian Armed Forces: (1) ORP benefits children by exposing them to opportunities to develop risk assessment and management; (2) I will be able to easily recruit participants for this research if I am available on bases to disseminate recruitment materials; and (3) the Canadian Armed Forces promotes risk-taking and violence during training and combat and thus military members in CAOs and female partners will promote ORP for their children. I realized early on that I needed to challenge these assumptions to recruit participants and centre their perspectives.

Assumption 1: Outdoor risky play benefits children. As a child growing up in rural and suburban communities in Ontario and Québec, I was constantly encouraged by my parents to go outside to play. I was further encouraged to push my physical and cognitive boundaries during my play by facing challenging situations, such as building a tree fort with my cousins by climbing to high branches, despite the fact that I was previously knocked unconscious when the large sticks fell from a makeshift skip-rope harness to lift branches. When I was 7, I sprained my ankle after falling off the monkey bars. After the recovery period, my parents encouraged me to try the monkey bars again, and when I was apprehensive about it, they told me that even though I was fearful, it was unlikely that I would be injured again. Indeed, my parents believed that I could learn from my past mistakes, and if I re-engaged with obstacles that had previously caused me injury, I would be better prepared to successfully handle them in the future.

I grew up believing that taking risks was a normal part of everyday outdoor play, and I was privileged to be able to enjoy it. I identify as Caucasian Canadian, grew up in a middle- to high-income predominantly Caucasian-Canadian neighborhood, and resided in relatively safe communities with a low crime-rates, paved streets, and plenty of access to natural parks and forests. After conducting this research and reflecting on my previous assumption that ORP benefits all children, I recognize that I had little understanding for how my own and my parents' attitudes towards my ORP might have been different if my parents handled weapons on a frequent basis, or if they witnessed their friends die. When my father encouraged me to play with sticks in the forest, unlike the participants in my study, he did not have flashbacks to how children can be casualties in war, so he did not stop me from pretending that these sticks were guns. My mom, although nervous if I played near the street, did not urge me to play closer to our home because, unlike a participant in my study, she was not thinking about the time she witnessed a child be run over and die in his mother's arms.

My research continues to teach me that although ORP can be important for children's development, it is important to understand how to provide children with ORP opportunities that meet their unique needs. Through my work with military members in CAOs and female partners, I challenged my assumption that ORP would benefit military children. I realized that it is much more complicated than simply promoting ORP in military communities. In fact, more work needs to be done to work with parents to understand how, for example, witnessing serious and fatal injuries during combat, and/or feeling pressure from Canadian society to overprotect children, may influence parents' ORP perspectives.

Assumption 2: I will be able to recruit participants easily at bases. When I devised this research project, I believed it would be easier to recruit participants from military bases

compared to recruiting them through social media and email. I believed this because I expected the one-on-one, in-person nature of recruitment to establish more trust between prospective participants and myself. I found early on, however, that I was mistaken, and that my assumption reflected poor understanding for how coming from outside of a military community would hinder opportunities for recruitment. I was told by many people, such as a thesis committee member with experience in a military household and members of the Social Science Research Ethics Board at the Department of National Defense, that military families are often part of close-knit communities, and their experiences are kept private. I was thankful when the military base in Petawawa indicated an interest in working with me during the project by providing me with a place to set-up a recruitment booth. I was told by Olga, my correspondent there, that despite recruiting in the community hall where family events were being held, people may not be interested in participating in the study. In fact, I found that even though I spent the afternoon recruiting participants and speaking to many families, no one participated in the research as a result of my time on base.

It is possible that I was less successful recruiting when I was on base because of the personal nature of communicating with someone in-person. I am sure that many of the parents at the family day events and traversing the community centre hall were busy tending to their families' needs. I imagine it is difficult to prioritize time with a stranger at a recruiting booth when there are other needs that require attention. Time, I believe, is a privilege that is typically given to and received by individuals who have pre-established connections. I was an outsider to the Canadian Armed Forces community. It is possible that, compared to in-person recruitment, more participants contacted me indicating their interest in the research because they were exposed to recruitment materials disseminated by trusted community members on social media

and through email. In future work with communities, I will adjust how I approach recruitment by asking if a community lead will join me at any recruitment booths I operate, and I will reflect on how to make my recruitment more personal in nature.

Assumption 3: The Canadian Armed Forces promote risk-taking and violence, and parents will promote ORP. My perspectives on risk-taking and violence in the Canadian Armed Forces were largely informed by my exposure to the depiction of soldiers through TV shows and movies: the hyper-masculine military man who cannot wait to go to war to defend his country. While there are certainly some similarities between this trope and the perspectives shared by the participants in my research, such as risk-taking during training as a means to prepare for real-world eventualities during war and combat, there are divergences that require attention. While CAOs are traditionally masculine and promote physical risk-taking, patriarchal structure, and an attitude of resiliency (Lane, 2017), the centring of voices and experiences of those who subscribe to dominant masculine values and beliefs can problematically devalue other perspectives. Thus, I had to become attentive to the participants' unique experiences and perspectives, and I had to consider perspectives that challenged dominant beliefs – including my own. I paid attention to how members in CAOs discussed their experiences with war and combat and if they believed risk-taking was necessary for survival purposes. I further examined the many potential influences that shape their ORP perspectives, such as how witnessing small children in the villages where combat occurred provided them with unique perspectives on what risks children are able to take successfully, and how they may perceive differences in parental child-safety practices in Canada versus abroad.

To ensure that I centred participants' experiences and challenged my pre-conceived assumptions that ORP is beneficial for children, and members and female partners will promote

it, I respected each individual's needs during the interview. For example, I made real-time decisions concerning what probing questions to ask and which to avoid. When a soldier's partner told me a story about her husband witnessing child soldiers being shot during war, I asked questions to explore how that exposure may influence her children's play with fake weapons. I found that the parents forbade the use of fake weapons (e.g., nerf and stick guns). When a member in a CAO proudly told me that he had shot and killed many people during combat but had never been shot himself, I reflected on how his experiences related to his perspectives on risk-taking more broadly and probed deeper in response. Conversely, when a female partner told me in anguish that she restricts her children's ORP around motor vehicles because she witnessed a truck hit and kill a small boy, I decided not to ask further questions that might have made her re-live that trauma.

Being present during the interviews to engage with participants' stories and reflecting on them when I revisited the audio files and transcripts was a journey for me, one that greatly challenged the hyper-masculine, cigarette-between-the-lips stereotype I grew up watching on the television screen. The journey instead took me deep into the interworking of grief, struggle, risk, community, and safety in a population with members who put their lives on the line in dangerous, uncertain terrain, in the name of freedom and protection. I challenged my initial assumption about risk-taking and violence in the Canadian Armed Forces through better understanding why risk-taking occurs (e.g., as a means for survival), and the meaning behind violent acts (e.g., violence as a means to protect and defend). Further, I was better able to grapple with how TV and movie stereotype can in fact hide other stories and experiences, such as the exclusion of female perspectives on risk-taking and CAO culture, as well as the perspectives of female partners of CAOs on child-rearing and safety.

By identifying and challenging my assumptions, I was able to conduct my research in a way that better respected participants' experiences and knowledge. I challenged my assumptions by examining ways in which certain perspectives can be subjugated within the Canadian Armed Forces and society at large. While identifying and challenging these assumptions were explicit components of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), they were also important to keep in mind for my critical discourse analysis for addressing research question 3.

Critical Discourse Analysis

I employed critical discourse analysis for research question 3, as this question required a more in-depth analysis of gendered discourses than the first two questions. According to the principles of critical discourse analysis, meaning is socially produced and shaped and sociocultural influences on phenomena are considered in research topics (Fairclough et al., 2011). Critical discourse analysis is used in research to illuminate power structures and systemic inequities that can (re)produce cultural, political, and societal differences, and challenge heteronormative discourses in society more broadly (Fairclough et al., 2011). As female partners of CAOs reside in a military society imbued in traditional masculine discourses (Lane, 2019), CDA was the most appropriate form of analysis to address question 3, through which I examined how traditional gender role expectations for female partners of members in CAOs influence their ORP perspectives.

To successfully and efficiently use CDA, I followed Willig's (2003) framework, which comprises six steps. First, I examined how the female partners identified within the transcript text as, for example, mothers and partners, and I explored initial discursive productions of overprotective parenting, female partners' experiences with the military, and mothering. Second, I examined how constructions of overprotective parenting, mothering, and partnership may relate

to one another. Third, I compared the identified discourses (e.g., female partners are societally expected to overprotect children; female partners resist expectations to be overprotective parents) to further examine how they related to each other. Fourth, I examined how each female partner was positioned relative to each discourse, such as whether or not they identified as an overprotective parent, and/or if they attempted to reduce the likelihood of their children being injured during ORP. Fifth, I examined if the female partners' position relative to the discourses related to greater scholarly literature on the topic (e.g., if overprotective parenting is expected of mothers, how do participants resist and/or challenge these expectations?). Sixth, I explored how each female partner's experiences and perspectives related to the discursive positions identified.

Dissertation Format

My dissertation consists of 5 chapters. Chapters 2 – 4 form three stand-alone, publishable papers resulting from the research. Before each publishable paper chapter is introduced, I provide a vignette of an experience related to each paper. These vignettes provide a brief reflection on my thoughts and feelings during interviews with participant. They serve as examples in which participants challenged my assumptions or beliefs concerning ORP and the military. In Reflection #1, I describe a meeting with a parent in a combat arms occupation. In Reflection #2 and #3 I discuss my thoughts and feelings as I met with participants partnered with a member in a combat arms occupation. In chapter 2, I discuss military members in CAOs' perspectives on their military experience and children's ORP (under review in the journal *Qualitative Research in Sports, Exercise & Health*). In chapter 3, I discuss female partners' fears for their children's safety during ORP (published in *Leisure Sciences*). In chapter 4, I explore female partners' perspectives on overprotective parenting and children's ORP (under review in *The Journal of Leisure Research*). In each of the publishable papers, I employ the use of "we" to

indicate the contributions of my co-supervisors, who will be credited as co-authors in the published manuscripts. In chapter 5, I offer some conclusions from my research.

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Reflection #1

It's evening outside the coffee shop. The sky is a lighter grey, but it's dark enough inside that the warm orange glow of the ceiling lights fills the room. There are many different loud noises, so I choose a table that's far enough away from the main serving counter, near a window. I don't know what the father I'm meeting with looks like, and I contemplate sending him an email telling him I'm wearing an orange-colored shirt and am sitting alone at a table. Then he walks in, and I don't think I need to do that anymore. Everyone continues what they were doing in the coffee shop, but all eyes are on him. He's tall and in full uniform, and the green and brown pants, shirt, and hat stick out in a room filled with the black leggings and overly large sweaters of undergraduate students. I realize that we societally construe the army uniform as one with specific connotations, such as power and authority. When he sits down, he's very friendly. He talks to me at length about his daughters, one of whom experiences deafness, and he tells me what it was like to find out the prognosis of deafness so early on in her life. He tells me that him and his partner try to create safer environments during outdoor play for his daughter who experiences deafness.

Later in the interview, he tells me about what it's like being in the military. He says that there's an attitude of resiliency, where you need to continually decide if you believe you are injured or if you are hurt. If you are hurt, such as when he badly hurt his back due to a fall during training, the military expects members to continue with training. He told me that any time someone is injured, there is a possibility of them being sent home from training, which means that they may miss out on other duties or be removed from their occupation. He said that this mentality is also present during times of war. When you are depending on the person next to you to be able to carry out their duty so that you can survive, any injury you experience can mean the

loss of a friend. No matter what, he said, it's important that if you can carry on, you don't complain. He tells me that he first joined the army because he liked to take physical risks, and he believes that many others also join because they enjoy risk-taking. I learn more about how injury experiences and risk perspectives can be shaped by systematically engrained value systems on masculinity.

Chapter 2

Perspectives of Parents in Combat Arms Occupations in the Canadian Armed Forces on Children's Outdoor Risky Play

Abstract

Parents' experiences with risk can influence their perspectives on their children's outdoor risky play. Parents in combat arms occupations in the Canadian Armed Forces have unique experiences with risk, as their occupations regularly include encountering and successfully navigating risky environments in military operations. In this study, we conducted seven semi-structured interviews with parents in combat arms occupations and used risk and sociocultural theory. Our reflexive thematic analysis resulted in two main findings: (1) parents in combat arms occupations believe outdoor risky play provides children with opportunities that challenge excessive safety restrictions promoted in Canadian society; and (2) due to their work, these parents distinguish between children's outdoor risky play and dangerous play-related injuries. Our findings advance scholarly conversations on how risk may be perceived and negotiated more broadly in populations who engage with risk on a frequent basis.

Key words: child development, military, outdoor play, parenting; risk

Outdoor risky play (ORP) is a term used to make explicit thrilling and exciting outdoor opportunities to engage in physically, socially, and/or mentally challenging situations that border on losing control of one's own abilities (Sandseter, 2007). Examples of ORP include, but are not limited to, play at great heights, where children may be injured if they fall, and activities such as running at high speeds, where there is potential for the child to collide with an object (Sandseter, 2007). While children can engage in risky play indoors, such as engaging in rough-and-tumble activity (e.g., rolling around with siblings), children's outdoor play typically offers more space to be physically active and engage in risky play that involves, for example, climbing and running (Sandseter et al., 2021). The benefits of ORP include developing physical literacy and risk management skills (Brussoni et al., 2015b; Sandseter, 2017), and participating in social play to experience fun and enjoyment (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). Problematically, in Western societies including Canada, prioritization of child safety and parents' fears that children may be injured during play have contributed to the development of a culture that neglects children's need to learn and explore through risk-taking opportunities during play (Ball et al., 2008). Indeed, researchers now fear that children may become risk-naïve adults who are unable to overcome potential threats to their safety in their environments due to restricted childhood access to opportunities that teach them to assess and manage risks (Hackitt, 2008). Further, the restrictions to ORP may be partially responsible for decreases in children's physical activity (Brussoni et al., 2015b), and increases in rates of child depression and anxiety (Gray, 2011; Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). As Western societies become increasingly risk averse (Harper, 2017), children's ORP needs to be considered against the progressive formation of a "risk society" (Beck, 1992, p. 1).

ORP in the Context of a Risk Society and Family

As articulated by Beck (1992), a “risk society” is shaped through late modernistic viewpoints of individualism, responsibility, and preoccupation with safety. Risks are largely discursively produced through public fears concerning futuristic occurrences, such as the potential to experience injury (Adam et al., 2000). Furthermore, within a risk society, individuals are viewed as responsible for their risk decisions, such as whether or not to engage in something that could cause injury, as well as the consequences associated with their decision (Adam et al., 2000). A risk society is thus one of blame in which individuals’ behaviours and perceptions are largely governed through dominant sociocultural and political discourses concerning what is risky and what is not. Further, risk-avoidant practices are expected of societal members, and individuals are reprimanded for their risk engagement (Adam et al., 2000).

Implications of a risk society on the behaviours and beliefs of societal members are especially apparent in the family sphere, where the production of risk as an individualized knowledge is complicated by the societal production of childhood as a state requiring adult protection (Jackson & Scott, 1999). Thus, parents are not only responsible for their own safety, but for the safety of their children. Parents are told through media disseminations of dominant risk knowledges (i.e., the often-authoritative voice of doctors and medical practitioners) that, if their child’s activity causes them to worry, they should limit or restrict their children’s engagement in that activity (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). They are societally perceived as the gatekeepers to children’s safety (Jackson & Scott, 1999), and researchers identify their fears and concerns to identify potential influences on the restrictions to children’s ORP (Bauer & Giles, 2019; Little, 2015; MacFarland & Laird, 2018). As their exposure to risk and danger is known to influence their perspectives on their children’s ORP (Bauer & Giles, 2019) and the injury prevention strategies they use (Niehues et al., 2015), it is problematic that the perspectives of

parents who take risks on a frequent basis, such as parents in combat arms occupations (CAOs) have escaped scholarly attention.

Parents in CAOs and ORP Perspectives

CAOs can include infantry soldiers and officers, gunners, armoured soldiers and officers, and artillery officers (Canadian Armed Forces, 2018). Parents in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces are a unique population of parents who encounter risk and danger on a regular basis by being in close proximity to weapons, war, and violence (Government of Canada, 2019). Risk taking is tied to the protection of and service to the Canadian public, and it is thus enacted as a way to safeguard others from potential threats to their safety such as enemy units and national emergencies (Lane, 2017). Members are trained specifically for combat, and they are exposed to stress inoculation (Canadian Armed Forces, 2018), such as being encouraged by their units to complete often gruelling and challenging obstacle courses despite their discomfort. They are frequently separated from their families during times of deployment (Manser, 2018). Their occupations regularly include encountering and successfully navigating risky and dangerous environments in military operations, where they can witness distressing events, including deaths and life-threatening injuries (Government of Canada, 2019).

In Canada, a shift in societal idealization of peacekeeping towards a remilitarization of Canadian society more broadly has occurred over the past three decades. This shift, largely due to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States and the election of conservative government in 2006 in Canada, resulted in the reinstatement of patriarchal structures and societal perpetuation of gender binaries (Lane, 2017). Today, Canadian and military society reflect the entrenchment of militarized ideologies, including the need for war and violence, and the preparation to defend one’s land and territories (Lane, 2017). It is thus possible that parents in CAOs in the Canadian

Armed Forces prioritize and idolize opportunities that allow them to hone their military proficiencies, such as risk-taking during training and combat, and that they may perceive ORP differently compared to civilian parents. In this study, we thus explored the question, "How do experiences in the military influence parents' in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces perspectives on their children's ORP?" using risk and sociocultural theory.

Risk and Sociocultural Theory

Theories that address societal influences on risk-aversion are necessary to use in research to reduce the likelihood of the occurrence of a "dystopian future for children's play" (Ball et al., 2019, p. 3), one in which children's risk-taking is excessively restricted. Risk and sociocultural theorists posit that societal perspectives on risk are influenced by a multitude of sociocultural factors, including overall societal belief and value systems that restrict or promote risk-taking, and cultural understandings of risk within distinct populations of people (Lupton, 2006).

Tenets of risk and sociocultural theory include addressing how and why people experience risk, how social constructions of risk occur, and how risk is negotiated in public spaces (Lupton, 2006). Specifically, pre-established cultural beliefs and community interpretations of risk are examined, such as the belief that people should be blamed for the negative consequences associated with risky activities (Lupton, 2006). Moreover, risk and sociocultural theorists commonly investigate how childhood risk-taking is influenced by broader socio-cultural discussions on parenting, supervision, and child protection (Jackson & Scott, 1999). Risk is understood as "a cultural strategy whereby communities or subgroups make sense of danger and threats they perceive from outsiders" (Lupton, 2006, p. 13). Risk and sociocultural theorists thus examine why and how communities become increasingly risk-averse, and how risk

strategies are developed and maintained through cultural norms (e.g., cautioning and not guiding children's navigations of their natural world) (Lupton, 2006).

It is possible that the perspectives of parents in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces on children's ORP may be shaped by their experiences in high-risk environments in their occupations and risk-aversion in Canadian culture (Harper, 2017). The employment of risk and sociocultural theory can help to provide novel insights into the perspectives of parents in the Canadian Armed Forces concerning their children's ORP. In our study, we used risk and sociocultural theory to inform our research question, data collection, and analysis.

Methods

Participant Recruitment

This study was part of a larger research project with parents in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces and female partners of members in CAOs in which we examined the overarching question, "What are parents' in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces perspectives of their 4- to 12-year-old children's ORP?" This question was addressed through three sub-questions, including the one that is the focus of this manuscript and specifically explores parents' in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces perspectives on military experience and children's ORP. The research was approved by the Department of National Defense and the University of Ottawa research ethics boards. Inclusion criteria for this study included i) being a military member who was serving in a CAO at the time of the study, and ii) having at least one child aged 4- to 12-years-old. We selected the 4- to 12-year-old age range because this includes pre-school and primary school-aged children. Preschools and schools offer children in this age range opportunities to learn risk assessment and management through social learning environments and use of playground equipment (Lavrysen et al., 2015; Sandseter et al., 2021). Children aged 4- to

12-years-old develop arousal-increasing and arousal-reducing strategies as they navigate their physical environments through these various interactions (Sandseter, 2010), which makes parents' in CAOs perspectives on their 4- to 12-year-old children's ORP important to consider.

We recruited participants through snowball sampling and word-of-mouth. As the first and second authors had some personal connections to members of the Canadian Armed Forces, we invited our connections to participate in the study and asked them to share our contact information with others. A representative at Military Family Services disseminated recruitment information to members through online platforms (e.g., Facebook groups), and passed the recruitment information to other military units and resource centres across Canada through email. Interested participants contacted the first author if they wished to participate or if they required any further information about the study.

In total, seven parents in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces participated in the study (female n = 1, male n = 6). It was unsurprising that we only recruited one woman, as women in the regular forces in general only consist of 15.8% of all members (Government of Canada, 2020). Further, while the Canadian Armed Forces does not report statistics for the number of women in CAOs, this number is known to be significantly less than the number in regular forces (Government of Canada, 2020). We chose to include the lone woman participant in our study as we believe that all members have valuable perspectives to share concerning their experience in CAOs and their children's ORP. We provide participants' pseudonyms, number and gender of children, and age, in Table 1 (Appendix A). All participants lived with a partner at the time of the interview. To protect participants' anonymity, we have not disclosed their specific occupations or additional demographic information.

Semi-Structured Interviews

We selected semi-structured interviews as the method for data collection because they provided us with a means to tailor conversation to specific topics while also providing us with a way to probe deeper into participants' responses (Kajornboon, 2005). We selected these interviews over other methods, such as focus groups, because we believed the one-on-one nature of the interview would make participants feel more comfortable sharing personal information (e.g., witnessing injuries during war). Further, the participants held different ranks in the military. It is possible that having members of different ranks within the same focus group would have made some participants feel uncomfortable about disclosing information in the presence of subordinates or commanding officers.

The first author conducted semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one hour with each participant at locations convenient to both parties, including in-person (e.g., local cafes) and virtually through Skype, Zoom, or Facebook Video. The semi-structured interviews that took place virtually enabled the first author and participants to discuss the research when in-person meetings were not possible, such as when the researcher and participant resided in different provinces. In the larger research project, the authors developed two interview guides. The authors used the first guide to explore female partners' perspectives, while the other was used for the goal of the present study to specifically address parents' in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces perspectives on their children's ORP. In the construction of the interview guide for the purposes of this study, the authors developed pre-established questions (e.g., "When your children play outdoors, is there any type of play you would consider risky?") and probing questions (e.g., "Do you think that training or dangerous environments you've been exposed to the military have affected how you parent?") to foster discussion (Kajornboon, 2005). The first author began each interview by asking the participants if they would be willing to provide more

information about themselves, such as their ages and the ages of their children. The first author then asked participants questions relating to their children's play, including any challenges to play their children may experience, and what the participants perceived as "risky" play. The last part of the interview guide consisted of questions pertaining to participants' experiences in the military and in combat arms occupations.

To demonstrate trustworthiness in our research, we used member-checking to strive for confirmability (i.e., the degree to which the findings relate to the perspectives of the participants and not the bias of the researcher) (Amankwaa, 2016). The first author transcribed each interview verbatim and returned it to the participant so the participant could decide if they would like to change/omit anything. One participant changed one word of their transcript to provide clarification on their perspective on a topic; no other participants made changes.

Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2019) articulated the need to employ reflexivity to a thematic analysis of data. They stipulated that an approach to thematic analysis should not be conducted similar to a "baking recipe" (p. 589); that is, it should not rely on a set of pre-conceived rules. Instead, researchers should conduct thematic analysis thoughtfully by unpacking their own pre-conceived biases towards the topic they study; aligning theoretical and analytical procedures; and finding patterns of meaning in data that relate to the purposes of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2019). We used an adapted version of Braun and Clarke's (2006) original version of thematic analysis by engaging in reflexivity.

We completed eight stages of analysis. First, we familiarized ourselves with the transcript content by reading and re-reading each transcript. Second, we considered how our own biases towards the topic may manifest in our approach to the research (e.g., how our scholastic and non-

military experiences may influence our notions of military life and culture). We attempted to address these biases by focusing on the participants' experiences and perspectives and acknowledging their voices on the topic. Third, we began to explore initial patterns of meaning in the data (e.g., exposure to injuries in the military shapes perspectives on child injuries during ORP). Fourth, we reflected on how these themes related to our use of risk and sociocultural theory (e.g., how they may relate to broader societal discussions on risk). Fifth, we further explored these themes within the transcripts. Sixth, we reviewed the themes to explore how they related to the participants' perspectives on ORP. For example, we explored if the female and male participants had different views on ORP. Seventh, we defined the themes in relation to ORP. Eighth, we used these themes to inform the development of our manuscript.

Throughout these stages of analysis, we engaged in reflexivity by reflecting on our own positionalities as researchers and attempting to identify and address potential biases towards the military and children's ORP. We agree, in accordance with Finlay (2002) that, "through the use of reflexivity, subjectivity in research can be transformed from a problem to an opportunity" (p. 531). Thus, we sought to consciously identify how our own interpretations of our experiences as civilians in positions of privilege (e.g., residing in a non-war-torn, high-income country) influenced our interpretations of our research. While we acknowledge that our own experiences and interpretations cannot be disentangled completely from our approach to our research, and that there is inherent bias in qualitative research in approaches to reflexivity in general (Finlay, 2002), we engaged in processes to centre the perspectives of our participants in the research. For example, we reflected on how our own beliefs about the military may be influenced by media interpretations, and we attempted to unlearn media representations of military culture and life disseminated through TV shows and movies. As a crucial part of being reflexive is empowering

the participant (Finlay, 2002), we focused on participants' perspectives of and experiences with the military and used the participants' perspectives on their children's ORP to challenge greater scholarly discussions on what we know about children's ORP in Canada. Our findings thus serve the important purpose of contributing to scholarly discussions on and for military families.

Results

Our analysis resulted in our identification of two themes: (1) Parents in CAOs believe ORP provides children with opportunities that challenge excessive safety restrictions promoted in Canadian society; and (2) due to their work, parents in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces distinguish between children's ORP and dangerous play-related injuries.

Parents in CAOs Believe ORP Provides Children with Opportunities That Challenge Excessive Safety Restrictions Promoted in Canadian Society

The parents in our study discussed that as part of a combat arms unit, they witnessed many different situations throughout the world that would be considered high risk in North America. Through these experiences, they became more confident in their children's physical capabilities and thus trusted their children's competencies to navigate ORP safely (i.e., in a way that does not lead to serious injury). When Bryan, father to a 4-year-old girl and 1-year-old boy, described his experiences abroad during his deployments, he said,

> I've spent time in multiple different countries and multiple continents. I mean, it's not abnormal to see what I would assume to be somewhere around a three, three plus year old child taking care of an infant, and you'll see them walking a main road by themselves, at least a kilometre away from any kind of a civilization, walking down this, this road that is relatively high speed, you know, but no guardrails …We almost underestimate our kids [in Canada], what they're capable of doing. And I think that's purely due to us kind of

> childproofing our world more than maybe we need to. We need to allow the kids [to take risks during outdoor play] and say, yeah, you're capable of doing this. You just need to learn how to self-regulate. You need to learn how to set your own limitations … I think the military and deployments have actually pushed me to say maybe we underestimate our kids. If I'm seeing kids capable of [travelling alone on the side of a busy road], I can certainly expect my kid to be capable, with the right training, right experience, right exposure, to do a lot more [while playing outdoors] than I think most North American parents expect the four-year-old to do maturity wise.

The parents further discussed their beliefs that Canadian culture promotes excessive safety restrictions for children more than other cultures to which they were exposed in their deployments abroad. When discussing his views on how the military and his time abroad influenced his own perception of risk and risk assessment, Jasper, father to two girls aged 4 and 6 and whose wife is also in the military, said,

> So [my wife and I have] become probably a little bit more risk aware in the last four years since we started doing [our jobs in the military]. So, there's certain risks that we never considered before that we consider now by comparison. There's still a sliding scale. When you risk manage, assessed risk versus [potential danger], are [the children] safe? Are you setting them up for success? … So, you kind of have to give them the rope and let them experience things so that they develop greater appreciation of what risk is … And, therefore, by extension they become safer. . .We live in a constant state of comfort [here in Canada] … [My wife and I are] not going to subject [our daughter] needlessly to risk, but we progressively introduced more ways to build her skillset so that when she does hit that next failure, she's ready to get back on the horse.

When Jasper identified activities that would be “risky” during his daughters’ outdoor play, he said, “high structures,” but indicated that he still encourages his daughters’ to pursue climbing high structures as an outdoor play activity. He said,

> [My youngest daughter] was on the monkey bars and wanted to skip a bar … And she lost her grip, [ended up with a] compression fracture on her arm … And so the cast came off just for a week and a half ago … She's like, ‘can I do cartwheels?’ I'm like, ‘yes, go do cartwheels’ … we've got a certain amount of reluctance following this, but it's like, ‘no, go back to do what you're doing and do more. Keep going. Push your limits.’.

Sam, father to a 2-year-old girl and 6-year-old boy, also believes that Canada is a relatively safe country compared to other countries. He believes that ORP can expose children to real-world circumstances in which they are not isolated from making mistakes or being injured:

> Kids in general need to have some freedom to explore and make mistakes. Making mistakes is basically how we learn, right? So, without that, all you ever have are somewhat positive experiences or very isolated, prepared, artificial experiences that don’t actually prepare you for the real world. I would argue that’s a failing of my generation for the most part … We’re doubly hit by living in a country as fantastic as it is in terms of comfort and security. So, I think a lot of people have grown up in a bizarre, somewhat fictitious kind of world, and it doesn’t really prepare them for the realities of life … So I’m trying to avoid that with my kids.

The parents thus believed that ORP provides their children with opportunities that challenged the “fictitious” world of safety promoted in Canadian society, which was quite unlike the situations to which they were exposed through their military service. The parents considered these

experiences essential for their children to have to develop skills needed for successful risk navigation.

Distinguishing Between Children's ORP and Dangerous Play-Related Injuries

Due to their experience in CAOs, the parents in our study distinguished between ORP and dangerous play, with the latter being play in which children can be seriously injured (i.e., experiencing long-lasting or debilitating injuries). When asked if he believed his 8-year-old daughter or 3-year-old son experienced serious injuries during ORP, Louis responded by saying,

> A serious injury? No … so a serious injury that would be like … life or limb for us, obviously you could still get very badly hurt. Like you could break your arm, break your leg, and in the minds of most people, that would probably be a serious injury. And obviously I'd be super concerned if I got a call saying, "hey, your kid broke her, his leg or her leg." So, I'd be concerned about that … something that I'd be awake at night feeling like, oh man, this kid's not gonna make it, I would be concerned about that.

Similarly, Tyler, father to two 18-year-old sons and a 6-year-old son, described the difference between being hurt or being injured in the military:

> If someone's hurt, you need a break, and if you're injured you need a doctor. It's like, you know, are you hurt or are you injured? Cause if you're hurt, suck it up and get back in … I'm very aware of the dangers that are out there, but you know, I don't bubble wrap him. I'm not the helicopter parent type. [In my occupation] you gotta be polite, be professional, but have a plan to kill everybody in the room … I think a lot of people are oblivious to threats … [With my son I say], enjoy being a kid and I'll take care of the rest of the stuff … It's the biggest part of my job that I'm trying to do is locate [threats] and come up with

> plans or strategies to mitigate [threats] for success … I'm very aware of the dangers that are out there, but you know, I don't bubble wrap him. I'm not the helicopter parent type.

Tyler explained that he encourages his youngest son to engage in outdoor risky play because he believes that his son will not be seriously injured:

> [My youngest son] is very risk averse. But I mean, if he gets into [outdoor risky play], I'm totally cool with that … I wish he was a little more risk-taking … He's pretty clumsy. He's a little fella, he's got the scrapes and stuff. Yeah, he's notorious for getting a scar, right … cause he would trip and fall and just did not have the body awareness to throw his hands out. So, he'd face plant every time but nothing injured … I mean, again, it's nothing, nothing untoward … You know, people are not to cry for every little bump and that's just life.

The parents in our study also argued that exposure to various injuries in the military lessened their fears about minor injuries experienced during children's ORP, such as broken bones, cuts, or bruises. For example, Sam discussed his views on what constitutes ORP:

> Honestly, as long as there's no mortal risk I'm pretty open with the kids trying pretty much anything. Or, risk that would have a disproportionate affect downstream … Right now they're kids so the worst they get are scratches and bumps and broken bones. But those are natural childhood things in my mind as long as there's nothing crippling.

He said that witnessing potentially debilitating injuries during war curtailed his fears for his children experiencing serious injuries during ORP. Sam explained,

> I mean, you see people get injured all the time [during war]. You see the after-effects in the local population as well when you're overseas … So amputations of limbs. Viscera and all that kind of stuff. Gunshot injuries, blast injuries, that kind of stuff … So, maybe

> it serves as a forcing function to realize that there's a wider scale of injuries that are possible that you can come back from? So, maybe my perception of where a broken bone sits on the spectrum of bad things is somewhat affected? Like a broken bone that somebody gets in a cast is on a different order of magnitude than a gunshot wound.

Unanimously, the parents felt responsible for their children's safety and wanted to ensure that their children were protected from ORP that could lead to their children experiencing serious injuries or death. Paul, father to four sons ages 3, 5, 7, and 9, articulated this feeling by saying,

> I would say I'm a little bit more accustomed to death than most [because of my experience with the military] … So visualizing what could be if one of my children were injured or killed … It's how I reason through what is too dangerous … So trying to make a distinction between what are things that could kill or injure in a permanent way versus things that could injure him at a playground if he falls and breaks a bone. All right, it sucks [if he falls at a playground], but it will be fine … If on the side of the road [my son] runs in front of a car and he's, you know, killed, that's not [fine]. So, my attitude is to let [my son] learn as much as he can and actually use his innate self-preservation, his pain tolerance to help teach him what he can and can't do. And all I really need to do is keep him from getting killed so he can learn enough about how to not get killed there.

Discussion

Our findings offer an important contribution to scholarly conversations on ORP by suggesting that military members in CAOs resist dominant productions of risk aversion in Canadian society. Indeed, our results suggest that instead of feeling the need to remove risk from their children's outdoor play, they instead encourage their children's ORP. This includes, for example, ORP from which their children were previously injured, as Jasper illustrated by

encouraging his daughter to swing on monkey bars when her fracture healed. We suggest that by witnessing children in foreign environments navigate risky situations successfully, regardless of whether or not the children's activities were play-oriented, the parents became aware of children's capabilities to successfully manage risks in their ORP environments.

Research by Lavrysen et al. (2015) with 76 school-aged children in Belgium indicated that children's exposure to a risky play intervention over three months resulted in stronger risk competence in children. As children in conflict settings may not be protected to the extent that children are in Canada, though this may be due to the conditions of war rather than a deliberate attempt by local parents to have their children experience ORP, it is possible that the parents in our study witnessed children during deployment who had stronger risk assessment and management skills compared to Canadian children. In response to this exposure, the parents could be more inclined to allow and promote their children's ORP because they trust that their children are capable of navigating threats in their physical environment. Further, it is possible the parents' exposure to other CAO members' successful navigations of injury during combat influenced their perspectives on ORP-related injury.

Our research indicates that the participants' military-related training and exposure to severe injuries, such as gunshot and blast injuries, influenced their perspectives on their children's abilities to overcome non-serious injuries resulting from ORP. Bauer et al. (2020) conducted research with 41 mothers and 63 fathers from urban and rural British Columbia and Québec, Canada, and found that these parents categorized children's serious play-related injuries as injury resulting in debilitation, requiring medical intervention, and resulting in head trauma or broken bones; however, these categorizations reflect the perspectives of civilian and not parents in the Canadian Armed Forces. Within the Canadian Armed Forces, risk and subsequent harm

during ORP may be assessed and categorized differently compared to civilian societies. Our results indicate that the parents' personal exposures to combat-related injuries (e.g., seeing someone get dismembered) inform their assessment and categorizations of children's ORP-related injuries.

Risk is typically assessed in accordance with the perceived probability of harmful consequence associated with risk engagement (Scott, 2020). In Western nations more broadly, where the onus of child protection can fall on parents (Johnson & Scott, 1999), there is a "feeling that the world is a threatening place" (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002, p. 318). Even outdoor play associated with a very small likelihood of being harmed, such as children playing independently outdoors near strangers (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2020), is perceived as risky (Bauer et al., 2021). Research, however, is often informed by the perspectives of parents who have the privilege of avoiding risk, such as those who are not involved in war and combat. Our results suggest that further research needs to be conducted to understand the implications of parents' risk exposure for their perspectives on children's ORP.

Considerations for Future Research

Our results are important to consider in relation to how exposure to risk may influence parents' perspectives on children's ORP. Specifically, if parents' in the Canadian Armed Forces perspectives on ORP are influenced by their experience in the military, it may be reasonable to assume that other influences on ORP in diverse populations need to be considered. For example, it is possible that experiences in first responder occupations (e.g., paramedicine, law enforcement, firefighting), where there is repeated exposure to the aftermath of children's severe injuries, may make first responder parents more reluctant to allow their children to engage in ORP. Indeed, there is a need to continue to expand ORP research to work with diverse

populations so participants' unique experiences with their communities, cultures, and families, can be better understood in relation to ORP.

Our research was limited by having only one mother in a CAO participate in the study. It is possible that military mothers in CAOs may have different perspectives on their children's ORP compared to fathers due to gendered role expectations for mothers in the military (Skomorovsky et al., 2019) and society at large (Doucet, 2004); their perspectives should be centred in future research. Further, future research should explore the perspectives of lone parents who are military members on their children's ORP, as lone parenting can influence the amount of supervision parents may be able to provide to their children (Sutton, 2008).

Conclusion

Conversations on how risk should be navigated by Canadian families abound in scholarly literature as an increasing amount of research has demonstrated the potential benefits of risk taking for children's health and development (Brussoni et al., 2015). Our results advance theoretical understandings of children's ORP in two main ways. First, we suggest that our results highlight how parents' occupations, such as those in CAOs, which involve watching children successfully navigating risky activities and other adults overcoming injuries, may influence their perspectives on their children's ORP. While current understandings of risk are informed by the ORP perspectives of parents who do not hold high-risk occupations (i.e., in which they may navigate risk and danger on a frequent basis), we believe their inclusion would provide more nuanced understanding of how witnessing injuries may shape parents' ORP perspectives. Second, while risk remains largely produced as synonymous with danger in Canadian public discourse, we suggest that parents in CAOs in the Canadian Armed Forces may not share this viewpoint. This was illustrated by the descriptions the parents provided for the differences

between injury and harm and serious and non-serious injuries. Our research can be considered a steppingstone towards achieving this goal and towards better understanding the nuances involved in the formation of risk societies.

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Appendix A: Table 1

Table 1. *Participant Characteristics* (*N = 7)*

Pseudonym	Children (b= boy, g= girl, m= month)	Age
Shelley	7b, 7b, 10g	30
Paul	3b, 4b, 7b, 9b	38
Sam	2g, 6b	35
Tyler	6b, 18b, 18b	49
Bryan	6mb, 4g	32
Jasper	4g, 6g	41
Louis	3b, 8g	30

Reflection #2

She sits straight on her end of the computer screen. She smiles a lot and is proud to tell me about her volunteer work in her community. Then I ask about if she finds anything risky when her children are playing outdoors. She says "yes" and identifies cars as what causes her concern. I ask her what concerns her about letting her children play next to the street or near cars. Her face changes – she doesn't smile anymore. She sits a little less straight. She says when she was younger, she saw a truck run over a little boy's head.

There's a silence during which she seems to gather her thoughts, not realizing that I am using this time to gather my own. She decides to describe the incident to me and says the boy was crossing the street with his mother and dropped a power ranger toy. He let go of his mother's hand and ran back into the street to pick up the toy. She said the truck driver didn't have enough time to brake. She saw the boy's mother fall to the ground and cradle her son. She looks at the computer screen at me, a little more haunted than she was a few minutes earlier, and she tells me that what she saw scared her. As a researcher, I know some injury-related statistics. But I don't know what it *feels* like to watch a boy's head be crushed under a truck tire. I don't know what it *feels* like to picture it every time a child goes near the street. I know what anguish feels like, and grief, and pain. I know what it's like to almost lose the person you love the most after I watched my mother go through chemotherapy and radiation each day for a year, with the doctors telling me she may not make it. But I don't know what it *feels* like to lose a child, or to think you are going to lose them. I can only imagine.

This mother's story brings me one step closer to understanding what losing a child or living in constant fear that a child may be injured may be like for someone to experience. I think to myself during this interview that this is why safety perspectives, including those related to

ORP, are so interwoven with emotional experiences. As a human being, we can connect with the stories of others. Each time we are told a story about a little boy being hit and killed by a truck, or a loved one being shot during war, or a stranger abducting a child, we can sympathize with the victims of tragedy, and we do everything we can to not experience the same thing. I remind myself that this is why sensationalized media of children's injuries and abductions scare parents – it reminds them that monsters and tragedy are real, and it meets a need in them to protect their loved ones.

Chapter 3

Bauer, M. E. E., Giles, A. R., & Brussoni, M. (2021). "I've seen what evil men do": Military mothering and children's outdoor risky play. *Leisure Sciences*.

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Abstract

The restriction on children's outdoor risky play is emerging as a pressing public health concern. To the best of our knowledge, no research has examined military mothers' perspectives on outdoor risky play. Military mothers have unique knowledge of war and combat and potential threats to children's safety due to their communications with their partners in combat arms occupations. Their perspectives on outdoor risky play are important to consider in expanding scholarly understandings of risk discourses in the context of military culture. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 military mothers from across Canada. The results of our reflexive thematic analysis are threefold: (1) Outdoor risky play in close physical proximity to strangers and cars is dangerous for children; (2) outdoor risky play should not result in children experiencing serious injuries; and (3) outdoor risky play can teach children to assess and manage risks.

Keywords: Child Health, Injury Prevention, Military Mothering, Outdoor Play, Risk

Children's outdoor risky play (ORP) consists of play from great heights, great speeds, where children can be lost or disappear, around or with dangerous tools, around or near dangerous elements, and involves rough-and-tumble types of activity (Sandseter, 2007). Engaging in ORP can benefit children by helping them develop risk management skills and improve their cognitive and social functioning (Brussoni et al., 2012). Despite the consensus amongst play researchers that many Canadian children would benefit from regular and repeated opportunities for outdoor active play with risks (Tremblay et al., 2015), there have been increasing restrictions to children's ORP over time in Canada that are due in part to increasing pressures on parents to keep their children safe and injury-free (Harper, 2017). Mothers more than fathers are primary caregivers for their children (Statistics Canada, 2015a), and their perspectives of ORP for their children need to be understood if play researchers wish to encourage mothers to allow their children to participate in ORP.

There is a wealth of research on mothers' perspectives on ORP for their children in developed nations (Kimbro & Schachter, 2011; Little, 2015); however, this research has not accounted for military mothers' (herein used to describe women who have a child and are partnered with or married to military members) perspectives. The lack of scholarly attention to military mothers' perspectives of ORP for their children is problematic. Unlike most civilian mothers, military mothers have knowledge of war and combat through their partners' engagement in war and combat, and this may shape their perspectives of ORP (Davis et al., 2011). In this study, we interviewed military mothers to examine the research question, "What are military mothers' perspectives on their children's ORP and how may these perspectives be shaped by their military experiences?"

Literature Review

Children's risk-taking is largely governed by adults in Western societies, and the sociocultural production of risk knowledges (i.e., who has authority and exercises control over construction of risk, including what risks are permissible for children to take) has shifted from the belief that individual families know what is best for their children's risk-taking to consensus that scientists, researchers, and medical practitioners are authoritative voices for what is "risky" for children (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). Since the turn of the century, child abductions (Kitzinger, 2002), injuries and fatalities have been sensationalized through media disseminations, and a "good" parent is produced in media and public discourse as someone who is attentive to their children's safety needs, and who can combat personifications of evil (Kitzinger, 2002) or harm that children may encounter (Harper, 2017). The concept of outdoor "risky" play arose primarily as a response to challenge the intensification of anti-risk discourses in a plurality of populations (Sandseter, 2007) that increasingly restrict children's freedoms to play in child-oriented activities that facilitate learning and development (Harper, 2017; Sandseter, 2009a, 2009b).

Societal aversion to children's ORP is influenced by multiple factors, including but not limited to the perception that risk is synonymous with danger, the belief that injury experiences can be controlled and mitigated (Harper, 2017), and the belief that children are vulnerable and in need of adult protection (Lupton, 1999). Play researchers have raised concerns that children will not reap the benefits of ORP, such as being physically active and developing risk management strategies (Brussoni et al., 2015). By engaging in ORP, children learn how to use their bodies to overcome obstacles, and they develop an understanding of their natural world (Herrington & Brussoni, 2015). These are skills that can help them better navigate potentially risky situations in other contexts and as they age (Herrington & Brussoni, 2015). As a result of excessive

restrictions placed on children's ORP, there have been multi-sectoral efforts in Canada to curtail societal risk-aversion (Tremblay et al., 2015).

There have been various efforts made to promote ORP for children in Canada. For example, OutsidePlay.ca is an online tool that offers educators, caregivers, and parents opportunities to reflect on and re-assess their tolerance for children's risk-taking during play (Brussoni et al., 2018). Further, injury prevention materials can shift away from equating risk with danger and instead describe the benefits of children's outdoor active play with risk-taking for children's development (Parachute, 2020). An additional effort was the Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play, released in 2015 as part of the PartcipACTION report card on children and youth physical activity. Its purpose was to challenge societal fears and prevailing myths concerning the potential for children to be injured while participating in ORP (Tremblay et al., 2015). The Calgary Play Charter, released to a multi-sectoral audience in 2017 and signed by 36 representatives from communities and organizations around Calgary to advocate for the importance of unstructured and outdoor play for children in Alberta, stated that it is vital to "understand and communicate that risk is a valuable component to play, and we will encourage, support, and enable play that allows children to develop risk-taking skills" (City of Calgary, 2018, para. 11). Further, in 2019, the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) released a toolkit for children's unstructured play to assist play providers with addressing parental concerns for children's safety and highlighting the benefits for children engaging in ORP (CPHA, 2019). While these efforts were important steps in the promotion of children's ORP, they did not address the nuances of all parents' perspectives of ORP for their children.

Constructions of "risk" can vary across societies and cultures and as a factor of values and beliefs to which individual members' subscribe (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). Societal norms

can dictate what fears and anxieties people should have towards activities deemed risky, and what permissions and affordances should be granted to children in the context of their risk-taking (Lupton, 1999). Giles et al. (2019) challenged the dissemination of generalized ORP information in the Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play (Tremblay et al., 2015). Giles and colleagues (2019) argued that generalized suggestions promoting ORP for Canadian children may be harmful, as these suggestions do not account for children, for example, who live and play in close proximity to hazards on a daily basis, or Indigenous children who experience injury to a significantly greater degree than non-Indigenous children. Their arguments show the limits of generalizations and draw attention to the benefit of including diverse perspectives in ORP research. It is possible that by generalizing ORP information to Canadian families, we may be romanticizing ORP instead of focusing on how values and moral beliefs influence social constructions of "risk" and, as a consequence, children's ORP. For example, there is a dearth of understanding of how risk is conceptualized by parents who are members of populations that experience risk, danger, and injuries on a frequent basis and what such parents may need to support their children's risk-taking during outdoor play.

Social Constructions of Risk and Military Mothering

In Canada, a population who experiences unique risk-taking on a continual basis is that of military members in combat arms occupations (CAOs). CAOs are different than other military occupations due to the need for specialized training to use and fire weapons for the purposes of eliminating enemies during combat (Hockey, 2003). Members in CAOs encounter some of the most difficult, challenging, and uncertain physical and emotional risks in their work: they frequently endure gruelling obstacle courses in combat training, and they can witness horrors

during their deployments that can include the deaths of comrades (Febbraro, 2003). Further, they and their families can reside in a household governed by military culture (Davis et al., 2011).

According to Davis et al. (2011), military culture is enforced through subscription to specific military values and beliefs. These values and beliefs typically consist of putting the needs of the military and military members before the needs of members' romantic partners. When their typically male partners in CAOs are deployed (Manser, 2018), female partners are expected to navigate the practices that their partner's deployment entails, including single parenting (Davis et al., 2011). Further, they can engage in protective buffering when they perceive that disclosure of information will result in a disruption of their partner's safety (e.g., knowing their partners/wives are feeling depressed could result in poorer performance in combat, so they do not disclose this information) (Joseph & Afifi, 2010), despite the fact that protective buffering is associated with a decrease in their own well-being, resulting in them experiencing greater upset, emotional turmoil, and marriage dissatisfaction (Joseph & Afifi, 2010).

Dominant social constructions of mothering suggest mothers and not fathers are the best fit to be primary caregivers for their children (Hays, 1996). Gendered productions of caregiving contribute to the societal pressure mothers more than fathers may feel to keep children safe (Zimmerman et al., 2008). The anti-risk climate in Canada may exacerbate pressures for mothers to perform "intensive mothering" (Hays, 1996) that is described by Hallstein (2006) as requiring "mothers to lavish copious amounts of time and energy on their children" (p. 97). As mothering is often traditionally societally equated with nurture and care and fathering with financial provision (Doucet, 2018), and a "good" mother is often constructed as someone who is child-centered and emotionally nurturing and caring towards their children (Hallstein, 2006), mothers may feel negatively judged by their neighbors and families if they do not successfully protect

their children from harm. In Canada, gendered discourses portray a ‘good’ mother as a mother who is aware of potential threats to their children’s safety (Clarke & Dumas, 2020), such as the potential threats of their children being taken by strangers or hit by a car. Further, the pressures on mothers to ensure their children’s safety are exacerbated by the child safety information mothers receive through television news stories and social media groups online (Manganello, 2016).

The pressure to ensure children’s safety at all costs may be heightened for military mothers who have a partner in a CAO, as they are often alone in supervising and caring for their children for extended periods of time (Weinstein & White, 1997). They may thus feel a heightened responsibility to mitigate potential perceived threats to their children’s safety during their children’s ORP. Further, they may be privy to information related to brutality encountered in combat through their conversations with their partners. As research indicates that parents’ experiences with risk and injury can influence their perspectives on their children’s ORP, as well as their conceptualizations of risk more broadly (Bauer & Giles, 2019; Kimbro & Schacht, 2011), it is reasonable to assume that military mothers who are partnered with members in CAOs may have unique perspectives on ORP. Thus, the supports required to facilitate balanced outdoor risky play for their children may be different compared than those for civilian mothers.

Theoretical Framework

As Canadian society grows increasingly risk-averse (Harper, 2017), children are deemed unfit to navigate their physical environments alone, and parents are concerned by the potential for their children to be abducted or struck by cars (Mitra et al., 2014). The once unobtrusive supervision that parents provided children during their outdoor play decades ago has been largely replaced by adult-supervised outdoor play or structured supervised activities (Lewis, 2017).

Theoretical approaches, such as risk and sociocultural theory (Lupton, 1999) consider emotional responses to risk-taking (Lupton, 1999), and can be used to examine parents' emotional responses to children's risk-taking.

The tenets of risk and sociocultural theory are contextualized within postmodern reflections on constructions of risk in society. Over time, societal risk assessment has expanded from risk being assessed on a technical and calculative level (e.g., what is the probability of a child being injured during outdoor risky play?), to risk also being examined for its emotional and reactive properties (e.g., how may parents' injury concerns influence children's development during outdoor risky play?) (Lupton, 1999). The examination of the emotional and reactive properties of risk provides insight into how and why engaging in risk taking is societally constructed as a negative practice, and it informs risk researchers' understandings of what supports parents and their children may require for healthful ORP. The use of risk and sociocultural theory can illuminate how risk is negotiated and approached within a population, and the potential sociocultural influences on these negotiations, such as community, gender, parent-child relationships, and family dynamics (Lupton, 1999). Further, risk and sociocultural theory can be employed in research to enrich understandings of how children adopt risk practices (Lupton, 1999), such as how they approach risk during their play. In Canadian society today, children are in jeopardy of developing into risk-naïve individuals (Ball & Sandseter, 2016). Specifically, as many children are not exposed to risks that allow them to test their physical and cognitive boundaries and help them learn to overcome threats to their safety during childhood, they are developing into anxious adults who are not capable of overcoming challenges in their physical environments (Ball & Sandseter, 2016).

We used risk and sociocultural theory to inform our approach (Lupton, 1999). It is important to consider how military mothers' perspectives on ORP may be different than in civilian culture due to the violent nature of CAOs and their heightened risk taking (Killgore et al., 2008). It is possible that they may perceive risk-taking as beneficial for overcoming threats in their physical environment, or fear that their children are at greater risk of injury during ORP because of the information on war and combat they may receive from their partners. It is important to consider the risk-taking culture of the military and specifically of that of CAOs in relation to mothers' perspectives on ORP, as the increased exposure of military mothers to information on war and combat may shape their perspectives.

Methods

We received ethics approval from the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board and the Department of National Defense Social Science Research Review Board. Sixteen military mothers from across Canada participated in this study. The mothers were partnered with military members in CAOs. Two of the mothers were military members themselves with one actively serving in a CAO. Table 1 (Appendix A) outlines participants' characteristics. To participate in the study, the mothers were required to have at least one child aged 4- to 12-years-old and have a partner currently serving in a CAO. The 4- to 12-year-old age range was selected because children aged 4 and over are typically more independent than toddlers (e.g., 1- to 3-years-old); learn risk assessment by climbing playground equipment and detaching objects (Sandseter, 2009a), and can learn how to avoid and manage injury experiences through participation in sports and school-related activities (Van Mechelen & Verhagen, 2005). The criteria for having a partner serving in a CAO was selected to better understand how military mothers' unique experiences with providing sole care for their children while their partners are away may

influence their experiences in a military lifestyle and their perspectives on their children's ORP. We recruited participants via online postings on military Facebook groups, recruitment posters on military resource centre bulletin boards, and in-person distribution of recruitment posters at a military family day event.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews (Kajornboom, 2005) included pre-established questions (e.g., "When your children play outside what activities do you find risky?") and probing questions (e.g., "why is that type of play concerning?" or "what could happen if your child participates in that activity?"). Participants could choose how they wanted to participate in the interview (e.g., in-person, by telephone, or through a virtual platform). The first author conducted thirteen interviews through virtual platforms over Facebook Messenger video, Skype, or Zoom, one on virtual platform by telephone, and two in-person (one at the participant's place of residence, one at the participant's work office). These interviews lasted one hour on average. The first author transcribed the interviews verbatim and returned the transcripts to participants for verification. No participant suggested edits of their transcript. We used pseudonyms for participants and their family members to ensure their anonymity in the research.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

To conduct our reflexive thematic analysis of the data, we employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of thematic analysis, and we also engaged with Braun and Clarke's (2019) update to this approach by emphasizing reflexivity. Thus, we started by (1) familiarizing ourselves with the participant responses to interview questions by reading through the transcribed materials; (2) formulating general codes that were used to track themes (e.g., concerns for safety); (3) searching the participants' responses for themes that relate to the initial

codes developed (e.g., road traffic); (4) reviewing the themes identified; (5) defining and naming each theme (e.g., outdoor play near strangers is risky because children can be kidnapped); and (6) writing the results by integrating the themes.

To achieve reflexivity throughout this process, we reflected on our own positions in relation to the research, such as how our childhood experiences, parenting, and our professional work may relate to how we perceive ORP in general (Braun & Clarke, 2019). For example, we reflected on how our beliefs that ORP can be beneficial for children's development derive from conducting research in the field of injury prevention. Our perspectives on ORP may be different if we did not have access to information on the benefits of ORP through research, and if we were instead solely exposed to media portrayals of children's risk taking. In each stage of the analysis, we reflected on how we were developing the codes and the purpose that the codes would inevitably serve. By prioritizing reflexivity in our analysis, we were able to reflect on how the themes identified may relate to greater scholarly literature on ORP and mothering, and what conclusions may be drawn from the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2019). We further reflected on and challenged our own assumptions about ORP. For example, we reflected on and challenged our assumptions that ORP for all children is beneficial by acknowledging that our perspectives derive from experiences with independent, unsupervised play in natural environments at young ages. Further, only one author is a mother, and we thus reflected on how our experiences with or without children may influence our perspectives on the topic at hand (e.g., how having children or not having children may relate to our perception of the benefits of ORP for children). Our reflections helped us recognize how military mothers' perspectives on ORP may differ from our own. For these reasons, we were able to add a level of reflexivity to our analysis that would otherwise be lacking.

Results

Our reflexive thematic analysis exploring military mothers' perspectives of ORP for their children resulted in three main themes: (1) ORP in close physical proximity to strangers and cars is dangerous for children; (2) ORP should not result in children experiencing serious injuries; and (3) ORP can teach children to assess and manage risks.

ORP in Close Physical Proximity to Strangers and Cars is Dangerous for Children

The mothers indicated that despite being aware that abductions are quite rare, they remained concerned around the possibility of strangers approaching their children. For example, Alisha, a mother to a 4-year-old girl and a 1-year-old boy, described her fear of her daughter being abducted by a stranger and provided an example of her daughter playing next to a road:

> I was watching her from the window, and she was going to cross the road to the neighbour's house to go play with the boys over there and like, I'm nursing [my baby], watching her from the window…And then two cars ended up stopping. So, then I got panicky and like ran out and was like, because the one car that stopped there was a man getting out and I thought, holy crap, he's going to abduct her. That's what I thought. And I felt really bad cause the student that came out of the door, he's like, sorry, sorry. And got back in his car and I was like, oh man. He was probably just trying to help but like, I didn't know. That's what I thought … And you know, you see a man getting out of a car towards your four year old girl, you're like, hell no. Like back off, mama bear's coming out.

Some of the mothers identified that their concerns for their children's outdoor play near strangers was influenced by their experience as part of a military family. They explained that because their partners witnessed war and combat overseas, they were aware that people can do

‘evil’ things to one another. This awareness made them hyper-vigilant of strangers around their children. When explaining her fears of strangers taking her 6-year-old son, Holly articulated,

> We have a neighbor whose child is a full year, a year and a half younger than [my son], and she lets him bike around the block by himself. I almost had a heart attack. I was like, we, WE, because even my husband feels the same way, [our son’s] not alone in our own yard for two seconds, no. Eyes on at all times. I think that stems a lot from …as military people…we’re hyper-aware of risk, and I’m just always, *always* thinking of the Bogeyman. I’m always thinking what could happen to him if he’s alone. He’s a very friendly child. I’m not 100% confident he wouldn’t go with somebody if somebody approached him. My husband uses the term, ‘I’ve seen what evil men do.’ That sounds ominous and terrible, but it’s a fact.

Nicoli shared similar sentiments and discussed that her fears that strangers will take her 5-year-old son are due in part to her own experiences in her work and her husband’s military CAO. When discussing her perspectives of ORP for her son, she said,

> I'm more worried about like random creepy weirdos than I am worried about him doing *something* risky. . .My husband's seen a lot of really horrible things. . . I probably have more fear of like random creepy weirdos, even though statistically it's not that stranger, it's someone you know. But I do probably think about it for those reasons.

Mothers were further alarmed by their children’s ORP in close physical proximity to cars. More than other environments, such as the woods, playgrounds, and parks, where children engage in ORP, the mothers conceptualized play in close physical proximity to cars as risky because they feared their children could be hit by cars. The mothers believed that due to their children’s ages and physical capabilities, playing on or near the street is risky because drivers

and children are not always aware of what is happening around them, such as stated by Marie-Claude, mother to a 5-year-old girl and a 7-year-old boy:

> Streets I don't like, because cars are usually going fast and they're not expecting kids to be in the streets. But kids are always in the street. And they don't have the notion of where the car is. Even if they hear it. So, I don't like streets. They have to be careful of the streets.

Some of the mothers believed that their neighborhoods influenced their concern with play near cars. They explained that streets would be safer in quieter neighbourhoods with fewer cars, but in larger cities such as theirs, play on or near the street concerns them. When explaining her views on this, Brigitte, a mother to a 5-year-old boy, said,

> In the streets I'm worried about fast cars because you know people don't pay attention. So yeah. I mean we'll let him, in his old neighborhood he was playing in the streets and we lived in an off shoot road. So, the only people that came down there were the people in the neighborhood, so I let him play in the street. But here, there are no stop signs on any corners in our neighborhood, so we don't let him play in the streets here.

Some of the mothers' perspectives of ORP for their children as play on or near the street were influenced by their own experiences with cars. For example, Anna, a mother to a 17-year-old boy, 14-year-old girl, and 11-year-old boy, contextualized this by describing the horror she experienced when she witnessed a truck hit and kill a little boy. When discussing why this influenced her current concerns for cars around her children, she said,

> Certainly, when they were younger, I was concerned about roads. I have anxiety about kids around vehicles. I saw a kid get hit by a truck when I was maybe 12 or 13 when I was babysitting once … He died … His mom was walking across the street with him and

> he ran back at the four way stop to pick up a power ranger toy and he knelt down and the trucker didn't see him. It was a big truck. And it ran over his head … I am overly anxious about kids around cars. I hate it when kids are anywhere around. I'll be the one when a kid is 10 feet away from a car, and I'm trying to get them to go further away. It stresses me out.

ORP Should Not Result in Children Experiencing Serious Injuries

The mothers were concerned about outdoor play opportunities during which their children could experience a serious injury, which were described by the mothers as, for example, concussions, deep gashes, or permanent damage to children's bodies. Alisha, a mother to a 4-year-old girl and a 5-month-old boy, described how she conceptualized serious injury: "Severe being, yeah, like a concussion where she gets knocked out or a major laceration … Breaks for sure. Dislocations."

The mothers voiced their concern for their children experiencing serious but not minor injuries. While serious injuries could encompass any harm that requires doctor visits and/or the need to call an ambulance, minor injuries were described as cuts, scrapes, or bruises, and were attributed to the natural course of play. Jolianne, mother to a 6-year-old boy and 2-year-old girl, described serious injuries as broken bones and visits to the emergency room at a hospital. When she differentiated serious from minor injuries, she described her children's experiences with minor injuries. She said,

> Oh like you know, scraped knees, like kid clumsiness - I tripped on the pavement and I skinned my knee, or I was running around and my sandal fell off and I slipped. Anything that can be fixed with a Band-Aid is I would say not super serious.

The mothers acknowledged that there are many different types of outdoor play that could

lead to serious injury: for example, if children overextend their physical capabilities by climbing too high in a tree to a point from which they are unable to descend, it could result in the child falling and breaking a bone, and swimming without a life jacket and/or adult supervision could result in a child drowning. In line with this, Hannah, mother to a 4-year-old boy, described her concerns for her son's safety during outdoor play:

> I'm worried about them getting hurt after [engaging in outdoor activities]. And like, you know, risky things like… something that could really cause danger … [In] the back of our house there's a big drop off into a creek. And so that's something we told [my son] from the beginning. Don't go near there because it's very dangerous and if you fall you'd really, really hurt yourself.

ORP Can Teach Children to Assess and Manage Risks

The mothers indicated that they believed ORP can positively influence children's development by teaching children risk-assessment because it provides children with challenging environments and activities that promote their ability to assess and manage risks. For example, when asked about why she believed ORP may benefit her children, Helene, mother to 3, 5, 7, and 9-year-old boys, noted,

> Giving them the room to assess their own limits will serve them well as an adult. They definitely need the space to be able to look at the situation and make a safety assessment for themselves … a couple of times [my youngest son] was climbing things and I was watching and I was thinking 'I'm not going to jump in, I'm not going to jump in', and I have to talk myself down. But then you see the light switch and look and assess and change his behavior and I think that translates directly into adulthood where he will look

> at a behavior that he is choosing and having practiced, even in play-base, he will assess 'oh this is probably not the wisest course, I should self-correct'.

Katie, mother to 8- and 5-year-old boys, and 6-month-old girl, discussed the need for children to assess risks:

> Well, I mean, I think just in general they have to learn to recognize when things are perhaps dangerous and not dangerous … And I'm hoping that with maybe perhaps some guidance that children start to recognize where they need to be careful.

The mothers further believed that children's engagement in ORP teaches children how to manage risks by problem solving, which the mothers believed was beneficial to children's overall development. When Pauline, mother to a 13-year-old and 11-year-old girl, was asked why she believes ORP can benefit her children, she replied,

> Because I think it makes them be better problem solvers. They need to figure out their problems. They need to, you know, work as a team with their friends. And you know, if a bully comes along and pushes [my daughters] off the swing, they have to figure out how to deal with it cause I can't be there with them all the time … Just because I feel that children, they need to learn how to problem solve and, and roadblocks are going to come up all the time and we're not always going to be there to help them.

Alisha, mother to a 4-year-old girl and 1-year-old boy, discussed her views on the benefits of ORP for her daughter:

> Allowing her to explore by herself, allowing her to figure out what her strengths and weaknesses are … Like natural consequences and help like allowing her to problem solve by herself without me having to tell her or guide her or direct her.

Thus, the mothers believed that learning how to assess and manage risks is an important part of child development because their children will learn how to overcome potentially risky situations on their own.

Discussion

Our findings advance scholarly understandings of military mothers' perspectives on their children's ORP by illustrating the potential influence of military culture on these perspectives. We found that the mothers had concerns for their children's ORP that were similar to civilian mothers' concerns. For example, like civilian mothers (Allin & Curry, 2014; Little, 2015), the military mothers considered strangers and motor vehicles to be some of the greatest threats to their children's safety.

While child abductions by complete strangers (i.e., not a friend or acquaintance of the family) do happen, are certainly horrible, and can be associated with tremendous suffering for the child and their parents, loved ones, and community, they are extremely rare: In 2019, stranger abductions related to 16 of 40,425 missing children reports in Canada (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2020). Despite the rarity of child abductions by complete strangers, parents can perceive strangers as the modern embodiment of the "wicked witch" or "bogeyman"' (Stokes, 2009, p. 7). In a study by Foster et al. (2015) examining parents' fears for strangers around their children in Australia, the researchers posited that the parents' concerns were largely unfounded and shaped by an emotional response to a perceived threat rather than an actual threat to children's safety. Further, Foster et al. (2015) discussed that the parents in their study knew that there was a minimal risk of their child being abducted by a stranger. In the military, the mothers can receive second-hand information on "evil men" who pose a very real threat to their partner's safety (i.e., strangers who are trying to hurt or kill their partners in combat). It is thus possible

that the exposure to this information shapes their perspectives of strangers as “evil” by making the mothers more aware of the potential for strangers to harm their families. Productions of strangers as people who may abduct or abuse children more broadly reflects dominant child safety discourses in the 21st century that suggest parents should protect their children from unknown threats (Harper, 2017). Mitigating strangers approaching their child, as well as opportunities for their children to be seriously injured (e.g., hit by cars), may mean that mothers can prove to themselves that they are capable of guarding and protecting their child and may curtail their risk anxieties. Problematically, conversations on child abductions by strangers can at times overshadow the ‘Bogeyman’ at home: children are far more likely to be abducted by someone they know than a stranger (Dalley & Ruscoe, 2003), and military children suffer more physical and sexual abuse by someone they know than civilian children (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2017).

Childhood in Western societies is construed as a period where children are fragile and weak, and where any threats to their safety must be eliminated by adult intervention (Jackson & Scott, 1999), including the threat of experiencing serious injuries. As mothers more than fathers are held societally responsible for eliminating threats to children’s safety (Zimmerman et al., 2008), they may thus be concerned by children’s play that they perceive as potentially resulting in children experiencing serious injuries. The mothers in our study, similar to civilian mothers (Little, 2015), believed that children must be protected from serious injuries, and that it was their responsibility to safeguard their children from serious injury, such as those that may be sustained during ORP in close proximity to cars. In Canada, mothers’ concerns for their children’s outdoor play in close physical proximity to cars is warranted: According to the Canadian Paediatric Society (2020), bicycle and car accidents are the leading causes of fatality for children. Despite

the fact that the majority of fatalities and serious injuries children experience resulting from motor vehicle accidents occur when children are passengers and not pedestrians (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2020), the mothers indicated that they still fear their children will be less able to respond to motor vehicles because of the unpredictability of drivers and children. To keep children safe and away from cars while children play outdoors, parents often restrict their children's play to the sidewalks, lawns, and adult-supervised spaces such as the home (McLaren & Parusel, 2012). When the mothers in our study feared their children would be struck by cars, they prohibited their children from playing near or on the street.

Implications for Military Mothering

For military mothers, the pressures to mitigate their children's serious injury experiences may be exacerbated by negotiating the multiple roles involved in sole parenting while their partner is deployed (Weinstein & White, 1997). Researchers have illustrated that in professions in which parents encounter injury and risk on a more frequent basis, such as paramedicine, risk perspectives could be influenced by beliefs that people are able to overcome their injuries (O'Hara et al., 2015). While the mothers in our study may have more information concerning injuries that military members can overcome, such as amputations and dismemberment during war and combat by having a partner in a CAO, their descriptions of serious injuries were similar to previous findings on civilian mothers' descriptions of serious injuries (Bauer et al., 2020; İnce et al., 2017). It is possible that because the mothers did not have direct experience of the risks, second-hand information on injuries and recuperation from their partners did not influence their perspectives concerning "serious" injuries. Future research should explore the influence of direct compared to second-hand experiences with injuries during combat, as the information and experience may shape fears about their children experiencing serious injury during ORP.

The Benefits of ORP for Assessing and Managing Risks

The finding that the mothers believed that ORP teaches children to assess and manage risks may demonstrate the tensions and negotiations that take place in affording children opportunities for ORP while simultaneously keeping them safe from potential threats to their safety. For military mothers, it is possible that these tensions are influenced by cultural dichotomies: in Canadian culture more broadly there is pressure on mothers to keep children safe and restrict children's risk-taking (Harper, 2017); however, in military culture specifically, risk-taking must be incorporated during training activities for military members to be prepared to assess and take risks during combat (Febbraro, 2003). Thus, while mothers may feel that they need to keep their children safe and injury-free, they may believe that ORP can provide beneficial opportunities to learn risk assessment strategies due to exposure to information on the benefits of risk-taking more broadly for military members. It is possible that conflicting dichotomies of the cultures in which military mothers are embedded cause tensions in how they wish to promote healthy ORP for their children.

While we have discussed the need to continue to explore mothers' perspectives on their children's ORP, we must acknowledge contemporary expansions in caregiving in Canadian households. Traditional gender discourses portray fathers as the financial provider for children and as secondary caregivers; however, while some fathers may identify with this role, many fathers provide nurture and care for children, including as the primary caregiver (Doucet, 2018). Fathers play influential roles in their children's navigations of ORP, and there have been calls to include a diversity of parenting perspectives in ORP research (Bauer & Giles, 2019). Although there are more mothers than fathers in at-home roles in the Canadian Armed Forces (Manser, 2018), it is important to disrupt the notion that women and not men are capable of being primary

caregivers (Doucet, 2018). Thus, as the Canadian Armed Forces strives to increase recruitment of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and Two-Spirit members (Fuhr, 2019), we advocate for further inclusion of diverse parenting perspectives in play research to expand scholarly understandings of the intersections of parenting, risk, and military culture.

Conclusion

Our results illustrate that military mothers are concerned with their children's ORP in close physical proximity to strangers and cars and consisting of activities in which their children can be seriously injured. The military mothers in our study had experiences as part of military families that shaped their perspectives of outdoor risky play for their children, such as having knowledge of "evil men" in war and combat. This suggests that military mothers' perspectives of ORP for their children may be influenced as a result of being exposed to information concerning war and combat. Further, the mothers' perspectives of ORP for their children as outdoor play in close physical proximity to cars were at times influenced by their personal experience with traffic and cars, such as witnessing a child being struck by a truck, and thus perceptions of neighborhood street safety. Future research should consider how on-base compared to off-base traffic may influence military children's ORP opportunities, and if there are opportunities for built environment interventions to balance military children's ORP while mitigating the potential threat of motor vehicle collisions.

Future research is needed to inform ORP materials that are disseminated to military families, and our results can broaden researchers' understandings of how ORP for children is conceptualized by military mothers. Future research may consider how military mothers' perspectives of ORP for their children may be different for their sons and daughters, or if they reside on- or off-base. Researchers should also consider military mothers' perspectives of ORP

for their children in households in which children have exceptionalities or experience challenges to play (e.g., a disability). It is possible that by encouraging mothers' support for their children's ORP, more pressure will be placed on mothers to provide opportunities to introduce children to risk-taking during outdoor play. This may consequently influence a shift in "good" mothering discourses to involve the promotion of ORP – play that, for some children, may not be beneficial. Play researchers must proceed to engage with research that centres the perspectives of all populations of parents – including those in the military – on children's ORP to understand what parents from diverse cultures and societies need to balance ORP for their children.

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Appendix A: Table 1

Table 1. *Participant Characteristics* (n = 16)

Pseudonym	Children (b= boy, g= girl, m= month)	Age
Anna	11b, 14g, 17b	38
Lillianne	8g, 10b, 10b	36
Brigitte	5b	34
Hannah	4b	33
Holly	6b	46
Sierra	5b, 7g	36
Marie-Claire	5g, 7b	36
Helene	3b, 5b, 7b, 9b	-
Jolianne	2g, 6b	34
Gabriella	7g	35
Katie	6mg, 5b, 8b	36
Nicoli	5b	34
Shelly	7g, 7b, 10b	30
Alisha	1b, 4g	-
Kelly	3b, 8g	31
Pauline	11g, 13g	41

Reflection #3

I can smell the chicken noodle soup she places in front of me on the table. I thank her for the lunch she has prepared for us. I've never been on a military base before, and as I look out her window, I want to ask about where her children play, given there are streets with many cars and little green space, but the interview has not started. She asks if I like the soup. I have a spoonful and tell her I do. We are sitting in her kitchen at a round table with a draped tablecloth. All around us on the walls are framed pictures of her family: a smiling man in an army uniform with a big brown beard, a little blonde boy, and a taller girl with straight brown hair. As I look around at the living room next to us, I can see the remnants of play artefacts for her children, with dolls and plastic play tables and toy helicopters.

Later, during the interview, after she brings the soup to her kitchen, she tells me that her daughter likes to play with army toys like helicopters. It's quiet other than her voice, which is surprising – I thought that there would be more noise on an army base. I ask her if and how she may identify with being a military mother. She says that although she identifies as a mother, she doesn't like it. She tells me that when her children were born, she didn't want to be a mother, and even today doesn't like the word "mother." I ask her why that is, and she says she doesn't know. She says it's just a feeling she had when her children were born. We talk more about it. She tells me she thinks she's a guardian for her children, but she's not very "motherly." We talk at length about what being a mother means, and how a woman can choose to be a mother but not necessarily identify as one. Through my conversation with her, I learn that not everyone who identifies as being a mother subscribes to traditional definitions of what that means, and I make a note to myself to explore this topic with other mothers I interview.

Chapter 4

"The Mother's Plague": Overprotective Parenting and Children's Outdoor Risky Play in Canadian Armed Forces Families

Abstract

Mothers' overprotective parenting during their children's outdoor risky play (ORP), such as restricting age-appropriate activities, can restrict opportunities for children's play and the myriad of benefits gained from it. Gender discourses promoted in Canadian society, such as traditional views on safety being a motherly concern, may shape mothers' overprotective parenting during their children's ORP. We conducted semi-structured interviews to explore overprotective parenting and ORP perspectives of 16 mothers who are partnered with male members in the Canadian Armed Forces. The results of our critical discourse analysis were twofold: (1) Military mothers resist discursively produced pressures to subscribe to overprotective parenting during their children's ORP; and (2) traditional gender discourses in Canadian society shape military mothers' feelings of responsibility for their children's ORP safety. Our findings expand scholarly understandings for how gender discourses influence military mothers' parenting during and promotion of their children's ORP.

Keywords: Gender, Military, Overprotective Parenting, Play, Risk

Overprotective parenting can be characterized as an over-involvement in children's lives that consists of a frequent if not constant monitoring and surveilling of activities, enforcement of safety restrictions that are excessive for a child's developmental level and capabilities (Brussoni & Olsen, 2012), and insertion in a child's life to the point of "smothering" (Jackson, 2011, p. 18) (e.g., overly engaging in activities with children). Overprotective parenting can have an adverse effect on children's well-being by restricting opportunities for them to be innovative, imaginative, and investigative of their physical and social environments (Cevher-Kalbraun & Ivrendi, 2016) and potentially limit their outdoor risky play (ORP). ORP, which refers to thrilling and exciting opportunities to be physically active and engage with uncertainty with the risk of minor injury, can provide children with important opportunities to learn how to assess risks in their environment and develop resiliency (Brussoni et al., 2015b). Overprotective parenting connotes an excess of protection and can result from feelings of paranoia, distrust of strangers around children, and concerns for minor threats to children's safety (Brussoni & Olsen, 2012). It is thus important to examine potential influences on parents' perspectives on overprotective parenting and children's ORP, such as traditional gender discourses that perpetuate normative role performances for mothers (Carreiras, 2006).

Expectations for mothers are reflected through public dogma on child-rearing: mothers are expected to tend to their children's needs through subscription to domestic duties, including cleaning, cooking, and nurturing (Doucet, 2018). Expansions in gender discourses reflect particular shifts in Canadian society, with the labour market reflecting more women entering the workforce and financially providing for their families, and feminist and gay rights movements advocating for men and women to have equal opportunity to care for children (Doucet, 2018). Although expansions in gender discourses promote mothers' non-traditional roles, such as

mothers' labour outside the home, mothers more than fathers are still expected to nurture their children and subscribe to traditional domestic responsibilities (Doucet, 2018). This is partially a result of patriarchal social practices that segregate feminine and masculine responsibilities in Western societies (Carreiras, 2006). Specific gender roles are reinforced through social policies, including historically less paternal leave than maternity leave, lower wages for women compared to men, and public discourse suggesting that men who are nurturing towards children are perverse (Doucet, 2006). It is thus unsurprising that overprotective parenting is commonly discussed in scholarly literature on child safety in relation to mothers' and not fathers' practices and beliefs (Cevher-Kalburan & Ivrendi, 2016; Harper, 2017; Jackson, 2010; Little, 2015). Problematically, there is a dearth of understanding for how male-dominated and patriarchal organizations may shape mothers' perspectives on overprotective parenting and children's ORP. Today, the military "is one of the last bastions of male domination" (Segal, 2006, p. 570). Within this "bastion of male domination" is one of the most violent and gender-segregated dominions of the military: Combat arms occupations (CAOs). Examining the perspectives of mothers who are partnered with male military members in CAOs can offer valuable insight into understanding overprotective parenting and children's ORP.

CAOs are traditionally conceived in military discourse as being the occupation associated with firing weapons (Segal, 2006), and these occupations can include gunners, tank operators, and infantry soldiers (Government of Canada, 2021). The overprotective parenting and ORP perspectives of military mothers (a term used in this paper to describe female partners/wives of military personnel in CAOs who have at least one child) are essential to consider in family research. Conceptions of risk differ according to normative values that are socially constructed within subgroups of people (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). Societal consensus for what is risky and

what is not is thus frequently challenged and renegotiated by members of society (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). Thus, ORP may be perceived and constructed differently in military compared to civilian populations. Below, we explore the influence of traditional gender discourses on overprotective parenting and mothering, and we explore the potential for the Canadian military more broadly, a largely gender-segregated organization (Lane, 2017), to influence these mothers' perspectives on these topics.

Literature Review

Children need outdoor play opportunities that allow them to take healthy risks (Alexander et al., 2014). Despite the potential consequence of children experiencing an injury, ORP is considered beneficial for healthful child development. One of the noted benefits of ORP is providing children with experiences to learn risk assessment and management strategies (e.g., navigating play in close proximity to traffic) (Brussoni et al., 2015b), which may contribute to curtailing the potential for children developing into risk-naïve adults (Ball et al., 2019). Specifically, ORP may provide children with opportunities to learn to navigate their cognitive and emotional appraisals of dangers in environments (Morrongiello & Matheis, 2007) to better approach and overcome real-world dangers (e.g., playing in close physical proximity to bodies of water where there is potential to fall in). The risk assessment and management strategies that children develop through engagement in ORP can translate into the strategies they can use to approach risk and danger across their lifespan (Van Mechelen & Verhagen, 2005), including improving their detection of risks in the physical environment (Lavrysen et al., 2015) and their negotiations of non-play-related threats such as adolescent sexual behavior and substance use (Gill, 2007). Problematically, children's engagement in ORP can be overly restricted by parents (Brussoni et al., 2012). Researchers have explored the influences on these restrictions with the

hope of supporting balanced opportunities for children's ORP (Brussoni et al., 2013; Clark & Dumas, 2020). One type of restriction is mothers' overprotective parenting when it comes to children's ORP engagement.

Overprotective Parenting and Mothering

Parenting is influenced by culture, community ideologies, and gender (Ungar, 2009). In particular, in Western societies there is a preoccupation with keeping children away from danger or potential threats to their safety (Lupton, 1999), and parents can engage in overprotective parenting in low-risk environments, such as neighborhoods where there is access to green space with few hazards (Ungar, 2009). Mothers' overprotective parenting may be an adaptive and reactionary practice to the "stress of modernity" (Ungar, 2009, p. 259), which includes the societal promotion of individualism whereby parents and not communities are responsible for children's well-being; children's achievements (or lack thereof) reflecting on their parents; and a societal consensus that children are not competent to keep themselves safe.

Risk researchers have posited that risk, including risks that facilitate learning and where children can engage in risk-benefit assessment, can be a controlled commodity (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). Specifically, authoritative voices, such as societally approved medical experts (e.g., family doctors), control the information of the detriments to risk-taking released to the public and approve or forbid specific risk-taking practices (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). In the context of child safety, the governance of risk often falls on parents. Thus, it is parents and not the children themselves who are expected to subscribe to and uphold community consensus for what is permissible according to unwritten articulations of child safety (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). As overprotective parenting becomes increasingly widespread and normative (Ungar, 2009), community ideologies may perpetuate the notion that children need to be protected at all

costs, including negating their opportunities to develop personal risk assessment and management strategies through ORP.

Pervasive risk discourses in Canada suggest that childhood is a state of innocence during which parents are expected to protect their children from all potential threats to their safety (e.g., kidnappings, illnesses, and injuries) (Brussoni et al., 2015a). The mass dissemination of information on potential threats to children's physical safety through media outlets, parents' fears that neighbours will call child-protective services, and prevailing risk anxieties towards strangers, have contributed to the production of perceptions that children's risk taking is inherently negative (Brussoni et al., 2013).

Overprotective parenting and gender expectations are inextricably linked: risk discourses commonly emphasize mothers' caregiving and nurturing tendencies while in close physical proximity to their children (Doucet, 2018). Specifically, neo-liberal ideologies engender parental blame for children's injuries and discursively position "good" mothers as abiding by societal ideals of child protection and supervision (Clarke & Dumas, 2020; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). Indeed, mothers are encouraged through societal practices (e.g., taking parental leaves of absence from work, having baby changing stations in female and not male restrooms) to perform in ways associated with gender discourses that promote the supervision of children, tending to children's injuries, and providing care that children require to develop healthfully (Doucet, 2018). If mothers succeed in performing in ways that subscribe to these gender discourses, they are societally produced as being responsible and therefore "good" mothers (Clarke & Dumas, 2020). Through the perpetuation of discourses that suggest risk is inherently negative and mothers are responsible for children's safety, mothers may believe that overprotective parenting is necessary and that children should stay away from all risky activities.

It is necessary to consider all mothers' perspectives on overprotective parenting and ORP, as risk perceptions are contextualized according to normative gender roles and societal subscription to dominant social discourses in subpopulations (Brussoni et al., 2013). To date, many communities of mothers remain unaccounted for in overprotective parenting and ORP research, including military mothers.

Military, Risk, and Gender

Mothers' exposure to hazards and threats to safety of family members, as well as the roles to which they subscribe, can influence their ORP perspectives (Little, 2015). The military in general is embedded in a culture of risk assessment and management in which military members identify and mitigate risks when they engage in war, combat, and training activities (Manser, 2018). Military mothers are thus vicariously exposed to risk and danger, and strategies for risk assessment and management. Further, the maternal roles to which they subscribe can be different than partnered civilian mothers' roles and can include, for example, providing lone-care for children while balancing household responsibilities and military volunteerism, while their male partners are deployed or away on training (Weinstein & White, 1997). The military is engrained in particular power relationships, and military members and their families must subscribe to values associated with military life (Weinstein & White, 1997), including placing the needs of the country and military members (due to the members direct servitude to the military through combat) above the needs of the partner (Lane, 2017). Military members are expected to sacrifice family time and involvement to serve overseas and are expected to put themselves in harm's way to fulfill their occupational duties (Lane, 2017). These values, however, are inherently tied to the gender processes of military culture – especially in CAOs.

CAOs are notorious for the traditionally masculine traits that members must exhibit, including physical and combative prowess and resiliency during injury experience (King, 2017). Indeed, there is a gender dichotomy of roles to which CAO members and their female partners must subscribe: members must tend to their duties during training and war and perform violent acts to succeed in combat, while their typically female partners fulfill household and child-rearing duties and perform in ways that demonstrate domestic nurture and care (Segal, 2006). Indeed, while their partners serve the military through their engagement in war, mothers are expected to serve the military through their dedication to family and are thus responsible for placing the needs of their partner and children above their own (Weinstein & White, 1997). Importantly, discursively produced pressure for military mothers to serve the military through family-oriented roles may be exacerbated by residing and performing duties within a "community of service" (Mullin-Splude, 2006): community members tend to trust and be responsible for one another due to the need to follow specific ethical and philosophical ideals and practices engrained in military structure. Military mothers may feel judged if they do not succeed in their partner- and child-specific duties (e.g., accommodating their partner's time away from the home by taking on household and child-caring responsibilities) (Lane, 2017).

Importantly, while military mothers may face discursively produced pressures to nurture and care for children within military communities, they also reside within a greater Canadian society that prioritizes child safety. Military mothers' perspectives on overprotective parenting and children's ORP thus warrant examination and should be approached with an appreciation for how constructions of gender and subsequent gender roles are perpetuated through military and broader societal discourses concerning mothering.

Theoretical Framework

To explore military mothers' perspectives on overprotective parenting and their children's ORP, we employed poststructural feminist theory. Poststructural feminist theory is especially useful in examining participants' voices and experience in relation to social relations of power, how language is used to convey meaning, and how participants' voices and experience relate to discursive fields (Weedon, 1988). Specifically, we employed poststructural feminist theory to understand the potential influences of societal and militarized gender discourses, such as discursively produced pressures to perform traditional roles that involve protecting children from safety threats, may influence their perspectives on overprotective parenting and their children's ORP (Lane, 2017). Further, we examined how power dynamics may shape these mothers' perspectives: relations of power are embedded in all cultures and people are expected to subscribe to norms and values promoted by dominant discourses, though they can also risk social censure and resist them. Relations of power exist within family settings, including within the home, as family bonds and relationships are exemplified by responsibilities, duties, and allowances (Bjarnegård, & Melander, 2011), such as permitting children to engage in certain ORP behaviours.

Mothers in Canadian society are often ostracized for their failure to subscribe to norms and values, and they can face societal consequences of being shunned or demeaned for their personal beliefs (Zimmerman et al., 2008). In the discursive field of military mothering, there are myriad pressures placed on military mothers to perform in ways that agree with traditional military discourses, such as being "good military mothers" by placing the needs of their children, their partner, and the military above oneself, and engaging in lone parenting (Lane, 2017). According to poststructural feminist theorists, the discursive field is a site of meaning production and generation in which traditional and competing discourses and societal consensus are

challenged and negotiated (Weedon, 1988). Thus, the discursive field of military mothering is critical to consider in relation to the present study in which we seek to understand military mothers' perspectives on overprotective parenting and children's ORP in relation to greater societal risk and gender discourses.

Methodology

Our use of poststructural feminist theory is complemented by our use of feminist methodologies. Feminist methodologies are useful for centring the perspectives and experiences of women in relation to gender discourses (Landman, 2006), especially in ORP research, in which military mothers' perspectives on overprotective parenting and children's ORP have escaped attention. The main tenets of feminist methodologies consist of gaining insight into the power dynamics that shape and influence women's negotiations of their social lives, and focusing on the gender processes of life (Hammersley, 1992). We used feminist methodology to explore mothers' negotiations of their social worlds, such as how they navigate discursively produced pressure to overprotect their children. Further, we used feminist methodology to examine how they may promote opportunities for their children's ORP despite feeling a sense of responsibility for their children's safety. Feminist methodologies thus provide an excellent methodological tool to examine the influence of power and gender discourses on military mothers' perspectives on overprotective parenting and ORP.

Methods

Participant Recruitment and Demographics

The Canadian Department of National Defence approved this study, which was part of a larger study exploring military parents' perspectives on ORP in Canada. The University of Ottawa's Research Ethics Board approved this study under file #H-06-19-4343. The inclusion

criteria for participants included self-identifying as a woman who has at least one child who is 4 to 12 years of age and having a partner who is employed in a CAO in the Canadian Army. We selected the 4 to 12 age range because throughout this period of time children are learning how to use their bodies to overcome potentially risky environments in preschool (Sandseter, 2007) and school settings (MacFarland & Laird, 2018), and their intentions to take risks translate to actual risk-taking during play (Morrongiello, 2004).

We recruited participants throughout Canada through the dissemination of recruitment posters via emails and on Facebook social media groups. Further recruitment was conducted through word-of-mouth: military members whom the first and second author know spoke to their colleagues, unit members, and friends about the research and passed along the recruitment information and posters. In total, 16 military mothers participated in the research (please see Table 1 for participant characteristics). The participants who chose to identify their ethnic background self-identified as European Canadian (n = 11), Chinese Canadian (n = 1), and German Canadian (n = 1). The majority of the participants had completed an undergraduate degree or higher (n = 13), and were, at the time of the interview, occupying various professions (e.g., educator), while 4 were stay-at-home mothers. All of the participants were married and spoke English as a first language.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The first author conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant. We selected semi-structured interviews over other interview techniques because semi-structured interviews provided opportunities to tailor the discussions with participants to topics of interest through pre-established questions (e.g., “Do you feel responsible for your child’s safety?”, “What is something that you would consider risky when your child plays outdoors?”) while also asking

probing questions (e.g., “Why do you feel responsible for your child’s safety?”, “Why do you think overprotective parenting is bad for children?”) (Kajornboon, 2005). The first author conducted a virtual platform interview by telephone (n=1), in-person (n=2), and through virtual platforms over Facebook Messenger video, Skype, or Zoom (n=13); they ranged between 30 to 90 minutes in length. We engaged in member checking: we transcribed the interviews verbatim and each interview transcript was sent to the corresponding participant for verification. No participants chose to edit their transcript. We analyzed the interviews through critical discourse analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis is a valuable analytic tool to examine how participants’ experiences and voices concerning overprotective parenting and ORP are shaped or potentially influenced by Canadian society, culture, and power structures (Willig, 2003). It is important to consider how the military mothers’ perspectives may be influenced by the dominant and gender value systems embedded in military life, such as the aforementioned subscription to selflessness.

We followed the six stages to critical discourse analysis outlined by Willig (2003). First, after we completed the transcripts, we explored how the participants were being identified across the individual transcripts and how these identifications may relate to larger discourses (e.g., if the mothers situated themselves as risk-averse what did this mean in relation to discursively produced pressures to conform to overprotective parenting practices?). Second, we further examined how each participant’s experiences related to other participants’ experiences. Third, we examined how each discourse related to the other discourses we identified. Fourth, we examined how the participants’ experiences related to each discourse. Fifth, we examine how each participant’s positioning relative to each discourse related to scholarly literature on the

topic. Sixth, we reviewed the data to further examine how the identified positions of the participants related to each identified discourse.

Results

We identified two main discourses: (1) Military mothers resist discursively produced pressures to subscribe to overprotective parenting during their children's ORP; and (2) traditional gender discourses in Canadian society shape military mothers' feelings of responsibility for their children's ORP safety.

Military Mothers Resist Discursively Produced Pressures to Subscribe to Overprotective Parenting During their Children's ORP

The military mothers in our study indicated that they felt socially pressured to restrict opportunities for their children to engage in ORP and to be overprotective. They stated that this pressure derived from Canadian society at large and not necessarily the military. Despite this pressure, they resisted overprotective practices because they believe that ORP can be beneficial for children's development. Pauline, mother to 13- and 11-year-old girls, said,

> from the moment that the girls were born, I felt I had to protect them. I think actually society is overprotective of children … I watched the child the other day walk across a [covered] pool that was an in-ground pool and (my partner and I) would never allow our children to do something like that, but we definitely encourage them to take risks out in their play within reason … Because I think it makes them be better problem solvers. They need to figure out their problems. They need to, you know, work as a team with their friends. And you know, if a bully comes along and pushes them off the swing, they have to figure out how to deal with it, 'cause I can't be there with them all the time.

Jolianne, a mother to a 6-year-old boy and 2-year-old girl, discussed the discursively produced pressure to keep children safe:

> Overprotective parenting is something that is very tough, and it's debated a lot among military spouses especially, because it's so tough, it's almost socially expected now to be a helicopter parent in that you're hovering around your children. And it's so weird to even be letting your kids be playing in the backyard. You never know, and you hear stories about other parents not having the decency to knock on your door and say, "hey are your kids cool playing in the backyard by themselves?" and instead jumping and calling the cops, right? Or calling child protective services? And that's kind of a scary thing … That, you know, [my spouse and I] tend to be a little bit more hands-off with the kids. We'll step in if they're injuring themselves or if they request it, but in general we tend to I would say lean on the laissez-faire attitude. But in general, you know, I think part of parenting is giving them the ability to make their own choices and make good choices and so you can't do that if you're overprotective.

The mothers identified that ORP provided many health benefits for their children that include but are not limited to making "good choices" for which dangers to approach and which to avoid in children's play environments, developing independence and confidence, and having fun. Pauline, mother to 13- and 11-year-old girls, said:

> I feel that children, they need to learn how to problem solve and, and roadblocks are going to come up all the time and we're not always going to be there to help them … [my spouse and I] encourage risk-taking … I much prefer children being able to sort through their problems and, and yeah, I prefer that than taking everything away. So, there's just

> this added amount of benefit to being able to navigate whatever they're doing and learn from it.

Similarly, Lilianne, mother to 10-year-old twin boys and an 8-year-old girl, described her children's ORP as "teaching them how to take care of themselves and keep themselves safe",

Two mothers reflected on their potential to be overprotective of their children during ORP and their desire to support it. Holly, mother to a 6-year-old boy, described her struggles with identifying overprotective parenting and managing her son's ORP:

> Like sometimes I think about my approach [to letting my son play] … For example, when I found out the little fellow was riding [his bike] around the block, I thought okay, I think that's . . . too far, but I'm like, am I too protective? If the other little fellows are playing outside, would he be okay to play outside with them if I was in the house making supper? I don't think I'm there yet though. Sometimes I think maybe… I grew up in Cape Breton. So, we used to, we called it runnin' the roads. We ran the roads. I'm pretty sure I was probably going across to my friend's house at [my son's] age and nobody thought anything of it, but different time, different place. Very rural community, everybody knows everybody, everybody trusts everybody. I don't feel that same level of trust in the city. Not at all. So, I think it would be highly influenced by where we're living.

Alisha, mother to a 4-year-old girl and 5-month-old boy, identified her behaviour as overprotective and wanted to change it:

> In certain situations, I would say I'm more overprotective probably than I need to be … we've got two ponds right behind our house and there's like these big limestone rocks and [my daughter] likes to climb up on them and hop from rock to rock, but they're very jagged edges. So, I let her do it. But I'm often eyes on or, and … I'm always saying, "Oh,

> be careful, be careful." I want to stop saying that personally. I want to be like, "Okay, just watch your step, watch where you're going." Because I don't, yeah, I don't want her to be careful all the time, if you know what I mean. But yeah, cause all I see is her slipping and like gashing her face off the edge of the limestone rock or any of those types of injuries, concussion.

Traditional Gender Discourses in Canadian Society Shape Military Mothers' Feelings of Responsibility for their Children's ORP Safety

All of the mothers in our study indicated that they felt responsible for their children's safety. When asked where they believe the feeling of responsibility comes from or what influences it, the mothers indicated that they feel Canadian society places pressure on them to be responsible for their children's safety. Hannah, mother to a 4-year-old boy, went so far as to describe the discursively produced pressures that mothers face as "the mother's plague." She explained,

> We're always responsible for everything they do. I know I'm not responsible for what he does and his actions, but I 100% take responsibility for it … I think it's a societal pressure that your kids are supposed to be perfect right? And nobody's kid is perfect. It's definitely societal pressure that makes us feel like we have to take responsibility for our children's actions even though we don't make those decisions.

When Helene, mother to four boys ages 3, 5, 7, and 9, described her feeling of responsible for her children's safety, she said, "the weight of responsibility for raising this being into adulthood".

The mothers pointed out that although they felt responsible for their children's physical safety, this did not mean they always engaged in overprotective parenting. For example, when

asked if she felt responsible for her children's physical safety, Gabriella, mother to a 7-year-old girl who is on the autism spectrum, replied,

> Absolutely. That she's safe at all times? … I don't want to say like wrap her up in bubble wrap kind of ordeal, but like if she wants to go on the play structure and go across the monkey bars that she shouldn't have a fear of having to go across the monkey bars.

Similarly, when Kelly, mother to an 8-year-old girl and a 3-year-old boy, was asked if she felt responsible for her children's physical safety while they engage in outdoor play, she said, "I definitely feel responsible. I'm not like a helicopter parent. And I do think that they need to learn like the limits of what they can do … So, I'm responsible, but I do let them, like, fail."

The participants indicated that they believed there was more discursively produced pressure on mothers than fathers to be responsible for their children's safety, and that this pressure may derive from traditional expectations for mothers and fathers concerning child care. When Anna, mother to a 17-year-old boy, 14-year-old girl, and 11-year-old boy, was asked in what ways she feels responsible for her children's safety, she said,

> There's a big difference between what people expect for mothers compared to fathers … [My partner] gets a lot of praise for the things he does with our children that nobody would notice if a mother was doing with their children.

When asked why she feels responsible for her children's safety during ORP, Katie, mother to 8- and 5-year-old boys and a 6-month-old girl, noted, "I think the onus falls on society. There's still expectations within society that the mother is kind of responsible for the wellbeing and care of the children." Nicoli, mother to a 5-year-old boy, felt similarly. She stated,

> I think there seems to be an expectation still somehow that dads don't always have to be as present or as involved and for that to be ok. I think that shouldn't be, but it's still a

little bit like that. The mom needs to be more involved somehow and the dads are kind of just… it's ok if they're not around as much.

Discussion

In Canadian society, dominant gender discourses suggest that mothers should be nurturing and caring for children and responsible for their safety (Doucet, 2008). If mothers are unsuccessful in performing in ways associated with a "good" mother, including keeping their children away from threats to their safety, they may be judged negatively by other members of their community and experience societal censure (Freymond, 2003). Dominant gender discourses are thus shaped by and reinforce power relations between mothers, the societies in which they live, and the "good" mothering ideologies to which mothers are expected to subscribe (Freymond, 2003). Any belief that challenges the expectation that mothers should keep children safe (e.g., the belief that ORP can benefit children), and any activity that jeopardizes children's safety (e.g., the encouragement of children's engagement in ORP), discursively positions mothers as negligent in performing "good" mothering duties (Clark & Dumas, 2020). The findings from our study illustrate the military mothers' tensions and negotiations in resisting and subscribing to societal gender discourses, and the potential power relations that influence their perspectives on overprotective parenting and children's ORP.

Our findings suggest that the military mothers felt discursively produced pressured to be responsible for children's safety; however, they believed ORP was beneficial for their children to experience, and they promoted ORP at the risk of being societally censured. They did not view themselves as adopting risk-averse practices and instead perceived that they had resisted discursively produced pressures to overprotect children by reflecting on their own safety biases and supporting opportunities for their children to engage in ORP. The mothers in our study used

language that reflected their conceptualizations of overprotective parenting as hindering children's healthful development through ORP, and they equated overprotective parenting with "bubble-wrapping" and "hovering." Their descriptions of overprotective parenting suggest that they believe it consists of an over-involvement in a child's life that inhibits children's freedom to explore and learn from their physical environments during ORP. The mothers' resistance to discursively produced pressures to be overprotective and thus adopt risk-averse practices during their children's ORP was surprising given they reside in a military culture where traditional gendered roles are typically performed (Segal, 2006).

The mothers in our study believed that the pressures they experienced to be overprotective derived from Canadian mothering discourses that engender a mother's role as consisting of protection, supervision, and guardianship (Doucet, 2018) rather than from gender discourses in the military. It is possible that the discursive pressure placed on mothers to be responsible for their children's safety (Clark & Dumas, 2020; Leigh et al., 2012) is so dominant and intense that it cannot be exacerbated by the perpetuation of traditional gender roles in the military. Conversely, our findings may suggest that although the military prioritizes protection and perpetuates traditional nurturing and caring roles for mothers (Carreiras, 2006), other military values reinforced the mothers' understanding that learning how to successfully navigate risks in the environment can be beneficial for children's development. In particular, the military - especially in CAOs - perpetuates the notion that risk-taking more broadly (e.g., exercising physical prowess during war) is necessary to reduce harm (e.g., protect society from outside threats) through hierarchies of power. The hierarchies of power in military culture consist of a prioritization of military goals, including members' combat preparedness, over mothers' child-rearing needs (Lane, 2017). As learning to take risks is an important component of combat

preparedness in military training, and the mothers reside in a military culture where risk-taking is prioritized, resiliency when injured is revered, and bravery during combat is rewarded (Carreiras, 2006), it is possible that military mothers more than civilian mothers believe risk-taking can be beneficial for children to experience. Specifically, exposure to these values may influence how military mothers challenge societal discourses in Canada that normalize overprotective parenting (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003), and how they resist overarching relations of power in Canadian culture.

Power relations that shape mothers' child-rearing in general are exercised through cultural practices of shaming mothers and not fathers for being a "bad" parent, and societal expectations that mothers more than fathers will be more responsive towards their children's care (Leigh et al., 2012) and outdoor activity (Clark & Dumas, 2020). In our study, the mothers indicated that they believed that mothers more than fathers are held societally responsible for children's care and safety. The mothers used language that reflected their belief that when mothers care and provide safety for their children, it is "expected" of them by members of their society and is unnoticed. Conversely, when their partners provide care for their children, their partners receive "praise." The language they used illustrates their belief that there is a societal expectation that mothers more than fathers will be involved in children's lives, and their belief that they will be judged by members of their society if they fail to meet gender expectations of caring for their children.

Further research in this area would be helpful to advance scholarly understandings on the potential influence of community cohesion and social networks on mothers' perspectives on overprotective parenting and children's ORP. Researchers should consider the experiences of military mothers in relation to expectations placed on them by members of their communities,

and the potential influence of social cohesion within the community on mothers' perspectives of overprotective parenting and children's ORP. Clarke and Dumas (2020) indicated that a lack of social cohesion may exacerbate mothers' feelings of overprotectiveness towards their children during their children's outdoor play. In military communities, especially in neighborhoods where the majority of residents are military members and their families, there is a strong sense of social cohesion (Mullin-Splude, 2006). Thus, it is possible that residing in these neighborhoods may lessen anxieties towards children's navigations of ORP in these areas.

Conclusion

The discursively produced pressure to keep children safe may exacerbate the pressures mothers already face in communities where traditional gender roles of nurturing and caring for children are expected (Doucet, 2018). Military mothers who are partnered with members in CAOs can navigate roles typically associated with gender discourses in civilian and military society, such as providing care for children through domestic roles (Segal, 2006); however, their roles are performed within a culture imbued with risk-taking (Carreiras, 2006). Our findings add breadth to larger scholarly discussions on the discursive production of overprotective parenting and children's ORP in Canada and the power relations that may shape military mothers' perspectives on these topics. The military mothers in our study indicated that they believe ORP is beneficial and overprotective parenting can hinder children's development. It is possible that, due to the risk-oriented nature of the CAO profession, the mothers in our study had more exposure to information on war and combat and the practical applications of risk-taking compared to mothers partnered with members in different occupations in the military or in civilian populations. The mothers' exposure to the practical applications of risk-taking may have

contributed to how they resisted the "plague" of discursively produced pressure to overprotect their children.

The perpetuation of traditional gender roles in Canadian society contribute to a "plague" of responsibility for mothers. We argue that disrupting the perpetuation of these gender roles may reduce the likelihood of mothers engaging in overprotective parenting during their children's ORP. By examining military mothers' subscriptions to overprotective parenting and understanding how discursively produced pressures may influence how they promote and/or restrict children's ORP, we may further understand how to challenge this plague of responsibility. More research should be conducted with communities of mothers who are exposed to the potential benefits of risk-taking, as these mothers may feel better suited to challenge discursively produced pressures to be overprotective and may support their children's ORP. Historically, women's contributions to the military, including their service as members and their familial duties, are hidden or poorly documented (Segal, 2006). We argue that exploring military mothers' perspectives on overprotective parenting and children's ORP presents an opportunity to engage in the feminist act of representing women's voices in male-dominated cultures more broadly – an act that serves the important purpose of contributing to understanding women's identities and the gender discourses that influence their lives (Segal, 2006).

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Chapter 5: Conclusion

Six years ago, when I first had conversations with Dr. Audrey Giles about conducting my Master's of Arts (MA) research at the University of Ottawa on outdoor risky play (ORP), I knew very little about child safety research. My background was in psychology and, specifically, quantitative examinations of human arousal and desire. I did not entirely know what to expect from ORP research. When I first considered what interviews with participants would be like, I naively assumed I would be discussing scraped knees and stick fights in the forest. While I was certainly interested in these conversations, I was not yet passionate about ORP. My passion for ORP research first developed in a surprising way - from a conversation with a grief-stricken father.

Late one night, I was interviewing a participant for my MA research about single, stay-at-home, and gay fathers' perspectives on ORP at a café in Ottawa. When I asked this father questions relating to how he kept his son safe during outdoor play, he quickly informed me that he frequently feared his son would be injured outdoors. Moreover, he feared that he would be unable to protect his son from injuries. He feared this because, four years prior to our interview, his youngest son died at the age of six from septic shock, likely due to undiagnosed blood cancer. One day, his son arrived home from a friend's birthday party and reported feeling very ill. The father and his partner decided to wait a day to see if the "cold" went away, and by the time they arrived at the hospital the following day, his son was dying. He told me, while crying against the rim of his coffee mug, that he felt guilty every day for failing to save his son. He told me he was very close with his surviving son, and he was afraid to let him do many activities outside because he worried about injury or death. He discussed the ways in which he protected his son from danger, including by restricting risk-taking during play.

I realized something in the coffee shop that night: parents have diverse experiences that should be accommodated in ORP initiatives and conversations. This is a lesson I took with me throughout my doctoral research. Four years ago, when I started my doctorate, I became interested in working with members in CAOs and female partners of members to understand their perspectives on ORP. In my youth, I volunteered for many years at the St. Anne's Veteran Hospital in Montréal with my cousin and grandmother. I visited with the veterans there and helped with event management, through which I organized annual dances and dinners. Through my communications with veterans at the hospital and my discussions with their families, I became interested in knowing more about how war and combat shaped their perspectives on a broad array of topics, including parenting. After finding my passion for research in the area of ORP during my MA degree, I had an opportunity to develop my doctoral research topic to explore members' in combat arms occupations (CAOs) and female partners' of members perspectives on ORP. I sought to better understand the factors that shaped their perspectives on ORP, such as combat experience, gender, deployment, witnessing injuries and/or death, risk aversion in Canadian society, and military culture.

My research addresses calls to include a diversity of parenting perspectives in children's ORP research (Bauer & Giles, 2019a, 2019b), advance understandings for how to support balanced opportunities for children's ORP (Brussoni et al., 2012), and challenge risk aversion in Canadian society (Harper, 2017). In this final chapter, I provide a summary of each of the three publishable papers that comprise this dissertation. I then describe the implications of the results from these papers for the advancement of scholarly understandings of children's ORP more broadly. Next, I explore some limitations to my research and provide recommendations for

future research on children's ORP. Finally, I conclude with reflections on what I have learned throughout my doctoral degree.

Summary of Papers

Paper One

In paper one, I used risk and sociocultural theory (Lupton, 1999) to examine how members' in CAOs experiences with deployment and combat influenced their perspectives on their children's ORP. I found that participants' experiences when deployed overseas, such as witnessing children successfully navigate risky situations in war zones (e.g., playing on the side of a busy road), shaped their perspectives of Canadian society as excessively risk averse and influenced their beliefs that their children are capable of successfully navigating ORP. Further, I found that the members' experiences with injury in combat and during training, including witnessing gun shot and blast injuries, influenced their perspectives on what constitutes serious versus minor ORP-related injuries for their children. The participants encouraged ORP that was unlikely to result in their children experiencing serious injuries, and they reported restricting ORP only in situations in which their children could be debilitated or permanently injured. I concluded by arguing that the members' perspectives are important given pervasive risk aversion in Canadian society (Harper, 2017), as they suggest that exposure to children's successful navigations of risk may mitigate parents' fears concerning children's ORP safety. I suggested that parents in professions in which they are exposed to serious injuries (e.g., those that are debilitating), such as CAOs, may have different perspectives on their children's ORP and related play and safety topics compared to parents who do not hold these occupations.

Paper Two

In paper two, I again used risk and sociocultural theory (Lupton, 1999) to examine how risk aversion in Canadian society and exposure to second-hand risk information on war and combat through communications with their partners who are in CAOs may influence the ORP perspectives of military mothers. I found that the mothers believed that ORP in close physical proximity to strangers and cars is dangerous, ORP can be important for children to experience to develop risk navigation strategies, and the mothers restricted their children's ORP that could result in serious injuries. I also found that the mothers' perceptions of strangers as "bogeymen" who can abduct their children during ORP can relate to their knowledge of "evil men" in war and combat who attempt to hurt their partners in CAOs. The results from this paper have implications for scholarly conversations on military mothering and children's ORP, as they suggest that exposure to second-hand information on harm from strangers can shape mothers' fears that strangers can abduct their children. Further, these results illustrate that previous exposure to serious injury and child fatalities (e.g., witnessing a child be struck and killed by a truck) can shape mothers' fears and concerns for their children's ORP and related safety practices (e.g., keeping children away from streets).

Paper Three

In paper three, I used poststructural feminist theory (Weedon, 1988) to examine the perspectives of female partners of members in CAOs on overprotective parenting and ORP. I was interested in understanding how discursive productions of traditional gender roles for female partners, such as expectations that they will protect children at all cost (Doucet, 2018), influence their perspectives on children's ORP. I found that the female partners felt societal pressure to engage in overprotective parenting and restrict their children's ORP; however, they nevertheless promoted their children's ORP because they believed it was beneficial for their children. The

findings illustrated that the female partners challenged dominant discursive productions of a "good" mother as someone who mitigates all threats to their children's safety. I suggested that because of exposure to the potential benefits of risk-taking in military culture and CAOs specifically, such as developing resiliency, the female partners may be more inclined to challenge traditional gender discourses that situate mothers as protectors and guardians by encouraging their children's ORP.

Research Implications

Taken together, my three papers advance scholarly understandings between the injury and risk experiences parents have and their perspectives on children's ORP. They advance scholarly understandings for how risk and sociocultural and poststructural feminist theories can be used to examine parents' perspectives on ORP, and they can inform ORP promotion efforts in civilian and military communities in Canada.

Advancing Theory on ORP

Currently, risk and sociocultural theory is used by researchers to examine dominant discourses on risk in society and the sociocultural influences on risk perspectives (Lupton, 1999). When it is used to study topics relating to childhood, researchers typically consider why and how adults adopt anti-risk perspectives (Jackson & Scott, 1999), because adults commonly believe children are fragile and dependent on adult protection (Jackson & Scott, 1999). My research challenges our understanding of parents' perspectives on risk more broadly by suggesting that some populations of parents, such as those in military communities, may be less risk-averse compared to non-military populations. My participants wanted to promote ORP for their children because they believed it benefits children's development, which suggests that they may not view childhood as a state of fragility and instead perceive their children as capable of navigating many

potential threats in their physical environments. They may, however, experience tension in promoting ORP due to societal pressure in Canada to restrict it, while having a desire to promote ORP. ORP researchers who use risk and sociocultural theory should thus consider how individuals in high-risk environments and occupations may challenge anti-risk discourses.

It is possible that because members of military communities are more familiar with the benefits of risk-taking, such as engaging in potential injury-incurring training to develop survival skills, they are less concerned with how those outside and within their communities judge their parenting, including their ORP promotion. Although risk-taking is societally construed as a deviant behaviour in risk societies (Beck, 1992), subpopulations that rely on or are exposed to risk-taking for survival purposes, such as members in CAOs and female partners, may be re-shaping what risk means and how it is valued. For example, according to my participants, risk-taking is associated with helping children develop confidence, self-governance, and physical prowess, while Canadian society typically perceives it negatively as a contributor to children's injury experiences (Jackson & Scott, 1999). In a subculture such as the Canadian Armed Forces in which risk-taking is routine practice, refraining from risk-taking may be perceived by members and partners as cowardly and unpatriotic. Thus, they may believe promoting children's ORP and challenging overprotective parenting practices are qualities of parents who want their children to develop healthfully.

My research illustrates how risk and sociocultural theory can be used to differentiate between parents' perspectives on acceptable and unacceptable forms of children's ORP. While the participants in my research promoted ORP they perceived as acceptable (e.g., only resulting in minor injuries such as scrapes and bruises), they described unacceptable forms similarly to civilian parents' descriptions: ORP that can result in serious injuries (Bauer et al., 2020), and in

close physical proximity to cars (Gielen et al., 2004) and strangers (Little, 2015). While exposure to high-risk environments can mean some parents have more trust in their children's ORP-related capabilities, this exposure does not completely eliminate concerns about serious injuries, cars, and strangers; these concerns may be exacerbated for females than males due to gender role expectations (Doucet, 2018).

My work with female partners of members in CAOs can advance the use of poststructural feminist theory in ORP research by expanding conversations on how gender role expectations influence ORP perspectives. While previous research has demonstrated that fathers' conceptualizations of masculinity can influence their ORP perspectives (Brussoni et al., 2013a, 2013b; Bauer & Giles, 2019a, 2019b), my research suggests that societal expectations for traditional gender roles in Canadian society in general and the military in particular can combine to make female partners feel pressure to overprotect their children and restrict their ORP. It is possible, however, that exposure to information on the benefits of risk-taking in CAO families may have negated the pressure on female partners to restrict ORP. In the future, researchers may wish to examine the implications of traditional gender roles on parents' ORP perspectives in societies and cultures in which these roles are challenged and/or reinforced. It is possible that parents and researchers may face greater resistance to promoting ORP for their children in communities where there is strict gender organization and role expectations compared to societies where gender is discursively produced as more being fluid.

Implications for ORP Promotion Efforts in Canada

There are multitude of ORP promotion efforts in Canada. In school settings, for example, some outdoor play spaces promote children's interactions with moveable and natural parts and provide risk-taking opportunities, such as having playgrounds in close physical proximity to

forests where children can climb trees (The Recess Project, 2021). Further, in some provinces like Ontario, programs such as Forest and Nature School (Child & Nature Alliance, 2021) offer children opportunities to be guided by a nature play instructor who can promote nature education and interaction while mitigating danger. Many of these programs work through supporting and scaffolding children's interests and play in their outdoor world (Child & Nature Alliance, 2021). Pop-up street initiatives, where roads are closed and traffic is restricted to promote pedestrian play outdoors (Outdoor Play Canada, 2018), can offer safe places for children to engage in physical activity and foster a sense of community for families (Meyer et al., 2019). Programs and initiatives such as these can work in tandem with efforts to re-frame parents' risk perspectives to support children's balanced ORP.

There is evidence that efforts to mitigate parents' excessive ORP concerns, such as risk re-framing workshops, may be succeeding. Brussoni et al. (2021) examined the effects of an online risk re-framing tool and in-person risk re-framing workshops. They found that mothers who completed the online intervention and in-person workshop had a significantly higher tolerance towards children's risky play when evaluated 1 week and 3 months after the workshop. Further, a growing body of evidence suggests that parents are promoting their children's ORP despite their fears for children's safety (Bauer & Giles, 2019a, 2019b; Brussoni et al., 2013; Little, 2015; Little et al., 2012), and adults are beginning to identify that, at times, their negative emotional responses to their children's ORP may be unfounded (Bundy et al., 2009).

It is possible that efforts to promote the benefits of ORP that have been successful with civilian populations may also be successful in military communities where, according to my research, parents can face tensions balancing their promotion of ORP against societal expectations to restrict it, and they can share similar ORP-related fears as civilian parents. While

it is known that civilian parents' exposure to potential threats to children's safety, such as sensationalized media on child abductions, can lead to parents' increased fear for their children's safety (Wilson et al. 2005), I found that military parents' exposure to information on the benefits of risk-taking can make them more likely to promote ORP for their children. Thus, the key to successful ORP promotion efforts in both civilian and military communities may be in exposing parents to information on the benefits of children's ORP.

My research was exploratory and provided insight into how parents' experiences in war and combat, as well as their exposures to various injuries (e.g., gun shots) and second-hand information on war and combat, influenced their perspectives on their children's ORP. Based on conversations with the military sponsor for this research, Laurie Ogilvie, I have been told that the results of this research may be used to inform the development of play programmes for children who have parents serving in the Canadian Armed Forces. For example, the results of this research can enrich discussions in the Armed Forces about why play programmes should promote ORP while mitigating parents' safety concerns for their children being in close physical proximity to strangers and cars. Taken together, the results of the publishable papers indicate that the parents believed ORP can be beneficial for children's development more broadly, and it can be used to foster their children's independence, confidence, and risk assessment and management skills. Importantly, however, the results also suggest that female partners may face tensions in promoting ORP for their children due to societal expectations for them to be responsible for their children's safety. Thus, this research can be used by personnel of Military Family Service departments to inform conversations on how best to support parents who attempt to promote ORP for their children in military communities. Personnel may wish to more closely target the child safety and ORP needs of females who are partnered with active members in CAOs, as my

research indicates that they may face exacerbated pressure from Canadian society in supporting their children's ORP.

I think our next steps in ORP research should be to further examine how ORP definitions and categorizations differ within and between populations, and use the results of these examinations to make future ORP-related programs relevant to and desired by the populations who will access or be influenced by them. While in-person workshops can be viable options for exposing parents to the potential benefits of children's ORP, mobile technologies such as cell-phones and tablets may prove an easily accessible option for some parents and children to access ORP information. Multi-sectoral efforts in the fields of health, education, and media, such as the potential development of an ORP cell-phone application, can provide parents and children with information on ORP categorizations and its benefits for children's health. To strengthen future ORP promotion efforts, researchers should work with diverse populations, such as the Inuit in Canada and those in remote communities, to see if these populations identify a need for ORP promotion programs. While I found that the participants in my study had ORP perspectives that were influenced by their exposure to information on war and combat, more research is needed to determine if military parents would benefit from ORP programs, such as risk re-framing workshops.

Limitations

My research was limited by the homogeneity of my participant sample, with the majority of members in CAOs identifying as male (6/7) and the majority of members in CAOs and female partners identifying as European-Canadian (15/22). Further, it was limited by my position as a civilian.

Homogeneity of Participants

In the Canadian Armed Forces, especially in CAOs, there is a scarcity of women (Manser, 2018). While there are currently no available statistics on the number of women in CAOs specifically, the portion is smaller than the 16% in regular forces in the Canadian Armed Forces (Government of Canada, 2021). It was thus unsurprising that I was only able to recruit one woman in a CAO to participate in my research. The inclusion of more women in CAOs may have provided me with more understanding of how issues surrounding gender, such as the known sexism and victimization of women in CAOs (Lane, 2017), may influence ORP-related perspectives. Women may face different challenges to promoting their children's ORP compared to men that include, for example, feeling more pressure to nurture and care for children and be a guardian for children's safety as a result of traditional gender role expectations for mothers (Doucet, 2018). If I had been able to recruit more women for this research, I would have been able to conduct a gender analysis on participant responses to further explore the similarities and/or differences in male and female CAOs' perspectives on ORP. Further, it is possible that the inclusion of more recent immigrant and Indigenous participants would provide context for how a diversity of cultural values and beliefs may shape ORP perspectives.

Recent immigrant and Indigenous female partners may have different ORP perspectives compared to non-immigrant and -Indigenous partners. Erez and Bach (2003) conducted 10 interviews with recent immigrant women who were partnered with US military servicemen and found that they lacked social and communal networks to support them when they moved to the United States. It is possible that a mother's knowledge that she can rely on other members of the military community to help supervise her children during ORP may shape her ORP perspectives. Further, there has been recent acknowledgement by researchers that cultural values can shape ORP perspectives (Bauer & Giles, 2018; Giles et al., 2019). For example, Bauer and Giles

(2018) argued that Inuit parents may have ORP perspectives that differ from those of non-Inuit parents, such as the belief that it is important for children to learn to use sharp tools to hunt. There is scant attention to the voices of Indigenous parents in play research more broadly. It is thus necessary to centre their perspectives on play-related topics and work with them to understand how to support any play-related needs they may identify. As risk production more broadly can vary across cultures (Lupton, 1999), it is possible that recent immigrant and Indigenous parents have perspectives on ORP that differ from dominant discourses on risk in Canada. More research is needed to understand immigrant and Indigenous parents' perspectives on ORP, both inside and outside of military populations.

Civilian Positionality

Challenges can arise when a researcher external to the community conducts research. For example, the researcher may not share similar value systems and may not capture the nuances or select appropriate questions, meaning certain population- and community-specific beliefs remain unaccounted for (Flores, 2018). Community members can be less trusting of the researchers' intentions from outside their community, and may be less inclined to participate (Collet, 2008). Historically, this mistrust has been shaped through outsiders at times forgoing authentic relations with insiders to instead serve self-fulfilling goals (Collet, 2008). Canadian Armed Forces members may be especially hesitant to participate in research if they do not believe the researchers are trying to genuinely learn their stories and experiences, as they may fear negative judgements (Cozza et al., 2018; Park, 2011).

My positioning relative to ORP was influenced by being an outsider to the community during recruitment and the interviews. It is likely that my position as an outsider negatively influenced my recruitment of participants, and thus served as a limitation to my research. As I

reflect on my research as a whole, I believe I had a positionality that was akin to what is described by Flores (2018) as a fluid outsider identity. According to Flores (2018), researchers can embody fluid outsider identities when there is a need to constantly negotiate their positionality throughout the research relative to the information they receive. For example, a researcher who has a position of being pro-war may reflect upon and re-shape their position if they are told a story about how a participant's loved one was killed during combat. Before speaking with participants, I believed parents should promote all categorizations of ORP for their children; however, I now believe certain categorizations (e.g., rough-and-tumble play), such as children chasing each other and rolling on the ground with toy guns, may cause stress for parents who have witnessed children injured by bullets during war and thus should not always be promoted.

Another limitation of my dissertation is my focus on parents' and not children's voices. There is a need to include the perspectives of children on topics concerning them, including ORP. Children have a right to be heard (UNICEF, 1989), and play researchers have advocated for children's voices in research (Moore & Lynch, 2018; Nicholson, 2015). Their perspectives can offer researchers unique insight into challenges they face accessing and being included in ORP, such as potential barriers to accessing ORP in playground settings (e.g., adults restricting children's use of play spaces) (Jansson, 2015). They can help identify ways to support ORP that are consistent with children's needs and desires (e.g., how adults can support children in accessing natural plays paces) (Moore & Lynch, 2018).

Future Research

Although I focused on parents' perspectives on ORP in my research, the inclusion of the perspectives of children from military families in ORP research is also needed. Children's

perspectives can potentially illustrate how their conceptualizations of ORP, including how they approach, access, and navigate risky activities and physical environments, may be influenced by second-hand information on war, combat, and risk-taking they receive from their parents who are military members. If it is possible for parents to have perspectives on ORP that are shaped through the first- and second-hand information they have on war and combat, then it is also possible for this to shape children's perspectives. This is thus a rich area for future study. Further, in addition to including children in future research in this area, I suggest that ORP scholars also examine the ORP perspectives of military parents who are minorities in the Canadian Armed Forces, such as single parents (Manser, 2018) and those who do not identify with gender binaries (Allen, 2016). None of my participants were part of a non-traditional household; however, previous research with non-traditional fathers (i.e., fathers not residing in a heteronormative, two-parent household), illustrated that these fathers can have unique perspectives on their children's ORP (Bauer & Giles, 2019a, 2019b). Parents residing in non-traditional households may have ORP perspectives that are shaped through their experiences in the Canadian Armed Forces – a largely heteronormative and traditionally masculine organization (Taber, 2018).

I recommend that future researchers also consider engaging a community advisory committee in their research (Newman et al., 2011). Community advisory committees consist of individuals who are members of the community with which the researcher works. Members of these committees meet with the researcher to discuss the approach to the research, including its design, the types of data collection methods and analyses used, how best to approach recruitment, and data analysis and interpretation (Newman et al., 2011). In hindsight, I believe that this would have strengthened my research, as having their insights into the research and their

potential assistance with recruitment, particularly at on-base events, could have been invaluable. Military members may prefer speaking to a trusted and familiar face compared to someone they have never met who has yet to prove if their intention for the research matches the needs of the community (Flores, 2018). I also believe that members of a community advisory board would be able to assist with knowledge mobilization to ensure that the research findings are used to benefit participants. In addition, someone who has experienced military life first hand might be better positioned to conduct research within a military community, though insiders may face different but just as difficult set of challenges (Greene, 2014).

Conclusion

Throughout my research, I have come to realize that our understanding of any topic is only as deep as our efforts to listen to, acknowledge, and reflect on the diversity of human experiences that exist in our world today. I think we should continue to listen to the voices of parents and children to understand what they need to support balanced ORP opportunities in their neighbourhoods. I believe that exploring parents' perspectives on ORP will be paramount for providing safe and accessible opportunities for children to learn risk assessment and management strategies. To all of the parents I have worked with over the years, I am ever grateful that you chose to share your time with me. You helped me grow as an individual and as a researcher, and your experiences and stories will continue to shape how I approach ORP research in the years to come. There is a lot more work to be done, and I am delighted to be a part of a growing network of people dedicated to doing it.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide 1 for Military Members in Combat Arms Occupations

(1) Would you be able to tell me a bit about yourself? How old are you? Do you identify with an ethnic background and if so, what would that be?

(2) How many children do you have?

(3) How old are your children?

(4) Can you tell me a little bit about your children?

(5) How would you describe yourself as a military parent?

(6) What does being part of the Canadian Armed Forces mean to you?

(7) What does being a combat specialist mean to you?

(8) Have you ever been injured in combat? If so, can you tell me more about it? How did it happen? How did it make you feel about being in the military? Did you take any steps to try to prevent it in the future?

(9) As a combat specialist, how do you feel about being in close proximity to dangerous environments? What about the environments is dangerous?

(10) How do you feel the training and/or dangerous environments you have been exposed to in the military have effected how you parent?

(11) What does the word masculine mean to you?

(12) Do you think the military promotes separations between masculinity and femininity? Is there a type of militarized masculinity?

(13) Do you think that how soldiers identify with masculinity influences their relationships with their children?

(14) Do you think that how you identify with masculinity influences your relationship with your children?

(15) How would you describe your relationship with your children?

(16) How often would you say your children play outdoors during the week?

(17) Do you feel differently about your children playing outdoors compared to when they play indoors?

(18) Tell me about a time that your child was injured playing outside. What about this event stands out for you? Did it influence how you parented?

(19) What kind of worries do you have about your children when they're playing outdoors? Why?

(20) How do you feel about your children playing on playgrounds, school grounds, or streets? Is there a difference in your comfort level?

(21) What kind of risks do you find your children take during outdoor play?

(22) How do you feel about letting your children play alone or without supervision?

(23) What type of situations/activities would cause you to worry about your children's outdoor activity?

(24) If you are worried, do you think any of these worries could be influenced by your own experience with injury or the military?

(25) If you feel the need to protect your child, how do you protect them from potential harm if they are playing outdoors?

(26) In your own words, how do you keep your child safe?

Appendix B: Interview Guide 2 for Female Partners of Military Members in Combat Arms Occupations

(1) I'm wondering if to start, we could discuss if you identify with a specific ethnicity?

(2) What being a military wife means?

(3) Is it difficult having a [partner] who is part of the military?

(4) In your own words, what makes someone a good parent?

(5) What's important about being a mother?

(6) What makes someone a good mother?

(7) What kind of pressures do you feel to behave certain ways as mothers? Where does this pressure come from?

(8) When your [partners] are away, how do you feel things change in the house?

(9) When your children are playing outside, what activities do you find risky?

(10) How do you feel the need to protect your children when they play outdoors?

(11) How do you feel about letting your child play alone or without supervision?

(12) What worries do you have about your child being injured outside?

(13) Do you think any of these worries could be influenced by your own experience as a military wife?

(14) How can letting your children engage with risky play be considered good, if at all?

(15) How do you feel about your children playing in different environments, like streets, parks, or neighborhood roads?

(16) How have your children ever been injured during play you would consider risky? How did this change the way you felt about the way they were playing? And how they were allowed to play in the future?

(17) What differences do you notice between how your children play you're your husbands are around compared to when they are away in the military?

Appendix C: University of Ottawa Ethics

20/07/2020

Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	H-06-19-4343
Titre du projet / Project Title	Exploring Military Parents' Perspectives on Their 4- to 12-Year-Old Children's Outdoor Risky Play
Type de projet / Project Type	Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status	Renouvelé / Renewed
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	20/07/2020
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	18/07/2021

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	Affiliation	Role
Michelle BAUER	École interdisciplinaire des sciences de la santé / Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Audrey GILES	École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics	Superviseur / Supervisor
Mariana BRUSSONI	University of British Columbia	Co-superviseur / Co-supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

This certificate is issued with the understanding that the Principal Investigator is responsible for the following:

1. ensuring that the research protocols comply with the most up-to-date advice, recommendations, directives, orders, advisories, guidelines about the spread of COVID-19 from government and public health officials and with those from institutions, organizations or funding agencies relevant to the research; and
2. establishing, maintaining and implementing an up-to-date continuance plan that includes reasonable precautions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 to participants, research team members and ensure safe research practises, for example, training of research team members, use of personal protective equipment, standards of sanitization, handwashing and physical distancing.

Appendix D: Social Science Research Ethics Board for Department of National Defense Ethics

DND/CAF Social Science Research Review Board (SSRRB): External Research Proposal Submission Form

SSRRB File #:	*(Will be assigned by SSRRB Secretary)*
Project Title:	**Exploring Military Parents' Perspectives on Their 4- to 12-Year-Old Children's Outdoor Risky Play**
Researcher Name:	**Michelle E. E. Bauer**
Researcher Institution:	**University of Ottawa**

Intended use of this form:

This form is designed for use by researchers who are external to DGMPRA/DRDC who wish to conduct social science research using DND employees, CAF members and their family, CAF applicants and members of Canadian cadet organizations as research subjects. **This form is also to be used by CAF military personnel and DND employees who are students and who wish to undertake social science research within Defence, even if that research is part of the Defence Personnel Research Program.**

For guidance when considering whether or not you need to complete this form, military personnel include currently serving members of the Regular and Reserve forces (and, if established by the Governor in Council, the Special Force)[1]. Reserve Forces include the Primary Reserve, Supplementary Reserve, Cadet Organizations Administration and Training Service (COATS) and Canadian Rangers.[2]

Authorities

Defence Administrative Orders and Directives (DAODs)[3] 5062-0 "Research Involving Human" and 5062-1 "Social Science Research" provide a definition of social science research and govern the establishment and conduct of the Social Science Research Review Board (SSRRB).

Please Note:

- This form is intended to be completed and submitted electronically in MS Word.
- For student/academic research, a copy of the academic institution's research ethics board approval (or submission) must be included with this submission.

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[1] National Defence Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. N-5), http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/N-5/

[2] Queen's Regulations and Orders: Volume I - Chapter 2 - Government and Organization, http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about-policies-standards-queens-regulations-orders-vol-01/ch-02.page#cha-002-034

[3] Defence Administrative Orders and Directives 5062-0 "Research Involving Human" and 5062-1 "Social Science Research, http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about-policies-standards-defence-admin-orders-directives-5000/toc-5062.page

- The SSRRB Research Agreement Form (Appendix B) must be included (signed and scanned) as part of the submission.
- The DND/CAF Sponsorship Form (Appendix C) must be included.
- Approval from CAF commands permitting a researcher access to military participants within their commands is a requirement that must be satisfied in order for the SSRRB to review and approve research. This approval will be requested by the SSRRB Secretary once a full and complete submission is received - the researcher will be informed of command decisions. **Note that command approval may not be granted or, if granted, the available window for data collection may not align with course or academic program requirements. Consequently, when planning academic research projects, students are strongly encouraged to have an alternate plan to use research subjects outside of the CAF/DND.**

Appendix E: Contributions

Michelle Bauer developed the content for this doctoral thesis submission, including synthesizing literature and writing. Drs. Audrey Giles and Mariana Brussoni supported the thesis development and helped inform all aspects of it, such as the theorization and analyses. Presently, the first paper is under review in the journal *Qualitative Research in Sports, Exercise and Health*, the second paper is published in *Leisure Sciences*, and the third paper is under review in the *Journal of Leisure Research*. For all papers, Michelle Bauer is first author, Dr. Audrey Giles is second author, and Dr. Mariana Brussoni is third author.