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Accepted Disorder

A Thematic Analysis on Media's Reporting of Shootings in the Public-
and Parochial Realms

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Master's thesis CCRM20, 30 credits

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Supervisor: Erik Hannerz

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ABSTRACT

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Shootings have become the central focus in both the political debate as well as in media coverage. Even though shootings are statistically rare, the symbolic impact they have on public perception is significant. The aim of this thesis is to examine how Swedish media symbolically constructs the public- and parochial realm when shootings occur in them, and what symbolic meanings are attributed to the respective physical spaces. The research questions are: *How does the media represent public- and parochial realms in its reporting on shootings?* And *What symbolic meanings are ascribed to these physical spaces through this coverage?* This thesis applies a thematic analysis of 261 articles based on 54 shootings that took place in Gothenburg and surrounding cities in 2024. The theoretical framework draws on Mary Douglas's theory on purity and pollution, Lyn, H, Lofland's theory on social realms, and David Garland's framework on risk management and culture of control. These perspectives are used to understand how social order, disorder, and symbolic boundaries are constructed within media's reporting on shootings. The findings show that shootings are not portrayed as being disruptive in all spaces. Affluent parochial realms are represented as orderly and disrupted by external raptures, while shootings in vulnerable classed parochial realms are instead represented as being inherently polluted. Police presence was also shown to carry symbolic meaning, even adding to disorder in some cases. The thesis concludes that media plays a pivotal role in shaping how society interprets social truths, and that spatial factors add context that significantly influences the symbolical representation of shootings.

Keywords: media, shootings, symbolic representation, social order, Sweden

Popular Science Summary

What makes a neighbourhood, or a public place appear either dangerous or safe, and how does a shooting affect that image? Shootings have been part of the public debate for the past decade in Sweden and they are extensively covered in the media. This thesis looks at how the media shapes spaces where shootings have taken place in, and how they create meaning through their reporting. To study this, an analysis of 261 articles that reported on the 54 shootings that happened in the Gothenburg region in 2024 was performed. This looked both at *what* the media reported on the shootings, but more importantly, on *how* they reported on them. Relevant sociological and criminological theories were used to help unravel how media make sense and give meaning to an event. The findings show that, depending on the type of area, there is difference in how shootings are reported on. Affluent neighbourhoods are seen as safe places that are suddenly struck with violence. On the other hand, vulnerable classed neighbourhoods are often labelled as dangerous, and where violence is expected to happen. The findings also show that even the presence of police can influence how a neighbourhood is described and in turn seen as out of control.

In conclusion, the media describes more than just the event of shooting, it also paints a picture of what kind place it happened in, and who the people living there are. Through these articles, we as a society shape our understanding of what crime and fear is, and why some places are seen as safe, while others are seen as dangerous.

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First of all, thanks to all of my classmates, for putting up with me constantly going and back and forth with theories and why they actually are applicable and for looking at tables with arrows pointing in different directions. Without the fun and critical discussions, I would not have managed this.

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1. Introduction

Questions of law and order have been ever-present in the national debate in Sweden over the past decade. In particular, public and political concern has increasingly focused on the rise in gun violence. In election surveys conducted by the Swedish Public Service Network (SVT), law and order have ranked among the five most important voter issues in both 2018 and 2022 elections. In the most recent election in 2022, it was considered the third most important issue by the voters, suggesting that a growing number of Sweden's population perceive crime as having escalated beyond the control of the government (SVT, 2022). Furthermore, this concern is reflected in a recently published report from the SOM Institute (2024), showing that 93% of the respondents expressed concern about the broader consequences that shootings have on the Swedish society.

This focus on law and order is also reflected by the three largest political parties in Sweden: Socialdemokraterna (the Social Democrats), Sverigedemokraterna (the Swedish Democrats), and Moderaterna (the Moderate Party). In the most recent general election in 2022, all campaigned on promises to dismantle criminal gangs and restore law and order. Central to this political focus has been the issue of gun related violence. For the Social Democrats, addressing crime is positioned as essential for improving public safety (Social Demokraterna, 2022). The Swedish Democrats argue that shootings have become a daily reality throughout the country, while the Moderates warn that Sweden is heading in the wrong direction, citing record-high levels of gun violence (Moderaterna, 2022; Sverige Demokraterna, 2022). On the Swedish government's official website, it is stated that "serious and organised crime constitutes a systemic threat", and that one of the government's highest priorities is to put an end to the criminality that characterises Sweden of today." (Regeringskansliet, 2025). Moreover, the government further highlights that in 2024, Sweden had six times as many gun-related deaths compared to the other Nordic countries combined that same year.

This political emphasis is mirrored in media reporting. Between January 1st, 2018, and May 20th, 2025, Sweden's three largest newspapers: Dagens Nyheter, Expressen, and Aftonbladet, have between themselves published a total of 32,317 articles mentioning the word *shootings*¹, an average of nearly 12 articles per day among them. This attention on shootings as a phenomenon is also reflected by the fact that SVT hosts an interactive website that maps all

¹ Search done through Retriever on the 20th of May 2025

recorded shootings in Sweden from the 1st of January 2018, to the present day. This site is updated twice a month to include newly reported incidents. In the website's description, it states: "Here you can see where and when shootings have occurred – and follow the development year by year. What does it look like where you live?". This framing, while explanatory, arguably normalises the presence of gun violence by inviting its users to monitor it the way you would of a weather forecast in your area, transforming something that is seen by the government and the public at large as problematic, to something that could be routinely observed, as if to check whether it will "rain" today.

This heightened attention from both media and politics may be partially explained by changes in how shootings occur. A recent report published by BRÅ (The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention), shows that the nature of gun violence has shifted significantly between the early 2000s and 2020s. In the early 2000s shootings were generally isolated events that occurred away from public view and were primarily targeted at high-ranking gang members. However, in recent years, this pattern has changed. Shootings are now increasingly involving more lower ranking members and, in some cases, individuals with no ties to criminal activity but with personal ties to gang members are targeted. Furthermore, shootings increasingly take place in public settings, making them more visible and disruptive to everyday life (BRÅ, 2024).

In multiple studies looking at how media reporting on crime affects its readers, results have shown that reading about crime also increases the individuals fear of crime (Kohm, 2009; Sandstig, 2010; Williams & Dickinson, 1993). Furthermore, a study looking at how the media defines newsworthiness, shows that the media follows what they think their audience wants to read (Hall et. al., 2013). Given the shift in gun violence, both in terms of spatial factors, where shootings are more and more seen in the public room, as well as the intensified political and media attention surrounding it, there is a clear criminological relevance in studying how media portrays shootings in the public space.

The purpose of the thesis is to study how the media symbolically represents the public- and parochial realms² in relation to shootings taking place in them, this will be done through a

² Public- and parochial realms stem from Lofland's theoretical concept of spaces. Public realms involve spaces where strangers interact regularly such as public squares, shopping centres. Whereas the parochial realm is defined by spaces where the interaction happens between acquaintances rather than between strangers. Spaces that fit this description is neighbourhoods, the local club and so forth. This concept will be further explored upon in the theory section.

comprehensive theoretical framework drawing on Mary Douglas purity and pollution, Lyn, H. Lofland's theory of the social realms, and Garlands framework of culture of control. The thesis will analyse the following:

- 1) *How does the media represent public- and parochial realms in its reporting on shootings*
- 2) *What symbolic meanings are ascribed to these physical spaces through this coverage?*

1.1 Outline

This thesis includes six chapters and is structured as follows: it starts off with an introduction to the subject, where the political and public debate on shootings in Sweden is laid out, this leads into the research purpose and research question. Thereafter, previous literature is outlined through the following chapters: *The Media Influence over its Readers*, that addresses how media affects their readers through reporting, which is followed by *The Production of Fear and Disorder*, which covers how fear of crime and disorder is shaped through media narratives. Subsequently, the thesis theoretical framework is introduced and explained, this includes Lyn. H. Lofland's concept of realms, Mary Douglas's purity and pollution followed by David Garland's culture of control. These are explored across the following chapters: *Defining the Public- and Parochial Realms*, *Social Order and the Polluted Public Space*, *Symbolic Construction of the Public- and Parochial Realms*, and *Risk Management and Criminology of the Other*.

In the following chapter the thesis methodical approach is outlined: *Research Design and Approach* argues for why the thesis has a social constructivist worldview, and why a qualitative thematic analysis was deemed to be the best fit for the purpose. *Data Collection* describes the search terms used in Retriever and which news outlets were relevant for the study. *Coding Process* explains how the thematic analysis was applied to the material and provides an extract from the collected data. In *Validity and Reliability*, the thesis addresses how reflexivity and ethical considerations are managed. Followed by the analysis that starts off with the chapter: *The Pollution of the Parochial Realm*, where an exploration on how order is performed, and how police presence affects the symbolic representation in different parochial realms. Followed by chapter: *The Pollution of the Public Realm*, that explores how disorder is interpreted in three different public realms. Lastly, the conclusion of the thesis is presented.

2. Previous Literature

2.1.1 The Media Influence over its Readers

Hall et. al. describes the news production as one being heavily informed by the social structure of society. The publicised news articles could then be seen as the end product of a complex process where the deciding factors lie on already set socially created categories for what should be deemed as newsworthy (Hall et. al., 2013). This means that media outlets base their news coverage on what it thinks its audience wants. Hall et. al. identifies that an important process within this construction as *the process of signification*, where the media both assumes and more importantly, constructs the consensus of society (2013). Through this process articles give social meaning to events and in turn reinforces a reality that does not go against its readers views. As many the readers themselves have not been exposed to crime, this consensus affects and reaffirms their worldview. Moreover, Hall et. al. notes that the media usually is the primary source of important events or topics, they are the ones who makes sense of things that breach the commonly held expectations in society (2013). This introduces two important functions of the media: firstly, they are the ones who decide what should be seen as significant event, secondly and more importantly, they are the ones who in turn interprets how we should understand the significance in relation to our society (Hall et al., 2013).

The media plays a central role when it comes to creating public opinion. This is mainly due to using specific language or framing when describing certain events. In a recent study concerning the negative framing found in the media's portrayal of immigrants in Southern Europe between 2014 and 2019, it was found that the public perception is not mirrored in the actual crimes committed. Amores et. al (2020) found three dominant narratives being told: *victimisation*, *burden* and *threat*. While the presence of the victimisation portrayal saw a decrease during the analysed period, threat and burden both saw an increase. This negative representation found in the different media outlet's was also found to be linked to the general increase of hate speech found within the countries themselves (Amores et al., 2020). As a result, the media's negative portrayal of immigrants may influence the public perception. In turn, this may lead to certain groups experiencing a feeling of victimisation when the reality may not, in fact, mirror that (Amores et al., 2020).

2.1.2 The Production of Fear and Disorder

In Linda Sandberg's intersectional analysis four major cases in Sweden and their effects on the representation of the public space through regional and local news outlets are studied (2020). Three of them are concerning serial rapists and one of a shooter focusing on minority groups with a foreign background. Through the use of Agnew's definition of the public space, Sandberg (2020) argues that the public space is constructed by the performance of the people that use or travel through said space. In other words, the construction of the public space according to Sandberg as well as Agnew is under a constant construction, and fluid in its nature (Sandberg, 2020). In addition, discourses found within media may choose to bring forward a certain narrative that fits its reader. In turn, the narrative of the public space is also influenced by what its audience finds interesting or connected to. Sandberg's research also highlights how media outlets tend to exaggerate certain types of crimes more than others. More articles are published when something is deemed as being uncommon, gruesome or overly violent, influencing and skewing the readers perception of crimes that occur in society (Sandberg, 2020).

In her research, Sandberg discovered two distinct narratives. The first of these focused on a collective concern of keeping women safe – in relation to the rape cases – and in turn keeping them away from public spaces which are deemed as being dangerous. Moreover, this victimisation also highlighted how certain hours during the day were seen as risky, in effect limiting all women's movements based on space and time. According to Sandberg, the media's production of fear is actively creating a distinction of what, where and when is consider safe, and in turn affirming which spaces within the city that aren't safe (2020). The second narrative concerns shaping the city of Malmö as one being divided, and only affecting *the other* – people with immigrant background or ethnic appearance. Sandberg (2020) argues that this reveals how spaces within Malmö were categories as being problematic and how the structures of our society define larger groups as vulnerable.

In a similar study to Sandberg, Sandstig examined how people experienced feelings of security, with a particular focus on the role of media and public space shaping these perceptions across different contexts (2010). The findings suggest that media coverage has a measurable effect in how people interpret public spaces and, in turn, how they experience feelings of insecurity. A lack of visible order in a space is also shown to influence how people later perceive that environment. In other words, environments that appear visually disordered and lack social interaction are more likely to be perceived as dangerous. Sandstig (2010) demonstrates that

reading about crime in the news reinforces and confirms these feelings of insecurity, making them seem more real. These experiences can influence how people think about and navigate public spaces, if the media relatedly portrays a specific area as dangerous, it can lead more people to view that areas threatening and choose to avoid it, even if they have not been there (Sandstig, 2010).

In a three-stage study looking at how fear of crime is mediated by reading newspapers in Britain, Williams and Dickinson (1993) found similar results to Sandstig. By first studying how much space news about crime was given in ten daily newspapers in Britain the researchers found that around 64 % of crime coverage were related to personal victim coverage. According to Williams and Dickinson this shows that there is an over representation of victimisation in the crime coverage. Moreover, the researchers found that crime coverage in general was deemed to be relatively high in relation to the output of other news. The second stage was in form of a questionnaire that focused on fear of crime. Here reading the news was found to impact the fear of crime by its readers. Similarly to Sandstig's research, Williams and Dickinson showed that reading the news related to crime, also impacts the level of felt insecurity. The third and last stage of the study related to what styles the newspapers used and how this was reflected in how crimes were sensationalised in the coverage. The results showed that newspapers that could be described as being *tabloids* also sensationalised to a higher degree compared to *broadsheets* (Williams & Dickinson, 1993).

In a spatial analysis looking at how different spaces in the Swedish town Uppsala are attributed to fear of crime in surveys, Guldåker et. al. (2024) found that the frequency of crime does not necessarily overlap with reported fear of crime. The results show that perceived social disorder plays a large part in how people feel in relation to fear. Factors such as the living conditions based on socio-economic- or social factors and if the neighbourhood is categorised as vulnerable by police, influence how safe the area is perceived to be. Moreover, the visibility of alcoholics or groups of youth was found to affect how areas were attributed to higher levels of fear of crime, indicating that crime does not need to have happened in the space to be linked with fear of crime. If instead the right features are present an insecurity is formed. However, the results also showed that actual events had a measurable effect on fear of crime. Spaces where shootings or other illegal activates had taken place, also showed higher levels of fear (Guldåker et al., 2024).

Disorder being a denominator in how fear is perceived is also found in Kohm's (2009) study *Spatial Dimensions of Fear in a High-Crime Community: Fear of Crime or Fear of Disorder?* By interviewing residents in an inner-city neighbourhood in Winnipeg, Canada. Kohm (2009) found that fear of disorder usually has a larger impact than fear of crime in high-crime communities. This is largely due to fear of disorder being more connected to specific places within neighbourhoods, whilst fear of crime was found to be more generalised and in turn harder to pin-point to a specific area. Suggesting that social factors or specifically, a lack thereof, are found to have a larger effect on how areas or neighbourhoods are perceived as insecure when compared to actual crimes committed (Kohm, 2009).

This relation between disorder and fear is also shown in two studies looking at how police presence is perceived and in turn motivated. In Campos-Manzo et. al. (2020) study comparing police presence in high-crime neighbourhoods with neighbourhoods that boasted a higher socioeconomic status and lower crime-rates found notable differences in how police were interpreted. In more affluent areas, low-crime neighbourhoods, residents described the police as being more or less invisible, whereas residents in high-crime neighbourhoods reported a constant visible police presence (Campos-Manzo et al., 2020). In another study looking at attitudes towards increased police presence in neighbourhoods, it was found that those areas that were deemed as being more discorded, also supported the notion of increased police presence through the argument of fear of crime (Metcalf & Bolaji, 2024).

As previously mentioned, the aim of this thesis is to analyse how media symbolically represents public- and parochial realms where shootings have taken place. In the previous research, it becomes clear that it is important to study what role visible disorder plays, and how police presence impacts the realms. Furthermore, the previous research demonstrates that the media has a strong influence on public opinion and plays a central role in forming how individuals perceive crime and public space. Through the process of signification, media reporting constructs consensus and reinforces dominant worldviews by both selecting what is deemed newsworthy and framing how such events should be interpreted (Hall et al., 2013). Studies by Amores et. al., Sandberg, and Williams and Dickinson show the sensationalism, media framing, and an emphasis on disorder contribute to the amplification of fear, often through the overrepresentation of uncommon or violent crimes. Even among individuals with no direct exposure to crime, repeated exposure to such framings can heighten feelings of insecurity. Moreover, the language used, and the visual representations chosen, influence public

perceptions by framing certain spaces as inherently unsafe (Guldåker et al., 2024; Kohm, 2009; Sandstig, 2010). Importantly, research indicates that fear of crime is often more closely linked to perceived disorder than to actual crime-rates, underlining the symbolic power of media narratives in constructing spatial fear. These findings suggest the need to look beyond crime frequency alone and consider how disorder and symbolic framing contribute to the construction of fear in media portrayals of public spaces. Additionally, there is limited research on how representation differs between neighbourhoods or public spaces and what the symbolic distinction between what is considered being safe and unsafe. This study aims to address these gaps by applying a comprehensive theoretical framework drawing on Douglas, Garland, and Lofland, with a specific focus on how order is framed and symbolically attached to public- and parochial realms in news articles reporting on shootings.

3. Theory

In the following section the theoretical framework of what this thesis basis its analysis on will be outlined. Initially public- and parochial realms will be defined and discussed through a theoretical point of view, drawing on Lofland and Sennett. Followed by Mary Douglas theoretical definition of social order and pollution, and how anomalies are dealt with within cultures. Lastly, a discussion on how risk management is done, where it stems from and how criminology of the other influences these notions.

3.1 Defining the Public- and Parochial Realms

When it comes to defining what is and is not a public space, there is a complexity that starts to form when the subject of public space is introduced. Adding to this, the temporal aspect further changes the implications of who the public spaces are accessible for. For example, a park in the middle of the day is perfectly suitable for children and their parents and not for delinquent adolescents, but shifting the clock towards midnight, this relation is shifted. In the following section, the definition of public space is broadened with Lofland's concept of public- and parochial realms and in turn how access is to these realms.

The concepts of the terms *space* and *realms* are important to keep separate from each other. At first glance they imply similar, but in the end hold different meanings. In this sense, public space entails spaces which are accessible both on a physical and visual level, private spaces are then the opposite – not accessible to all and visually removed from the general public (Lofland,

2009, pp. 8–12). However, the binary relationship between public and private does not allow for spaces where communities have similar drives. In a residential area, a common goal might be to keep the physical space tidy to maintain its value on the housing market or to report a burglary if they witness one in a neighbour's apartment. Spaces such as these where people have categorical knowledge of each other live between the private and public. The introduction of different realms is then vital to explain how these spaces interplay and in turn functions in society. Realms are more fluid in their nature, and the emphasis is on who the individuals are and what the relations they have to each other. By this definition then realms can entail *areas* rather than *an area*.

Lofland (2009, pp. 9–14) describes three different realms that are found within today's societies: the *public* realm, the *private* realm and the *parochial* realm. The public realm is made up of environments where the individuals are unknown to each other or where they only have categoric knowledge of one another (Lofland, 2009, p. 9). In other words, areas where a large number of strangers tend to move around in with different intentions. Sennett (1992, pp. 151–152) follows this definition, emphasising the mix of different cultures, ethnicities and working classes as quintessential in the modern city. The areas within the public realm could then be squares, malls, bus stops and so on (Lofland, 2009, p. 9). In comparison, the definition of the private realm is more clear-cut and straightforward; these are spaces where intimacy is found among the primary groups. This is found within households or within personal networks. This is further explored in how Sennett discusses how design and aesthetics of the private realm express values of retreat, individuality, and security, supporting Lofland's notion of the private realm as a space where intimacy and shelter is given from the public realm (Lofland, 2009, pp. 10–11; Sennett, 1992, p. 74). The last realm Lofland brings up is the parochial realm. Here, the sense of community between one another is key. The members of the parochial realms do not necessarily need to know each other personally or by name, but a connection is needed, for instance sharing a culture or living in the same area is needed for it to be sustained. This is normally found in residential areas, local clubs or organisations where members have similar goals or interests (Lofland, 2009, pp. 46–47).

Lofland argues that realms are fluid in their description and do not have a physical space allocated; the definition thereby constantly changes and shifts depending on who inhabits it (Lofland, 2009).

3.2 Social Order, and the Polluted Public Space

Mary Douglas uses the term *Social Order* in her discussions on how societies construct their realities (Douglas, 2002, p. 73). To maintain social order within any social interaction or community Douglas stresses that it is of great importance to uphold these symbolic rules. This could be simplified down to two distinct opposites: *Purity* and *Pollution*. The distinction provides a guide on how one should act in any given situation within cultures. Sorting that of which is considered good (pure) for the community, and that which is considered bad or hurtful (polluted), and which is swiftly condemned. Douglas exemplifies it through the religious rite of cleanliness. Not adhering to the accepted rules of the culture could mean harm to others, and so to maintain the status quo these rites need to be followed. In essence, these symbolic dualities are found in every culture, if there is something that is considered good or sought after, there will be something that is its opposite, something that hinders the cultures chances of survival, and in turn something that needs to be dealt with (Douglas, 2002, pp. 32–33). Things that are perceived as being polluted is by Douglas definition an anomaly within the culture – something that does not align with its preconceived notions.

According to Douglas (2002, pp. 39–41) there are five different means of reclassifying these as to fit. Firstly, one or other interpretations could be assigned to the anomaly as a way to reduce its implications. An example from the animal kingdom is the mixing between a horse and a donkey, which then would defile the line between the two different animals. However, the introduction of a mule then restored it from being an anomaly to becoming something expected. Secondly, anomalies can be controlled by physical means, by getting rid of the anomaly all together its effect on the culture is all but eliminated. Thirdly, Douglas stresses that if there are rules put in place of avoiding anomalies, they in turn reaffirm how things should be. Fourthly, labelling anomalies as dangerous helps to strengthen conformity within the culture. Fifthly and lastly, anomalies as symbols such as in poetry and mythology are used to enrich meanings – and create a unifying pattern where good and evil can coincide. These classifications creates social order, as the culture seeks to be as pure it can be, individuals' risk being excluded from the larger group if they do not adhere to the fixed rules of the culture (Douglas, 2002).

Douglas's discussions on anomalies works well when applying it to different parts of societies norms. Shootings in society is something mostly consider as bad, there are multiple laws surrounding regulations regarding possession of firearms, shooting, injuring or killing. In recent years the Swedish government has applied, what they deem as, even tougher repercussions on

those acting out. There are however some parts in our society where possession of firearms is deemed as tolerated and even expected, these include organisations such as the military and the police. Through this short analogy a duality can be seen, what then decides the classification between pure or polluted is depending on the who the actor in possession is, and the symbolic system within it takes place. For example, in Texas, USA, it would be acceptable for a person to store his or her gun in their car, however, in Sweden the same would be viewed as an abnormal- or criminal behaviour. Moreover, looking at how physical spaces are classified, Douglas framework of anomalies can be applied. The Swedish police define some residential areas as being *utsatta områden* (vulnerable areas), these are geographically areas defined by their low socio-economic status and where the local community is greatly impacted by criminals (Police, 2024). In Douglas's terms these areas could be seen as being an anomaly in relation to neighbourhoods or areas that do not have this classification. As Douglas argues, societies often respond to anomalies by labelling them as dangerous or disorderly, this in turn reinforces the boundaries of what is considered sought after or acceptable. The designation of areas as being vulnerable not only identifies them as problematic, but also reaffirms the normative ideals of what is considered as being safe, and what constitutes as being an orderly neighbourhood.

3.3 Symbolic Construction of the Public- and Parochial Realms

As shown above, realms are constructed by social factors or events that takes place within them. However, the construction of the public- and parochial realms are also influenced by how they are talked about. Reporting on a crime that has taken place on public square has implications vastly different than if the news report is about flee market taking place. Both reports lend the square an association, either somewhere you would bring your family or somewhere you should stay away from. As discussed in the background section Sandberg (2020) shows how certain areas within the city of Malmö were deemed as being dangerous by the media, places to stay away from, in turn altering who has the access to these spaces. Moreover, Sandberg's article also shows how this denied access can be focused on to one specific group in the city, such as immigrants in Malmö being in danger if they move around specific places (Sandberg, 2020). The construction of the public space then also entails "outsiders" views or descriptions of the specific place.

To further this discussion, Sennett introduces the narrative of time and boundaries in the public and parochial realm. Just as the inhabitants change what the realm should be and who has access to it, the temporal aspects play just as big of a role as the people who have access to certain spaces (Sennett, 1992, pp. 169–190). Here the boundary is not made up of anything physical that separates the ones standing inside to the ones who are outside, rather access is granted through different socially constructed codes that in turn grant or deny entrance (Sennett, 1992). Just as there are certain roads you should not use during rush-hour, there are no-go-zones in cities where there is a consensus you should stay away from if you do not want to be exposed to danger. Time-based access to public spaces is not a new narrative, as discussed in the previous litterateur. Sandberg found narratives within the media reinforcing certain areas as dangerous for women during late hours, and by affect denying access for women to move freely within the city (Sandberg, 2020). These types of reinforcement from the media could through Lofland's theoretical framework be interpreted by what she calls assaults. These assaults in turn challenge the validity of the realm and in effect, realms are symbolically pressured differently (Lofland, 2009, pp. 123–126). There are two types of assaults: direct and indirect. Direct assaults attack the realm through moral targets, i.e. calls out something that goes against norms of society, aligning with Douglas' discussion on how cultures handle and take care of anomalies that threatens the cultures status quo (Douglas, 2002; Lofland, 2009). The presence of what Lofland calls the unholy are used as to undermine the realm, and in turn attaches itself to the symbolic representation of the realm (Lofland, 2009). Indirect assaults on the other hand are not directly calling out the moral dilemmas of the realm, instead providing warrants that in turn concludes that something should be done to fix it. Warrants justify a call for action based on the facts that are provided in the statement (Lofland, 2009). In other words, the reader themselves is led to draw a conclusion based on the information and underlying logic presented, without the article needing to outright state a judgement pointed at the realm.

In effect, the symbolic construction of the public- and parochial realms are influenced and understood by several different actors and is influenced through different forms. Firstly, it is constructed by those who use it, i.e. live near it or by those who move through it. Secondly, it is constructed by those who mention or describe it, i.e. media outlets reporting on a crime and linking it to a specific location through direct and indirect assaults, in turn influencing and altering its perception. These preconceived meanings are then allocated to both temporal and psychical aspects.

3.4.1 Risk Management and Criminology of the Other

Garland argues that the norm of policing and crime control of today can be boiled down to the management of perceived risk. Risk management entails a need to control all aspects of criminal activity and means that instead of relying on patrols over larger areas, policing in the late modernity is instead focused on areas where crimes, according to police, are most likely to occur (Garland, 2001, pp. 147–148). An effect of this strategy according to Garland is that by risk managing specific areas, the police themselves play a pivotal role in creating expectations of these spaces as being inherently criminal (Garland, 2001, p. 183). An example of risk management in the context of Sweden are the before mentioned vulnerable areas defined by the Swedish police. Through classifying these areas as being filled with criminality, they also support their own increased presence. This dynamic aligns well with the discussion on Douglas' theory of pollution and Lofland's realms. Firstly, Social order is preserved by socially constructed boundaries that distinguish between what the cultures sees as pure and polluted. In the context of Douglas (2002), risk management is an accepted method to minimise the pollution. Secondly, through the lens of Lofland risk management would disproportionally affect parochial realms, as some would "need" it, while other would not. This in turn alters the meaning between parochial realms that are subjected to this type of management from the others (Lofland, 2009).

To grasp how today's society is leaning more towards risk management rather than underlying factors such as having a strong welfare system that incorporates social, Garland talks about how there has been a commercialization of justice (Garland, 2001, pp. 193–196). This is a trend that has been going on since the early 1980s in Western parts of the world and has increasingly trickled its way down the in the sphere of justice. The field's development has been largely because of what is deemed a successful and working criminal justice system. In today's society, social order is measured by the number of perpetrators who are caught, sentenced, and to a large degree, *taken off the streets*. By that logic, the efficacy of the system is then put in the limelight and private security companies have been allowed to take a larger role within the system. This has been made possible by the private sector offering a lower cost for the same service compared to what the state would have to spend for them (Garland, 2001, pp. 188–189). Garland stresses that this could have dreadful consequences as performance is measured by the number of incarcerated perturbators which drives a monetary incentive instead of the perceived, or actual safety of law-abiding citizens. This change may be due to the shift in how crime is managed by the state, ever since higher crime rates became a fact after the historically low rates

during the 1950s there has been a shift in how the sovereign state manages risk (Garland, 2001, pp. 195–196). Areas that are seen being filled with more crime, are then managed at a higher level compared to areas where crime-rate is low.

The focus on effectiveness and the government's ability to keep its population safe is also reflected in news coverage. Similar to the situation where the criminal justice system is heavily influenced by commercialization motives, the media also gains from selling fear or crime as a product to its readers (Garland, 2001, pp. 157–158). This becomes important when considering that Hall et. al. argues that the media assumes and construct a consensus of society (Hall et al., 2013).

3.4.2 Criminology of the Other

Within governments discourse on crime Garland argues that there is a dualistic contradiction at place. On the one hand, there is a *criminology of the self*, this viewpoint argues that offenders are normal and act rational. It does not differentiate between offenders and non-offenders. On the other hand, there is the *criminology of the other*, where offenders are seen as a threatening outcast, calling for a fear of strangers and demands them to be excluded from society. As shown, these viewpoints are polar opposites to each other. Criminology of the self rationalises crime as something that happens, whilst criminology of the other demonises the offender as well as promoting fear and resentment. Through these two interpretations, risk management can be argued to follow the latter perspective. Applying criminology of the other on areas that are categorised as vulnerable by the Swedish police, these areas are by effect framed as being in constant risk, in a sense, justifying an increased police presence. This follows Garlands concept of a discourse where the unpredictable offender is constructed as ever-present, demanding and justifying continuous control and intervention (Garland, 2001, pp. 184–186).

As presented, this framework draws on multiple theoretical concepts. However, it is through the relation that they have to each other that allows for a comprehensive analysis of how media symbolically represents the public- and parochial realms. Using concepts from both Douglas and Garland, it further explains the inner workings of Lofland's construction of public- and parochial realms. The concept of direct- and indirect assaults follows Douglas's discussions on how anomalies are taken care of within cultures. Furthermore, Garland's discussion on risk

management shows how differences between parochial realms can be created. In a sense, all of these are needed to explain how shootings affect medias' interpretation of an area.

4. Methods Section

In the following section research design and approach will be discussed. This is succeeded by an overview of shootings in a Swedish context. Thereafter, it addresses how the data collection was carried out and then followed by how the coding was performed. Subsequently, examples are provided from the coding process, this includes examples of used codes and themes. Lastly, a brief discussion on reflexivity, ethics, and limitations are provided.

4.1 Research design and Approach

As shown in the previous literature, researching media, fear of crime, and disorder makes use of multiple different approaches, including both quantitative and qualitative methods, however, the purpose of this thesis is to analyse how Swedish media constructs and adds meaning to shootings in the public- and parochial realms through news articles. To explore how symbolic representation and spatial meaning-making are made sense, a qualitative approach is best suited. As the goal is not to test hypotheses or measure how many shootings happen where. This thesis aims to interpret and furthermore, understand how the articles themselves construct social truths. Following Cresswell and Cresswell's (2017, p 9) procedure, this thesis takes a social constructivist worldview, this approach aims to understand how its studied subject understands and in turn construct its truths. The purpose of the thesis is to study how the media represents the parochial and public realm and how they make sense of these physical spaces through reporting on shootings that occur within them. To answer the research question, a thematic analysis was applied. This approach was chosen due to its flexibility and systematic nature, which allows the researcher to sift out reoccurring themes in larger data pools while also applying comprehensive theoretical frameworks (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

4.1.1 Relevance and Overview of Shootings 2024

To be relevant for shootings of today and how they are described, the year 2024 was deemed to be the most appropriate. Compared to 2025, 2024 is complete and in turn full media coverage is available. This allows for a more coherent examination. To obtain an overview of all shootings that occurred in Sweden during 2024, a request was sent to the Swedish Police to acquire the official statistics on all confirmed shootings between 1st of January and 31st of

December 2024. This provided a total 297 distinct of shootings across Sweden. The data set included the following variables for each entry: date, time, region, police area, local police area, municipality, geographical coordinates, number of fatalities and wounded per shooting.

Due to the data sets extensive size, a decision was made to limit the sample to shootings that took place in Gothenburg and its surrounding and nearby cities. The selected cities were Borås, Kungälv, Uddevalla, Mölndal, and Partille. The purpose of this paper is not to compare if representations differ between cities, but rather to analyse how Douglas' theory of pollution is symbolically attached to the parochial and public realms. To achieve this, the representation of pollution will be studied in terms of if areas are being predefined as vulnerable by the Swedish police, and the impact of police presence. Limiting the sample to only the Gothenburg area was not deemed to hurt the analysis. This resulted in a total of 54 shootings. The raw material was then categorised. Following Sennett, time of day was split into four major groups:

- Day - (07.00 – 13.00) 5 shootings
- Midday - (13.00 – 19.00) 6 shootings
- Evening - (19.00 – 02.00) 25 shootings
- Night - (02.00 – 07.00) 18 shootings

To identify shootings that occurred in vulnerable classed areas, an official Geographical Information System-layer (GIS-layer) defining these areas was retrieved from the Swedish police website³. This was then overlaid with the geographical coordinates provided from the dataset using GIS software. Four shootings were found: three in Gothenburg and one in Borås. The choice of shootings in non-vulnerable classed areas was based on the richness of information found in the articles. Higher information was prioritised, and three shootings were chosen.

4.2 Data collection

The empirical data was collected through the media archive: Retriever Research (Mediearkivet), a database that stores Swedish news articles. The primary data collection was conducted in February 2025. In the initial search the terms: “("Skottlossning" OR "Skjutning" OR "Skott") AND "Göteborg"” (different variations of the word shooting in Swedish) was used

³ <https://polisen.se/om-polisen/polisens-arbete/utsatta-omraden/>

and was filtered to show both scanned newspapers and web articles. This resulted in 5117 hits. In the second search the category filter “brott och rättsväsende” (*crime and judiciary*) was used to further limit the search to only include articles related to crime, resulting in 1353 unique articles. In the final search, an additional filter was applied to limit which newspapers were to be included: Göteborgs Posten (GP), GT, Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter (DN), Sveriges Radio Göteborg (SR Göteborg) and Expressen. This resulted in 468 unique articles. To capture the initial symbolic representation of the events, a decision was made to include only articles published within 12 hours the shooting. To do this, the collected articles were cross referenced with the data set obtained from the police. This resulted in a total of 200 collected articles. The search for articles concerning the cities in the Gothenburg area was initiated by using the following filter: ("Skottlossning" OR "Skjutning" OR "Skott") AND ("Kungsbacka" OR "Uddevalla" OR "Borås" OR "Mölndal" OR "Partille"). The subsequent narrowing steps of the search were the same as for Gothenburg. This resulted in 61 additional articles, leaving 261 articles in total.

4.2.1 Studied Newspapers of the Thesis

The news outlets were chosen based on the following terms: GP, GT and SR Göteborg were chosen for regional relevance, allowing for more relevant material as they are based in the region. Furthermore, Aftonbladet, DN, and Expressen were deemed as relevant by the fact that they are three of Sweden’s largest and most read papers. As noted by Williams and Dickinson (1993), there is a difference between how tabloid- and broadsheet newspapers report. In the chosen news outlets, there are representatives from both tabloid- (GT, Expressen, and Aftonbladet) and broadsheet newspapers (GP and DN). SR Göteborg is purely online-based. Moreover, the selected newspapers have different political viewpoints; DN, GP, Expressen, and GT are liberal, whilst Aftonbladet is social democratic. SR Göteborg is non-political and follows the public service mandate. However, as the analysis will show, despite the differences in type and political viewpoint, there is a similarity in how shootings are presented.

4.3 Coding Process

According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 88) a thematic analysis follows similar steps to other qualitative approaches. The first phase of a thematic analysis involves the researcher familiarising with the collected data. The initial readthrough should be without coding the material actively. This helps with noticing reoccurring themes or patterns on subsequent read

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 91) stress that the researcher should keep notes that will aid during the latter phases.

The second phase of the thematic analysis is generating initial codes from the data. These codes indicate features of the data that seem interesting to the researcher. For the thesis, the coding phase was done inductively, to uncover themes in the raw material. Moreover, the coding and the analysis were carried out using NVivo 14, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (QAQDAS). Qualitative software's such as NVivo allows for coding large amounts of data without it getting out of hand, aiding during the analytical procedure (Rubin, 2021). This systematic approach aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 88) emphasis on the importance of repeatedly engaging with the entire data set during thematic analysis. This means that the coding or the themes that are found in the initial stages of analysis may, or more likely, will change when the researcher has wider knowledge of the studied subject. This is seen as one of the biggest strengths of the analytical approach as it introduces a flexibility which in turn prevents that the researcher is becoming locked to one explanation (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The third phase begins after the researcher has coded all the collected data. Here the emphasis is focused on generating themes rather than new creating codes. During this process Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 93) suggest that the focus is instead on analysing the codes and what relation they have to each other, rather than looking at all of the collected data. In the thesis this was done through a deductive process, where the theoretical framework presented was applied to the material. Following Creswell's coding practise, this thesis adopts an abductive approach, where inductive and deductive reasoning work in tandem to allow for emerging patterns as well as theory driven patterns to coincide during the coding process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Themes generated deductively were based on Lofland's concept of the parochial and public realms, Douglas's theories on social order and dirt, and Garland's framework of the culture of control. The deductive approach generated the two main themes: *The Pollution of the Parochial Realm* and *The Pollution of the Public Realm*. Following this, four subthemes were generated: *Doing Order*, *Order Done Wrong*, *Disorder in Orderly spaces - The Exceptional*, and *Accepted Disorder*. One theme emerged during the inductive phase: *Police Presence Adding to the Context of the Shooting*. As Clarke and Braun stress, the "thematic analysis are unbounded by theoretical commitments" (2017, p. 297), which lends itself well with approaches that make use of multiple theoretical perspectives and an abductive approach. See examples of how quotes were coded and subsequently themed in *table 1* below.

Table 1

Data extract	Coded for	Theme
Among the neighbours in the residential area, it is unusual - and worrying - that their neighbourhood has suddenly become the focus of attention in connection with a serious violent crime (Callstam, 2024).	1. Sudden 2. Not part of crime wave	Doing Order
Man shot outside her window: "Didn't dare to look" - Several neighbours heard shots and loud screams when a man in his 30s was shot in Biskopsgården in Gothenburg on Monday night. The man, who is known to the police, is being treated for serious injuries - One of the people who heard the shots was a mother of young children who had recently moved after a shooting where she used to live. The children asked, what's that blood mom? Now she had to explain to the children again why there was blood on the street outside. (SR, Mannen sköts utanför hennes fönster: "Vågade inte titta")	1. The use of witnesses 2. Chaos 3. Children 4. Crime scene	Order Done Wrong
A shooting has taken place in a parking lot in central Partille, east of Gothenburg. Witnesses heard shots outside and saw a black car with an unknown number of people in it leave the scene. [...] "Somehow there has been a confrontation," says Thomas Fuxborg, police spokesperson. - "We find a bullet hole, but it's in another parked car belonging to the public that has nothing to do with this. So that car is hit by a bullet. So we can conclude that there has been a shooting at the scene.	1. Calm 2. Orderly presented 3. Crime scene	Accepted Disorder
I've never been so scared, I've never heard gunshots like that. I have heard hunter's shots, but never so close, it kind of echoed and hurt my ears. What did you do when you heard the shots? [...] There were a lot of people running into shops, and a lot of people running out, it got a bit chaotic. How is the boy now? - He comes from a country in crisis, he has probably heard	1. Chaos 2. Otherwise ordered space 3. Children 4. Analogy	Disorder in Orderly spaces - The Exceptional

this and that. I was probably more scared than he was. It feels so bloody awful that it's creeping so close, no way!		
The area is described by both police and neighbours as relatively quiet, but some residents feel that the police presence has increased slightly recently. According to him, the area is normally a quiet area. Neighbours on the street share this view, but several have experienced that the police presence has increased slightly recently.	1. Police Presence 2. Increase 3. Calm 4. Disorder	Police Presence Adding to the Context of the Shooting

4.4 Validity and Reliability

Following the discussion of Creswell and Creswell on validity and reliability, this paper adopts several of the strategies outlined to strengthen its credibility. Creswell and Creswell (2017, p. 213–214) emphasise that validity is one of the core strengths of qualitative research, with key terms including authenticity, trustworthiness, and credibility. Actively incorporating strategies to ensure validity enhances the accuracy of the findings. In this thesis this has been achieved, for example, by including multiple quotes when presenting themes. As Creswell and Creswell note, this helps establish coherent evidence that supports the identified themes. Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell (2017, p. 214) argue that using detailed descriptions when introducing themes makes the findings more realistic and relatable for the reader, which in turn reinforces the study's validity. In this paper, such descriptions are provided before each quote is presented in the analysis. Finally, Creswell and Creswell highlight the importance of clarifying the researcher's biases, as this helps the reader understand how the researcher may have arrived at certain conclusions (ibid). This transparency further strengthens and enhances the validity of the research. In addition to validity, the current thesis also addresses reliability. To fulfil these goals this paper follows Yin's (2009) suggestion of actively documenting the research process. This is done, for example, by including coding examples with corresponding quotes, allowing the reader to better understand how the researcher arrived at specific conclusions. Moreover, Creswell and Creswell emphasise the importance of accurately presenting the material used. In current thesis, that material consists of quotes from Swedish news articles. Since these were originally in Swedish and translated into English, there is a risk that underlying meanings may be lost. To mitigate this, the coding was conducted in Swedish, and the quotes were subsequently translated with particular attention to preserving the semantic meanings. However, this risk cannot fully be eradicated.

4.4.1 Reflexivity and Ethics

In qualitative research the researcher's position is important to address. As background, past experiences, and culture all hold a potential for shaping what themes that emerge, and how these in turn are interpreted. As Creswell and Cresswell note, it is of the utmost importance for the researcher to continually reflect on their position towards the analysed material (2017, p. 194–195). However, these aspects can also be seen as a resource to the researcher, as past knowledge of the studied subject can aid in noticing underlying aspects (Finlay, 2002). Indeed, balancing between the researcher bias affecting too much and their knowledge aiding the research is a fine balance. To limit my own impact on the results, I have tried to reflect when instances of conflict came up, as to mitigate my own views or preconceived opinions. Since this study is based on news articles, which are publicly available sources, no ethical approval was required. However, throughout the process I have been continually critical in how I represent the sensitive topics this thesis discusses.

4.4.2 Relationship to the Studied Matter

I grew up in Gothenburg, in an affluent neighbourhood that is to a mostly homogeneous in terms of class and social background. This upbringing has to a large degree shaped my perceptions of what I constitute as being safe, and the differences between order and disorder. My own notion of what I consider as normal or out of place in public- or parochial spaces are in large part influenced by these facts. Moreover, this may carry imbedded biases, specifically when studying portrayals of vulnerable neighbourhoods or neighbourhoods with lower socioeconomic status – what I consider as being order may not reflect in how people with other experiences sees it.

4.4.3 Limitations

Braun and Clarke point out that there is a potential loss of context when conducting a thematic analysis. However, to limit this risk, quotes are presented in extended form, as to mitigate this loss of context. As previously mentioned, the decision was made to limit this study in relation to shootings only happening in Gothenburg or the before-mentioned surrounding cities. This exclusion was deemed not to significantly affect the results, as the purpose was not to compare how representation is created between cities, but rather to examine how shootings affect Lofland's theoretical concept of realms. Furthermore, TV reports and other media forms were excluded from this study, narrowing the scope to print and web-based reporting. However, while these media formats are influential and widely consumed, they represent only one part of

the boarder media ecosystem. Articles published more than 12 hours after a shooting were excluded because the purpose of this thesis is not to examine how representation changes over time, but rather to focus on the initial symbolic creation. Furthermore, language was a minor challenge, as all articles were translated from Swedish to English, which could introduce an indifference in meaning. However, I tried to be as correct with the translation as possible, to reflect the essence of the original article.

5. Analysis

On a statistical level shootings in Sweden are anomalies – these are not events that happened every day and has for the last couple of year's been on a steady decline (Police, 2025). Looking more specifically at the studied cities, 54 shootings took place over a period of 366 days (2024 was a leap year), that is an average of 0,15 shootings per day. The point of this paper is not to state that shootings are anomalies, this is evident by the mere fact stated above. However, as this analysis will show, shootings bring different levels of meaning to the anomalies, and in turn if these anomalies should be interpreted as pollution or not. As Douglas (2002) discusses, pollution may take different forms depending on its setting. This is down to cultures assigning different expectations and meaning. As the course of events of a shooting taking place in two distinctly different residential areas are by mere fact the same – a trigger is pulled, causing a bullet to exit the barrel of a weapon and travel toward the endpoint of its trajectory – however, it is the interpretation of the anomaly and its context that are the important factors to study.

The outline of the analysis is the following: In the first section medias interpretation of how order is represented in neighbourhoods in the parochial realm. Following this, the context of police presence will be analysed. Subsequently, media's representation of shootings in the public realm will be outlined using examples of a shopping centre, parking garage and an empty street. Lastly, this is followed by discussion and conclusion.

5.1.1 The Pollution of the Parochial Realm - Doing Order

Douglas (2002) argues that in areas with a high degree of social order, anomalies are swiftly managed. This notion is also supported in the previous research, where Sandstig (2012) argues that areas that are seen as dangerous lack the same social environment and order as areas which are perceived as safe. Furthermore, Lofland (2009) argues that questions of morality are mediated through direct and indirectly targeted assaults in realms where order is not done right.

The absence of such assaults can be interpreted as sign of a neighbourhood's underlying strength. How order is performed then is an important cornerstone in how anomalies are interpreted and in turn categorised. The coming section will show how order in affluent areas such as Grimmered and Örgryte are performed, and by extension how this order underlines shootings as anomalies:

Among the neighbours in the residential area, it is unusual - and worrying - that their neighbourhood has suddenly become the focus of attention in connection with a serious violent crime (Callstam, 2024).

Here the focus of the article lies in how unusual it is that a shooting is taking place. In a sense, the neighbourhood itself is the victim rather than the two people who lost their life's during the night. As Douglas (2002) stresses, categories within cultures are not so easily prone to alteration. If the anomaly is not quickly called out or dealt with, it risks the anomaly forming itself into a normative expectation. She introduces a few different methods for taking care of anomalies and in turn keeping the social order intact: one of them being the introduction of a new category. In the case of Grimmered, this is seen when the shooting is marked as being *unusual* – in this way reducing the severity of the situation. This distancing continues when the representation of the neighbourhood is compartmentalised as not being a part of the violent crime wave, as it is “suddenly” appearing alongside with the other shootings taking place in Gothenburg. By these categorisations, the category of the residential area shifts the meaning, the shooting is defined as an anomaly.

Another method of controlling anomalies according to Douglas (2002) is through physical means. This is done through for instance removing physical aspects of a shooting such as bullet casings, shattered glass and so forth. This removes the anomaly's effect on the residential area:

A quiet, grey Sunday morning - in the hours after the suspected double murder, there was little evidence of what had happened on the ground in the residential area of Grimmered (Lönnroth, 2024).

The choice of words that are used here underlines the “normalness”: the sound level being low paints a picture of a nice, calm Sunday neighbourhood that was struck by something outrageous and sudden. Hence, the narrative being brought forward is highlighting how a double murder, or crime in general for that matter, is something that is not an everyday occurrence, far from it even. The construction of the physical space by the newspapers then does not lead the reader to associate it with other shootings, this is somehow different from them. Moreover, as Sandstig (2012) shows in her research, appearance, i.e. the level of cleanliness or the well-kept nature of the neighbourhood affects the perceived level of order. Implying that communities that possess the capacity of restoring leads to neighbourhoods that are harder to associate with something so chaotic and uncontrollable as a double murder. When narratives of shootings lack these notions of keeping up order, other measures need to be highlighted.

The third way of addressing anomalies according to Douglas (2002) is by emphasising that an anomaly has violated a whole category. In other words, when something does not conform with how we believe the world should be ordered, it reinforces and affirms the boundaries of what is considered to be acceptable. In the following quote describing a shooting that took place in the residential area Örgryte, which is situated in the east parts of the inner-city, the shooting is placed in bigger context – not merely as something affecting Örgryte alone:

“This is really an area that you think is so safe, nothing happens, and nothing will happen. And then suddenly something happens here too. It feels like nowhere is safe,” adds Valeria (Filip Lyrheden, 2024).

Similarly to the shooting in Grimmered, the emphasis on the shooting being a sudden event helps to maintain the status quo that social order is still performed in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the quote introduces what Douglas (2002) describes as the third way of addressing anomalies: by acknowledging that a boundary has been breached while still reaffirming the underlying order. The phrase “nowhere is safe” implies that social order continues to be performed in Örgryte, but the presence of violence is framed as an external disturbance, suggesting that the neighbourhood itself remains orderly, even as it is momentarily affected. Similarly to the framing used in Grimmered, it is Örgryte itself that is the victim rather than the

individuals who were affected by the shooting. As Douglas (2002) points to, for pollution to be viewed as an anomaly and not as something that is a part of the social order, it needs to be defined and categorised as such, otherwise it risks being defined as the new normal. This dynamic is evident in the way the Örgryte shooting is represented. In stark contrast to Grimmered, the narrative in Örgryte does not have the same amount of restoring capacity, when the journalist is on site, the aftermath of the shooting is still on-going:

Some stop by to take a picture of the bullet holes, and several do not want to talk to the newspaper when GP is on site. Most agree, however, that they did not think it would happen here (Filip Lyrheden, 2024).

The calmness after the shooting in Grimmered is nowhere to be found, instead the physical aspects paint a scene where the anomaly is not contained. The representation focuses on the lack of order in the situation, the description of bullet holes creates vivid associations to war torn cities. As previously mentioned, well-kept neighbourhood are seen as being less dangerous (Sandstig, 2012). However, according to Douglas (2002, p40–41), anomalies do not necessary disrupt existing categories, the existence also plays a crucial role in reaffirming them as just that. By framing the event as something that should not happen or that no one thought would happen, also reinforces the idea of what normally does. This can clearly be seen in the reporting on Örgryte. Through the use of witness accounts that express their disbelief, or people stopping and taking pictures of the bullet holes, reaffirms a space where such events are out of place. In addition, a difference in tone can be seen when witnesses from both Grimmered and Örgryte are compared. The first quote is from Örgryte, then followed by two from Grimmered:

“We heard five or six blasts outside the window. When we look out, we don't see anything. But it only took a minute or so and the police were outside looking for something,” said a witness at the scene (Filip Lyrheden, 2024).

Magnus Hallberg is walking his dog, Bob. He explains that his family gradually realised what it was all about. - “I didn't hear the shots personally, but it was my wife and sister-in-law who heard the shots around 11pm. There were a number of

rapid cracks, then there was a small pause and then there was another shot. They thought it was fireworks” - but there were no lights in the sky (Lönnroth, 2024).

Another resident said he heard between five and ten bangs. - I thought it was fireworks at first, but ten minutes later we heard sirens (Lönnroth, 2024).

In the first quote, the loud noises are immediately identified as something wrong, there is no ambiguity. The witness in the second quote is out in the neighbourhood walking his dog, in stark contrast to the uncontrolled nature of which the events described in Örgryte. The sense of social order in Grimmered is further reinforced by the fact that several of the witnesses from initially believed the gunshots were fireworks, in a sense reaffirming that these types of events don't conform (Douglas, 2002). All three quotes convey the residents' description of the events – shots were heard by people living in the area – however, the context which is added in the second quote clearly describes a scene that is both calmer and under more control. Lending the representation of Grimmered to be one more in control of their anomalies when the representation of Örgryte is more undefined. As Lofland (2009) argues, when an area is under indirect assault the journalist does not outright state the area as being bad or dangerous, but through the description of the setting different *warrants* are provided. In other words, a narrative is created in which lessons are provided for the reader to take with them (Lofland, 2009). In the case of Örgryte the article doesn't explicitly state that the shooting is not under control, but by not describing the interview scene as in Grimmered, it implicitly gives that impression.

5.1.2 Order Done Wrong

In this section we will compare how order is done wrong. In the first quote, a shooting that took place in Biskopsgården in Gothenburg, following that, Sjöbo in Borås will be discussed in relation to Grimmered and Örgryte. Both residential areas are categorised as being vulnerable by the Swedish police (Police, 2024). Areas classified as vulnerable are already plagued with the narrative of serious crime. As stated on the Swedish Police Authority's official website, these areas are: “A geographically defined area characterized by low socio-economic status where criminals have an impact on the local community” (Police, 2024). In this context, due to its frequent occurrence, crime is no longer portrayed as an anomaly, rather, the area itself is

framed as one. Categorially defined as something else compared to other parts of Gothenburg or Borås where anomalies such as these are kept at bay, and the social order works:

Man shot outside her window: “Didn't dare to look” - Several neighbours heard shots and loud screams when a man in his 30s was shot in Biskopsgården in Gothenburg on Monday night. The man, who is known to the police, is being treated for serious injuries - One of the people who heard the shots was a mother of young children who had recently moved after a shooting where she used to live. The children asked, what's that blood mom? Now she had to explain to the children again why there was blood on the street outside (Lindholm, 2024).

Compared to the earlier quotes where Grimmered and Örgryte were seen as the victim, the narrative being told here is a more sinister one, where Biskopsgården is portrayed as the anomaly rather than the shooting. Descriptions of multiple shots being fired, people screaming, blood was seen on the street by residents living in the area and, children being exposed to gruesome scenes. This questions the capacity of controlling the anomaly (Douglas, 2002). Comparably to the quotes discussed before, where they either thought the shoots were fireworks at first, or curiously looking out their window to see what was happening, the narrative here is one of fear. The reader gets a sense of residents knowing the difference between loud bangs, as this is occurring more frequently here compared to the affluent neighbourhoods. Where the streets in Grimmered were clean and showed no signs of a double murder, stating: “there was little evidence of what had happened on the ground in the residential area of Grimmered”, the streets here are instead covered in blood. Comparably to the shooting in Örgryte, where people stopped and took pictures of the bullet holes, people in Biskopsgården knows better, using statements such as “Didn't dare to look”, in a way cementing shootings as not being viewed as anomalies in the area, to something that unfortunately happens (Douglas, 2002). Biskopsgården itself radiates a narrative of being uncontrolled and unordered compared to Grimmered and Örgryte.

This is not an indirect assault on the residential area as Örgryte was exposed to, where questions and descriptions were left out. This is what Lofland (2009) calls a direct assault, these are realms which contain the wrong kind of properties which there is a consensus within society has agreed

on. Taking Douglas's (2002) example of the importance of cleanliness within close quarter relations as to not implicate others, direct assaults imply something that also could contaminate others around them if it is not kept under control. In the article this is seen when questions of morality are lifted: Should a child really need to see blood on their street and, should a mother ever have to need to explain that to their kids? Indicating a presence of what Lofland (2009) calls an unholy, directed at Biskopsgården. This in turn creates a consensus surrounding the residential area as being dangerous, which then could affect the willingness to move around within the area. Like the article in Örgyte, the representation of Biskopsgården does not include any extra descriptions of the interview process, it then does not have a chance to reprehend the implication of chaos to taking place during the shooting. Furthermore, this follows the findings in Sandberg's (2020) research on discourses relating to less affluent residential areas in Malmö, where the problem is not framed as one belonging to society, it is framed as a problem relating to the area, in effect creating a wall between us and them. From an outsider's perspective, this is seen as only affecting certain parts of the city. Likewise, the next quotes from a shooting taking place in Sjöbo, in Borås which resulted in a young man's death, shows similar signs of morality being lifted:

A neighbour GP spoke to, who does not want her name in the newspaper, says that she did not wake up from the sounds of gunfire but was badly affected when she found out what had happened - It is unpleasant, sometimes you were at the playground with the grandchildren and had coffee but nowadays you are more careful (Filip Persson, 2024).

A family with children is talking to the police, and the children wonder when they will be able to swing again (Filip Persson, 2024).

Comparably to Biskopsgården, the representation is more muted, lacking the chaotic descriptions of the event such as screams being heard by residents, or the aftermath being described such as blood being left on the street. However, like the event in Biskopsgården morality is brought in to question. There is a narrative brought forward of an uncontrolled nature, as residents call out the safety of the kids in neighbourhood being called in to question. The articles representation of Sjöbo directly assaults the capacity of the neighbourhood of

keeping its residents safe; by using quotes such as you must be “carful”, which in turn could be understood as denying access to certain spaces. Similar to Sennet’s (1992) discussions around temporal access being given to specific groups. The narrative being told here speaks of one where residents cannot move as they please, in effect shutting the access of parts where they are supposed to be allowed. Using descriptions of a family asking the police for when the swing is available again further enhances the representation of a neighbourhood without order, lacking what others have where shootings do not take place around playgrounds.

This is similar to the findings in Sandberg’s research, where narratives within articles deemed some areas as being risky for women to move around in (2020). Moreover, it also indicates a fear being spread in the neighbourhood, limiting its residents’ habits and movements, where a cup of coffee at the playground is not safe for anyone anymore. Similarly to Biskopsgården the use of children’s safety is a central part of the morality being brought forward in the article, this can be seen as a reaffirmation that the neighbourhood itself is the anomaly, rather than the shooting. As Hall et. al. (2013) stresses, the media play an important role when it comes to how things are interpreted. Through direct assaults targeting moral aspects such as kids’ ability to be safe in their own neighbourhood, these realms are symbolically represented as lacking the right social order – creating a realm where people are under constant danger. As both Sandberg and Sandstig show in their research, narratives of fear or crime influence how people later perceive feelings of security to spaces, and by media deciding the significance of the situation – through what they publicise, they in turn have the power of deciding which realms are safe (Hall et al., 2013; Sandberg, 2020; Sandstig, 2010).

5.1.3 Police Prescence Adding to the Context to the Shooting - Parochial Realm

While shootings represent a life-threatening form of pollution, they are not the only disruption that can influence the symbolic representation of a realm. As the following section will show, police presence – which is typically associated with control, can itself be perceived as a form of pollution. According to Garland (2001), risk management has become the norm in modern policing. This means that police no longer maintain constant patrols across all areas but instead rely on statistical data where crime is most likely to occur and allocate their resources there. As shown in Campos-Manzo et. al (2020) study, residents in low-crime areas may rarely see police presence, making such appearances seem unusual or even suspicious. In this sense, police presence itself can be perceived as an anomaly to the neighbourhood, areas that are exposed to

higher levels of police presence are then associated with being exposed to more crime. In the coming section we will look at how the introduction of visible police within neighbourhoods is represented differently through the articles.

The first quote is from a shooting in Kungsbacka, a town located 20 minutes south of Gothenburg, the increased police presence is viewed as worrisome and not being normal in the neighbourhood:

The area is described by both police and neighbours as relatively quiet, but some residents feel that the police presence has increased slightly recently. According to him, the area is normally a quiet area. Neighbours on the street share this view, but several have experienced that the police presence has increased slightly recently (Klara Sävenlund, 2024).

The neighbourhood is described as quite which is clearly seen as something positive. However, the presence of police disturbs this notion. Moreover, both police and residents are in agreement that the neighbourhood normally is quiet, indicating that the presence of police would be viewed as an anomaly. In a sense, there is two types of pollutions at work here. Firstly, just as a shooting contributes to the area lacking in control of its borders. Having to have police there to uphold order provides outsiders with a view of a neighbourhood being faltered, indicating that the neighbourhood isn't strong enough as to stop the increasing crime rate. Secondly, when the norm in society is not seeing police where crimes do not usually occur, their presence then adds to a narrative that suggest that crime rates have increased. If this continues, Douglas (2002) argues that it might overturn the anomaly of police presence to being a norm in the neighbourhood.

The slightest indication of police presence then risks the neighbourhood as being viewed as polluted, in relation to other residential areas where police presence is not the norm. As Lofland (2009) discusses, the symbolic creation of neighbourhoods is achieved by things that are attributed to it. Indirect assaults such as these where warrants in the form of representation of increased police presence hints at the anomaly maybe changing its form. In the next quote, from

the previously discussed shooting in Grimmered police presence is as something not at all attributed to the neighbourhood:

Carina Hellquist, who lives nearby, had had friends over in the evening. At around 11pm, they left her home - and were met by a large police presence. She heard police sirens herself, but assumed the sounds were coming from one of the major highways nearby. Carina has lived in the area for 27 years (Lönnroth, 2024).

From the quote it is clear that police are perceived as being uncommon to the area, comparing with the quote from Kungsbacka, where police had been seen more and more lately. The added context of her having lived in Grimmered for over 27 years lends a weight to the statement. This is in a sense confirming that police presence is not seen as something normal, even to a degree that the sounds of sirens first made her think of the highway located close by – affirming Douglas tactic of ascribing pollution to something else, as a way of neglecting its effect on the neighbourhood. This reflects earlier findings by Campo-Manzo et. al. (2020) of more affluent areas also seeing less visible police. Dissimilar to the pollutions actively being at work in Kungsbacka, where the police presence actually had seen a rise, opposite is at work here when the added context gives the impression that Grimmered hasn't seen an increase in crime-rates.

As Douglas (2002) notes, that for something to be perceived as pollution, the anomaly needs additional context that suggests a loss of control. Moreover, the severity of the shootings does not seem to play in. By all accounts the event in Grimmered where two people lost their lives, compared to the shooting in Kungsbacka where no one was injured, would from the onset suggest less control of anomalies in Grimmered than in Kungsbacka. However, as Douglas (2002) discusses, anomalies do not change based on one occurrence. For anomalies to be viewed as the new normal, context needs to be added which offers an explanation on how it transpired (Douglas, 2002). This context is found in both of articles, in Kungsbacka residents had seen an uptick in police presence overtime whereas the article in Grimmered emphasised the opposite, where the sirens were thought to be coming from somewhere else. Both adds to the respective symbolic construction of the neighbourhoods, where Kungsbacka seems to be on a more negative spiral comparably to Grimmered. Making the shooting affect Kungsbacka to seem more polluted, as the added context of increased police presence suggests a loss of social

order. Furthermore, the presence of police can also convey a sense of chaos, just as shootings that are portrayed as overly gruesome or extraordinary. As Garland stresses, increased police presence is a result of risk management, the representation then builds a narrative of a neighbourhood where anomalies are not kept at bay (Garland, 2001). In the next quotes, both from the previously described event in Örgryte, extraordinary police measures are used:

Soon the street in front of their apartment was closed off, police officers swarmed the street, and a helicopter circled overhead (Filip Lyrheden, 2024).

Several of the neighbours talk about the helicopter that circled over the houses during the night, and the police officers who knocked on the door to take statements from witnesses in the hours after midnight (Filip Lyrheden, 2024).

Several bullet holes are visible in an apartment window. A couple of police officers get into a police car and drive away after knocking on doors in the residential area. From time to time, horse hooves can be heard against the asphalt, as mounted police officers circulate in the area. Otherwise, the streets are mostly quiet and empty (Filip Lyrheden, 2024).

Just as Garland (2001) describes how shootings are sensationalised to sell newspapers or attract attention by emphasising their exceptional nature, the depiction of large-scale police operations can similarly be used to amplify the fear of crime, functioning as part of a broader symbolic representation of risk. Moreover, through both Lofland and Douglas it could be argued that these types of descriptions add to the narrative of crime-rates rising. Firstly, an indirect attack is at work which is seen through the descriptions of a hovering police helicopter, lending the reader to think of vulnerable areas. Furthermore, police officers knocking on doors and “swarming the street” during the night hours, also adds to a narrative where these types of police operations are not common. The representation through these warrants then gives the reader a sense of lost control, where extreme measures need to be used to regain control. Moreover, the sound of hooves or the word “swarmed” lends to the interpretation of riot-like occurrences, where large groups of people need to be controlled and contained. Secondly, according to Douglas, pollution arises not only from explicit transgressions but also from symbolic cues that

suggest matter out of place. Here the unusual presence of mounted police, or the use of the term “swarmed” function as highlighting the area as being contaminated. This disrupts the cultural expectations of the realm.

These descriptions do not outright describe the area as being dangerous. There is no indication or mentioning of that the danger is still ongoing, as the sense of why is left out of the context, leaving the reader to interpret the warrants. In the next quote from a shooting in Skälltorp, a residential area in the north parts of Gothenburg categorised by police as vulnerable, where a young man was shot at 11.30 on a Saturday, quotes from officers emphasize the state’s efforts to reassure that order will be restored:

"Parts of the area around Skälltorp were closed off. According to the police, the perpetrator may have moved up towards the Blå staden area. - “You should not move around in areas unnecessarily, given that we have armed police looking for an offender,” warned Stefan Gustafsson" (Beri Zangana, 2024).

It is clear from the start that social order in Skälltorp is on the brink of falling apart, an armed gun man is still on foot in or around the area. Firstly, it implies a presence of immediate risk and secondly, it points to a symbolic breakdown of normative boundaries, what Douglas would describe as the eruption of disorder into an otherwise “controlled” space (Douglas, 2002). The shutdown of the area and the warning not to move unnecessarily within it, serves both as a tactical- and performative function, reinstating territorial control by authorities while reinforcing the idea of danger as spatially focussed. From a media discourse perspective, such framing contributes to the stigmatisation of specific neighbourhoods – just as Sandberg found in her research, portraying them as spaces where the boundaries between order and chaos are constantly at risk of collapse also affects the interpretation of the space (Sandberg, 2020). It reproduces a narrative of containment. This follows Garlands concept of “Criminology of the other”, where the unpredictable offender must be kept in check through visible and exceptional means. Through this lens, Skälltorp is not just a location of violence – it becomes a symbol of neighbourhood collapse, affirming the vulnerable classification on the area. This type of eruption is also seen in the next quote, concerning another vulnerable classed residential area

Backa at around 18.30 on a Sunday, closely located to Skälltorp in the northern parts of Gothenburg where a man was shot:

The police are searching for the perpetrator, including by helicopter. - “It happened in a densely populated residential area, several apartment buildings, on an open street in the early evening,” says police duty officer Jon Franzén to TT (Olsson, 2024).

Similarly to the quote previously discussed, a sense of urgency is apparent. Firstly, the perpetrator is still at large, and by all accounts dangerous, the indication that it is a “densely populated residential area” further increases the notion of an ongoing chaos in the neighbourhood. Out of the 37 total shootings in Gothenburg during 2024, only five happened between 13.00 and 19.00, whereas 28 happened between 19.00 and 06.00. This may be a contributing factor to why the sense of urgency is high. Crimes that are visible, particular those occurring during times of high public movement carry a heightened symbolic risk, as they increase the chance that innocent bystanders may be caught in the crossfire. Articles surrounding such incidents highlight the necessity of a strong police response, this is not framed as a pollution, but rather as an essential measure to restore order. This adds another layer of perceived danger to the residential area and contributes to a discourse where violence disturbs established social norms. In effect, a socially constructed code is breached, as Sennett argues, this challenges the social agreements that are established within society (Sennett, 1992). Times and spaces that are mutually agreed as being “safe”, such as residential areas during a Sunday afternoon, then needs to be dealt with as not to let the pollution “take-over” the status quo. Events such as these can be described through Lofland’s *presence of unholy*, in effect the media undermines the realm and is symbolically represented as being unstable (Lofland, 2009). The emphasis on time and space from the media then adds to the discourse of the neighbourhood being on the brink of chaos and losing its grip on the control. As Douglas would argue, the media is labelling the area as being different compared to others – where shootings do occur and, in a sense, confirming the need of control and containment through such extreme measures (Douglas, 2002).

5.2 Pollution of the Public Realm

The difference between creation and representation of the parochial- and the public realm is straightforward, as there are more people who move in or around public space, the representation and by extension the symbolic creation is dependent on more heterogenic input in comparison to the parochial realm where the symbolic creation mainly is based on the residents and in turn more homogenic input (Lofland, 2009). In a sense, people do not “belong” to the public realm in the same way they do to their neighbourhoods. It then becomes important to study how the symbolic representation is done in both spaces and if it differs or display similar traits. In the following section we will look at how shootings and police presence affect the public realm’s symbolic representations.

5.2.1 The Exceptional – Disorder in Orderly Realms

In the first example we will look at the shooting that took place at the shopping centre Kungsmässan located in the central parts of Kungsbacka, on the 6 of October at three a clock on a Sunday. As discussed earlier in relation to access to spaces in terms of both temporal and psychical aspects with Sennett’s discussions socially coded keys, the visitor population and access could be seen as open to all (Sennett, 1992). In the sense that no one is frowned upon depending on the time of day or for entering the space. While shopping centres might fall into what Sennett calls *sterile urban environments* or *camouflaged control* in the words of Lofland, i.e. areas or spaces that priorities order and control over spontaneity and diversity, this also lends its visitors a sense of security (Lofland, 2009; Sennett, 1992). This sense of security related to shopping centres and galleries is probably influenced by that Sweden historically has been spared of shootings taking place in them, only accounting for two [before the shooting in Kungsbacka] during last 10 years in Malmö and Linköping. This in turn adds to the narrative of public spaces where there is a lot of different people moving as being coded as safe. In the following quotes, a narrative of chaos shown:

People are crying, it's closed off and full of police and firemen, says a man at the scene. Panic broke out at Kungsmässan in Kungsbacka on Sunday when a young boy fired several shots inside the shopping centre (Alex Rodriguez, 2024).

This quote shows control being exchanged with disorder, the security of the shopping centre is substituted to authoritative personnel, indicating the severity of the situation to the reader. Compared to the previous events depicted in Grimmered and Örgryte, where the presence of police was seen as an anomaly and even a symbolic threat to the community's self-maintained order. This aligns well with earlier studies and examples provided in Skälltorp and Backa, where police presence is framed as something necessary and even stabilising (Metcalf & Bolaji, 2024). In these cases, the media does not represent the authorities as polluting factors but rather as instruments that uphold the boundary of disorder. According to Douglas, pollution arises when these boundaries are violated, and order is challenged by matter out of place (Douglas, 2002). In the example from Kungsmässan, the violation is not by the fact that the police are there, but rather by the shooting itself, interpreted as disorder intruding on an otherwise controlled space. The police presence is therefore not seen as a symbolic pollution, as it does in some parochial spaces, but an attempt to reinstate the social order. Extraordinary situations like these, where disorder is placed in an orderly realm may fuel a narrative of the state not doing enough to protect its citizens, indicating that pollution is not effectively being contained. Moving on, in the next two quotes, questions of morality is lifted in relation to kids and families being exposed to the chaos that unfolded:

Eating ice cream near the shots - Another witness says he and his 7-year-old were eating ice cream 20 meters from the store when the shots fell. He describes it as multiple shots (Alex Rodriguez, 2024).

I heard several bangs. My family and I were heading in the direction where the shots were fired and then we were met by a lot of people running. We just ran with the crowd," says Louise Englund, 43 (Alex Rodriguez, 2024).

Through the use of witness remarks a direct assault on the public space can be seen at work, lifting questions of morality that concerns the safety and protection of its citizens. Similarly to symbolic representation of the shooting taking place in Biskopsgården, the focus is on how innocent families are exposed to heinous crimes, through normal day-to-day activities such as eating ice-cream is contrasted to shots going off and is exchanged with panic. This legitimates the space as it is going from something safe and by extension somewhere people put their trust

in, to somewhere on the opposite of the spectrum. These warrants emphasise the normalness before the events taking place, where a sense of calm is in the focal point. Moreover, contrary to the parochial realm where neighbourhoods are distinct, personal and unique, the public realm could be argued as being the same or having similar traits everywhere (Lofland, 2009). In a sense lending association to other similar spaces on other locations. In other words, a shooting in a shopping centre in Kungsbacka could affect the will of entering shopping centres in other towns and in a way spreading the pollution further.

Going back to Douglas' discussion on the importance of cleanliness within cultures, the implications could be applied to other similar spaces (Douglas, 2002). Shopping centres in Sweden often follow the same aesthetics, boasting similar stores and sharing the same symbolic role within society, an act of violence in one could then have a meaningfully impact on others. As Sandstig (2010) notes, reading about crimes reinforces fear and insecurity to certain spaces. In a sense creating public fear attributed towards urban environments where people tend to feel safe, spaces that normally are seen as controlled and protected are then exchanged to disorder and randomness. The symbolic representation then creates a ripple effect that trickles down over similar spaces that then questions what constitutes as a safe space in society. This follows Douglas' analysis of anomalies not only threatening how people act and what is consider as normative and pure, and in turn what is considered as polluted or sticking out, but that it can have an effect on how physical spaces are seen and interpreted (Douglas, 2002). This narrative of chaos is seen the next quotes were a father and his son are interviewed:

I've never been so scared, I've never heard gunshots like that. I have heard hunter's shots, but never so close, it kind of echoed and hurt my ears. What did you do when you heard the shots? [...] There were a lot of people running into shops, and a lot of people running out, it got a bit chaotic. How is the boy now? - He comes from a country in crisis, he has probably heard this and that. I was probably more scared than he was. It feels so bloody awful that it's creeping so close, no way! (Alex Rodriguez, 2024).

A woman was driving past the mall in her car and says she was met by people running out of a restaurant. - "I rolled down the window to see what was happening and heard a 'bang' and people started running even faster. "I thought,

'Shit, someone's shooting,' and I gased out of there and called 112,” she says, adding: ‘I completely panicked and thought, ‘What's going on? It was such an incredible bang, so you react (Alex Rodriguez, 2024).

As this could have happened to anyone, that is to say that the attack took place inside a public space, witnesses remarks become key in the symbolic construction of public spaces. Lofland stresses how the public realm relies on normative ques that guides movement and how expectation, this is suddenly raptured when violence is entered into the equation (Lofland, 2009). In turn this transforms the public realm into a space of fear and disorder. Similarly to the shooting in Örgryte where there was an emphasis on that “nowhere is safe”, the emphasis on “it’s creeping so close” alludes to similar narrative where shootings are polluting more and more spaces, and in turn speaks of a potential danger that could happen anywhere, at any time. Social order in the public realm then may hold similar symbolic representation to parochial realms where order is deemed as being done right.

Moreover, as Douglas highlights, dirt is a matter out of place, that goes against the cultural system (Douglas, 2002). Here, the sound of gunshots which are normally associated with more controlled arenas, such as in the forest when hunting or shooting ranges, is instead placed inside where these factors are missing. This mismatch between matter and space is seen when the witness remarks of having heard shots before, but never so close or in this setting. Stating “I’ve never heard gunshots like that” further enhances this misplacement of the occurrence. The quote that follows, highlights similar associations where shopping centres are mostly associated with walking speed and how this then is shattered when the witness remarks at seeing people running out of the space, further enhancing matter out of place. Representation where normative behaviour and expectations are turned upside down fuels the symbolic creation of the public realm and gives way for new expectations to be associated with the space (Lofland, 2009). This risks shopping centres to be interpreted as potential zones of violence in the future. This aligns well with Garlands discussions around “criminology of the other” where unpredictable threats are framed as ever-present risks (Garland, 2001). These types of reactions or broad associations does not necessarily need to end with fear or anomalies not being at check.

5.2.2 Accepted Disorder

Public realms where people are not as likely to move around within also renders a cooler response. In the next quote relating to shooting in a parking garage in northern parts of Gothenburg at 22:30, the representation does not call out moral or other dilemmas:

At 22:30 on Tuesday evening, the police were alerted to a shooting in a parking garage at Selma Lagerlöfs torg. [...] We have a patrol on site there quite immediately and in this parking garage they find a man with a gunshot wound, says Jens Andersson, spokesperson at the police in region West. He comes and parks, and then they stand and wait for him. When he then goes out of the parking garage, he is shot and hit by at least two shots, says police Thomas Fuxborg (Mathilda Alveflo, 2024).

A shooting has taken place in a parking lot in central Partille, east of Gothenburg. Witnesses heard shots outside and saw a black car with an unknown number of people in it leave the scene. [...] “Somehow there has been a confrontation,” says Thomas Fuxborg, police spokesperson. - “We find a bullet hole, but it's in another parked car belonging to the public that has nothing to do with this. So that car is hit by a bullet. So we can conclude that there has been a shooting at the scene (Fernholm, 2024).

The difference between the symbolic creation of a shopping centre and a parking garage being so wildly different is however not that surprising. Comparing the purposes the two public realms they present vast differences between each other, whilst a shopping centre might induce positive recollections of meetings with friends, images of families strolling around and a sound wall of voices and cash registers being used, parking garages do not hold similar associations. Parking garages serves a more utilitarian purpose, where you arrive, park your car and then leave. Moreover, as they are not used as spaces where people are supposed to meet and hang out, they are also stripped of features that would welcome its visitors, presenting a darker and unwelcoming image. Representations in popular media often portray garages as being meeting places for criminals in dark Nordic dramas, whereas shopping centres are usually portrayed as being meeting spaces for friends in high school movies. When violence occurs in these settings, the symbolic representation is already set, results in more composed framings, as it does not

necessarily break the expectations as spaces that are more socially loaded with emotional memories such as shopping centres.

As Lofland (2009) suggests, all public realms do not carry the same amount of normative expectation, some spaces are already plagued with a clear lack of order. As shown above, the article presents the deadly shooting in a formative and ordered way. There is no indication of chaos or a disruption of order. In the quote following, the same approach is taken, where the facts are not loaded with any emotional triggers or warrants. Spaces such as parking garages might allow for a form a contained disruption of order, as these events do not shift the public perception drastically. Furthermore, they might function as “dirty” public spaces that coincide with more emotionally loaded spaces that in turn creates contrast between them. Through the framework of Douglas these realms may already be symbolically viewed as spaces that lack the same amount of social order and social attributes such as shopping centres (Douglas, 2002). The shootings are then aligning more with the already imagined perception of such environments – as they are usually unsupervised and therefore allows the possibility of illicit activities (Douglas, 2002).

This absence of any emotional or moral observations in the articles may indeed point to a spatial symbolic hierarchy. Where shootings that takes place in shopping centres are seen as a destabilisation of the public realm, shootings in parking garages are instead attributed to narrative of commonplace, or even routine criminality – albeit an extreme version of that. All spaces are not subjected to the same symbolic framework, leading to an uneven distribution of pollution in the public realm. Garland’s discussions on “criminology of the other” could be applied in a more targeted way, where some public realms bring a higher level of risk attributed to them, in a way legitimating the lack of moral assaults as these types of events are more or less excepted (Garland, 2001). This symbolic hierarchy is even more present when no one witnessed the shooting:

The indications are that there was a shooting, but it is not fully established. Our working hypothesis is that it must have occurred during the night, says Hans-Jörgen Ostler and adds that they have not received any calls about blasts during the night (Divinyi, 2024).

The police who were alerted to the cartridge finds in central Gothenburg soon found bullet holes. This leads to the suspicion that a shooting took place during the night (Divinyi, 2024).

A shooting in the central parts of the inner city would probably, under different conditions result in a higher concern from the public and as a result a greater reaction from the media. However, the fact that this shooting went “under the radar” for everyone, including the police until it was discovered the following day, suggests a lack of witnesses or victims and in turn no meaningful impact on the public. The lack of visibility lends itself for a more muted response, missing the input from witnesses that narrate their experienced fear or moral dilemma, the incident then is not loaded with symbolic disorder. As a result, leaving the symbolic representation of the public realm largely unharmed in the grand scheme of things.

This indicates that the symbolic representation is not only reliant on where it happens, but also how it is perceived and by extension how it is performed. As important inputs are missing, such as witness remarks that adds meaning and impact to the event, a victim as well as police presence. This then results in a muted response which lacks moral question that Lofland argues is needed when realms are attacked (Lofland, 2009). Moreover, it aligns well with Garland discussions on how fear of crime is sold and marketed through media representations, *the exceptional* that could be formed when describing an event is nowhere to found by the fact that no one saw it happen (Garland, 2001). Lastly, as discussed in earlier sections, Douglas’ notion of “dirt” is only matter out of place and therefore can only be attributed to space if it violates a cultural belief, when pieces then are missing, the meaning is not recognised and in turn not placed and, in a sense, thrown out (Douglas, 2002). Indeed, it is how violence is framed through moral dualities that in turn stands to attack the public realm, when important cornerstones such as witness remarks, the exceptional or when events do not stretch the preconceived notion of what is allowed in a specific realm, the symbolic representation turns a blind eye.

6. Conclusion

This thesis set out to research how news articles symbolically add to the representation on events surrounding shootings in relation to public- and parochial realms, with a focus on the meaning of how the space itself informs how the media will represent it, how moral narratives add meaningful context, and the performance of order. Using a theoretical framework based on

Douglas, Lofland, Sennett and Garland, the analysis shows how violence is not portrayed as being disruptive of all spaces, but that they are symbolically loaded through existing spatial hierarchies and moral expectations.

The findings suggest that based on where the shooting takes place, its meaning also shifts depending if it occurs in a parochial or public realm, i.e. shootings carry different symbolic weight depending on *where* they happen. Furthermore, there is also a difference between shootings that occur within the public and parochial realms. In affluent parochial realms, the shootings are described as unusual or shocking, the articles reinforce this by connecting the events as external ruptures, and not as something reflecting the spaces itself. In a sense, symbolically representing the spaces as orderly and morally sound. This aligns well with how Douglas describes matter out of place, and through categorising it as something that momentarily disrupts the social order, it does not leave a mark on the symbolic representation.

However, shootings that occur in parochial realms that are already categorised as being vulnerable, are instead represented as realms where violence is normalised and where the social order is already lost – alluding to them being inherently polluted, and shootings only reaffirms this notion. This aligns well with Sandberg's (2020) research on how parts of Malmö were deemed as being in *fear*, and only affecting the people who lived there. Moreover, the media representation added symbolic risks to these realms, as Sandstig (2010) shows, spaces that are represented as being disorderly also heightens the perceived insecurity to that space.

This creates a symbolic narrative where, in affluent parochial realms, the neighbourhood is depicted as the victim of an unusual or shocking disturbance, with the police validating the communities' concern and restoring order. In contrast, vulnerable classed neighbourhoods are instead represented as an anomaly compared to the rest, and police presence is framed as a necessity for controlling the disorder.

The same difference can be seen between how spaces are symbolically loaded within the public realm. Public realms that are highly populated and where social order is deemed as being strong, are depicted as sanctuaries being violated when violence occurs. Comparing it to the response in highly ordered parochial realms where this disorder is affiliated to coming from outside its borders, this cannot be seen in the representation of the public realm. Instead, the media representation leans heavily on moral assaults that convey loss of order. When violence

transpires in low-populated public realms where crimes are excepted at a higher level, the media represents it as something excepted and the moral qualms are missing. Following how media represents vulnerable parochial realms. In effect symbolically representing them as inherently risky. Interestingly, shootings that lack witnesses or victims renders in no apparent effect on the space. Indicating that an impact on society is needed for it to be viewed as pollution. This is supported through the process of signification brought up by Hall et. al., where media constructs the consensus of society, and if no one was deemed as being exposed, it also falls short of being significant to the larger population (2013).

Furthermore, police presence holds different symbolic meaning depending on what realm they are in. Following previous research, police presence in affluent parochial realms are all but invincible and not attributed to them in anyway (Campos-Manzo et al., 2020). Through the media's representation, police presence is shown to be low – this in turn strengthens the realm and shows that it is capable to uphold the social order within their own borders. However, in parochial realms that are ascribed as being vulnerable, their presence is instead deemed as being something necessary to uphold social order. Again, this also follows previous research that neighbourhoods that are seen as disorderly also tend to justify or normalise a stronger police presence as a necessity (Metcalf & Bolaji, 2024). Moreover, as Garland argues, areas that are deemed as being more risky are in turn risk managed at a higher level (2001). Following the dynamic of media's symbolic representation between the public and parochial realms, the representation of police presence and their necessity are shown to be different. When social order is disrupted within the public realm, police are represented as being the ones who represent order and reassurance. Such as the case in vulnerable parochial realms and not as something that adds to the pollution, such as in more affluent parochial realms. Where police presence is represented only being affiliated to the shooting itself, rather than being symbolically attached to the realm.

Moreover, as the previous literature clearly shows, the way media reports also have effects on public opinion and how readers in turn interpret fear of crime (Amores et al., 2020; Sandberg, 2020; Williams & Dickinson, 1993). However, more importantly representing spaces as inherently disordered may in fact create more fear than the crimes themselves as Kohm (2009) and Guldåker et. al. (2024) notes. The articles representing these spaces in a negative and disorderly manner may then create polarisation and societal gaps, where the blame is put on the residents – because how can they keep allowing this to happen? It pollutes all of us! – and

where the lack of social order is the end all be all when portraying neighbourhoods. Media then plays a pivotal role in how we, as a society, interpret social truths.

Lastly, police presence and the shooting are both needed when understanding how the event affects a realm. Without the context of both, the event cannot be fully interpreted. Shootings that occur out of thin air, and that could be argued as being more gruesome and horrifying can be passed off as an unfortunate event if the police presence has not gone up. Whereas shootings that are less dramatic and damaging to its population can be understood as adding pollution to the realm if police presence instead has gone up. As both explain and give meaning to each other. If dirt is not a matter out of place as Douglas puts it, then it should be understood as such.

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