

Reconstituting Social Order through Mentally-Disturbed-Persons-Problems

Making Sense of Shocking Physical Violence



Master Thesis: Engaging Public Issues

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Abstract

On 2023, September 28, normalcy in the Netherlands and the city of Rotterdam was ruptured through an incident of shocking physical violence. Different actors featured in media coverage highlighted and left out various aspects of the events. In this thesis, the sensemaking process after a shocking incident of physical violence is researched. First, existing literature on constructivism, media narratives, postmodern disability studies, and stigma theory is outlined. Thereafter, a narrative analysis is performed on the media narratives published after the events. The results indicate that actors featured in media coverage of the events put multiple political issues at stake, including mentally-disturbed-persons-problems through a complex narrated sensemaking process. Besides, mentally-disturbed-persons-problems is brought into the discussion to socially reconstitute a sense of a normal social order. This thesis contributes to the academic field of sociology by adding stigma theory to the analysis of a sensemaking process after a shocking incident of physical violence.

Keywords: mentally-disturbed-persons-problems, narrative analysis, normalcy, shocking physical violence, stigma theory

Introduction

“Fouad L., the suspect of the Rotterdam shootings, sometimes demonstrated worrying behavior. It is unclear whether he received accurate help for this. The police spend much time on reports about people with mentally disturbed behavior, even though that is not precisely their job” (van der Plicht, 2023).

On 2023, September 28, the Netherlands and the city of Rotterdam were shocked by a shooting and fires at a house and at the Erasmus Medical Center in Rotterdam. As the emergency services tried their best finding the suspect, everyone waited anxiously following the latest news live from Rotterdam. The following hours, days, and weeks, more information appeared on the shockingly violent incident. Violent events are experienced as shocking by a public when victims are killed or injured quickly in single incidents and when the social location of the events contribute to the amount of shock that is experienced (Hoore, 2003, p. 10). The Erasmus Medical Center is a caregiving and educational institution. Physical violence within caregiving institutions is experienced as shocking, as the purpose of these institutions is to provide care for vulnerable people (Rossiter, & Rinaldi, 2018, p. 1). Violent events in educational institutions are experienced as shocking because an educational institution is considered a community that is presumed to be protective and safe (Hoore, 2003, p. 10). A shocking incident of physical violence is likely to grab both the public imagination and the media focus (Rossiter, & Rinaldi, 2018, p. 2). Therefore, people engaged in knowledge production and sensemaking about what precisely happened and how the shocking physical violence could have happened in Rotterdam.

This sensemaking process is, according to the constructivist ontology, an ongoing social process of meaning construction in which people interpret events and create meanings to make sense of their environment after the rupture of existing meaning. Quickly after the events of September 28, actors featured in media coverage of the events paid attention to the mental condition of perpetrator Fouad L.. Following assumptions from constructivism, postmodern disability studies and stigma theory, discussing his mental condition is part of a sensemaking process of the events. Stigma theory as part of postmodern disability studies argues that mental conditions are social constructs of identities that are not only perceived as different, but also as *deviant* or at times even *dangerous* opposed to a socially constructed idea about being ‘normal’. Thus, actors featured in media coverage are not only making sense of what happened, but also of how normalcy is socially constructed and how a normal social order can be socially reconstituted after an incident of shocking physical violence.

Engaging in sensemaking processes around the events through the mental condition of Fouad L., contributes to the stigmatization of mental conditions into threats to the public order. This stigmatization of mental conditions can result in negative stereotypes around mental health. This effect concerns me, as I am personally engaged with mental conditions. My grandmother has struggled with borderline her entire life before she took her own life in 2011. I remember my grandmother as outgoing, loving, and beautiful. When I read about how people with mental conditions are a threat to the public order, it feels unjust to the remembrance of my grandmother.

The aim of using stigma theory as part of postmodern disability studies in the analysis of the shocking physically violent incident of 2023, September 28, was to research to what extent stigma theory can help to understand how people made sense of the shocking physical violence. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to make visible how constructions of normalcy in a person and in society are reaffirmed through relating mental conditions to shocking physical violence. It demonstrates how mentally-disturbed-persons-problems is brought into discussion in a sensemaking process to create narratives of how normalcy in the social order can be regained. The logic of selection for the people that I researched, follows from an initial exercise of looking into personas in media representations attached to the events. I will elaborate more on this in part II of this thesis. For this thesis, I attempted to find an answer to the research question: “How do actors featured in media coverage make sense of normalcy after a shocking incident of physical violence?”.

This thesis contributes to the academic field of sociology by adding stigma theory to the analysis of sensemaking processes after an incident of shocking physical violence. It can give insights into the sensemaking processes of what happened in Rotterdam on 2023, September 28. Moreover, it can give insights into stigma theory outlining how mentally-disturbed-persons-problems is brought into the discussion to make conclusions about how normalcy in the social order can be regained.

In part I of this thesis, I will outline my theoretical framework and expectations. In part II, I will discuss my research design and how this helped me answering the research question. in part III, I will discuss the results and analysis of the narrative analysis performed on my collected materials. I will conclude this thesis with a conclusion, in which I will give an overview of my research and briefly discuss some implications.

Part I. Theoretical framework

In this part, I will outline different theories that helped me answering the research question “How do actors featured in media coverage make sense of normalcy after a shocking incident of physical violence?”. As outlined in the introduction, I expected to find most sensemaking processes through a focus on concerns around the mental condition of Fouad L., following constructivist, postmodern disability studies, and stigma theory assumptions of sensemaking processes. Furthermore, in my initial search for actors featured in media coverage, I encountered possible other sensemaking processes through concerns around the migration background of Fouad L. and concerns around his right-winged extremist worldviews. I will also outline in this part how ethnoracial differences and political extremism relate to postmodern disability studies and stigma theory.

1.1. Constructivism and sensemaking processes

To answer my research question, I used a constructivist perspective. Constructivism can outline how social constructs exist and how meanings are constructed through the lens of an individual their experiences interacting with others resulting in many varied and complex views (Creswell, & Creswell, 2023, p. 42; Gioia, 2021, p. 42). Ontology according to constructivists, exists of the assumption that we understand the world through our understandings of social constructs (Guba, & Lincoln, 1998, p. 208; Lee, 2012, p. 407). People create systems of meaning through meanings and senses in which we inhabit a constructed reality (Creswell, & Creswell, 2023, p. 42; Gioia, 2021, p. 22). Different constructivist theories outline how we give meaning and make sense of reality. The constructivist epistemology is interpretive knowledge consisting of shared ideas, understandings, and practices to find understandings of the world we live in (Schwandt, 1998, p. 240).

An example of a constructivist meaning making process is sensemaking. Sensemaking is the ongoing social process of meaning construction in which people interpret events and issues by engaging in talk, discourse and conversation to make sense of their environment after the rupture of existing meanings (Cornelissen, 2012, p. 118; Dwyer, Hardy, & Tsoukas, 2023, p. 422; Weick, 1995, p. 41). Sensemaking processes are processes in which we enact our environments through social construction and committed interpretation to increase social order (Weick, 2001, p. 15). Incidents of shocking physical violence imply extreme contexts and a rupture of existing meanings in which confusion and ambiguity exists and in which the social order is breached (Brown, 2004, p. 99; Maitlis, & Christianson, 2014, p. 92). Incidents are typically followed by a public inquiry that attempts to hold perpetrators accountable for their

actions and that gives recommendations for preventing future incidents, which in return implies further sensemaking. Such public inquiries are public acts aimed at understanding underlying mechanisms of an incident and sensemaking processes that play an important part in creating narratives around past events and the future (Brown, 2004, p. 99; Dwyer et al., 2023, pp. 421-422; Fraher, 2021, p. 487; Yanow, & Tsoukas, 2009, p. 1352). Yet, a sensemaking process after an incident remains complex and confusing (Dwyer, Hardy, & Maguire, 2021, p. 640). This specifically implies for my research that the sensemaking processes after the shocking physical violence of 2023, September 28 in Rotterdam is a complex social process of meaning constructions sensitive to context. Using constructivist theory allowed me to gain in-depth understanding of the sensemaking processes. However, actors featured in media coverage of an incident have a specific significant role in creating the narratives of such incidents, which I will discuss in the following paragraph.

1.2. Media narratives of incidents

Constructivist assumptions of an incident imply that the narration around an incident is crucial to its existence as an incident (Wagner-Pacifici, 2010, pp. 1356-1357). Media are no objective windows to the world, yet they are “subtly bending and distorting the view of the world its projects” (Jewkes, 2004, p. 37). Media narratives are “located in the cultural activities it gives rise to, rather than in what it is in itself” (Rigney, 2008, p. 349). Actors featured in media coverage of an event shape the events as incidents through narrated constructions in media productions, which have the power to change the reality of events and to shape reality and identities related to the events (Hardy, 1997, p. 60; Neumann, & Zierold, 2010, p. 104; Nünning, 2010, p. 191). Therefore, a media event is “not understood as something given or natural, but rather as something made or constructed” (Nünning, 2010, p. 196). Sensemaking and existence of incidents as events occurs through narrations of events by the media that represent or embody cultural knowledge (Koselleck, 2002, p. 25; Neumann, & Zierold, 2010, p. 103; Wagner-Pacifici, 2010, p. 1366). Through these cultural knowledges, particular aspects, ideas, motives, and stereotypes are interrelatedly re-narrated (Neumann, & Zierold, 2010, p. 106).

Media events are occurrences with a high relevance and importance, thereby being singled out from a continuous flow of occurrences. Constructing an event as a media event implies selection, abstraction, and distinction by actors featured in media coverage (Nünning, 2010, p. 197). What is regarded as substantial is highlighted, while irrelevant elements are not present in media coverage, implying cultural hierarchies of norms and values with assigned meanings (Erll, Grabes, & Nünning, 2008, pp. 12-14; Goodman, 1992, pp. 10-12). The

publicness of violence implies the tendency in news reporting to frame it as part of something bigger, rather than isolated incidents (Monckton Smith, 2012, p. 63). Thus, actors featured in the media have a power to transform events into political issues at stake reflecting different social needs, values, and interests (Neumann, & Zierold, 2010, p. 115). Moreover, media coverage on violent incidents is argued to demonize particular groups in society and to create fear and alarm in response to crime issues, implying that narratives in news media can shape political agenda setting and responses to violent incidents (Cohen, 2002, xvii).

Occurrences become relevant events when they violate norms and routines of everyday experience, implying the breakdown of normalcy and a change of normal conditions (Nünning, 2010, p. 198; Schmid, 2010, p. 20). Events result from a deviation from normalcy, through a breakdown of norms, implying that events exist on the break with expectations of people (Bruner, 1991, pp. 15-16). Besides, actors featured in media coverage of an event can assign different meanings to the 'same event' because of a different actor or perspective (Nünning, 2010, p. 202). Thus, media narratives cannot be neutral nor free from ideological and political implications (White, 1973, p. 7). This implies for my research that it was likely that there were multiple assigned meanings to the events, in return implying different narratives. Besides, the existence of media events relies on the breakdown of normalcy, implying political issues put at stake reflecting different social needs, values, and interests.

1.3. Postmodern disability studies

To gain in-depth understanding of the sensemaking process around the events of 2023, September 28, I applied assumptions of postmodern disability studies, as a subfield of constructivism. Disability studies argues that disabilities are a social construct or a social relationship of bodies and identities, comparable to race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality, rather than a biological condition (Garland-Thomson, 2017, p. 5; Mawyer, 2005, p. 62). A disability, according to disability studies, does not refer "to a human being's capacity to perform certain tasks or adopt certain behaviors, but rather to an individual's location within a social system" (Mawyer, 2005, p. 64). This implies that according to disability studies, the mental condition of Fouad L. is a social construct in relation to other social constructs, rather than a biological condition. When looking from this perspective to the ethnoracial differences and political extremism, it implies that they are also social constructs that get their meaning in relation to other social constructs. Ethnoracial differences or political extremism do not just exist 'out there' but are determined to an individual their location within a social system.

Disability studies has three main goals. The first goal is to retract the binary distinction between able and disable (Linton, 1998, pp. 120-121). The second goal is to articulate a comprehensive understanding of disability aiming at increasing the integration of disabled individuals in society, challenge oppressive constructs, and deepen understanding of disability as a social phenomenon (Linton, 1998, pp. 121-125). The third goal is to interrogate from a postmodern perspective and deconstruct meaning-making processes that take place in metaphysic and symbolic uses of disability to subvert the power of these meaning-making processes (Linton, 1998, p. 125). This postmodern notion of disability studies implies that it emphasizes the role of language, symbols, and discourses in constructing social reality and influencing power dynamics. Moreover, it recognizes the social construction of knowledge and the influence of power, language, and culture on our understanding of reality (Garland-Thomson, 2017, pp. 5-6). Following postmodern disability studies assumptions, the social construct of a disability, both physical and mental, is the product of a socially constructed discourse about how a disability is the negative concept opposing an able-bodied and culturally privileged ideal or 'normal' (Garland-Thomson, 2017, p. 6; Mawyer, 2005, p. 65). This able-bodied ideal is socially constructed through narratives (Garland-Thomson, 2017, p. 6). This implied for my research that a mental condition, according to postmodern disability studies, is a social construct constructed through narratives opposed to a social construct of being mentally 'normal'. Applying the assumptions of postmodern disability studies to ethnoracial differences and political extremism, implied that they are also social constructs that exist as opposed to constructs of being ethnically 'normal' and politically 'normal'. They are the products of powerful narratives constructing social reality. I have treated the migration background, right-winged-extremism, and other individual characteristics of Fouad L. that I encountered in the analysis as social constructs, rather than given factual characteristics.

1.4. Stigma theory

Stigma theory as part of disability studies argues that a disability is not only perceived as *different* through interactive social processes, but also as *deviant* (Garland-Thomson, 2017, p. 31). The stigma and oppression against mental deviance is also known as 'mentalism' or 'sanism' (Chamberlin, 1977, p. 219; Perlin, 2000, p. 21). Mentally disturbed behavior was officially categorized as *deviant behavior* in 2015 by previous Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport Edith Schippers, claiming to be caused by one or more mental conditions or life issues, such as a divorce or unemployment (Schippers, 2015, pp. 1-2). This official categorization of mentally disturbed behavior as deviant behavior, resulted in a new police registration system of

mentally disturbed behavior. Since 2015, people with mentally disturbed behavior causing nuisance are registered under so-called E33-notices by the police (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). This new police registration system has led to a socially constructed idea of a political issue in the Netherlands, officially named “*mentally-disturbed-persons-problems*” (Roex, 2019, p. 117). Through this mentally-disturbed-persons-problems, the behavior of people with a mental condition is conceptualized as deviant ‘mentally disturbed person’ behavior. Moreover, this deviant behavior is then categorized as nuisance and dangerous behavior (Roex, 2019, p. 33). The enforcement and monitoring of this deviant behavior is targeted at marginalized groups, amongst people with a long-economic status and people familiar with a mental healthcare point of contact (Koekkoek, 2017, p. 6; Wacquant, 2009, p. 294). There exists a danger stigma, in which people with a mental condition are perceived as deviant from ‘normal’ people considering the chances that their behavior will become a danger to society (Roex, 2019, p. 25). This specifically implied for my research that a mental condition is not merely constructed as different, but also as *deviant* opposed to a constructed normalcy of a person and a constructed normalcy in society, and that there exists a danger stigma through interactive sensemaking processes. Applying the assumptions of stigma theory to ethnoracial differences and political extremism, implied that a migration background and a right-winged extremist worldview are also not merely constructed as different, but also as deviant through interactive sensemaking processes.

Part II. Research design

In this part, I will outline my research strategy, methodology and materials and how these helped me understanding the sensemaking processes of normalcy after the shocking physical violence of 2023, September 28. I will outline how my research design helped me answering my research question “How do actors featured in media coverage make sense of normalcy after a shocking incident of physical violence?”.

2.1. Single case study

Following the constructivist epistemology, a single case study can outline in-depth knowledge and understandings of an event and the sensemaking processes (Creswell, & Creswell, 2023, p. 47; Gioia, 2021, p. 22; Swanborn, 2010, p. 3). Besides, a single case study is sensitive to context and hence, it allowed me to think from the middle of the case with a high number of actors and distinct types of sources (Swanborn, 2010, p. 16). From here, an in-depth analysis of how people make sense of shocking incidents of physical violence can be reviewed (Dwyer, et al., 2021, p. 641). The case that I have chosen is the shootings and fires of 2023, September 28 in Rotterdam. As outlined in the introduction, the shocking physical violence that occurred that day was hot topic in the following days and weeks and discussed broadly by different people featured in media coverage. This allowed me to gain in-depth understanding of the specific context and unique case of the shocking violence that occurred on 2023, September 28 in Rotterdam (Creswell, & Creswell, 2023, p. 46).

2.2. Narrative analysis

To answer my research question, I have performed a narrative analysis. According to the constructivist ontology, a narrative is the result of a sensemaking process of events and objects in relation to each other. Sensemaking processes exist through narratives and collective narratives create shared meanings around events. Narratives can shape the understandings of an event or threat and frame it in opposition to a dominant group (Cunliffe, Coupland, Colville, Pye, & Brown, 2012, p. 66). A narrative analysis is a method that aims to obtain knowledge about social life and the narratives used to shape social reality. Besides, a narrative analysis can outline how humans make sense of the world through narratives by the shaping of discourses and the sensemaking processes of events (Forchtner, 2021, p. 304; Pouliot, 2007, pp. 360-365; Puckett, 2016, pp. 2-4; Reichelmann, 2021, p. 538). Performing a narrative analysis on my collected materials, will enable me to find sensemaking processes of the events of 2023,

September 28 using stigma theory assumptions about how mental conditions are framed as deviances.

2.3. Materials

There are many people involved in sensemaking processes after shocking incidents of physical violence. Researching a single case study allowed me to look into different actors involved in the case. The initial actors that I have begun analyzing were mental healthcare workers, national and regional police workers, the Public Prosecution Service officials, animal police workers, journalists, municipality of Rotterdam officials, mayor of Rotterdam Achmed Aboutaleb, Erasmus University Rotterdam officials, Erasmus Medical Center officials, Safety Alliance Rotterdam officials, demissionary Prime Minister Mark Rutte, demissionary Minister of Justice and Security Dilan Yeşilgöz-Zegerius, demissionary Minister of Education, Culture and Science Ernst Kuipers, demissionary Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations Hugo de Jonge, and other Dutch politicians. The logic of selection for these actors followed from an initial exercise of looking into personas in media coverage about the events. However, I expected to encounter more actors during the actual performance of the narrative analysis. The choice to limit my materials to Dutch materials, was a pragmatic choice considering time limitations. Moreover, I expected that the most important and in-depth sensemaking processes could be found by limiting this research to Dutch materials. I have collected materials through various sources and infrastructures, such as newspapers, digital news publications, speeches, and official statements.

My materials consisted of the transcript of the national press conference of 2023, September 28 and 318 newspaper articles, columns, interviews, and statements. I collected the articles, columns, interviews, and statements through the ten most-read online news platforms, the regional news platform in Rotterdam, the Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Erasmus Medical Center, the most-read medical news platform, the police, the municipality of Rotterdam and the public prosecution service. I used the search engines on their websites to find all materials related to Fouad L., Marlous and Romy, Jurgen Damen, the events at the Erasmus Medical Center and the events at the Heiman Dullaertplein by searching for: Fouad L., Rotterdam, shooting incident, shooting drama, violent incident, arson, Erasmus Medical Center, Heiman Dullaertplein, Marlous and Romy, and Jurgen Damen. It turned out that after searching for three different terms, I usually was able to collect all materials. Yet, I extended my search by using all terms to ensure that I collected all materials. I transcribed the press conference that I found on YouTube.

2.4. Narrative elements

I will analyze all material on the incident from 2023, September 28 until 2024, March 28, because the most important materials about the sensemaking processes will be found in the first six months after the events. The decision to focus on multiple months, rather than only the period when the events were hot topic, is based on the notion that sensemaking varies over time because of different emotions that affect post-incident sensemaking differently (Dwyer, et al., 2023, p. 422). In my actual analysis, I have manually coded these narrative elements in ATLAS.ti using both deductive coding based on my theoretical framework and inductive coding based on new concepts that I encountered. I have found eight narrative elements for sensemaking processes through the stigmatization of mental conditions that I turned into interpretive codes related to stigma theory. I have used ATLAS.ti to help me find patterns and interrelations that I could overlook during the analysis. Moreover, ATLAS.ti eased the process of coding, specifically with multiple codes in one material. The narrative elements helped me to make sense of the materials. Eventually, I used fifty-two codes to unpack my materials. To ensure consistency when coding, I created a codebook, which I added in Appendix B of this thesis.

2.4.1 Narrative elements related to individual characteristics

The first three narrative elements are related to individual characteristics of a person. The first is a reference to one or more mental conditions of a person. The second narrative element is a reference to substance use of a person. Mentally disturbed behavior is commonly understood by both the public and professionals as the result of problematic substance use, a mental condition, or a combination of those (Koekkoek, 2017, p. 2; Van der Post, Zoeteman, Van Luik, Van Oudenaren, & Dekker, 2021, p. 858). The third narrative element is a reference to one or more private troubles of a person, such as a divorce or unemployment. According to a national research rapport, these private troubles are likely to result in frustration, combined with social problems, which in return results in stress and traumas (Muller, Bron, De Hoog, & Van der Varst, 2010, p. 11). People dealing with such private troubles are constructed into being likely to become a threat after a personal socioeconomic disadvantage combined with stress taking the upper hand (Muller, et al., 2010, p. 11). Roex (2019) discusses that this description of private troubles and how people manage their private troubles implies that people dealing with private troubles, are turned into fear caricatures capable of mentally disturbed behavior (Roex, 2019, p. 110). These three narrative elements are in line with the assumption from stigma theory that mental conditions are stigmatized into negative deviances opposed to a constructed mental

normalcy of a person. Therefore, looking into these narrative elements enabled me to research to what extent stigma theory can help to understand how the shocking physical violence of 2023, September 28 was made sense of through a stigma around mental conditions and how it relates to normalcy.

2.4.2. Narrative elements related to contexts

The fourth and fifth narrative elements are related to contexts around events in media coverage. The fourth narrative element is a reference to previous incidents with the same person, implying previous incidents of physical violence with Fouad L.. Roex (2019) discusses how the E33-notice regulation has led to collective fear within the authorities responsible for public safety. This collective fear results in exaggerated responses to persons that are known for 'deviant' behavior (Roex, 2019, pp. 112-113). Koekkoek (2017) indicates that 60 percent of the persons that get an E33-notice appear more than once, precisely because of earlier notices and the locating of mentally disturbed persons (Koekkoek, 2017, p. 4). The second narrative element is a reference to previous incidents with other mentally disturbed persons. Koekkoek (2017) and Roex (2019) discuss how shocking incidents are often linked to other E33-notices and other persons in media discussions. This link constructs an idea that there are many mentally disturbed people in the Netherlands capable of committing an act of violence, which in return results in social unrest around violent incidents (Koekkoek, 2017, p. 4; Roex, 2019, p. 112; Van der Post et al., 2021, p. 854). The fourth and fifth narrative elements are pulling narratives out of discussing a single incident and put the incident into larger contexts. These narrative elements are in line with the assumption from stigma theory there exists a danger stigma around mental deviancy, as single incidents are narrated as part of larger contexts. Therefore, looking into these narrative elements enabled me to research to what extent stigma theory can help to understand how the shocking physical violence of 2023, September 28 was made sense of through a stigma around mental conditions and how it relates to normalcy.

2.4.3. Narrative elements related to society

The sixth, seventh, and eight narrative elements are related to society-wide discussions. The sixth narrative element is the discussion of the public order. The public order is often brought into discussion to make conclusions about mental health and mental healthcare, since incidents are repeatedly linked to earlier incidents, as discussed before. The result of this link is that debates around public order and safety are dominating the discussions of mentally disturbed behavior (Koekkoek, 2017, p. 2; Roex, 2019, p. 102). The seventh narrative element is the discussion of the actual problems within the mental healthcare system. These problems are also

often brought into discussion to make conclusions about mental health and mental healthcare. It is not dominating the discussions, yet the public in the Netherlands commonly indicate that there is a need for a better functioning mental healthcare system to solve the problems of mentally-disturbed-persons-problems (Koekkoek, 2017, p. 2; Roex, 2019, p. 120). The eight narrative element is the discussion of the actual problems within the police registration system. These problems are also often brought into discussion to make conclusions about mental health and mental healthcare. Koekkoek (2017) argues that the police registration system is unprecise and there is too little cooperation between the police and other institutions, such as the mental healthcare or governmental institutions (Koekkoek, 2017, p. 8). The lack of cooperation implies that people cannot get the right help and that they are criminalized (Van der Post et al., 2021, p. 855). The sixth, seventh and eight narrative elements are in line with the assumption from stigma theory that mental conditions are stigmatized into negative deviances opposed to a constructed normalcy in society. Moreover, they imply that there exist certain problems that need to be solved to restore normalcy in society. Here, it is not just about deviating from normalcy anymore, but also about regaining normalcy after a shocking incident of physical violence. Looking into these narrative elements enabled me to research to what extent stigma theory can help to understand how the shocking physical violence of 2023, September 28 was made sense of through a stigma around mental conditions, how it relates to normalcy, and how normalcy can be regained.

Figure 1.

Systematic representation of narrative elements related to stigma theory

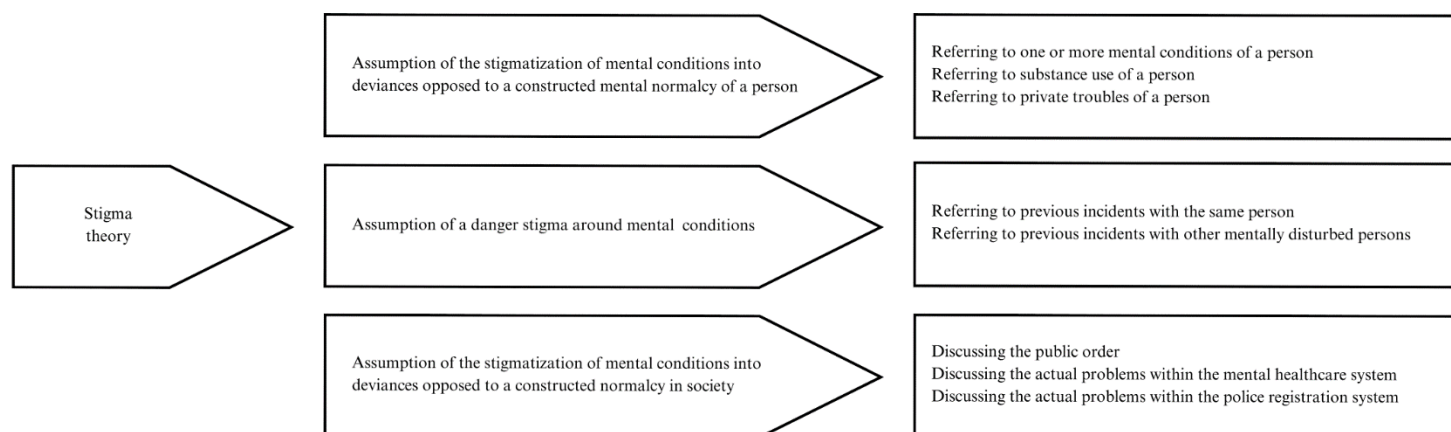


Figure 1 shows a systematic representation of the narrative elements structure related to stigma theory. It outlines the theoretical assumptions, which lead to the narrative elements. As outlined before, I started by applying deductive and inductive codes. Then, I created code categories to create a mapped overview of the full complexity of my findings (Gioia, 2021, p. 24). Thereafter, I used axial coding to find connections between code categories to find patterns, similarities, and differences (Strauss, & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). The theoretical assumptions are underpinning the aggregate dimension of stigma theory, following the approach to concept development and coding by Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2012). Such systemic representation both configures the research design in a visual aid and represents how theory is related to elements and codes in the actual analysis (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 20). The code categories and axial coding can be found in Appendix C.

I have analyzed my materials by researching if one or more of these narrative elements are visible in a material. Lastly, I have further researched the materials for other narrative elements and attempted to outline what other sensemaking processes are found, since I expected to encounter other sensemaking processes, such as the migration background and right-winged extremist worldviews of Fouad L., as discussed in the theoretical framework.

Part III. Results and analysis

The aim of this thesis is to answer the research question “How do actors featured in media coverage make sense of normalcy after a shocking incident of physical violence”? In the following paragraphs, I will unpack my materials in a few steps to make the argument that the sensemaking process after 2023, September 28 was a complex process with multiple things going on. There were two main events characterized by one being private violence, and the other being shocking public violence. This public violence is the focus point for the rupture of the public order. By this narrative, the actors implicitly discuss a normal public order, from which the events deviate. Different actors create different narratives of what precisely happened to make sense of the rupture of the normal public order, such as holding a perpetrator accountable, creating contextual narratives, and putting multiple political issues at stake. By relating the events to political issues, they are no longer parts of a single unique event, but merely part of bigger political tensions or problems. Moreover, relating the events to political issues is when not only the public order is breached, but also the social order. When discussing how the social order was breached, the actors featured in media coverage implicitly discuss a normal social order, from which the political issues put at stake deviate. Thus, normalcy after a shocking incident of physical violence is no longer simply understood as normalcy in the public order, but also as a normalcy in the social order. The difference between a public order and a social order is that a public order is socially constructed to be about safety and security, while the social order is socially constructed to be about beyond safety and security. It is about social structures, systems and institutions that are now threatened to be breached by this incident of shocking physical violence and therefore, it needs to be reconstituted. By putting one of those political issues at stake, which is mentally-disturbed-persons-problems, actors featured in media coverage explicitly discuss how the normal social order can be reconstituted. Mentally-disturbed-persons-problems is either conscious or unconscious brought into the discussion to not only make sense of how normalcy in the public order and normalcy in the social order were breached, but also to make sense of how normalcy in the social order can be regained after this shocking incident of physical violence.

In this part, I will first elaborate more on how precisely the normal public order was ruptured during the events of 2023, September 28. Second, I will outline the narratives about individual deviances and contextual narratives that I encountered. Thereafter, I will explain how political issues are brought into the discussion in my materials and how they rupture the normal

social order. Lastly, I will discuss how mentally-disturbed-persons-problems is put at stake and what this means for the stigmatization of mental conditions.

3.1. The rupture of the normal public order

The events of 2023, September 28 are narrated as two major events related to each other. The first major event is narrated as Marlous and Romy being killed by their neighbor in private violence after previous confrontations and a neighbor dispute, as visible in the following sentence: “Since she filed a report in 2021 ... the tension between those two was extremely high, according to several neighbors and friends” (14.1.).¹ Despite the widely discussed misery, drama and emotions that Fouad L. caused, such as a father saying “my daughter, who went to school with [Romy] is immensely sad” (16.1.), actors featured in media coverage emphasize the privateness of the violence that occurred. The narratives fit within existing meanings of socially constructed ideas of private violence and personal drama without a rupture of the normal public order. It implies that the killing of Marlous and Romy fits within the social constructs of a normal public order. Forum for Democracy leader Thierry Baudet is one of the actors featured in media coverage who argues that it was “a neighbor dispute” (16.2.). The writers suggest in this interview that the events might be political. Therefore, Thierry Baudet referring to a neighbor dispute is particularly interesting, because it emphasizes that what happened to Marlous and Romy was merely private violence, rather than violence disrupting the normal public order. Additionally, the following is said about Fouad L. killing Marlous and Romy: “Initially, the news indicated a shooting and fire in the city, which to healthcare workers may sound like an average day in Rotterdam” (2.1.). The actors featured in describing the private violence and personal problems are reporting journalists, neighbors, friends, and relatives. This is particularly interesting, since these actors pertain with discussions of seemingly factual reportages of events, or discussions of emotions and misery, rather than discussions of contexts or political issues.

The second major event is narrated as Fouad L. purposely attacking the Erasmus Medical Center, thereby killing teacher and general practitioner Jurgen Damen. This violent incident ruptures the normal public order and existing meanings. Here, the violence is not considered as a normal aspect of social life anymore, and thereby the actors play this symbolic trick in their narratives where this violence is externalized from society. As outlined in my methodology, such media events are singled out from a continuous flow of occurrences, as if it

¹ See Appendix A for the references to quoted materials in this part.

is an event outside of normal social life. The publicness of the violence is stressed in my materials, by discussing witnesses of the events in the Erasmus Medical Center. This is visible in the following quote: “The drama not only had a major impact on those directly involved with the victims, but also on students and teachers who had to flee and were terrified” (12.3.). This actor narrates about multiple victims, but only writes about witnesses of what happened at the Erasmus Medical Center. The attack by Fouad L. is considered as shocking physical violence disrupting normal public order, because “The Erasmus MC and the educational center are supposed to be a place where everyone can learn and teach in a safe environment. The fact that this was not the case yesterday, is a shock to us all” (5.2.). Actors featured in addressing this rupture are primarily actors concerned with the public order, such as the police, the public prosecution service officials, and mayor of Rotterdam Achmed Aboutaleb, and actors representing the community of the Erasmus Medical Center. The shocking aspect is described as “attacking a place where people are being treated and where future doctors are educated” (7.3.). The specific circumstances of the Erasmus Medical Center being a hospital and educational institution implies the shocking aspect disrupting normal public order by Fouad L. attacking it, as also visible in the following two quotes:

It is a place that, above all, should be safe. And this applies not only to Erasmus MC, but to all hospitals. Our security is a precious asset; we are all working hard on that. And we also trust that hospitals, schools, and public spaces are safe. This incident undermines the core of this fundamental trust (5.1.).

We are extremely sad and shocked by this indescribable act, which deeply touches the hearts of our community. Every day we work and study in a place where we are at the heart of society, want to make a positive contribution to society and must be able to feel safe at all times (4.1.).

The announcement for the press conference demonstrates why Fouad L. attacking the Erasmus Medical Center is the focus point for the rupture of normalcy in the public order. The national police stated that “Rotterdam’s authority triangle will hold a press conference at the Rotterdam City Hall at 06:45 PM following the incident at the Erasmus MC” (10.1). This statement does not contain any information about Marlous or Romy being killed by Fouad L.. Hence, Fouad L. attacking the Erasmus MC is the focus point for the rupture of the normal public order for which a press conference is necessary. This focus point for the rupture of normal public order requires, according to the actors featured in media coverages, an explanation or

motive through a public inquiry. Here the media coverages are not merely about physical violence disrupting the normal public order, but also about reconstituting the normal public order by discussing how this could have happened. Chief commissioner of the Rotterdam Regional Police Unit Fred Westerbeke mentioned in the press conference that “when something like this happens, there is always a history ... and we will find out what that history is led by the public prosecution service and we will make clear what has happened here” (6.1.). The rupture of normalcy implies a need for an explanation, a motivation, or an underlying history able to create meanings for sensemaking of what has happened and how public order can be reconstituted. The aim of this reconstitution is preventing future incidents, as outlined in my theoretical framework. Important to note here, is that the reconstitution is limited to safety and security issues, implying the reconstitution of the normal public order, rather than the normal social order.

3.2. Individual deviances

One aim of a public sensemaking process after an incident is about holding a perpetrator accountable for their actions, as outlined in my theoretical framework. It implies the creation of meanings in the construction of Fouad L. as the person capable of attacking the Erasmus Medical Center and the construction of how he deviates from normalcy in a person. By doing so, actors featured in media coverage implicitly discuss how a normal person is socially constructed. The actors featured in this process are predominantly reporting journalists. Seemingly being factual, these reporting journalists contribute to the construction of Fouad L. as a person deviating from normalcy in a person by continuously repeating deviant aspects of Fouad L.. Moreover, the deviances get their meaning through the framing of them opposed to a constructed normalcy in an individual person. The result of these narrated deviances is that it contributes to the stigma theory assumption that mental conditions are stigmatized into deviances opposed to a constructed mental normalcy of a person. More broadly, other individual aspects of Fouad L. are also stigmatized into deviances opposed to a constructed normalcy of a person. Multiple deviances of Fouad L. are narrated. First, actors featured in media coverage of the event continuously narrate about deviances of Fouad L. unrelated to his mental condition, which are his right-winged extremist worldviews, his anger towards women, his migration background, his skepticism towards vaccines, and that “he says he hates Jews, Berbers, and persons with a dark skin color” (7.1.).

Second, actors featured in media coverage also narrate about four other deviances of Fouad L. that are related to his mental condition. I have found three of these individual

deviances related to his mental condition through using the deductively created narrative elements from my methodology. The first deviance is referring to one or more mental conditions of Fouad L.. The most common narratives about his mental conditions are references to psychoses and to Asperger syndrome, as visible in the following quote: “He says he has Asperger syndrome, a form of autism” (13.1.). The second deviance is referring to substance use of Fouad L.. Narratives of substance use refer to Fouad L. himself admitting or discussing his problematic alcohol use, such as that “messages that the suspect most likely posted on the internet forum 4Chan show that he was angry at the university. He claimed that an excuse was made to send him away and that is why he turned to alcoholism” (6.2.). The third deviance is referring to private troubles of Fouad L.. Actors featured in media coverage on the events discuss multiple private troubles of Fouad L. such as that “L. was given two weeks to vacate his home on Heiman Dullaertplein and hand in the keys” (13.2.). However, the broadest discussed private trouble of Fouad L. was the doctor’s degree situation, whereby:

The Erasmus MC was informed by the Public Prosecution Service earlier this year by letter that L. had a history of animal abuse and other disturbing behavior. The hospital then decided that psychological research was necessary before L. would be eligible for his diploma as a primary doctor. He promised to cooperate, but ultimately did not (6.2.).

According to many actors featured in media coverage on the events, “the medical student vents his frustrations online about missing out on his diploma” (1.4.). People dealing with such frustration because of private troubles are constructed as a threat or a fear caricature capable of mentally disturbed behavior, as discussed in my methodology. The fourth deviance is referring to Fouad L. his aversion for normies, as visible in the following quote: “Ordinary people ('normies') do not understand him, he writes. This applies to his environment, but also to the people at the university. ‘Death to all normies,’ he writes” (9.1.). Such references emphasize the social construct that Fouad L. himself also is aware of his deviant mental condition. Besides these deviances, another important recurring element of narratives around the deviancy of the mental condition of Fouad L., is referring to the Pieter Baan Center, a mental health institution capable of reviewing the mental condition of a person. Referring to the Pieter Baan Center implies that this institution is able to objectively review whether the mental condition of Fouad L. is normal or deviant, such as visible in the following quote: “The Rotterdammer has by then completed the observation in the Pieter Baan, so that perhaps more information may become known about what motivated him” (12.1.).

By referring to individual deviances of Fouad L., actors featured in media coverage implicitly outline how a normal person is made sense of. Normalcy in a person is socially constructed as a person without right-winged extremist worldviews, anger towards women, migration backgrounds, skepticisms towards vaccines, hate for Jews, Imazighen, and Black persons, mental conditions, problematic substance use, private troubles, and aversions for normies. On the other hand, persons who deviate from this normalcy, are socially constructed as threats capable of disrupting the public order. Therefore, the normal public order is socially reconstructed in my materials without deviating persons threatening safety and security issues.

3.3. Contextual narratives

Contextual narratives are about putting the events into context. It implies outlining how the events fit into existing patterns and meanings related to historical and social contexts. The result of putting the events in these contexts of existing patterns and meanings is the danger stigma around mental conditions that Roex (2019) and Koekkoek (2017) discuss, as outlined in my methodology. It suggests the construction of collective fear towards mentally disturbed persons and the construction of an idea that there are many mentally disturbed persons in the Netherlands capable of committing an act of violence. Actors featured in media coverage of the events creating contextual narratives are to some extent also reporting journalist, but columnists are primarily putting the events into context. It is interesting that columnists are more often featured here. It implies that columnists are the actors featured in media coverage who provide more in-depth sensemaking processes by putting the shocking physical violence into context. They discuss multiple contexts and patterns around the events.

The first context in which the events are put in, is the context of social media in creating a platform and network for people with matching deviances to connect, exchange ideas, and radicalize. More specifically, the culture and community of 4chan, and images and videos of people being killed are the most common narratives about how Fouad L. radicalized on social media. One actor argues that “Fouad L. was mainly present in the widely used channel /pol/, which stands for 'politically incorrect'. It is a controversial part of the platform, where the long, political discussions are mainly read as an outlet for frustrated men” (1.3.). These narratives put Fouad L. into the social context of a larger group of deviant persons able to connect with each other and exchange ideas through social media. It suggests that the role of social media has been crucial for Fouad L. radicalizing and becoming a threat or a danger to society. The contextual narrative of social media relates to both deviances related and unrelated to the mental condition of Fouad L..

The second contextual narrative stems from references to previous incidents with Fouad L., such as the following narrative.

L. already had to answer to the police judge in 2021 for kicking a rabbit and shooting a pigeon. The judge considered only the first fact proven and sentenced the Rotterdam resident to forty hours of community service. Later the police arrested him for allegedly abusing a dog (1.5.).

References to previous incidents with Fouad L. form the most common contextual narrative related to Fouad L. attacking the Erasmus Medical Center. Moreover, individual deviances related to his mental condition were often linked to previous incidents with Fouad L., such as his substance use and private troubles. These references put the events into a historical personal context of Fouad L. repeatedly committing acts of violence.

The third contextual narrative is formed by references to previous incidents with other mentally disturbed persons, as visible in the following narrative written by a columnist:

Think of the out-of-control loners Bart van U., Tristan van der V., Michael P., and Karst T. Are there enough legitimate and effective means to protect society against the mentally disturbed individual? Fouad L. can join in straight away. An apparently out of control student who murdered three people (7.2.).

References to previous incidents with other mentally disturbed persons put the events into a socio-historical context of mentally disturbed persons in the Netherlands committing acts of violence. Through these references, there is an idea constructed that there are many mentally disturbed persons in the Netherlands capable of committing an act of violence, as discussed in my methodology. Besides, I also encountered more specific references to previous incidents with other mentally disturbed medical students, such as that “there are more students about whom teachers think: they should not become a doctor” (16.3.). Particularly interesting with the contextual narratives of previous incidents with Fouad L. and other mentally disturbed persons, is that the individual deviances unrelated to the mental condition of Fouad L. cannot be related to these contexts in my materials. For example, a group of persons deviating from normalcy through their hate for Jews, is not related to the contextual narratives of previous incidents with Fouad L. or previous incidents with other persons and their hate for Jews in my materials. By narrating these contextual narratives, actors featured in media coverage implicitly outline which contexts are socially constructed as normal public order. It implies the public order being in the absence of threatening contexts of social media where people radicalize, and

previous incidents with the same or another mentally disturbed person. Thus, the three contexts around the events of 2023, September 28 imply how it deviates from normalcy in the public order. It is still about the public order here because the contextual narratives are related to threats to safety and security, rather than threats to structures, systems, and institutions, which would imply the social order.

3.4. Political issues and the social order

As outlined in my methodology, narratives in media coverage can shape political agenda settings and demonize certain groups in society. Some actors featured in media coverage on the events implicitly or explicitly put political issues at stake. Thereby, the events are no longer part of a single unique event, but merely part of bigger political tensions or problems. One result of putting political issues at stake is the construction of the narrative that not only the normal public order was breached, but also the normal social order. Here, the larger socially constructed structures, systems, and institutions are threatened. When discussing how the social order was breached, the actors featured in media coverage implicitly discuss how a normal social order is made sense of, from which the political issues deviate. Therefore, normalcy after a shocking incident of physical violence is understood as a normal social order which needs to be reconstituted. Actors featured in media coverage of the events that put political problems at stake are primarily ‘experts’ and politicians. By putting these political issues at stake, actors in media coverage of the events transform the events into reflections of different social needs, values, and interests, as outlined in the theoretical framework. The political issues that are brought into the discussion can be divided into political issues unrelated to mental conditions on the one hand, and on the other hand mentally-disturbed-persons-problems.

The political issues unrelated to mental conditions are connected to the individual deviances unrelated to the mental condition of Fouad L., potentially yet not necessarily through the contextual narrative of social media as a platform for radicalization. Actors featured in media coverage relate the right-winged extremist worldviews and migration background of Fouad L. to national and international political tensions of right-winged extremism and globalization, present in national and international politics. This includes references to Thierry Baudet and Forum for Democracy. Forum for Democracy officials repeatedly deny any connection between Fouad L. and their political party:

When asked, the party spokesperson does not believe that FVD leader Thierry Baudet, who has repeatedly declared himself a 'conspiracy theorist', has contributed to a climate

in which people like L. can become radicalized. "This has nothing to do with our politics," he said (1.1).

Besides references to this national tension, I also encountered references to international tensions, such as the following quote:

He is a fan of countries such as Russia ('Putin is the good guy'), China ('hopefully China will become Nazi Germany, but with nuclear weapons') and Iran and he himself makes a trip that is popular today: the Roman Empire. What appeals to him about the ancient Romans is 'masculinity and imposing your will on the world, if necessary through action and violence' (12.2.).

The quote above also demonstrates how his anger towards women is related to misogyny, patriarchy, and masculinity, and how his hate towards Jews is related to antisemitism and Nazism. Furthermore, his skepticism towards vaccines is related to antivaxxers and his hate towards Imazighen and Black persons is related to racism. In other words, the narratives here are not merely about shocking physical violence breaching normal public order, but rather about these political issues breaching normal social order. The contextual narrative of social media implies a connection between the individual deviances and related political issues. For example, a group of persons deviating from normalcy through their hate for Jews, also relate to antisemitism through the contextual narrative of social media, as "4Chan is a discussion platform with little to no control over what is written (...) swear words for Jews and people of color are used, also by the suspect's account" (9.1.). By bringing these political issues into narratives, actors featured in media coverage implicitly discuss that normalcy in a social order is constructed without political tensions of right-winged extremism and globalization, and without misogyny, patriarchy, masculinity, antisemitism, Nazism, antivaxxers, and racism. However, it is not outlined in my materials *how* a normal social order which is breached by these political issues can be reconstituted.

3.5. Mentally-disturbed-persons-problems and reconstituting the social order

Mentally-disturbed-persons-problems is another political issue brought into discussions in my materials. Similar to the other discussed political problems at stake, actors featured in media coverage of the events are primarily 'experts' and politicians. Mentally-disturbed-persons-problems is particularly interesting, because of multiple reasons. First, mentally-disturbed-persons-problems requires contextual narratives based on specific narrated individual deviances

of Fouad L. in order to be put at stake. They cannot be directly related to political issues, like the deviances unrelated to the mental condition of Fouad L. can. Mentally-disturbed-persons-problems is only brought into the discussion when it is linked to the contextual narratives of previous incidents with the same or another mentally disturbed person. This implies that narratives about the individual deviances of Fouad L. related to his mental condition are crucial to the existence of mentally-disturbed-persons-problems being brought into discussion in my materials.

Second, it is particularly interesting in references to mentally-disturbed-persons-problems that actors featured in media coverage explicitly outline how social order can be reconstituted, unlike the other political problems at stake. Mentally-disturbed-persons-problems is either conscious or unconscious brought into the discussion to not only make sense of how normalcy in the public order and normalcy in the social order was breached, but also to make sense of how normalcy in the social order can be regained after this shocking incident of physical violence. The solutions to reconstitution of the social order are visible when looking into the three smaller issues that come with mentally-disturbed-persons-problems in my materials. First, the actual problems within the mental healthcare system are at stake, as visible in the following quote:

There are also more residents with psychological problems, says the psychologist. This is partly due to cuts in mental health care and higher healthcare costs. As a result, patients avoid help for fear of having to pay the deductible. This can escalate into a police report. But sometimes things go even worse. Van Dongen also regards the Erasmus MC shooter as someone with mentally disturbed behavior (1.2.).

This quote demonstrates how an expert relates the shocking physical violence to the bigger actual problems within the mental healthcare system and how this problem requires a solution. Therefore, the narratives here turn away from physical violence rupturing normal public order, into narratives about how the current functioning of the mental healthcare system is breaching the normal social order. It explicitly implies that normalcy in the social order can be regained with a better functioning mental healthcare system. Second, the actual problems within the police registration system are at stake, as visible in the following quote:

The Netherlands is full of seriously mentally disturbed people, for whom it is exceedingly difficult to assess whether they pose a danger to themselves or those around them. Police chiefs and administrators have been complaining for years about their

apparent inability to deal with confused people. Let alone that it is possible to correctly diagnose and then treat all of this group. That is why the risk that individuals like Fouad L. will eventually go crazy sooner or later can never be completely avoided (14.2.).

This quote demonstrates how an expert relates the events to the bigger actual problems within the police registration system and how these problems require a solution. The narratives here also turn away from physical violence rupturing normal public order, into narratives about how the current functioning of the police registration system is breaching the normal social order. It explicitly implies that normalcy in the social order can be regained through a better functioning police registration system. Third, the actual problems within medical studies are at stake, as visible in the following quote:

There are improvement programs for students who exhibit unprofessional behavior. However, it is almost impossible to prevent students - who do not show any improvement - from receiving their diploma. The law protects students very well. "That is very good," says Maas. "But we cannot take any steps where things are really not right" (8.1.).

Lastly, this quote demonstrates how an expert relates the events to the bigger actual problems within medical studies and how this problem requires a solution. The narratives here also turn away from physical violence rupturing normal public order, into narratives about how the current functioning of the medical studies system is breaching the normal social order. It explicitly implies that normalcy in the social order can be regained through a better functioning medical studies system. It is particularly interesting that all three solutions imply the better functioning of a societal system. This explicates how mentally-disturbed-persons-problems is not merely about a normal public order, but also about a normal social order, considering the discussions of systems, structures, and institutions. Thus, putting mentally-disturbed-persons-problems at stake directly implies the need for solutions and better functioning systems to reconstitute normalcy in the social order.

3.6. Implications for stigmatization

Narratives in which the social order can be regained through mentally-disturbed-persons-problems have several important implications. Mental conditions are framed as individual deviances threatening the normal public order and through its relation to mentally-disturbed-persons-problems threatening the normal social order. The identities of people with a mental

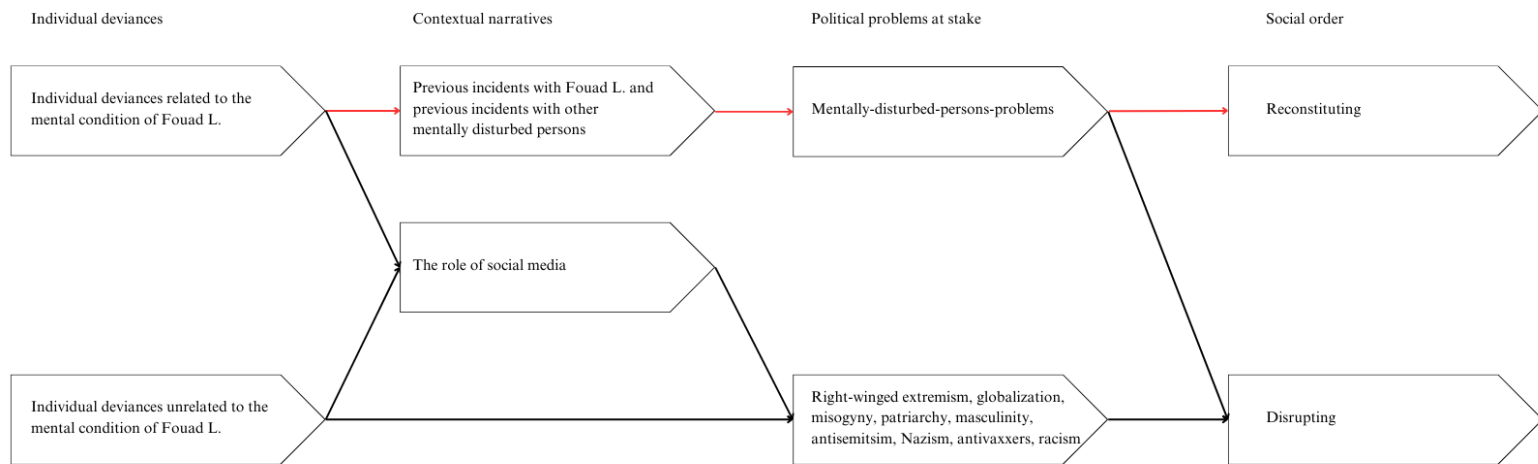
condition are shaped into socially constructed dangers and deviances. Furthermore, the problems that come with persons with mental conditions being part of society, can be solved to regain normalcy in the social order. This narrative is particularly problematic, because it suggests that this group of mentally disturbed persons can be ‘solved’ to regain normalcy in the social order. While actors featured in media coverage tend to argue that people with a mental condition are categorized as deviant and threats to social order in my materials, I would like to argue by showing how it operates in my materials that it is exceedingly dangerous to suggest that issues caused by a certain group of persons can be solved. First, it is important to recognize, in line with the constructivist ontology, that a social order is not something given ‘out there’. It is socially constructed and dependent on perspectives and interactive processes. This implies that the narratives of how normalcy in the social order can be reconstituted in my materials are also socially constructed in an attempt to find understandings of the world we live in, as part of a sensemaking process. Making it about political issues, implies the political agenda setting that happens in media narratives. The narratives about mentally-disturbed-persons-problems reflect cultural knowledges with hierarchies of norms and values with assigned meanings to it. This means that it reflects dominant ideas and political agendas in the Netherlands of how mentally-disturbed-persons-problems ruptures normalcy in the social order and how it should be solved to reconstitute the normal social order, rather than that it is something given ‘out there’.

Second, as outlined in my methodology, this narrative demonizes marginalized groups in society. This group of ‘mentally disturbed persons’ is then stigmatized into a problem. Thereby, the stigma theory assumptions that I outlined in my theoretical framework are relevant to this specific case. In sum, these assumptions were firstly the stigmatization of mental conditions into deviances opposed to a constructed mental normalcy of a person, which implies the narratives of individual deviances. Second, the assumption of a danger stigma around mental conditions, which implies the contextual narratives. Lastly, the assumption of the stigmatization of mental conditions into deviances opposed to a constructed normalcy in society, which implies the narratives of mentally-disturbed-persons-problems being at stake.

I conclude this part with a systematic overview of my found narratives. The red arrows in figure 2 demonstrate the crucial connections for putting mentally-disturbed-persons-problems at stake.

Figure 2.

Systematic overview of the found narratives during the analysis



Conclusion

On 2023, September 28 the Netherlands and the city of Rotterdam were shocked by Fouad L. engaging in private violence with his neighbors, and public violence at the Erasmus Medical Center. Shocking events exist through continuous narrations in the media on the breakdown of expectations and normalcy. Sensemaking processes after incidents of shocking physical violence are complex processes reflecting different social needs, values, and interests. I have examined the following research question: “How do actors featured in media coverage make sense of normalcy after a shocking incident of physical violence”? The aim of this thesis was to make visible how constructions of normalcy in a person and in society are reaffirmed through relating mental conditions to shocking physical violence by performing a narrative analysis on a single case study according to the constructivist epistemology. It demonstrated how mentally-disturbed-persons-problems is brought into the discussion in a sensemaking process to create narratives of how normalcy in the social order can be reconstituted. This thesis adds to the academic field of sociology by adding stigma theory to the analysis of sensemaking processes after an incident of shocking physical violence and it gives insights into how stigma theory explains how this incident of shocking physical violence is made sense of through a stigma around mental conditions.

The results have indicated that the sensemaking process of this specific case indeed was a complex process. The events at the Erasmus Medical Center imply when the shocking physical violence ruptured normalcy in the public order. Different individual deviances and contextual narratives are narrated in my materials. The events are related to political problems reflecting how the shocking physical violence not only ruptured the normal public order, but also the normal social order. Moreover, mentally-disturbed-persons-problems is consciously or unconsciously brought into the discussion to appoint how normalcy in the social order can be reconstituted.

I would like to conclude this thesis with the remark that, in line with the constructivist epistemology, it is important to acknowledge my personal interference with this subject. I started this research with a biased perspective on the stigmatization of mental conditions. Another important implication is that it should also be acknowledged that I, as the writer of this thesis, too, conscious and unconscious, highlighted some aspects that I encountered, and left other aspects out. If someone else were to write this thesis, they could see other sensemaking processes that I perhaps was unable to see or unable to write down. Lastly, hopefully, this thesis

could raise awareness of the carefulness that should be taken with socially constructing mental conditions as deviating from normalcy, thereby creating a stigma around mental conditions.

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Appendix A. Collected materials and references to quotes in results and analysis

1. *Algemeen Dagblad*

Fifty-three materials

1.1. Domestic editors. (2023, September 29). READ BACK | Local residents of shooting not yet home this weekend, suspect in full restrictions. *Algemeen Dagblad*. Retrieved from <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/teruglezen-omwonenden-schietpartij-dit-weekend-nog-niet-naar-huis-verdachte-vast-in-volledige-beperkingen~ae1020e4/>

1.2. Kooyman, M. (2024, Januari 2). Plan to put an end to enormous problems surrounding mentally disturbed persons. *Algemeen Dagblad*. Retrieved from <https://www.ad.nl/rotterdam/plan-om-einde-te-maken-aan-enorme-problemen-random-verwarde-personen~aab4cd7e/>

1.3. Rosman, C. (2023, September 29). Haters find each other on forum 4chan, Fouad L. was one of them: 'Kill all normies'. *Algemeen Dagblad*. Retrieved from <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/haatzaaiers-vinden-elkaar-op-forum-4chan-fouad-l-was-een-van-hen-kill-all-normies~af09dcb0/>

1.4. Timmermans, C., & Boere, R. (2023, October 7). Sister of Erasmus shooter: 'We had a dangerous, miserable childhood'. *Algemeen Dagblad*. Retrieved from <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/zus-van-erasmus-schutter-we-hebben-een-gevaarlijke-ellendige-jeugd-gehad~a275574e/>

1.5. Timmermans, C., & Oosterom, E. (2023, December 5). New arrest in investigation into Erasmus shooting: DNA trace on weapon Fouad L.. *Algemeen Dagblad*. Retrieved from <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/nieuwe-aanhouding-in-onderzoek-naar-erasmus-schietpartij-dna-spoor-op-wapen-fouad-l~a3c60f0c/>

2. *Erasmus Magazine*

Twelve materials

2.1. Hok, F. (2023, October 5). What happened on Thursday touched our Erasmus MC in its soul. *Erasmus Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/2023/10/05/wat-donderdag-gebeurde-heeft-ons-erasmus-mc-in-zijn-ziel-geraakt>

3. *Erasmus Medical Center*

Two materials

4. *Erasmus University Rotterdam*

Three materials

3.1. Van Esch, R. (2023, October 2). Jurgen Damen: general practitioner and teacher through and through. *Erasmus University Rotterdam*. Retrieved from <https://www.eur.nl/nieuws/jurgen-damen-huisarts-en-docent-hart-en-nieren>

5. *Medisch Contact*

Five materials

5.1. Buiting, P. H. (2023, October 19). Rotterdam. *Medisch Contact*. Retrieved from <https://www.medischcontact.nl/actueel/federatienieuws/federatiebericht/rotterdam-1>

5.2. Kleijne, I. (2023, September 29). Traumatizing for students. *Medisch Contact*. Retrieved from <https://www.medischcontact.nl/actueel/laatste-nieuws/nieuwsartikel/traumatiserend-voor-studenten>

6. *NOS*

Twenty-three materials

6.1. NOS. (2023a, September 28). *Look back. Aboutaleb about Erasmus MC shooting* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBA6ujfl2OQ>

6.2. NOS. (2023b, September 29). *This is what we now know about the shootings in Rotterdam*. Retrieved from <https://nos.nl/collectie/13956/artikel/2492325-dit-is-wat-we-nu-weten-over-de-schietpartijen-in-rotterdam>

7. *NRC*

Twelve materials

7.1. Haenen, M., & Heck, W. (2023, September 29). Fouad L. took out his frustrations on animals and dreamed of becoming a doctor. *NRC*. Retrieved from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2023/09/29/fouad-l-botvierde-zijn-frustratie-op-dieren-en-droomde-ervan-dokter-te-worden-a4175829>

7.2. Jensma, F. (2023, October 9). In addition to punishment, the Public Prosecution Service can also cancel. *NRC*. Retrieved from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2023/10/09/behalf-straffen-kan-het-om-dus-ook-cancelen-a4176548>

7.3. Kamerman, S. (2023, September 28). Suddenly Rotterdam experiences a 'jet black afternoon' with three deaths and a hospital filled with panic. *NRC*. Retrieved from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2023/09/28/ineens-beleeft-rotterdam-een-gitzwarte-middag-a4175768>

8. *NU.nl*

Thirty-three materials

8.1. Lachmeijer, R. (2023, September 30). How studies prevent 'risky' students from becoming doctors. *NU.nl*. Retrieved from <https://www.nu.nl/binnenland/6283182/hoe-opleidingen-voorkomen-dat-riskante-studenten-dokter-worden.html>

9. *Parool*

Twenty-one materials

9.1. De Koning, A., & Rosman, C. (2023, september 29). Public Prosecution Service warned Erasmus MC about Fouad L.: 'Videos on telephone in which people were stabbed to death'. *Parool*. Retrieved from <https://www.parool.nl/nederland/om-waarschuwde-erasmus-mc-over-fouad-l-video-s-op-telefoon-waar-in-mensen-werden-doodgestoken~b6845551/>

10. *Police*

Four materials

10.1. Police. (2023, September 28). *Liveblog closed: Shooting incident Rotterdam – suspect arrested*. Retrieved from <https://www.politie.nl/nieuws/2023/september/28/liveblog-schietincident-rotterdam.html#>

11. *Public Prosecution Service*

One material

12. *Rijnmond*

Forty-seven materials

12.1. Rijnmond. (2024, Januari 15). *Fouad L. remains silent about triple murder and goes to Pieter Baan Center to see if he has a disorder*. Retrieved from <https://www.rijnmond.nl/nieuws/1764649/fouad-l-zwijgt-over-drievoudige-moord-en-gaat-naar-pieter-baan-centrum-om-te-kijken-of-hij-een-stoornis-heeft>

12.2. Verspeek, P. (2023, October 1). Lonely behind his computer, Fouad dreamed of a world without women. *Rijnmond*. Retrieved from <https://www.rijnmond.nl/nieuws/1721928/eenzaam-achter-zijn-computer-droomde-fouad-van-een-wereld-zonder-vrouwen>

12.3. Verspeek, P. (2024, Januari 15). Fouad L. must appear in court for the first time on Monday but is conspicuous by his absence. *Rijnmond*. Retrieved from <https://www.rijnmond.nl/nieuws/1764309/fouad-l-moet-maandag-voor-het-eerst-voor-de-rechter-verschijnen-maar-schittert-door-afwezigheid>

13. RTL Nieuws

Twenty-seven materials

13.1. RTL Nieuws. (2023a, September 29). *Suspect Fouad L.'s posts were laced with hate, which is how he behaved online*. Retrieved from <https://www.rtl.nl/rtlnieuws/artikel/5410362/fouad-l-verdachte-schietincidenten-rotterdam-drie-doden>

13.2. RTL Nieuws. (2023b, October 2). *Rotterdam shooting suspect had to leave home due to rent debt*. Retrieved from <https://www.rtl.nl/nieuws/nederland/artikel/5410835/fouad-l-erasmus-mc-huurschuld-heiman-dullaertplein-rotterdam?redirect=rtlnieuws>

14. Telegraaf

Forty-seven materials

14.1. De Groot, I. (2023, October 4). Marlous wanted to move out because of the behavior of neighbor Fouad L.: 'She was terrified of him'. *Telegraaf*. Retrieved from <https://www.telegraaf.nl/nieuws/1651719276/marlous-wilde-door-gedrag-van-buurman-fouad-l-verhuizen-voor-hem-was-ze-doodsbang>

14.2. Van den Heuvel, J. (2023, October 4). Actions, no words, after shooting drama. *Telegraaf*. Retrieved from <https://www.telegraaf.nl/watuzegt/618813388/geen-woorden-maar-daden-na-schietdrama>

15. *Trouw*

Thirteen materials

16. *Volkskrant*

Sixteen materials

16.1. Bormans, A., & Van Dongen, M. (2023, September 29). Sadness and dismay in Rotterdam: ‘I screamed and cried exceedingly loudly’. *Volkskrant*. Retrieved from <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/verdriet-en-ontzetting-in-rotterdam-ik-heb-heel-hard-geschreeuwd-en-gehuild~bb579f09/>

16.2. Hendrickx, F. & Meijer, R. (2023, October 17). Thierry Baudet from Forum for Democracy: ‘Are we crazy or is the world crazy?’. *Volkskrant*. Retrieved from <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/thierry-baudet-van-forum-voor-democratie-zijn-wij-nu-gek-of-is-de-wereld-gek~b642b222/>

16.3. Van Dongen, M., & Stoker, E. (2024, January 13). When students are not allowed to become doctors, but do not want to hear it. *Volkskrant*. Retrieved from <https://www.volkskrant.nl/kijkverder/v/2024/als-studenten-geen-arts-mogen-worden-maar-dat-niet-willen-horen~v996360/>

Appendix B. Codebook

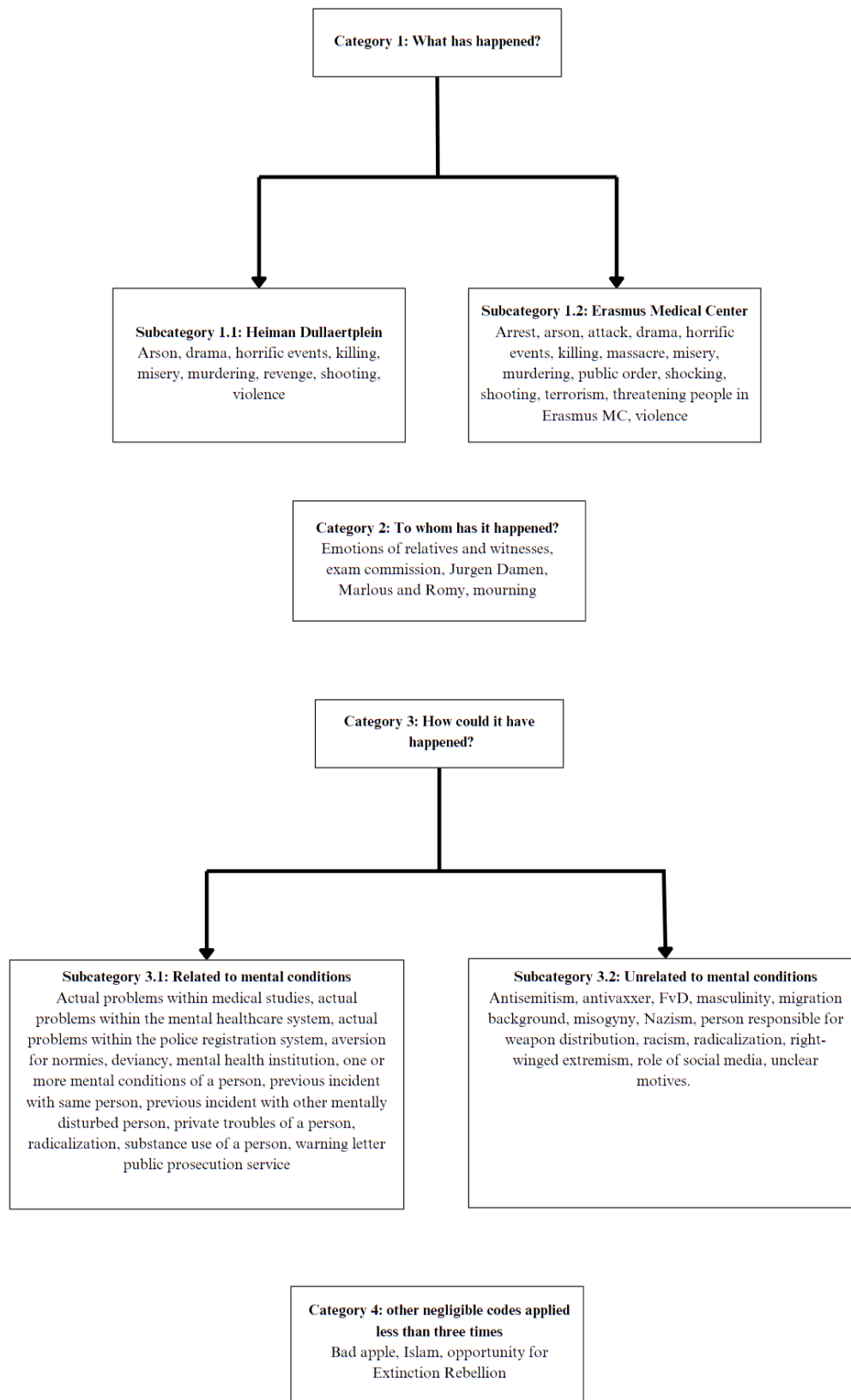
Actual problems within medical studies	Referring to struggles within universities to ban problematic students, referring to the problematic system within medical studies
Actual problems within the mental healthcare system	Referring to problems within mental healthcare, referring to the need for a better functioning mental healthcare system
Actual problems within the police registration system	Referring to problems of police registration, impreciseness, little cooperation between police and other institutions, criminalization of people by the police
Antisemitism	Implicit and explicit references to antisemitism
Antivaxxer	Referring to Fouad L. as an antivaxxer, referring to his aversion for the COVID-19 vaccine
Arrest	Discussing the events as the arrest of Fouad L.
Arson	Discussing the events as arson
Attack	Discussing the events as an attack or attacks
Aversion for normies	Referring to Fouad L.'s aversion for normies, referring to "death to normies"
Bad apple	Comparing Fouad L. to a bad apple
Deviancy	Discussing the events as deviancy, deviant behavior
Drama	Discussing the events as tragic, drama, disastrous, catastrophic
Emotions of relatives and witnesses	Discussing the emotions of relatives, witnesses
Exam Commission	Referring to the exam commission as a target, referring to the problems between Fouad L. and the exam commission
Fouad L. confessed	Discussing the confession of Fouad L.

FvD	Referring to political party FvD, referring to Thierry Baudet
Horrific events	Discussing the events as horrific, gruesome, horrifying, dreadful
Illegal possession of weapons	Discussing Fouad L.'s illegal possession of weapons
Islam	Implicit and explicit referring to Islam or Muslims
Jurgen Damen	Referring to Jurgen Damen
Killing	Discussing the events as Fouad L. killing people
Marlous and Romy	Referring to Marlous and Romy
Masculinity	Referring to masculinity, patriarchy, male-dominated culture, incels
Massacre	Discussing the events as massacre
Mental health institution	Referring to Pieter Baan Center, other mental healthcare institutions
Migration background	Referring to the migration background of Fouad L.
Misery	Referring to the misery, suffering that Fouad L. has caused
Misogyny	Referring to misogyny, Fouad L.'s anger towards women
Mourning	Referring to mourning of relatives, mourning of witnesses, mourning of a community
Murdering	Discussing the events as Fouad L. murdering people
Nazism	Referring to Nazism
One or more mental conditions of a person	Referring to one or more mental conditions of Fouad L.

Opportunity for Extinction Rebellion	Discussing the events as an opportunity for Extinction Rebellion to protest in absence of the police
Person responsible for weapon distribution	Referring to a person responsible for giving one or more weapons to Fouad L.
Previous incident with same person	Referring to a previous incident with Fouad L.
Previous incident with other mentally disturbed persons	Referring to a previous incident with another mentally disturbed person
Private troubles of a person	Referring to private troubles of Fouad L, including the doctor's degree situation
Public order	Referring to the public order, a danger to society, ticking time bombs
Racism	Implicit and explicit referring to Fouad L.'s racist conceptions and views, referring to racism
Radicalization	Referring to radicalization of Fouad L, discussing how radicalization occurs, discussing radicalization
Revenge	Discussing the events as revenge
Right to silence	Referring to Fouad L.'s right to silence
Right-winged extremism	Referring to right-winged extremism, referring to Fouad L.'s right-winged extremist thinking, discussing how right-winged extremism exists
Role of social media	Referring to the role of social media, referring to 4Chan, referring to the photos and videos found on Fouad L.'s phone, referring to online platforms
Shocking	Discussing the events as shocking
Shooting	Discussing the events as Fouad L. shooting
Substance use of a person	Referring to the substance use of Fouad L.

Terrorism	Referring to terrorism, referring to Fouad L. as a terrorist, discussing the events as terrorism
Threatening people in Erasmus MC	Discussing the events as Fouad L. threatening people in the Erasmus Medical Center
Unclear motives	Referring to unclear or unknown motives of Fouad L.
Violence	Discussing the events as physical violence
Warning letter public prosecution service	Implicit or explicit referring to the warning letter sent by the public prosecution service

Appendix C. Code categories and axial coding



CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Bonnie French, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Reconstituting Social Order through Mentally-Disturbed-Persons-Problems: Making Sense of Shocking Physical Violence

Name, email of student: Berbe Olijerhoek, 668459bo@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Rogier van Reekum, vanreekum@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: 2024, April 9 – 2024, June 23

Is the research study conducted within DPAS YES

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. NO

If 'NO': skip to part V.

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? N/A
Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. N/A

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). N/A

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? N/A
2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? N/A
3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? N/A
4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? N/A
Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).
5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? N/A
6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? N/A
7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? N/A
8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? N/A
9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? N/A
10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? N/A

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

Not applicable

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

Not applicable

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

Not applicable

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

Not applicable

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

Not applicable

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

Not applicable

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

On my laptop.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

I am.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Twice a week.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

Not applicable.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

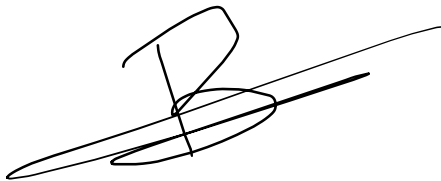
Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Berbe Olijerhoek

Name (EUR) supervisor: Rogier van Reekum

Date: 24-03-2024

Date: 15-04-2024

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'B' followed by a horizontal line and a loop.A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'R' followed by a series of vertical lines.