MASS MURDER AND THE MASS MEDIA: AN EXAMINATION OF THE

MEDIA DISCOURSE ON U.S. RAMPAGE SHOOTINGS, 2000-2012

by

Jaclyn V. Schildkraut, M.A.

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
with a Major in Criminal Justice
May 2014

Committee Members:

Mark C. Stafford, Chair

Marcus K. Felson

Scott W. Bowman

Glenn W. Muschert

FAIR USE AND AUTHOR'S PERMISSION STATEMENT

Fair Use

Duplication Permission

DEDICATION

To the victims of these senseless tragedies,

May your legacies live on and your losses inspire change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation never would have been possible without the support of many people who have guided me and cheered me on throughout this journey.

To my chair, Dr. Mark Stafford, the words "thank you" just do not seem to be enough. In the last three years, you have guided me, supported me, cheered me on, and helped me grow as both a scholar and a person. I am so honored and grateful to be able to go out into the world and say I have had the immense privilege of being your student. There are many greats that came before me, and I am sure many more to come. Thank you for your "Staffordisms" that made this journey fun, for being a founding member of Team Sparkly Butterfly, and for everything you have done and continue to do.

To Dr. Marcus Felson, thank you for teaching me the importance of being able to see both the forest and the trees, and for teaching me to always make sure my tables are perfect. You always have been so supportive and encouraging of my work, and I am forever grateful not only to have gotten to take a class with you, but more important, just to know you. You truly are one of the most amazing minds I have ever met, but also an amazing person. Learning from you has been an honor and a privilege.

To Dr. Scott Bowman, thank you for helping me find my way on this methodological journey, for keeping me sane when coding went awry, and for being one of the most approachable and helpful professors I have had. You have helped me grow into a stronger researcher, and helped me to hone my craft. I appreciate your calm in the

storm of my dissertation, and for being able to shoot the breeze (not Brees) about sports throughout the years. Go Coyotes and Panthers!

To my final committee member, Dr. Glenn W. Muschert, it has been a very interesting and amazing journey that started with a naïve, first semester Masters student and a phone call back in 2010. Over the last five years, you have helped mentor me, guide me, advise me, and mold me into a potential force in our research area. You have helped me pursue my passion, think more critically, and consider the bigger picture. Without your continual support and guidance, I would not have the opportunities I have had, gotten to work with Gary, met Ralph or Jack, or had the courage to reach out to victims of these tragedies. It has been an honor, a privilege, and a dream come true to get to work with you, and I hope our collaborations continue for years to come. I do not know how I will ever thank you for all that you have done, but I know that I will never stop trying and will always remember to pay it forward.

I also want to thank other educators who have motivated me, inspired me, championed me, and guided me along this journey. To Drs. Donna Vandiver and Elizabeth Erhardt Mustaine, thank you both for being such strong examples of what female scholars should be. You both are incredibly strong, intelligent, and thoughtful women, and I am so honored to have had the opportunity to learn from you both. Thank you for all of the support, words of encouragement (and words of wisdom), and help you have given me along this journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

Nearly as soon as the first shot is fired, the news media already are rushing to break coverage of rampage shooting events, the likes of which typically last days or, in the more extreme cases, weeks. Though rampage shootings are rare in occurrence, the disproportionate amount of coverage they receive in the media leads the public to believe that they occur at a much more regular frequency than they do. Further, within this group of specialized events, there is a greater tendency to focus on those that are the most newsworthy, which is categorized most often by those with the highest body counts. This biased presentation can lead to a number of outcomes, including fear of crime, behavioral changes, and even copycat attacks from other, like-minded perpetrators.

Following the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, the news media have compartmentalized different types of mass shootings. This fracturing has led to differential understanding of school shootings, workplace shootings, shootings at religious centers, and other mass shootings taking place in public forums (e.g., malls, movie theaters). In reality, there are few differences between these events, yet for some reason, they are covered differently. The result is not only a vast public misconception about them, but ineffective and redundant policies and legislation related to gun control and mental health, among other issues.

In order to understand how the public comes to understand rampage shooting events, one must first understand how the stories are constructed by the media. This project seeks to undertake such a task by examining the social construction of rampage

shootings that occurred between 2000 and 2012. In addition to understanding how these events are constructed both individually and as the phenomenon of rampage shootings, it enables the researcher to examine how this construction changes over time. As the media are by no means static, one could predict that the framing of these events would be equally as dynamic.

There are a number of benefits to uniting different types of mass shootings under a single definition. First, topical research can be approached from multiple disciplines, which will allow for a more robust body of research. This can, in turn, lead to more streamlined and effective legislation and policies. Finally, understanding rampage shootings as episodic violent crime is beneficial because it allows for these events to be understood in the greater context of violent crime. This understanding ultimately can lead to more responsible journalistic practices, which can help to reduce the outcomes of fear and crime and moral panics over events that are both rare and isolated.

This dissertation takes an important first step in understanding rampage shootings by examining them as a product of the news media. Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory provides a theoretical orientation through which to understand how these stories are constructed in the media, and Altheide and Schneider's (2013) qualitative media analysis provides a framework in which the content can be analyzed. A total of 91 cases were examined, representing rampage shootings that occurred in the first 12 years following Columbine. The overall findings of the study indicate that the coverage of these shootings consistently relied on Columbine as a cultural referent, that

the media are used as a tool by claims makers pushing their personal agendas, and that the disproportionality of coverage in the media and its related content is highly problematic when considering public perceptions of these events. Limitations of the study, as well as avenues for future research, also are discussed.

I. INTRODUCTION

News is what the newspapermen make it.
- Gieber (1964, p. 173)

On December 14, 2012, the town of Newtown, Connecticut was disrupted when

20-year-old Adam Lanza forcefully entered Sandy Hook Elementary School and opened

fire (Barron, 2012). In his wake, 20 first grade students and six faculty and staff

members, including the school's principal, lay dead (Barron, 2012). Lanza then shot

himself as authorities entered the school (Barron, 2012). A later investigation of his

residence revealed that prior to his rampage, he also had shot and killed his mother as she

slept (Barron, 2012). Within minutes of the shooting, the story had taken hold of the

nation's focus with little foreseeable chance of letting go.

The Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre was not a new event by any means.

Earlier that same week, 22-year-old Jacob Tyler Roberts opened fire in a Portland,

Oregon area mall, killing two patrons before committing suicide (Johnson & Kovaleski,

2012). In July 2012, 24-year-old PhD student James Holmes had opened fire in an

Aurora, Colorado movie theater during a midnight screening of *The Dark Knight Rises*

(Frosch & Johnson, 2012). He killed 12 and wounded 58 others before being

apprehended outside the theater by police (Frosch & Johnson, 2012). Student T.J. Lane

killed three students and wounded several others when he opened fire in his Chardon,

Ohio high school in February 2012 (Tavernise & Preston, 2012). In years prior, mass

shootings have claimed the lives of innocent victims during a political speaking

engagement in Tucson, Arizona; on college campuses including Virginia Tech, Northern

Illinois University (NIU), and Case Western Reserve University; at military base Fort Hood in Texas; malls in Salt Lake City, Utah and Omaha, Nebraska; places of worship in Oak Creek, Wisconsin and Colorado Springs, Colorado; and an immigration center in Binghamton, New York.[1]

Each of these events has become, albeit at varying intensities, what Kellner (2003, 2008a, 2008b) calls a "media spectacle," whereby media outlets will cover every facet of a story in an effort to win the ratings war. Through local, national, and even international media, these stories permeate television screens, especially on 24-hour news stations, such as CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC. Headlines are splashed across daily newspapers, and the transition of these papers to digital news via the Internet allows even faster and more frequent story generation. These spectacles essentially take relatively uncommon events, sensationalize them, and make the events appear far more commonplace than they actually are (Kellner, 2008a; Surette, 1992). Further, the media use these events to "present a world of crime and justice that is not found in reality" (Surette, 1992, p. 246).

There are a number of outcomes that result from the glorification of mass murder events beyond ratings. Fear of crime among news consumers can increase (e.g., Chiricos, Padgett, & Gertz, 2000; Heath & Gilbert, 1996; Kaminski, Koons-Witt, Thompson, & Weiss, 2010; Kupchik & Bracy, 2009; Liska, Lawrence, & Sanchirico, 1982; Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). In some instances where the fear of crime is at its highest levels, the over-glorification of a particular issue in the media can incite what Cohen (1972) called "moral panics," whereby members of society believe their personal values and interests are threatened (see also Burns & Crawford, 1999; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Springhall, 1999). Further, both the events and the

---

[1] For a brief description of each event included in the study, refer to Appendix A.

subsequent responses to the events have the ability to shape public opinion and drive policy change on such issues as gun control and mental health (Beale, 2006; Birkland & Lawrence, 2009; Downs, 1972; Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2013; Soraghan, 2000).

Rampage Shootings: A Conceptualization

In their book, *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings*, Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, and Roth (2004) defined rampage school shootings as those events that

> …Take place on a school-related *public stage* before an *audience*; involve multiple victims, some of whom are shot simply for their symbolic significance or at random; and involve one or more shooters who are students or former students of the school. (p. 50, emphasis added)

Newman and colleagues' (2004) definition has served as the basis for categorizing acts of school shootings since its publication. A number of other studies (e.g., Kalish & Kimmel, 2010; Langman, 2009; Muschert, 2007a) have relied on this definition. In one study, Langman (2009) created a typology to differentiate among a group of 10 rampage school shooters in eight school shooting events. He presented three different categories of school shooters – the traumatized, the psychotic, and the psychopathic (Langman, 2009). In a separate article, Muschert (2007a) offered a different typology through which to analyze school shootings. Specifically, he differentiated rampage shootings, as defined by Newman et al. (2004), from mass murders, terrorist attacks, targeted shootings, and government shootings (Muschert, 2007a).

In a recent commentary, Harris and Harris (2012) called for a new exploration of rampage violence. With the string of mass shootings at schools in the late 1990s and early 2000s, school shootings had become their own unique and distinct phenomenon, both in the mass media and also in research (see, for example, Muschert, 2007a). In

particular, Harris and Harris (2012) noted that such events as the 2011 shooting of Congresswoman Giffords, as well as earlier attacks (e.g., the 1984 San Ysidro, California McDonald's massacre and the 1991 shooting at a Luby's Cafeteria in Killeen, Texas), did not vastly differ from school shootings. Specifically, the main differences between these events and Columbine, for example, were the location of the event and the age of the perpetrators as well as the victims. James Huberty, the perpetrator of the San Ysidro McDonald's shooting, was 41 years old at the time of the incident (Brennan, 2012). George Hennard was 35 years old when he opened fire in a Killeen, Texas restaurant (Brennan, 2012). Yet even the discourse about the age of the perpetrator is becoming more and more distant as mass shooters, such as Jacob Roberts (Portland, Oregon, 2012) and James Holmes (Aurora, Colorado, 2012), are younger than before school shootings took center stage. Further, other events, including instances of workplace violence and political terrorism, also could fall under Newman et al.'s (2004) definition when it is broadened to include acts beyond school campuses (Harris & Harris, 2012).

There are several benefits to broadening the definition of rampage shootings noted in Harris and Harris' (2012) commentary. First, many of the responses filling the discourse following these events remain the same – gun control, right-to-carry laws, mental health, and violent media (Harris & Harris, 2012; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2013). By uniting different types of events (e.g., school shootings, workplace shootings, and other mass shootings) under a single definition, this will enable researchers to conduct more focused, and ultimately robust, studies (Harris & Harris, 2012). This joining also may yield more transdisciplinary research – including the social science, public health, and mental health disciplines – which can lead to more productive and effective

legislation (Harris & Harris, 2012). Additionally, Harris and Harris (2012) note that because Newman et al.'s (2004) definition focuses on systems failure rather than individual causality, such transdisciplinary research would lead to a better understanding of rampage violence, which itself is a "multidimensional social problem" (p. 1055). Finally, expanding Newman et al.'s (2004) definition to encompass all acts of rampage violence is beneficial in that it unites episodic violent crime events, which differ significantly from those that are more common, such as gang violence or even general school violence (Harris & Harris, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

While research has begun to examine media discourse about individual events, particularly school shootings,[2] virtually no research has been conducted to examine the media's construction of the overall phenomenon of rampage shooting events in the context offered by Harris and Harris (2012). The present study aims to examine all rampage shootings between 2000 and 2012 in the media discourse. Specifically, one goal of this research is to situate the phenomenon of mass shootings, regardless of location or perpetrator, in the context of social reality constructed by the media. Rampage shootings, particularly in the current technological era, do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they exist on a public stage.

Another goal of the present study is to glean a better understanding of why certain cases of mass shootings garner more attention, both with the public and in the media, than others. If school shootings were so tragic that they were spun into their own phenomenon, why do we as a society, and the media as our informants, focus more

---

[2] See, for example, Muschert's (2002) discussion of Columbine or Schildkraut's (2012a) discussion of Virginia Tech.

attention on two high school students who killed 13 people rather than the one college student who killed 32? Why do we focus so much attention on the shooting of six-year-olds at an elementary school when a six-year-old was among those killed in a movie theater shooting five months earlier?

While the answers to such questions may seem simple, the complex relationship between the media and its audience make it anything but. Mayr and Machin (2012) suggest that a function of the media discourse is "reality construction" (p. 7). This, however, requires that there is an audience whose reality is in need of construction. It requires a relationship between the media and its consumers, a fluid and open dialogue that works to shape the reality (Cerulo, 1998).

Research aims. In order to understand the overall impact of rampage shootings on the public, this study is guided by several research aims. The first is to determine how the discourse on rampage shooting events as a phenomenon is constructed in the media. Next, consideration is given to those themes that are consistently prevalent across rampage shooting events. Specifically, it is expected that discussion of guns, mental health, and the violent media will be a critical component of the discourse, and thus are existent themes that the research will examine. Emergent themes, however, still are possible and expected. Finally, the research will examine how these themes within the rampage shootings discourse change (or remain consistent) over time.

Methods

Before research can more adequately address the dialogue between the media and its consumers, it is important to, as with any story, start from the beginning. Assessing the public's understanding of rampage shooting events requires that researchers first

understand how these stories are constructed, or more simply told, in the media. This means gaining a critical understanding of how and why the media focus on these events and devote the amount of coverage to these stories, both in comparing different rampage shootings to one another and to other forms of violent crime (e.g., homicide or assault).

There are a number of ways to gain such an understanding. However, debatably one of the best ways is to examine the product the media put forth – news articles and broadcasts. While there are arguably drawbacks to such a method (e.g., not being able to directly ask media producers about their production strategies), the analysis of these social artifacts has several benefits. First, an abundant amount of such data (e.g., news articles) already is archived and easily accessible (Berg, 2007; Garrett & Bell, 1998; Muschert, 2002). This helps researchers to minimize time and expenses related to data collection (a concern for any practicing researcher), while still collecting a significant amount of data. Second, using media archives allows researchers to analyze social artifacts as they exist in society. Therefore, what is being examined is the actual product that helps to shape ideas and impressions of news consumers. Finally, through content analysis (which is discussed in Chapter 4), researchers can draw inferences about a particular news organization's goals and agendas through the framing of the stories it puts forth.

Conclusion

The present study seeks to examine how the phenomenon of rampage shooting events is constructed through the media discourse for 91 events between 2000 and 2012 (see Figure 1 for a distribution of the number of events by year). Specifically, this research aims to uncover themes that are consistently prevalent within and between

events. This includes those themes that are consistent following most mass shootings (e.g., guns, mental health, and violent media), as well as those that emerge through the analysis of the coverage. In addition, since media processes are by no means static, this research also seeks to examine how the discourses related to rampage shooting events change (or remain consistent) over time.
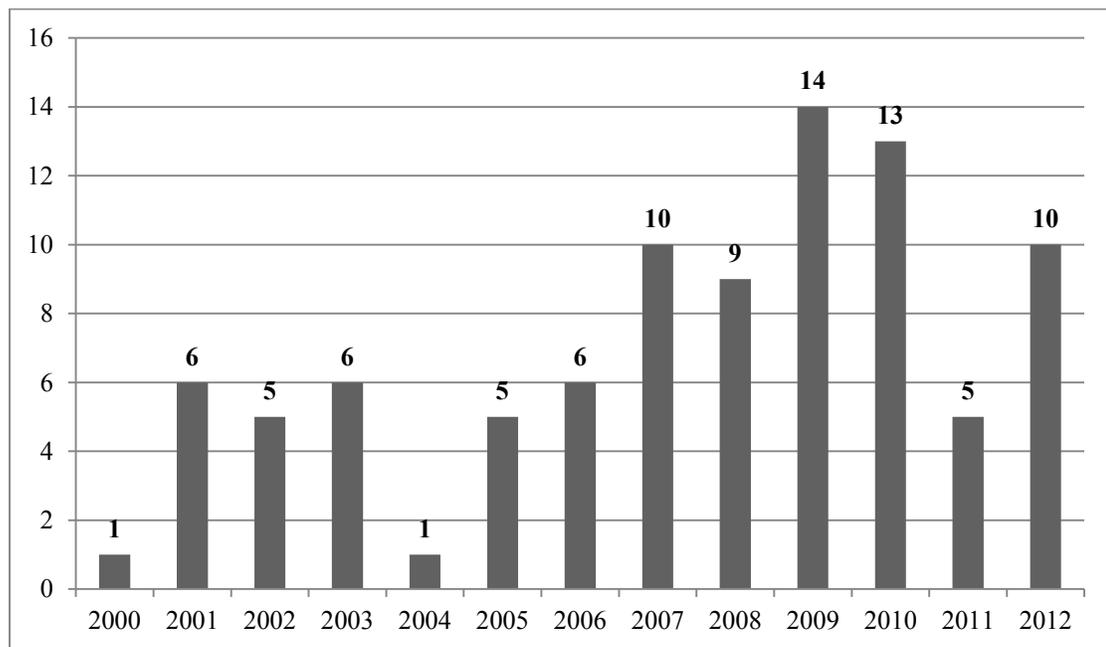
Figure 1. Rampage Shooting Events by Year, 2000-2012

By answering these questions, the overarching goal is to provide a critical awareness of how rampage shootings are portrayed in the media, which is essential to be able to continue the story and understand how members of society (news consumers) make sense of the events. The first portion of this paper offers background into how and why this study is needed. Chapter 2 of this study provides a thorough examination of the news making process, from beginning (news as a product in need of a consumer) to end (intended and unintended effects of crime news on said consumers). Chapter 3 offers a

theoretical lens, via social constructionism, through which to understand how these events are presented to the public. Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive methodology for the study designed to answer the research questions posed earlier.

The latter half of the dissertation focuses on the findings of the study. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the dataset, including a description of the cases included and how the coverage was distributed. Chapter 6 explores how the social problem of rampage shootings is constructed through the model proposed by Joel Best (1987, 2006), looking at how the problem is defined and how examples and statistics are used to underscore the magnitude of the problem of rampage shootings. Chapter 7 examines the existent themes of guns, mental health and violent media. Chapter 8 reviews how the narrative of rampage shootings has changed over time, both on a space and time continuum (Chyi & McCombs, 2004), but also in the context of the aforementioned existent themes. Chapter 9 explores several emergent themes that revealed themselves as dominant throughout the course of the project. Finally, Chapter 10 concludes with some overarching findings and considerations from the study, as well as limitations of the project and directions for future research.

II. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The mass media play a critical role in the social construction of society. As many people will never be directly affected by crime, their individual beliefs and perceptions of crime are typically shaped by the media (Chermak, 1994a; Garofalo, 1981; Graber, 1980; Humphries, 1981; Jewkes, 2004; Maguire, Sandage, & Weatherby, 1999; Mayr & Machin, 2012; Pollak & Kubrin, 2007; Robinson, 2011; Surette, 1992; Warr, 2000b). Studies have shown, in fact, that the mass media are the primary source of information about crime for nearly 95% of the general population (Graber, 1980; Surette, 1992). The media then "support and legitimize dominant definitions and discourses of crime and deviance" (Mayr & Machin, 2012, p. 13).

With this in mind, it becomes even more critical to understand the media's role in society as well as the practices used to construct the news that members of the society consume. This chapter first explores how the news is constructed, from news as a commodity to how newsworthiness is assigned and stories framed. Sources of news, including an examination of how the audience and even perpetrators contribute to the media discourse, also are discussed. Additionally, consequences from how these stories of crime are presented is discussed, from fear of crime to additional impacts, such as moral panics, contagion effects, misinformation of the public, and legislative responses to such events.

If It Bleeds, It Leads: The Construction of Crime News

It can be posited that the creation and maintenance of social problems often are the result of media influence (Gerbner, Gross, Signorelli, & Morgan, 1980; Robinson,

2011). With the media responsible for shaping the audience's perceptions about a number of issues (Gerbner et al., 1980; Mayr & Machin, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Surette, 1992), such as crime, it becomes even more important to understand how discourse about such issues takes place in the media. Mayr and Machin (2012) note that understanding the media discourses on crime and deviance requires that they be grounded in the "context of the institutional procedures and practices of news organizations and the constraints of ownership and control" (p. 2). As such, several researchers have examined issues critical to news construction, including the disproportional amount of attention devoted to stories of crime, and how the news is treated as a commodity and run like its own economy. Other researchers have studied how newsworthiness is assigned to stories to attract viewers and advertisers, what sources of news are used to tell stories both effectively and efficiently, and finally how the framing of news stories contributes to overall perceptions of the stories they tell. The following sections discuss these facets of news construction in greater detail.

Disproportionality of crime news. Researchers (Chermak, 1995; Garofalo, 1981; Gerbner et al., 1980; Graber, 1980; Humphries, 1981; Lawrence & Mueller, 2003; Maguire, Weatherby, & Mathers, 2002; Maguire et al., 1999; Paulsen, 2003; Pollak & Kubrin, 2007; Surette, 1992) have shown that stories pertaining to crime can account for up to 50% of news coverage. Further, the media often focus a disproportionate amount of attention on the most serious and violent crimes, even though property crimes are considerably more common (Chermak, 1994a, 1995; Garofalo, 1981; Gerbner et al., 1980; Graber, 1980; Gruenewald, Pizarro, & Chermak, 2009; Humphries, 1981; Jewkes, 2004; Maguire et al., 1999; Mayr & Machin, 2012; Meyers, 1997; Paulsen, 2003;

11

Pritchard, 1985). Even still, the most serious of crimes, such as homicides, will not always garner coverage (Chermak, 1995, 1998; Jenkins, 1981; Johnstone, Michener, & Hawkins, 1994; Pritchard, 1985; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997; Weiss & Chermak, 1998). Of those that do, varying amounts of coverage will be allocated based on the seriousness of the crime (Chermak, 1998; Gruenewald et al. 2009; Jenkins, 1981; Meyers 1997). Further, by focusing on only the most severe or extreme cases, the media give audiences a distorted understanding about crime (Barak, 1994; Lawrence & Mueller, 2003; Maguire et al., 2002; Robinson, 2011).

The school shooting phenomenon is one example of the overrepresentation and disproportionality of such extreme events in the news (Lawrence & Mueller, 2003; Maguire et al., 2002). Robinson (2011), for example, reports that the Columbine High School shooting was the top crime story covered on evening news broadcasts. In the year of the shooting, 319 stories about the event were aired (Robinson, 2011). Muschert (2002) notes that when the story first broke, CNN aired over six hours of uninterrupted coverage from Littleton, and Robinson (2011) observes that the major three news networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) devoted no less than half of their nightly news airtime to stories about Columbine for up to a month after the shooting. Maguire and colleagues (2002) had similar findings. Their analysis of coverage of 14 school shootings for one-week periods on ABC, CBS, and NBC found that 53 stories (and almost four hours of total airtime) were allocated to coverage of Columbine (Maguire et al., 2002). By comparison, the remaining 13 school shootings examined shared just slightly more airtime combined (Maguire et al., 2002).

The disproportionate coverage of school shootings is not limited solely to television news. One study found that approximately 10,000 articles were published about the Columbine shooting in the nation's 50 largest newspapers in the year following the shooting (Newman, 2006). In the 30 days following the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, 181 articles (including op-eds) were published in just *The New York Times* alone (Schildkraut, 2012a). While this is an average of six articles per day, the majority of the coverage took place within the first five days after the shooting (Schildkraut, 2012a), a trend that was similar in the reporting of Columbine (Muschert, 2002). Interestingly, similar shootings, such as the 2008 NIU shooting, did not garner such extensive coverage.

The commodification of crime news. Mayr and Machin (2012) note that the present-day media are characterized by an intense commodification of crime news, which often results in increased market competition. Indeed, crime news is essentially a product that the media want to sell to its consumers because it is what will keep an audience hooked (Buckler & Travis, 2005; Chermak, 1995; Jewkes, 2004; Johnstone et al., 1994; Leavy & Maloney, 2009; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997; Robinson, 2011; Shoemaker, 2006; Surette, 1992). As such, the news media have been reduced to "what is commercially viable, popular, easily digestible, mainly unchallenging, and uncritical" (Mayr & Machin, 2012, p. 12). Stories about crime, in particular, are both inexpensive and easy to cover (Chermak, 1995; Robinson, 2011).

Agger (1989) refers to the dependence on the mass media as *fast capitalism*, whereby the media operate in an economic model that serves the public by "objectifying and commodifying all human experience" (p. 6). Tuchman (1978) also refers to the news

13

as "a depletable consumer product that must be made fresh daily" (p. 179). In addition to the need to keep the content fresh, media producers also must keep the content interesting enough to attract viewers (Kellner, 2008b; Lawrence & Mueller, 2003; Leavy & Maloney, 2009). The format needs to account for the fact that the news is not solely for informational, but also entertainment purposes (Kellner, 2003; Lawrence & Mueller, 2003), a format Kellner (2003) refers to as *infotainment*. The format and ultimate sensationalism of these stories also results from intense market competition between numerous mass media outlets (Kellner, 2008b).

It is important to consider, however, that the news is not the only product of the mass media. Equally as prevalent is the audience as a commodity (Robinson, 2011). One of the biggest consumers of the audience commodity is advertisers, which is why it is critical to attract viewers to a station (Robinson, 2011). Robinson (2011) further notes that in an effort to draw viewers in to satisfy their buyers, media outlets may forego objective and honest journalism (see also Muschert, 2007a). This too can impact matters of policy (such as those discussed below) as key information needed to make informed and educated decisions also may be sacrificed (Robinson, 2011). Tabloid-style reporting of crime also helps to attract advertisers (Robinson, 2011). Robinson (2011) notes that serving the interest of advertisers may be the number one goal of media producers.

Assigning newsworthiness. Audiences will typically favor those stories that are graphic or violent in nature (Chermak, 1995; Gans, 1979). Due to limitations in space or constraints in time, the media typically will focus on those cases that are the most extreme in order to capture (and keep) the audience's attention (Chermak, 1994a; Gans, 1979; Lawrence & Mueller, 2003; Pollak & Kubrin, 2007; Weiss & Chermak, 1998).

This requires selection decisions by newsmakers, whereby values of newsworthiness are assigned to cases to determine what is presented in the news and what is left on the cutting room floor (Chermak, 1994a, 1995; Gans, 1979; Liska & Baccaglini, 1990; Lundman, 2003; Meyers, 1997; Weiss & Chermak, 1998). Also influencing values of newsworthiness is the need to produce news both quickly and efficiently (Chermak, 1995; Gans, 1979).

In her commentary on newsworthiness, Shoemaker (2006) notes "news is a social construct, a thing, a commodity, whereas newsworthiness is a cognitive construct, a mental judgment" (p. 105). Even the definition of newsworthiness has continually been refined in the scholarly literature, yet it remains a construct. Surette (1992), for example, has identified newsworthiness as "the criteria by which news producers choose which of all known events are to be presented to the public as news events" (p. 60). Meyers (1997) also has suggested that

> newsworthiness . . . [or the] qualities journalists believe make an event worth reporting . . . has never been easy to define. There are no hard-and-fast rules about what constitutes the news, and reporters and editors themselves are often vague about how they separate what to cover from what to ignore within the vast pool of occurrences that could, potentially, be news. (p. 18)

Ultimately, the level of newsworthiness assigned to a particular case or event will be contingent upon a number of different factors, including (but certainly not limited to) the organizational goals and journalistic style of the news outlet and its target audience (Schildkraut & Donley, 2012). Chermak (1995) has suggested that newsworthiness may be assessed based on five criteria – the violent nature of the crime, demographic characteristics of the victim and offender (such as age, gender, race, and occupation), characteristics of the news agency, the uniqueness of the event, and the event's saliency.

Greater values of newsworthiness are typically assigned to the most serious or violent crimes – those that are statistically rare, have atypical elements, or are what Johnstone and colleagues (1994, p. 869) called "high amplitude" (see also Chermak, 1994a; Jenkins, 1981; Mayr & Machin, 2012; Paulsen, 2003; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997). These stories receive such elevated values because they are more likely to generate increased interest among news consumers (Schildkraut & Donley, 2012).

Sources of news. Traditionally, the media have relied on relationships with law enforcement and criminal justice personnel for information pertaining to crimes (Chermak, 1995; Gans, 1979; Jewkes, 2004; Mayr & Machin, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Sacco, 1995; Surette, 1992). These sources are not only easily accessible to the media, but their credibility has been established with the public (Chermak, 1995; Jewkes, 2004; Robinson, 2011; Sacco, 1995). Further, these sources help to provide reliable and consistent information to the news outlets, as well as limiting expenditures in time and money by the media (Chermak, 1995; Jewkes, 2004; Maguire et al., 1999; Mayr & Machin, 2012; Robinson, 2011).

Modern technology has brought about a shift in the news production phase with the introduction of a new information subsidy (Wigley & Fontenot, 2009). Gandy (1982) defines information subsidies as a source of information making "[information] available at something less than the cost a user would face in the absence of the subsidy" (p. 61). The increased prevalence of cell phones that stream video and social networking sites, for example, have allowed news consumers to shift from passive audience to active participant (Couldry, 2012; Kellner, 2008b; Mayr & Machin, 2012; Wigley & Fontenot, 2009). This was first evident in the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, where the initial

images from the scene came from a graduate student and his cell phone, footage which he later uploaded to CNN's iReport feature (Kellner, 2008b; Schildkraut, 2012b; Wigley & Fontenot, 2009). The footage received over a million hits by the evening of the shooting (Stanley, 2007). Today, it is more commonplace to see raw, unedited cell phone footage (as was flashed across television screens following the shootings at the Aurora, Colorado movie theater and the Clackamas Town Center mall in Portland, Oregon) incorporated into news loops.

In addition to the audience taking a more active role, there also has been a shift towards mass shooters themselves helping to construct the story of their events (Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010). Nowhere is this more evident than with Seung-Hui Cho, who sent a multimedia manifesto to NBC News just hours before his shooting rampage (Kellner, 2008b; Leavy & Maloney, 2009; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010; Schildkraut, 2012b; Serazio, 2010). Though Steve Capus, president of NBC News, elected to air only a fraction of the material received by the network from Cho, the images and video were re-aired over and over on major news outlets after being copied under the fair use doctrine (Kellner, 2008a; Leavy & Maloney, 2009; Schildkraut, 2012b). Other shooters, such as those from the 2007 and 2009 school shootings in Finland, leave video "blogs" about their upcoming shootings on YouTube before the shootings occurred (Larkin, 2009; Lindgren, 2011; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010; Serazio, 2010). This also increases audience participation, as many people will not only view the posts, but also will respond with their own comments (Lindgren, 2011).

Framing. Media framing is one of the most influential techniques utilized to assign newsworthiness and construct the news. Erving Goffman (1974) first introduced

the concept of framing to explain how members of society make sense of the world around them. Later research (e.g., Entman, 2007; Gans, 1979; Reese, 2007; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) has applied Goffman's framing concepts to media and agenda setting, particularly with respect to political agendas presented to society. A media frame, as Tankard (2001) explains, is "a central organizing idea for news content that supplies context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration" (pp. 100-101). In a sense, media framing has become a way for taking complex social issues and presenting them in a manner that makes them accessible and relatable to the intended audiences (Gans, 1979; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Entman (1993) suggests that framing can be thought of as "communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (p. 52). Reese (2007) suggests that as certain aspects of a particular news story and its "reality" are emphasized, different media frames may surface. From these ideas has stemmed the notion of content bias, which has been described as patterns in framing that result from the influence of social institutions, media routines, or media hegemony (Entman, 2007; Reese, 2007; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

Much like the media itself, framing is not restricted to either a macro-level or micro-level construct but rather can address issues across both (Scheufele, 1999). More specifically, Scheufele (1999) notes that macro-level constructs, or those that rely on social and cultural processes, can explain how the media present the news so that it resonates with audiences. Conversely, micro-level constructs, or those that rely on individual participation for the construction of meaning, are used to explain how the

audience uses the information presented to form impressions (Scheufele, 1999).

However, this does not require that the audience be familiar with a particular construct, as

Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) note, as they typically will be provided ample

information about the topic through the media.

Framing of a news story, or more specifically a set of stories about a particular

phenomenon, is rarely static. Rather, the movement between levels of space (e.g.,

whether a story is told at the local, regional, or national level) over time allows the media

to change the presentation of information over a continuum, a process referred to as

"frame changing" (Muschert & Carr, 2006, p. 747; see also Chyi & McCombs, 2004;

Muschert, 2009). Muschert and Carr (2006) explain that the media can influence

perceived public reality by changing the frames of the news coverage during an event

(see also Muschert, 2009). The change in frames helps to highlight different features of a

particular news story that the media select as important and ultimately newsworthy

(Altheide, 2009b; Cerulo, 1998; Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert, 2007b). This

enables the media outlet to keep the audience hooked by providing fresh content

(Altheide, 2009b; Chyi & McCombs, 2004).

Saliency of an event is often measured in the amount of news coverage it

receives, and events often will be reframed throughout their lifespan (Chyi & McCombs,

2004).[3] The framing and reframing of events also allows the media to highlight various

attributes of importance and present them to the audience in different ways (Chyi &

McCombs, 2004; Muschert, 2009). Several studies (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert,

2009; Muschert & Carr, 2006) have examined the framing dynamics relating to coverage

of the Columbine High School shooting. Chyi and McCombs (2004) found that framing

---

[3] See also Downs (1972) for his discussion on the related issue-attention cycle.

stories at the societal level was most common, drawing attention to issues plaguing all of society, not just Littleton. The majority of the frames told the story of Columbine in the present, though 13% of stories were framed in the future context, and included discussion on possible outcomes of the shooting. In their replication of Chyi and McCombs' (2004) study, Muschert and Carr (2006), examining media coverage of nine school shootings, had similar findings. Articles framed in the present time and at a societal level were again the most prominent (Muschert & Carr, 2006). Interestingly, their findings showed that as media coverage progressed from event to event, the space frame began to shift from societal to community post-Columbine (Muschert & Carr, 2006). Muschert's (2009) analysis revealed that specific themes, or attributes, within the coverage also changed over time.

Feeling Safe By Comparison?: Fear of Crime and the Media

Fear of crime as a resulting effect of media consumption has been the focus of a considerable body of research for over 40 years (e.g. Chiricos, Eschholz, & Gertz, 1997; Chiricos et al., 2000; Doob & McDonald, 1979; Heath, 1984; Jewkes, 2004; Liska & Baccaglini, 1990; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). The relationship between the media and fear of crime, as noted by one study, is predicated on "characteristics of the message, of the audience, and of the dependent measure" (Heath & Gilbert, 1996, p. 384). As such, research has focused not only on examining the different effects between media types (e.g., television vs. newspaper), but also across macro-level units (e.g., neighborhoods vs. cities, or in the context of news, local vs. national coverage). Jewkes (2004) notes that such examinations are important because the media can impact audiences both spatially and culturally. While spatial proximity focuses on how physically close the consumer is

20

to the event, cultural proximity focuses on the importance and relevance of the topic to an audience (Jewkes, 2004). In order to get a complete understanding of how the media impact fear of crime, both must be examined.

Two studies (Heath, 1984; Liska & Baccaglini, 1990) have examined the effects of crime presented in newspapers on fear of crime. Heath (1984) notes that the most sensational stories have the greatest impact on readers, and Liska and Baccaglini (1990) concur, noting that stories about homicide are the most strongly correlated with fear of crime. It is important to note that while homicide makes up the smallest percentage of crime occurrences, it often constitutes the greatest focus of news stories (Liska & Baccaglini, 1990). Additionally, when these stories are not local to the reader, this can make them feel safe by comparison, as opposed to an abundance of local crime news, which increases fear of crime (Heath, 1984; Liska & Baccaglini, 1990). As Heath (1984) summarizes, "the worse things are elsewhere, the better we feel about our immediate environment" (p. 270).

Other studies (Chiricos et al., 2000; Doob & McDonald, 1979) have examined the impact of television news consumption on fear of crime. As the amount of television news consumed increases, so too does the fear of crime among audience members (Chiricos et al., 2000; Doob & McDonald, 1979). This pattern holds consistent at both the local and national level, and these effects hold constant independent of other factors, such as crime rates and prior victimization (Chiricos et al., 2000). However, residents in high crime areas with high consumption of television crime news were found to have significantly greater fear of crime (Doob & McDonald, 1979). Local news consumption had a greater impact on the fear of crime in women as opposed to men (Chiricos et al.,

2000; Doob & McDonald, 1979), as well as in blacks as opposed to whites (Chiricos et al., 2000). Similarly, Doob and McDonald (1979) have found older news watchers to be more fearful than their younger counterparts. In sum, those who are less likely to be victims of crime have been found to be the most fearful (Stafford & Galle, 1984; Warr, 1984, 2000a).

Several studies (Callanan, 2012; Chiricos et al., 1997; Kohm, Waid-Lindberg, Weinrath, Shelley, & Dobbs, 2012; Romer et al., 2003; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004) also offered comparisons between newspaper and television consumption and fear of crime. While older people had significantly lower levels of fear, respondents who were female and black, or who were in locales where crime rates were perceived to be increasing, were found to have higher levels of fear across both newspapers and television consumption (Callanan, 2012; Chiricos et al., 1997; Romer et al., 2003; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). Callanan (2012) also found that with high levels of television news consumption but not newspaper readership, increased fear of victimization and crime among Hispanics and respondents who had previously been victimized was present (see also Kohm et al., 2012). Television news was found to have a more significant impact on fear of crime than newspapers (Callanan, 2012; Chiricos et al., 1997; Kohm et al., 2012; Romer et al., 2003; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004), particularly when the news was local (Romer et al., 2003; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004).

Studies of the impact of the media on fear of crime are not solely limited to the general public or to the topic of general crime. In the wake of school shootings, such as Columbine and Virginia Tech, researchers (e.g. Addington, 2003; Fallahi, Austad, Fallon, & Leishman, 2009; Kaminski et al., 2010; Kohm et al., 2012; Stretesky & Hogan, 2001)

22

have shifted their focus to understand such an impact on students. In their general assessment of college students and fear of crime, Kohm and colleagues (2012) find that students are more fearful of violent crime than property crime. This fear is exacerbated by media consumption, even when controlling for perceived risk of victimization or the concern over crime of the respondents (Kohm et al., 2012). Students reported being more fearful of crime when television news is the primary source of information (Kohm et al., 2012). Conversely, students who report internet news sources and the newspaper as their main source report lower levels of fear (Kohm et al., 2012). These findings are not entirely surprising, given the transition of students to a "Net generation" (Carlson, 2005). In fact, Kohm et al. (2012) found that students with higher usage of social networking sites also were more fearful.

Several studies (Addington, 2003; Fallahi et al., 2009; Kaminski et al., 2010; Stretesky & Hogan, 2001) specifically examine students' fear of crime as a response to school shooting events. One important finding of these studies is that the media can impact students' fear of crime, even when the event is spatially distant (Fallahi et al., 2009; Kaminski et al., 2010; Stretesky & Hogan, 2001). Fallahi and colleagues (2009), for example, found that students who had greater exposure to media coverage of the Virginia Tech shooting were more fearful and were more likely to believe that such an event would happen again, though it was less likely to occur on their campus. Kaminski and colleagues (2010) found that shootings at both Virginia Tech and NIU increased general fear of crime on campus as well as students' fear of being murdered or attacked with a weapon on campus. Addington (2003) found that after Columbine, fear of crime among students increased, albeit the change was small. However, while general fear of

crime increased, 77% of the respondents reported not being fearful at school (Addington, 2003). Stretesky and Hogan (2001) posit that the media coverage of such events can alter perceptions of safety by creating indirect, almost vicarious, experiences.

It's More Than Just Ratings: Additional Impacts of Mass Media

As illustrated above, fear of crime generated by the mass media is considerable enough that it has warranted an entire body of research. However, there are other outcomes, both directly and indirectly linked with fear of crime, which result from the mass media's reporting of crime news. Such consequences include misinformation of the public, copycat or contagion effects, moral panics, and political responses to the fear of crime and subsequent panics. These consequences may be intentional, such as the case with legislative responses, or unintentional, such as copycat effects or public misinformation. Each of these facets can be explored independently; however, their discussion is warranted for the simple fact that they are collectively intertwined.

Misinforming the public. One serious flaw of instant news is the opportunity to misinform the public. In a rush to disseminate information to the public, accuracy of such information is at times traded in exchange for winning the race to the air (Robinson, 2011). Gatekeepers that traditionally fact-checked information and determined which details were the most important (Gieber, 1964; Janowitz, 1975; Schudson, 1989; Shoemaker, 2006; Surette, 1992) now are bypassed in order to get the details on the air (Lipschultz & Hilt, 2011). In doing so, however, Janowitz (1975) notes that personal opinions may override objectivity and facts, and O'Toole (2000) notes that news reports may provide information that is "not necessarily complete, balanced, or accurate" (p. 3). For example, though Adam Lanza was eventually named the shooter at Sandy Hook

Elementary School, initial reports claimed that his brother Ryan was the shooter and even circulated his Facebook photo (Hack, 2012; Soliwon & Nelson, 2012). Within five hours of the shooting, Ryan Lanza's picture had been splashed across television screens and re-shared on Facebook nearly 10,000 times (Soliwon & Nelson, 2012). Similar inaccuracies plagued the Virginia Tech shootings, as reports of the initial shooting in the West Ambler Johnston dormitory had fingered victim Emily Hilscher's boyfriend as the killer (Kellner, 2008b).

In typifying live news coverage, Graber (2006) notes "media personnel are often the first to try to fit breaking events into a coherent story" (p. 130). This process typically involves three distinct phases of news construction. First, news personnel rush to the scene, interrupt regular programming with breaking news coverage, and present "a flood of uncoordinated bulletins announcing the extraordinary event" (Graber, 2006, p. 130). As more details become available from either eyewitnesses or responding law enforcement, the media then work to "correct past errors and put the situation into proper perspective" (Graber, 2006, p. 133). From there, Graber (2006) notes that the media work to place "the crisis into a larger, long-range perspective and to prepare people to cope with the aftermath" (p. 134; see also Shoemaker, 2006).

In a 2011 article, Lipschultz and Hilt examined local news television coverage of the 2007 Omaha, Nebraska mall shooting over four local news outlets for several hours after the story broke. Variation in the reporting of the incident was found across each of the news stations – some carried continuous coverage of the shooting while others opted only to break in when verified reports from law enforcement were available (Lipschultz & Hilt, 2011). The stations that elected to maintain continuous coverage relied on shaky,

25

unedited footage and eyewitness accounts. They incorrectly reported the racial identification of the shooter, leading the public to believe that a black male was still on the loose when the shooter, a white male, was dead in the Von Maur department store (Lipschultz & Hilt, 2011). Eyewitnesses also named victims before law enforcement had a chance to provide an official release (Lipschultz & Hilt, 2011). Conversely, the news station that took the time to fact check provided "more descriptive rather than interpretive [reporting] in the earliest moments of a breaking news story" which can help to abate the public's concern (Lipschultz & Hilt, 2011, p. 210).

Beyond misspecifying facts associated with a particular case, the media may also misinform the public about the relevance of a particular phenomenon. The significant amount of coverage a shooting receives in the media will ultimately lead the public to believe that such occurrences are more common than they are (Lawrence & Mueller, 2003; Lindgren, 2011; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010; Newman, 2006). As a result, the reaction to other threats of violence may also not be proportional. Serious threats may be underestimated, less serious threats may be met with overreaction, and people who are not dangerous may be unfairly stigmatized or punished (O'Toole, 2000).

Contagion effects. In her discussion of domestic terrorism, Nacos (2009) defines contagion effects as those "whereby violence-prone individuals and groups imitate forms of (political) violence attractive to them, based on examples usually popularized by mass media" (p. 3). O'Toole (2000) notes that violent events that generate intense and extensive media coverage may lead to threats of replicated violence or actual copycat incidents (see also Lawrence & Mueller, 2003; Newman et al., 2004; Serazio, 2010; Surette, 1992). Indeed, Coleman (2004) concurs, noting that "the copycat effect is what

happens when the media makes [sic] an event into a 'hot death story' and then via behavior contagion, more deaths, suicides, murders, and more occur in a regularly predictive cycle." Research has shown, for example, that in periods immediately following intense media coverage of incidents of terrorist acts, the likelihood of repeat acts also increases (Jenkins, 1981).

In many of the school shooting events following the 1999 Columbine shooting, including the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, the shooters confirmed such an effect by referencing Harris and Klebold and Columbine either directly or indirectly (Coleman, 2004; Larkin, 2007). Though the shooting at Columbine would become a cultural script for disgruntled youth to later emulate, particularly due to the coverage it received in the media (Carvalho, 2010; Cloud, 1999; Larkin, 2007, 2009; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010; Newman et al., 2004; Tonso, 2009), Jefferson County Sheriff Ted Mink (2006) considered contagion effects in his decision to release or withhold evidence from the shooting to the public. Specifically, Mink (2006) elected to withhold The Basement Tapes, arguably one of the most critical (and most publicly demanded) pieces of evidence from the shooting, citing that they were a call to arms for other potential school shooters and an instruction manual for how to plan and implement an attack. However, excerpts and still frames from the tapes were circulated through the media after reporters from *Time* magazine were allowed to view the tapes prior to them being sealed (Gibbs & Roche, 1999; Schildkraut, 2012b).

Columbine was not, however, the only event to encourage copycats. Within days of the Virginia Tech shooting, for example, a web post was made threatening to kill 50 students at San Diego State University and another man threatened to kill more people

than in Cho's attack, leading to an entire school district in California being shut down

(Hoffman, 2007). These threats came on the heels of the media releasing portions of

Cho's manifesto, in which Cho described his act as a movement "to inspire generations

of the weak and defenseless people" (ABC News, 2007; see also Kellner, 2008b; Serazio,

2010). Four months after the Aurora movie theater shooting, Missouri police arrested a

man planning to carry out a similar shooting during a showing of *Twilight* (Associated

Press, 2012). His shooting plan was thwarted after his mother alerted the authorities

(Associated Press, 2012).

Moral panics. Chermak (1994b) suggests that crime reports in the media can

create moral panics among the general public. Such a claim has been the focus of

research beginning with Cohen's (1972) seminal work examining the presentation of

deviant youth in the British media. Building off Becker's (1963) earlier work, Cohen

(1972) suggests that moral panics are generated when interest groups (or moral

entrepreneurs, as Becker denoted) generate significant public concern about a particular

issue. More specifically, moral panics are best described as

> A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a
> threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and
> stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by
> editors, bishops, politicians, and other right-thinking people; socially accredited
> experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or
> (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges, or deteriorates
> and becomes more visible. (Cohen, 1972, p. 9)

While Cohen's contribution is noteworthy, the study is also limited in that it is

essentially a single case study of a particular phenomenon. However, in addition to

Cohen's (1972) work, researchers have applied the framework of moral panics to a

number of other social issues. This includes juvenile crime (e.g., Hay, 1995; Welch,

Price, & Yankey, 2002), gangs (e.g., McCorkle & Miethe, 1998; Zatz, 1987), drugs (e.g., Hier, 2002; Robinson, 2011), and terrorism (e.g., Rothe & Muzzatti, 2004). Following the 1999 Columbine High School shooting, two studies (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Springhall, 1999) undertook applying the theoretical concepts of moral panics to school shootings, and more recently Schildkraut, Elsass, and Stafford (2013a) operationalized Burns and Crawford's (1999) conceptual indicators into a quantitative assessment of moral panics. They found that certain sociodemographic variables were able to significantly predict moral panics as they pertained to school shootings and college students (Schildkraut et al., 2013a).

There are five main indicators that are indicative of moral panics (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994), each of which is entwined with the media. The first, *concern*, must be able to be concretely measured (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994), and this is typically achieved by utilizing newspaper reports, opinion polls, or social and political movements (Burns & Crawford, 1999). Concern also may be measured by the saliency of the event – how long the event is covered and how much coverage it receives (Schildkraut et al., 2013a, 2013b). *Hostility* is often manifested through the alienation, demonization, and criminalization of certain groups (Burns & Crawford, 1999; deYoung, 1998; Mayr & Machin, 2012). The media may facilitate hostility through their choice of language as they convey a particular event to their audience.

Consensus occurs when members of society agree that a particular threat is "real, serious, and caused by the wrongdoing of group members and their behavior" (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 157). A sense of disorder and a loss of control are often markers of a moral panic (Altheide, 2009a), and these too may be perpetuated through the media.

For instance, following the Columbine shooting, the discourse shifted from an isolated shooting in Littleton to a national problem plaguing all suburban high schools (Altheide, 2009b; Muschert, 2009). A high level of *disproportionality* can mark events when the amount of attention they receive, particularly in the media, far exceeds their actual occurrence (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010; Newman, 2006; Serazio, 2010; Waddington, 1986). Heightened media attention may make events or phenomenon seem more epidemic than they are (Muschert, 2007a; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010; Newman, 2006), particularly when the media focus on several high profile cases (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Muschert, 2007a; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010; Newman, 2006; Sorenson, Manz, & Berk, 1998). Finally, *volatility* occurs as a result of the sudden eruption and diminution of a moral panic (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). While some events, such as Columbine, may become what Goode & Ben-Yehuda (1994, p. 158) call a "cultural legacy," others may be limited in the attention they receive. This can be analyzed in the media by examining the average life cycle of a particular event, such as mass shootings, in comparison to other key issues (such as politics), which typically have a longer story timeline (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Zhu, 1995; Schildkraut, 2012a).

Legislative responses. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) note that a common response to moral panics is to focus on "strengthening the social control apparatus of the society, including tougher or renewed rules, increased public hostility and condemnation, more laws, longer sentences, more police, more arrests, and more prison cells" (p. 30; see also Robinson, 2011). Harsher laws and policies often are supported by the media's routine use of feelings from victims, their families, or the general public as cause for such

responses (Mayr & Machin, 2012). Public opinion also is shaped by what is presented in the media and how it is presented, which too can impact policy decisions related to crime (Chermak, 1994a; Lawrence & Mueller, 2003; Surette, 1992).

School shootings, in particular, have been catalysts for legislative changes. Most often, these responses are aimed at gun control measures. Following the 1999 Columbine High School shooting, for instance, over 800 bills combined at both the state and federal levels were introduced in the first year following the shooting (Soraghan, 2000). A number of these bills were aimed at closing the "gun show loophole" that had allowed a friend of shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold to purchase the guns used in the massacre without a background check (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2013). Still, despite the demand for change and action in response to Columbine, only about 10% of those bills that were introduced were enacted into law, and none of those enacted addressed the gun show background check requirements (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2013; Soraghan, 2000). Following the December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, 23 bills aimed at gun control measures alone were introduced in the first 75 days (Schildkraut et al., 2013a).

Legislative responses to school shootings are not solely limited to gun control. Following the 1998 shooting at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas, the state legislature passed a number of provisions, including amending the ages for which a juvenile could be charged with capital or first degree murder and for which they could be waived to adult court (Ford, 2011). At the time of the shooting, Arkansas did not provide for such waivers, and ultimately the shooters – Mitchell Johnson (age 13) and Andrew Golden (age 11) – were tried in juvenile court and released at age 21 (Ford, 2011; Tanner,

31

2000). The Extended Juvenile Jurisdiction Act (EJJA), the bundle of legislation to which these measures were primary components, also amended existing laws related to criminal history reporting for juveniles, added new provisions for facilities to confine juveniles in state custody, and amended the age of eligibility for transfer to the state's Department of Corrections (Tanner, 2000). Unlike the Columbine shooting, however, the Jonesboro massacre impacted only Arkansas state legislation; many of the provisions introduced by the EJJA had already been incorporated into other states' legislation prior to the shooting (Griffin, Torbet, & Syzmanski, 1998).

Another area that has received a considerable amount of attention in Congress is mental health (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2013). The introduction of legislation seeking to disqualify gun purchasers based on mental health considerations was particularly prominent following the 2007 Virginia Tech shootings (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2013). Despite a well-documented history of mental illness, including being subjected to a temporary detention order at the local mental health facility, during which time he was declared an imminent danger to himself and those around him, shooter Seung-Hui Cho was never reported to the background check system to be disqualified from purchases (Bonnie, Reinhard, Hamilton, & McGarvey, 2009; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). Both of the firearms used in the shootings were purchased legally, and Cho even waited the mandated 30-day period between purchases (Roberts, 2009). In response to this failure, both state and national legislation was changed. Then-Governor of Virginia Timothy Kaine issued an executive order to improve reporting between mental health facilities and all relevant databases (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2013). President Bush also signed the NICS Improvement Amendments Act into law in 2008, which designated

over one billion dollars in federal grant money to improve state reporting of mental health and criminal records (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2013).

Conclusion

The media play an influential role in society. When it comes to reporting crime news, particularly of those crimes that are statistically rare or episodic, disproportional reporting can lead to a number of different outcomes, many of which were highlighted in this chapter. These outcomes in many cases mirror the specific organizational agendas that news agencies use to structure their coverage in attempts to increase their audience size, and by extension, their revenue. The long-reaching effects, however, go far beyond the outcomes discussed in this chapter. The news media play a considerably more important role as creators and architects of society's reality through the process of social construction, discussed in Chapter 3.

III. THEORY & THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

The outcomes discussed in the previous chapter are the result of the social

construction of rampage shooting and other murder events by the news media. As

depicted in Figure 2 below, this construction takes place via a processual model with

phases occurring at both the macro- and micro-levels. Following a rampage shooting

event, there are two ways in which the "reality" of the event can be constructed. The first

is directly, and is represented by the broken line in Figure 2. In this instance, reality is

directly constructed for those individuals who are personally involved with the event –

the survivors and other victims, family or community members, and first responders and

law enforcement. This construction occurs without any influence from the media. The

number of people whose "reality" is constructed in this manner, however, is quite limited.

More common, however, is the construction of the "reality" of these events for

the masses, a process which is mediated through the mass media. This process involves

Shapes Individuals' Perceptions of Structurally Similar Future Events

Macro-Level Process (via Social Construction)		*Micro-Level Process (via Symbolic Interaction)*	
EVENT [Type / Locale]	**NEWS STORY CREATED**	**AUDIENCE RECEIVES STORY**	**CREATE / RECREATE "REALITY"**

Direct Impact of Specific Events on Individuals Prior to Media Coverage
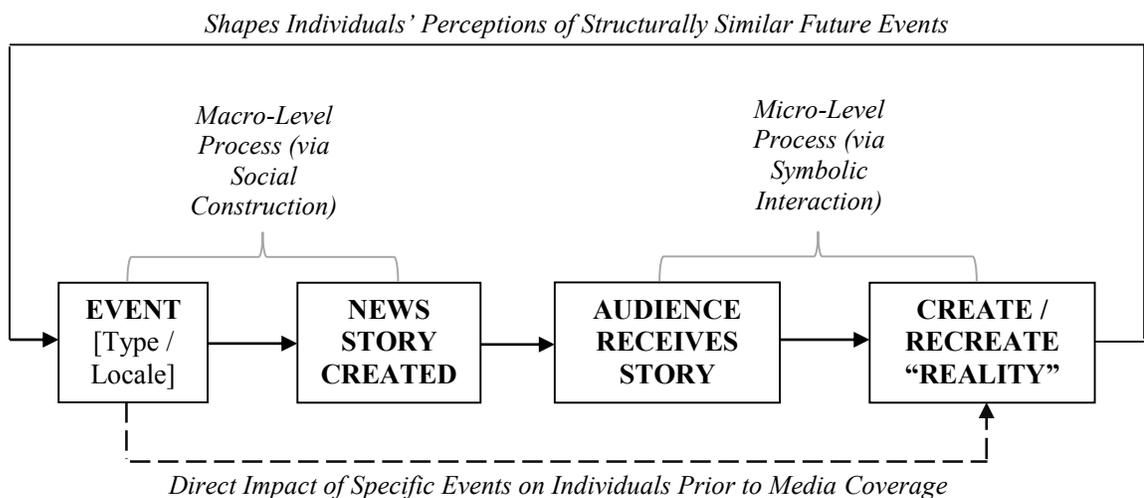
Figure 2. Conceptual Process Model of Mediated Reality Construction

two key phases. At the macro-level, the news media receive information about the event

from law enforcement or community representatives, such as the mayor or even the

state's governor. This information is then constructed into a tangible story, either in the

form of newspaper or web articles, or sound bites to be aired on television. The product

is then released to the news consumers. This phase is ultimately guided by what Berger

and Luckmann (1967) called the social construction of reality.

Following this release, the "reality" construction of the event shifts to a micro-

level process. While each news consumer is receiving similar, if not identical,

information (e.g., all persons tuning in to CNN would be receiving the same information

just as all persons reading the *New York Times* would have access to the same

presentation of details), how they process or interpret that information varies by

individual. Following receipt of the information, individuals may internalize the

information or they may discuss it with others. Each of these approaches is indicative of

Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism, whereby meaning is drawn from one's social

interactions and incorporated into individuals' interpretative processes. The outcome of

this interpretation is the "reality" of the event.

There are three important points to consider with regard to this processual model.

First, the latter phase of the process is contingent upon the individual assigning some

meaning to the event (Blumer, 1969). Some will assign no meaning to these events – that

is, they do not subscribe to the hysteria about the event or may not even hear about it.

Therefore, they will not invest the time or energy to create a "reality" through which to

understand the event.

Next, at the micro-level phase, this process may not occur in a single wave. More specifically, there may be a continual and dynamic "dialogue" that occurs over multiple occurrences that both creates, and then subsequently re-creates, the reality. For example, a person may hear of the event and then read about it in *The Times* or watch coverage on an evening news broadcast. At this stage, they have begun to create their reality about the event. The next day, however, they may go to work and talk about the event and their perceived reality with a co-worker. This interaction may lead to the person re-evaluating or re-interpreting his/her reality (Blumer, 1969). It is important to note, however, that this dynamic process of shaping and re-shaping reality does not rely solely on one's interactions with others. Instead, this process also may occur as the individual consumes more and more news that builds upon previous coverage, either expanding on or digressing from the initial breaking coverage (Cerulo, 1998).

Finally, the process of reality construction serves to shape one's meaning for future events. This occurs both directly for those personally affected and indirectly for news consumers. Specifically, the reality that is created in response to a rampage shooting event (or for any phenomenon for that matter) serves as a foundation for how people process the next event. The reality created in one event provides a "database" for people to draw information from when a subsequent event happens. This recall may be as simple as where they were at the time of the event, or how they felt when they received the news of the shooting. This information also may include creating personal linkages, such as the avoidance of movie theaters or malls after the Aurora (2012) or Clackamas (2012) shootings, or concerns about school safety for parents or students following Sandy Hook (2012). These social facts then impact how people respond to

future events, and with each new event, additional layers of information are added to the database. Like the conceptual model of mediated construction of reality, how people process and respond to these events also is dynamic.

Though the entire processual model conceptually explains the social construction of the "reality" of rampage shootings (or other events put through the same process of news coverage), it relies, as noted, on two separate sociological theories – Berger and Luckmann's (1967) social constructionism and Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism. The present study, however, is focused on understanding the first phase of reality construction of rampage shooting events – that is, the understanding of how the media construct the stories based on the information provided to them. Therefore, despite the theoretical overlap between social constructionism and symbolic interactionism in respects to the full processual model, the present study relies on Berger and Luckmann's (1967) social constructionist theory. This chapter provides an overview of their theory, as well as discussion about how the media, as claims makers and agenda setters, employ social constructionism in their presentation of news. Finally, this chapter briefly examines how social constructionism has been used to mold the narrative about school shootings.

The Social Construction of Reality

A key focus of Berger and Luckmann's (1967) theory is the notion that people construct their own reality, and to understand the process of how this occurs, one must utilize the sociology of knowledge. These realities, however independently constructed, still are shared in everyday life with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Two main concepts guide Berger and Luckmann's (1967) theoretical discussion of how social

37

objects or phenomena are constructed – reality and knowledge. Reality, they note, is "a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 1). More simply stated, phenomena exist beyond one's control or choice. The other concept, knowledge, can be understood as "the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 1). For Berger and Luckmann (1967), to understand these concepts in terms of sociological inquiry is to understand them in respect to their social relativity, as what is real to one person or society may not be real to another.

For Berger and Luckmann (1967), language also plays an integral role in the social construction of reality. Language is important because it helps to convey ideas and spread information, which people use to make sense of the world around them (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Further, language helps to situate out of the ordinary or extreme events in the context of everyday reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Language also provides people a vehicle with which to share the reality of everyday life with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). In essence, language is both a subjective and an objective experience.

Language is the most important system of signs for human society, which is important because signs "serve as an index of subjective meaning" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 35). While gestures require recipients to be physically present in the moment in order to discern meaning, language transcends the "here and now" as one does not need to be directly present in order for meaning to be conveyed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Instead, language, when detached through writings, radio or television broadcasts, or even a telephone call, still is able to communicate the ideas that shape the reality of

everyday life. More importantly, according to Berger and Luckmann (1967), language has the capability to become "the objective repository of vast accumulations of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations" (p. 37). Essentially, language is the archive of ideas and information that shapes the reality of everyday life over both time and space.

The reality of everyday life also must be understood in terms of its relevance to a given individual. When something is of relevance to a person, it becomes worth more social stock to that person (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). When situating that stock in the context of everyday life, however, one must consider the relevance of the object of inquiry in relation to others' social stock. For instance, people would not visit their auto mechanic if they felt ill, nor would they ask their primary physician to diagnose an engine problem in their car. Therefore, one must consider how their reality is relevant to others' realities.

Though highly complex, Berger and Luckmann's (1967) theory of social construction can be summarized in three key processes – internalization, objectification, and externalization. These processes are not discrete nor do they occur in a specific temporal order, despite often being identified in what appears to be a progressive sequence (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Instead, recognition of society and individuals' places in it requires reality to be examined simultaneously through each process (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; see also Tuchman, 1978). This is the dialectical relationship that Berger and Luckmann (1967) posit to exist between humans, the social world, and the reality's producer.

Internalization refers to the process "by which the objectivated social world is retrojected into the consciousness in the course of socialization" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 61). In effect, the process of internalization involves the internal processing of social objects (or phenomena) from the outside world. Objectification refers to the belief that these objects are in fact real and then transforms them into objects of general knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Finally, externalization occurs when individuals cast their own means of reality back into society (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This allows the reality, shaped by individuals and their experiences, to become part of history and tradition (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This reality, however, would not be possible without a continual dialogue between individuals and society. As Tuchman (1978) summarizes, reality construction is a simultaneous process of society shaping one's consciousness, and at the same time, social phenomena are constructed by the same individual.

Claims Makers and Social Problems

John Austin has said that law is what the sovereign says it is (Bix, 2013). Similarly, the broader concept of reality, as it is applied to law or other aspects of everyday life, often is determined by those who have the power to shape and promulgate their ideas. This group is referred to as "claims makers," and these people often are responsible for declarations or objections towards a particular social issue (Spector & Kitsuse, 1977). Further, the purported claims are not "objective truths" as outlined by Berger and Luckmann's theory (1967), but instead represent the attempts by claims makers to validate their claims or push their respective agendas (Best, 1987, 1989).

To understand the processes of claims making, one must begin with an understanding of what the claims are about – social problems (either actual or perceived). Claims makers have the ability to influence public perception and policy with relation to "social problems" (Best, 1987). According to Spector and Kitsuse (1977), social problems are "the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances or claims with respect to some putative conditions" (p. 75). Essentially, then, "social problems" are a product of those with the power or resources to define them as such and typically reflects the interests of those who are making the claims. Once claims makers have convinced others of a problem, they then offer solutions to the problem or policies aimed at deriving such a solution (Best, 1987).

There are three key components to making claims about social problems (Best, 1987, 2006). The first is to identify a problem by offering a definition, or more specifically, a name (Best, 1987, 2006). By defining the problem, the claims maker can identify its domain – that is, whether the problem is new or whether it has been in existence but not present in the forefront (Best, 1987). In each case, the defining of the problem and its domain allows claims makers to create an appearance of originality that will entice constituents to be concerned about the problem (Best, 1987). One technique that claims makers use in defining the problem is vagueness, or perhaps more accurately, the absence of a precise definition (Best, 1987). For example, the problem of "terrorism" has undergone many permutations of its definition, particularly after 9/11. Still, claims makers even have likened the Columbine High School shooting to an act of terrorism (Frymer, 2009). Similarly, definitions of "mass shootings" also remain vague. Even the

term "rampage shootings," underscored in the present study, leaves room for interpretation in its definition as a social problem.

The second component in the claims-making process is the use of examples (Best, 1987, 2006). Examples often may be used throughout the discourse of the problem, but claims makers typically will rely on an extreme case as an initial example to underscore their perceived seriousness of the problem (Best, 1987; see also Barak, 1994). For example, President George W. Bush heavily relied on 9/11 as his example for terrorism in his campaign to engage in war. Other claims makers have routinely used Columbine as their main example when campaigning for safer schools and gun control following other incidents of school shootings. In addition to furthering their view, these types of examples also are easily identified and related with by those people whom the claims makers are trying to convince of the social problem (Best, 1987).

Claims makers also attempt to determine the magnitude of the social problem by discussing numeric estimates (Best, 1987, 2006; see also Barak, 1994; Sacco, 1995). By using these figures, claims makers are essentially able to offer some sort of context within which the social problem exists (Best, 1987). The larger the number, the greater the problem, and by extension, the more attention it will receive (Best, 1987). Following incidents of mass murder, regardless of the type (e.g., school shooting or terrorism), claims makers regularly include numeric figures to put the issue into context. After 9/11, it was repeatedly emphasized that the attacks killed 2,977 people (excluding the hijackers). As the deadliest attack on U.S. soil, this figure often is used to emphasize the seriousness of the problem of terrorism. By comparison, statistics often are used in constructing school shootings as a problem. Claims makers often refer to the 13 killed at

Columbine, but that is used as a point of reference for how important these events are. By comparison, the 1998 shooting at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas claimed five lives, but the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School claimed 26. Not only do these figures emphasize the importance of the problem, they also offer a continuum upon which one can rank perceived importance of the event in the domain of the problem.

One of the main problems of claims making is that often these problems are not put into context, but instead blown out of proportion (Best, 1987). Yet, given the standing of the claims maker, these claims often are taken as accurate (Best, 2006). Claims making can make atypical problems seem typical, and typical problems seem atypical (Best, 1987). Not only does this shape public perceptions of these social problems, but the broader reach extends to policy implementation, including those aimed at increasing social control, prevention, and awareness (Barak, 1994; Best, 1987; Sacco, 1995). These inconsistencies are furthered through the language that is used by claims makers to propagate their agendas, and ultimately affect the social construction of social problems. As Jones, McFalls, and Gallagher (1989) have noted, claims makers have the ability to make "objective molehills" out of "subjective mountains" and vice versa (p. 341).

Claims makers have been conceptually subdivided into two groups – primary and secondary claims makers (Best, 1989). Primary claims makers are those who have some sort of exclusive or intimate knowledge about the problem (Best, 1989; Ogle, Eckman, & Leslie, 2003; O'Neal, 1997). This group may include victims, witnesses, or experts in a particular area who call attention to a particular issue and offer potential solutions or

simply bring awareness to the problem (Best, 1989; Ogle et al., 2003). Secondary claims

makers, on the other hand, are further removed from the issue and simply interpret or

disseminate the claims made by the primary claims makers (Best, 1989; Ogle et al., 2003;

O'Neal, 1997). Despite the often reinterpreting of claims made by the primary group, the

media, therefore, according to Best (1989), are considered to be secondary claims makers

(see also Ogle et al., 2003; O'Neal, 1997).

Social Constructionism, Agenda Setting, and the Media

The mass media play an important role in the social construction of reality as they

define and shape issues and events rather than just reflecting what is occurring in society

(Barak, 1994; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). In his commentary on how the media

contribute to the social construction of crime, Sacco (1995) notes that

> The ways in which the news media collect, sort, and contextualize crime reports
> help to shape public consciousness regarding which conditions need to be seen as
> urgent problems, what kinds of problems they represent, and, by implication, how
> they should be resolved. (p. 141)

This process, known as agenda setting, enables the mass media to highlight particular

attributes of a story that call attention to and lend support for claims made by the primary

group (Entman, 2007; McCombs, 1997; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Weaver, 2007).

While agenda setting by the media often is considered synonymous with the process of

media framing (as discussed in the previous chapter), researchers (e.g., Entman, 2007;

Weaver, 2007) have suggested that the terms are not entirely interchangeable. Still,

regardless of the terminology used, these processes both focus on how objects or issues

are portrayed in the media and the amount of saliency assigned to each object's particular

attributes (Weaver, 2007; see also McCombs, 1997; Surette, 1992). Additionally, the

process of agenda setting is concerned with the relationship between the media and the

audience rather than how the media interact with social institutions to determine which issues are of increased saliency (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Weaver & Elliott, 1985).

According to McCombs (1997), one of the main goals of agenda setting is to achieve consensus among the public about the importance a particular topic or issue, and the news media are instrumental in generating this consensus. By highlighting certain stories or issues as important (or perhaps more accurately, as more important than others), news producers call attention to issues that may either directly or indirectly affect a particular community (Barak, 1994; Entman, 2007; McCombs, 1997; Reese, 2007). Over time, as more coverage is allocated to a particular issue, the saliency of that issue for the public is likely to increase, and eventually becomes a priority for the public's agenda (Entman, 2007; McCombs, 1997; Reese, 2007). As the saliency increases, policies aimed at addressing the issue also can be pushed as part of the agenda (Entman, 2007). As Cohen (1963) noted, the media "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling people what to think *about*" (p. 13).

Rarely, however, does the news or public agenda focus on more than a few key issues at a time (McCombs, 1997). This limited focus stems from the fact that very few issues are able to command the consensus needed to maintain saliency (McCombs, 1997). Most often, the media focus on those issues that are the most serious or atypical in nature (Barak, 1994; Sacco, 1995) or those that threaten society's perceived stability (Gans, 1979). At the same time, the limited focus on only a few key issues allows for a more complete, full-bodied discussion to take place in both the public and media discourses. When an issue is of perceived importance, the media agenda is impacted as the demand

for more information increases (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Accordingly, how the

mass media portray such issues also impacts the way in which the public perceives and

understands them (Barak, 1994; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

How the agenda is set in the media is largely dependent on the organizational

constraints of the agency (Berkowitz, 1987). Most often, the mass media rely on public

or political officials (including members of the law enforcement community) as their

sources of information, and by extension, these groups serve to become the primary

claims makers. Given the media's heavy reliance on these "official sources," the

information that news consumers receive is shaped largely in part by primary claims

makers through the media as secondary claims makers (Berkowitz, 1987). The media,

however, do not necessarily play the same type of passive role as other secondary claims

makers. By consciously deciding which aspects of a story to highlight or what sources to

incorporate, the media play an active role in the construction of reality (Barak, 1994;

Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978; Weaver & Elliott, 1985). At the same time, however, the

shaping of the public agenda may not always be so deliberate but rather an unintended

outcome of reporting the news (McCombs, 1997).

Social Constructionism and the Narrative of Murder

Tuchman (1978) notes that when the news media construct reality about a specific

event, the details imparted into the public consciousness serve as a general reference for

all other events of a similar nature (such that details gleaned by news consumers about

one mass shooting are applied when stories of other mass shootings are presented). The

narrative of murder, be it general homicide or a more specific form, such as serial killers

or school shooters, has long been constructed in the media. The result, however, has

been a disproportional understanding of just how common these events are. As discussed

in Chapter 2, property crimes are far more commonplace than homicide. According to

the FBI's 2011 *Uniform Crime Reports*, there were an estimated 9,063,173 property

crimes nationwide that year (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012). By comparison, during

the same year, there were 1,203,564 violent crimes known to law enforcement (U.S.

Department of Justice, 2012). Therefore, there are over seven and a half property crimes

for every one violent crime. The social construction of violent crime, however, gives the

impression that it is far more common than property crime.

A study by Duwe (2005) examined the social construction of mass murder

incidents in the United States. Despite the prevalence of mass murder early in the 20th

century, it was the 1960s – with the mass murders by Charles Whitman at the University

of Texas-Austin (1966) and the killing of eight student nurses in Chicago by Richard

Speck two weeks prior – that were touted to be the start of the main wave of the

phenomenon (Duwe, 2005). One important claim that Duwe (2005) makes, however, is

that the importance of this time period did not surface until nearly 20 years after these

events, and the media were an instrumental tool of claims makers seeking to identify

landmark incidents to typify the phenomenon and for the public trying to understand the

claims. He asserts that

> The overemphasis placed on the most sensational and least representative mass killings, though hardly surprising, has significant implications for the social construction of mass murder. Because claims makers have uncritically and almost exclusively used news coverage (or more specifically, national news coverage) as the main source of information on mass killings, they have made a number of questionable assertions, not only about long-term trends in the prevalence of mass murder but also about the characteristics of the typical mass killing. (Duwe, 2005, p. 60)

The media's focus on high profile cases serves to underscore that the events are random and typifies the victims as blameless and the offenders as monsters (Duwe, 2005; see also Best, 1987). Not only does this create an opportunity for claims makers to use these celebrated cases as examples for why these events are social problems, but it also creates an entertainment product for the media to sell (Duwe, 2005). Duwe (2005) examined 909 cases of mass murder that spanned the full 20th century. His findings support his claim and illustrate that the media disproportionately focus on high profile cases – those with larger body counts, public locations, assault weapons, and often suicidal offenders – that is indicative of a counterfactual presentation of mass murder (Duwe, 2005). These *event* traits, along with stranger victims, public locations, use of a firearm, and older and/or white offenders, also provide a model of "newsworthiness" through which to examine these events (Duwe, 2005), similar to the model Sorenson and colleagues (1998) proposed to assess newsworthiness of homicide *victims*.

Beyond Duwe's (2005) examination of the media's portrayal of mass murder, several other studies (e.g., Consalvo, 2003; Frymer, 2009; Kupchik & Bracy, 2009; Ogle et al., 2003) have examined how the media have constructed the narrative of school violence and rampage school shootings. Such events as school shootings cause widespread fear, but this effect may be amplified by the media coverage they receive. Kupchik & Bracy (2009) found that the news media frame school violence and crime as increasing at a time when it was actually decreasing and without informing readers of how statistically rare such events are (see also Frymer, 2009). Further, the media rely on constructing the stories based on emotion and people's perceptions of the events rather than fact (Kupchik & Bracy, 2009). Specifically, they found that the media coverage of

school violence heightened in conjunction with the cluster of school shootings that occurred during the 1998-1999 school year (Kupchik & Bracy, 2009). The results further indicate that the media chose to focus on several key events while, at the same time, giving readers the impression that these events could happen anywhere (Kupchik & Bracy, 2009; see also Frymer, 2009).

Consalvo's (2003) study provided a different examination of the media construction of school shootings. While prior literature on gender presentations in coverage of news violence had focused on women, Consalvo (2003) focused on the construction of males in the news, particularly with reference to juveniles. She found that in constructing the story, media outlets utilized terminology closely related to how terrorism is covered, using words like *war zone* or *bloodbath* (Consalvo, 2003). Harris and Klebold specifically were constructed as monsters – a term that Consalvo (2003) notes is not gendered – and could not be discussed in comparison to normal kids as monsters were not human. Almost simultaneously, however, the media also positioned the shooters as geeks who were somehow lesser than the normal kids (Consalvo, 2003). Finally, by categorizing them as deviant, the media framed Harris and Klebold beyond the mainstream discussions of masculinity, thereby removing masculinity (either a lack or excess of the characteristic) as a potential cause for the shooting (Consalvo, 2003).

Ogle and colleagues' (2003) study examined the role of appearance cues in the construction of the Columbine school shooting in the *Denver Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News*, the area's two largest newspapers. Their analysis revealed that in the immediate aftermath of the shooting, the news media relied on primary claims makers (e.g., students who were direct witnesses of the attack) as details were scarce; this trend,

however, did not sustain, and ultimately the media reverted to secondary claims making by interjecting their own commentary into the narrative (Ogle et al., 2003). This was particularly evident with reference to the outfits that Harris and Klebold wore on the day of the shooting, which led the media (and the public, by extension) to suspect additional people, particularly others at Columbine who wore black trench coats, had been involved in the shooting (Ogle et al., 2003; see also Consalvo, 2003). The media, as secondary claims makers, also made the link between Harris and Klebold and characters in *The Basketball Diaries* and *The Matrix* movies who had worn similar coats (Ogle et al., 2003; see also Frymer, 2009).

The use of appearance cues not only gave way to speculation about certain articles of clothing and linkages to mainstream popular culture movies, but also to speculation as to why the shooting had occurred (Ogle et al., 2003). These assertions were categorized into three main claims – subculture or out-group, social tension or revenge, and dress-as-facilitator (Ogle et al., 2003; see also Consalvo, 2003). The discussion of Harris and Klebold as members of the Trench Coat Mafia manifested itself through the media into linkages with other subcultures, including Goths, neo-Nazis, and satanic cults (Ogle et al., 2003; see also Frymer, 2009). The implicit notion of situating Harris and Klebold in an out-group was that kids who didn't fit that role, or who were "normal," wouldn't carry out the type of violence that they had (Ogle et al., 2003). A second explanation offered was that the Columbine shooting was a revenge killing against athletes with whom social tensions had been brewing (Ogle et al., 2003). This claim, however, was not solely propagated by the media as secondary claims makers, but also by primary claims makers, particularly those students who had been present in the

library and who claimed that Harris and Klebold specifically targeted athletes in white baseball hats (Ogle et al., 2003). Finally, some credence was provided in the discourse for the use of appearance as concealment, particularly as the long trench coats worn on the day of the shootings had easily concealed Harris and Klebold's arsenal (Ogle et al., 2003).

The social construction of the school shootings problem created a number of misconceptions that were affixed to many students around the nation. Columbine became a symbol for national concern over alienated and disgruntled youth. Other students, both in Denver and across the country, feared the backlash of wearing or even owning a trench coat, or being outside of the popular groups in school (Ogle et al., 2003). In some instances, school officials subscribed so faithfully to the idea that clothing was a partial cause of the Columbine shootings that they implemented school dress codes or required uniforms (Ogle et al., 2003). While violence, to the point of Columbine, had been considered an inner-city problem precipitated by minorities, the claims made by both primary and secondary claims makers led to the belief that white middle-class youth should now be feared, particularly when they had been observably alienated from society (Frymer, 2009).

Conclusion

The news media serve an important function in society as they act as a primary source of information (Barak, 1994; Surette, 1992; Tuchman, 1998). As Gans (1979) notes, the news can be described as "what this society tells itself about itself" (p. xi). As a result, understanding how reality is constructed in the media is important given the ability these agencies have in influencing public opinion and legitimizing social values

(Surette, 1992). Particularly with news of extreme or episodic crime, the media

constitute the main representation of these events (Barak, 1994). Therefore,

understanding how these stories are constructed and subsequently presented is an

important first step in addressing public understanding and reactions, including policy-

related responses, which are based upon misconceptions about the prevalence and

frequency of such events.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The present study seeks to examine the mediatization of rampage shooter cases between 2000 and 2012 through a series of research questions:

- How is the discourse on rampage shooter events as a phenomenon constructed in the media?

- What themes are consistently prevalent across rampage shooter events?

- How do the themes within the discourse on rampage shooter events change (or remain constant) over time?

- How does the discourse vary between the local and national levels of coverage?

While the goal of the present study is to answer these questions, it also is important to consider the greater meaning of the media discourse on rampage shooters. There are a number of issues that are woven throughout the discourse following these events, such as the resulting changes in fear of crime and/or moral panics, police and tactical responses to these events, gun control, and issues with the mental health system. The media, in some way or another, impact each of these "behavioral outcomes." Therefore, in order to better understand the public response and behavioral changes in the wake of these tragedies, it is critical to first understand how the public receives these communicated messages via the media. It is, in essence, keeping the proverbial horse before the cart.

Ultimately, the most sensational details of a case are what will sell the story. With this in mind, the researcher expects that of the issues outlined above, those that are

the most controversial – gun control and mental health – also will be the most prevalent. These two topics are easily debated not only by the public, but also by politicians. In many instances, this debate is conducted through the media via quotes and interviews and fueled by the repetition of these statements in the media. These issues also have the greatest ability to evoke behavioral changes among the general public. For example, while there may be an outcry for more rapid response by law enforcement, this is something that the public has little control over. Conversely, members of the public have significantly more control over whether they purchase a firearm to protect themselves and their family.

Data Source

In order to answer the research questions proposed above, the present study analyzes newspaper coverage of the 91 rampage shooter events that occurred during the study's time frame (see Table 1). Altheide (2009a) notes that the newspaper format in particular is more compatible than television news with framing in terms of moral panics and specific audience effects, because they offer a wider variation in views. Specifically, both local and national coverage is examined. For the examination of national coverage, *The New York Times* is selected. Previous researchers (Altheide, 2009b; Leavy & Maloney, 2009; Muschert, 2002; Wigley & Fontenot, 2009) have identified *The Times* as the national standard for print news. Muschert (2002) further notes that in some instances, *The Times* even may act as a source of news for other publications, which may reprint their articles. *The Times* also has an impressive reach, with a circulation of over 1.15 million readers weekly and nearly 1.65 million readers with its Sunday edition[4]

---

[4] Circulation estimates as of September 2011.

Table 1. Timeline of Rampage Shooting Events, 2000-2012

Date	Location	Shooter(s)	# Dead	# Wounded	Shooter Dead
12/26/00	Wakefield, MA	Michael McDermott	7	0	No
01/10/01	Houston, TX	Ki Young Park	4	0	Yes
02/05/01	Melrose Park, IL	William Baker	4	4	Yes
03/05/01	Santee, CA	Charles Andrew Williams	2	13	No
03/22/01	El Cajon, CA	Jason Hoffman	0	5	No
04/14/01	Elgin, IL	Luther Casteel	2	16	No
12/06/01	Goshen, IN	Robert Wissman	1	6	Yes
01/16/02	Grundy, VA	Peter Odighizuwa	3	3	No
03/22/02	South Bend, IN	William Lockey	4	5	Yes
07/04/02	Los Angeles, CA	Hesham Mohamed Hadayet	2	4	Yes
10/26/02	Sallisaw, OK	Daniel Fears	2	7	Yes
10/28/02	Tucson, AZ	Robert Flores Jr.	3	0	Yes
04/24/03	Red Lion, PA	James Sheets	1	0	Yes
05/09/03	Cleveland, OH	Biswanath Halder	1	2	No
07/02/03	Jefferson City, MO	Jonathon Russell	3	5	Yes
07/08/03	Meridian, MS	Douglas Williams	7	8	Yes
08/27/03	Chicago, IL	Salvador Tapia	6	0	Yes
09/24/03	Cold Spring, MN	John Jason McLaughlin	2	0	No
12/08/04	Columbus, OH	Nathan Gale	4	7	Yes
02/13/05	Kingston, NY	Robert Bonelli Jr.	0	2	No
03/12/05	Brookfield, WI	Terry Michael Ratzmann	6	4	Yes
03/21/05	Red Lake, MN	Jeffrey Weise	9	5	Yes
11/08/05	Jacksboro, TN	Kenneth Bartley, Jr.	1	2	No
11/20/05	Tacoma, WA	Dominick Maldonado	0	6	No
01/30/06	Goleta, CA	Jennifer San Marco	7	0	Yes
03/14/06	Reno, NV	James Scott Newman	0	2	No
03/25/06	Seattle, WA	Kyle Aaron Huff	6	2	Yes
07/28/06	Seattle, WA	Naveed Afzal Haq	1	5	No
08/24/06	Essex, VT	Christopher Williams	2	3	No
10/02/06	Lancaster County, PA	Charles Carl Roberts	5	5	Yes

Table 1 – Continued. Timeline of Rampage Shooting Events, 2000-2012

Date	Location	Shooter(s)	# Dead	# Wounded	Shooter Dead
02/12/07	Salt Lake City, UT	Sulejman Talovic	5	4	Yes
02/12/07	Philadelphia, PA	Vincent Dortch	3	1	Yes
04/16/07	Blacksburg, VA	Seung Hui Cho	32	23	Yes
05/01/07	Kansas City, MO	David Logsdon	3	8	Yes
08/08/07	Walbridge, OH	Calvin Neyland Jr.	2	0	No
09/21/07	Dover, DE	Loyer Braden	1	1	No
10/07/07	Crandon, WI	Tyler Peterson	5	1	Yes
10/10/07	Cleveland, OH	Asa Coon	0	4	Yes
12/05/07	Omaha, NE	Robert Hawkins	8	4	Yes
12/09/07	Colorado Springs, CO	Matthew Murray	4	5	Yes
02/07/08	Kirkwood, MO	Charles Lee Thornton	5	2	Yes
02/08/08	Baton Rouge, LA	Latina Williams	2	0	Yes
02/14/08	DeKalb, IL	Steven Kazmierczak	5	21	Yes
05/25/08	Winnemucca, NV	Ernesto Villagomez	2	2	Yes
06/25/08	Henderson, KY	Wesley Neal Higdon	5	1	Yes
07/28/08	Knoxville, TN	Jim David Adkisson	2	7	No
09/02/08	Seattle, WA	Isaac Zamora	6	4	No
10/26/08	Conway, AR	Kawin Brockton, Kelsey Perry, Mario Toney, & Brandon Wade	2	1	No
12/24/08	Covina, CA	Bruce Jeffrey Pardo	9	2	Yes
01/25/09	Portland, OR	Erik Salvadore Ayala	2	5	No
03/10/09	Samson/Geneva, AL	Michael Kenneth McLendon	10	6	Yes
03/29/09	Carthage, NC	Robert Stewart	8	3	No
04/03/09	Binghamton, NY	Jiverly Wong	13	4	Yes
04/09/09	Temecula, CA	John Chong	1	3	No
04/26/09	Hampton, VA	Odane Greg Maye	0	3	No
06/01/09	Little Rock, AR	Carlos Leon Bledsoe	1	1	No
06/10/09	Washington, DC	James Wenneker von Brunn	1	1	No
08/04/09	Collier Township, PA	George Sodini	3	9	Yes
09/12/09	Owosso, MI	Harlan James Drake	2	0	No
11/05/09	Fort Hood, TX	Nidal Hasan	13	32	No

Table 1 – Continued. Timeline of Rampage Shooting Events, 2000-2012

Date	Location	Shooter(s)	# Dead	# Wounded	Shooter Dead
11/06/09	Orlando, FL	Jason S. Rodriguez	1	5	No
11/29/09	Parkland, WA	Maurice Clemmons	3	1	Yes
12/23/09	Baton Rouge, LA	Richard Matthews	2	1	No
01/07/10	St. Louis, MO	Timothy Hendron	3	5	Yes
01/19/10	Brooksville, FL	John Kalisz	3	2	No
02/10/10	Knoxville, TN	Mark Stephen Foster	0	2	No
02/12/10	Huntsville, AL	Amy Bishop	3	3	No
02/23/10	Littleton, CO	Bruco Eastwood	0	2	No
03/09/10	Columbus, OH	Nathaniel Brown	1	2	Yes
03/30/10	Tarpon Springs, FL	Arunya Rouch	1	0	No
06/08/10	Hialeah, FL	Gerardo Regalado	4	3	Yes
07/12/10	Albuquerque, NM	Robert Reza	2	4	Yes
08/03/10	Manchester, CT	Omar Thornton	8	2	Yes
09/09/10	Philadelphia, PA	Yvonne Hiller	2	1	No
10/04/10	Gainesville, FL	Clifford Miller Jr.	2	5	Yes
10/08/10	Carlsbad, CA	Brendan O'Rourke	0	2	No
01/05/11	Omaha, NE	Robert Butler Jr.	1	2	Yes
01/08/11	Tucson, AZ	Jared Loughner	6	13	No
08/07/11	Copley Township, OH	Michael Hance	7	1	Yes
09/06/11	Carson City, NV	Eduardo Sencion	4	7	Yes
10/12/11	Seal Beach, CA	Scott Evans Dekraai	8	1	No
02/27/12	Chardon, OH	T.J. Lane	3	2	No
04/02/12	Oakland, CA	One L. Goh	7	3	No
05/30/12	Seattle, WA	Ian Lee Stawicki	5	1	Yes
07/20/12	Aurora, CO	James Holmes	12	58	No
08/05/12	Oak Creek, WI	Wade Michael Page	6	3	Yes
08/13/12	College Station, TX	Thomas Caffall	2	4	Yes
09/27/12	Minneapolis, MN	Andrew Engeldinger	5	2	Yes
10/21/12	Brookfield, WI	Radcliffe Haughton	3	4	Yes
12/11/12	Clackamas, OR	Jacob Roberts	2	1	Yes
12/14/12	Newtown, CT	Adam Lanza	27	1	Yes

(Edmonds, Guskin, Rosenstiel, & Mitchell, 2012). While *The Times'* weekday

readership is exceeded by *The Wall Street Journal (WSJ)* and *USA Today* with 2.07 and

1.78 million daily readers respectively (Edmonds et al., 2012), the news formats of these

papers depart from the intention of the present study. The *WSJ* focuses more heavily on

business and economic news, while *USA Today* utilizes a more infotainment approach

(Muschert, 2002).

      Data collection. When possible, the LexisNexis database is utilized to download

the articles. Originally created to contain information for legal and financial sources, the

database is now credited as one of the leading media archives (Deacon, 2007) and one of

the most widely used within the social sciences (Deacon, 2007; Weaver & Bimber,

2008). LexisNexis archives approximately 300 papers within the United States,

including most of the major national publications (e.g., *The New York Times*, *The

Washington Post*), many papers from mid-size markets (e.g., *The Boston Globe*, *The

Dallas Morning News*), and a smaller sample of local papers (Weaver & Bimber, 2008).

It also archives an additional 500 general print publications and transcripts from several

dozen broadcast outlets including ABC News and CNN (Weaver & Bimber, 2008).

      Researchers (e.g., Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Deacon, 2007; Snider & Janda,

1998; Soothill & Grover, 1997; Weaver & Bimber, 2008) have noted several benefits to

utilizing online media archives, such as LexisNexis, for content analysis. First, these

databases effectively address many of the traditional concerns of archiving news accounts

– storage space, speed of information retrieval, and physical access to the data (Deacon,

2007, p. 6; see also Altheide & Schneider, 2013). With the advances in computer

technology, searches through a larger number of news sources can now be conducted

quickly, reliably, and remotely (Deacon, 2007; Snider & Janda, 1998; Soothill & Grover, 1997). Deacon (2007), for instance, notes that the computerized searches of media archives actually can increase study validity and reliability as they limit human error (see also Snider & Janda, 1998). Soothill & Grover (1997) agree, though they note the importance of using carefully constructed search terms to yield the best results.

Though the benefits of using such a system as LexisNexis appear to be ample, there are several drawbacks that also warrant consideration. Deacon (2007), Snider and Janda (1998), Soothill and Grover (1997), and Weaver and Bimber (2008) all point to the standardization of the results in online archives. While one might think that standardizing the results format is beneficial in eliminating or at the very least reducing bias, the reality is that information critical to examining print media are omitted from online archives (Deacon, 2007; Soothill & Grover, 1997, Weaver & Bimber, 2008). This can include font styles and sizes, positioning, and placement of the article relative to other stories on the page, and photographs (Deacon, 2007; Soothill & Grover, 1997, Weaver & Bimber, 2008). While each of these could be beneficial in understanding the media's construction of a particular story, the present study is most interested in the content (what's being said) and therefore is not as impacted by these constraints.

Soothill and Grover (1997) also note that information may be lost due to false positive or false negative search results (see also Deacon, 2007). False positives occur when a search term has multiple meanings, thus resulting in more results than are intended (Deacon, 2007; Soothill & Grover, 1997). Alternately, false negatives can occur when the search term is so limited that articles are omitted because they do not meet the

entered criteria (Deacon, 2007; Soothill & Grover, 1997). Both can present a challenge for the present study.

For example, using the location (city) name for the event may yield excess results in that it will return articles within the designated time frame that include that city. However, one can easily address this issue by weeding out irrelevant articles from the results (Deacon, 2007). On the other hand, using the name of the shooter as the search term can lead to false negatives in that initial coverage published prior to the release of the shooter's identity would be omitted. Addressing this issue is considerably more time consuming, in that multiple searches may be required to ensure that no articles are missed, and even then the researcher may still end up with duplicate articles needing to be weeded out.

Though duplicate articles, particularly with wire sources, such as the Associated Press, or articles from *The New York Times* that are reprinted by other sources, may be an issue, they are not considered a major threat to this study (Deacon, 2007). It is important to note, however, that the results should not be taken as valid on their face; rather, the researcher should comb the results for duplicates to ensure an accurate dataset (Deacon, 2007). Deacon (2007) also notes that there may be a limitation to the historical reach of online news archives, such as LexisNexis, as many publications may not be available prior to the mid- to late-1990s. This is not expected to present an issue in the present study for those titles that are archived in LexisNexis, as the study does not examine coverage prior to 2000. Snider and Janda (1998) also suggest an important limitation to the use of online databases is the rapid advancements in technology. However, as the

articles for the present study are collected over a relatively short period of time (within a week's time), this is not expected to be an issue.

In order to maintain consistency between the searches, the same parameters are used to access articles about each individual event. The city or institution name is utilized as the primary search term rather than the shooters' names. Institution names are used when the shooting took place at a school, as it is more common for the media to report this aspect.[5] When the shooting did not occur at a school, the name of the city is used.[6] The results are limited to one month of coverage including the day of the event, as discussed below. While some shootings occur after the paper has gone to press for the day, others occur in the early morning hours, and the stories may still be added. Therefore, including the day of the shooting addresses this contingency. Finally, the present study is primarily concerned with the *news* reporting of the events. As such, opinion and editorial articles are omitted from the dataset.

Coverage period. Each of the cases included in the present study will be covered for 30 days following the event in both the local and national papers. A study by Chyi & McCombs (2004) examining the media coverage of the Columbine High School shooting found the life span of the story to be limited to one month. Additional studies examining the coverage of school shootings in the media (e.g., Muschert, 2002, 2007b; Schildkraut, 2012a; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014) also have utilized the 30-day coverage period.

There are several potential explanations for why mass shooting events receive coverage for shorter time periods. First, as many rampage shooting events have the

---

[5] For example, the majority of the coverage of the Virginia Tech shooting consistently references the name of the university rather than Blacksburg, Virginia where the school is located.
[6] For example, the July 20, 2012 movie theater shooting in Colorado is most commonly referenced as the Aurora shooting rather than the shooting at the Century 21 movie theater.

ability to incite moral panics, albeit to varying extents, Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) concept of volatility is particularly relevant. Moral panics are suggested to be short-lived, both erupting and subsiding at a rapid pace (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). This results from a lack of sustainability of the interest in the event (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994), which is further consistent with Downs' (1972) "issue-attention cycle" and Cerulo's (1998) communicative process of news construction. Downs (1972) suggests that over time (and typically a shorter period of time), interest in a particular issue will fade, requiring the media and the public to focus on a new issue. Cerulo (1998) concurs, suggesting that the news making process involves an open dialogue between news producers and news consumers, whereby the consumers will relay their approval or dissatisfaction with a particular news story back to the media, which in turn will either churn out more stories or replace the story with a new topic (see also Chiricos et al., 2000).

Though media coverage and public attention to mass shooting events may be short-lived, this window still allows ample time for the story to unfold as details of the cases also become available. By following the news coverage for each event for 30 days rather than examining just the initial reporting, the researcher has the opportunity to examine how the discourse changes over time. This is important for two reasons. First, the changes in framing throughout the life span of a story allow the media to emphasize different aspects or topics relating to a case both independently of and in conjunction with one another (Altheide, 2009b; Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert & Carr, 2006). Additionally, the changing of frames allows the media to provide fresh content to the

audience, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will keep viewers hooked and increase ratings (Altheide, 2009b).

Method: Content Analysis

To understand how rampage shootings are socially constructed in the media, this study employs qualitative content analysis – specifically ethnographic content analysis (ECA), also known as qualitative media analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013) – as the primary analytic tool. Berger and Luckmann (1967) contend that phenomenological analysis – that is, analysis that is purely descriptive – is the best method to understand socially constructed reality and knowledge. For scholars in communications and other disciplines, content analysis provides the opportunity to critically analyze texts and language that are put forth by news makers (Bell, 1991; Berg, 2007; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998). As Riffe and colleagues (1998) explain, content analysis is "a method used to answer research questions about content" (p. 11).

An overview of content analysis. Though the definition of content analysis has been continually refined by scholars (e.g., Bell, 1991; Berg, 2007), Riffe and colleague's (1998) definition of content analysis is one of the most inclusive definitions through which to describe this process. In addition, Muschert (2002) proposes that

> Content analysis is the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those rules, and the analysis of relationships…in order to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication its context, both of production and consumption. (p. 80; see Riffe et al., 1998, p. 20 for the original definition)

There are several key components of this definition that validate the use of content analysis as a methodology. First, the process of content analysis is systematic (Berg,

2007; Muschert, 2002; Riffe et al., 1998). Content analysis can be a complex process used to test theoretical propositions, or it may be used simply for description of a particular phenomenon (Riffe et al., 1998). Since all people engage in content analysis at an informal, non-scientific level, however, the requirement of a systematic research plan adds scientific quality to the findings (Muschert, 2002; Riffe et al., 1998).

Second, the examination must be able to be replicated (Muschert, 2002; Riffe et al., 1998). The ability for others to replicate a study ensures that researcher bias does not confound the findings of said study (Riffe et al., 1998). While quantitative content analysis emphasizes the need for researchers to be clear about how their variables of interest are operationalized (Riffe et al., 1998), qualitative content analysis also faces the same standards (Berg, 2007). Specifically, by clearly defining one's themes, or codes, qualitative researchers essentially are "operationalizing" their "variables" for future researchers to be able to replicate their study and thus validate the study's findings through reproduction (Berg, 2007).

Third, content analysis focuses on symbols of communication (Berg, 2007; Muschert, 2002; Riffe et al., 1998). This ties the methodology to Berger and Luckmann's (1967) call for an examination of language. In the present study, as with other content analyses of media products, the symbols of communication may be synonymous with a whole news article or its parts. Researchers have defined their unit of analysis in respect to these symbols as words, sentences, paragraphs, or even full articles (Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Berg, 2007; Riffe et al., 1998).

Finally, the definition highlights the process of describing and inferring meaning from the content (Muschert, 2002; Riffe et al., 1998). Description is important because it

allows researchers to explain a particular phenomenon as it exists in the news media. This is particularly important in consideration with the production phase noted in the definition. Through the process of describing, researchers come to understand how the media construct the particular phenomenon. Once the researcher has described the problem, they then can draw inferences about what it means. Such inferences may relate to the organizational goals of the media, or to what the portrayal of a particular issue means to the news consumers (thus tying to the consumption process noted in the definition).

In a broad sense, content analysis allows researchers to categorize media content of various forms (Riffe et al., 1998). Qualitative content analysis, in particular, seeks to identify patterns and themes from which researchers can draw meaning (Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Berg, 2007). Berg (2007) identifies a model of qualitative content analysis that facilitates this goal. Once the research question or questions have been identified, the researcher may determine analytic categories (Berg, 2007). Such categories may be existent from the researcher's general knowledge, while others may emerge from the data itself. For example, research has identified three main causal factors in the discourse on school shootings – guns, mental health, and violent media – that can be more broadly applied to the discourse on rampage shootings (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2013). By allowing for additional themes to emerge from the data through a process of open coding, however, researchers do not limit their findings but instead embrace the organic process that is indicative of qualitative data analysis (Berg, 2007). Once categories have been identified through open coding, the researcher engages in axial coding, to deliberately code around a specific theme (Berg, 2007). Following the

processes of open and axial coding, the researcher then sorts and organizes the gathered data into categories (Berg, 2007; Riffe et al., 1998). The data, then, can be analyzed by examining frequencies of occurrence of themes or seeking patterns within the data from which inferences may be drawn and such findings explained (Berg, 2007).

While there are, of course, drawbacks to content analysis as a methodology, as there are with any analysis technique, it offers a number of benefits that make it best suited for the present study. As a methodology, content analysis is unobtrusive and nonreactive (Bell, 1991; Berg, 2007; Riffe et al., 1998). This means that there is no effect of the researcher on the news product or its creators as these objects (news stories) are examined after the production has completed (Bell, 1991; Riffe et al., 1998). Therefore, as there is no effect of the researcher on the final news product, there is little chance of a confounding effect on a study's data (Riffe et al., 1998). Further, as noted earlier, content analyses are cost effective while still allowing a large amount of data to be analyzed (Berg, 2007; Garrett & Bell, 1998; Muschert, 2002). In addition to analyzing large amounts of data, it allows researchers to do so over time, thereby enabling them to examine longitudinal trends and patterns (Bell, 1991; Berg, 2007).

Content analysis and the media. Content analysis, particularly that which was quantitative in nature, was prevalent in research between the 1930s and the 1960s as it was used to analyze propaganda from World War II and the Cold War (Bell, 1991; Riffe et al., 1998). In more recent research, however, there has been a shift from general content analysis to discourse analysis (Macdonald, 2003; Paltridge, 2012; Richardson, 2011; van Dijk, 1988) and later qualitative media analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Discourse analysis, as described by van Dijk (1988), is an ambiguous process that draws

on a number of disciplines, including semiotics, psychology, sociology, and speech (see also Garrett & Bell, 1998).

To define discourse analysis broadly, it is "a theoretical and methodological approach to language and language use" (van Dijk, 1988, p. 24; see also Paltridge, 2012). It assumes that within society, language exists as a dialogue (Richardson, 2011), and the media are key figures within the dialogue (Macdonald, 2003). Further, this language both "represents and contributes to the production and *re*production of social reality" (Richardson, 2011, p. 48, emphasis in original; see also Macdonald, 2003). Treating the news as a type of text or discourse allows researchers to ground media processes in theory and allow for explanation of the role these structures play in creating and shaping reality (Garrett & Bell, 1998; Macdonald, 2003; van Dijk, 1988). More specifically, situating news in a discourse analysis framework enables researchers to conduct a more systematic review of such processes (van Dijk, 1988).

Paltridge (2012) proposes an alternate view of discourse analysis that examines communicative units (texts) in the processes of societies and cultures. This view, drawn from Berger and Luckmann's (1967) social constructionist perspective, suggests discourse is "both shaped by the world as well as shaping the world" (p. 7). As people communicate with one another, both the context of the language and how it is used are shaped (Paltridge, 2012). Discourse also changes and is changed by the medium in which it occurs, such as the mass media (Paltridge, 2012). As such, when studying discourse as it relates to the media, researchers must hone in on the interaction between the audience and the news product itself, as it is the interaction that creates the meaning and importance of the story (Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

To study documents as a form of media discourse, Altheide and Schneider (2013) offer a research methodology of ethnographic content analysis (ECA) that blends objective content analysis with participant observation (see also Altheide, 1987). As media documents, such as news articles, can represent social meanings, such analysis enables researchers to understand culture and, more broadly, the shared reality of society's members (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). At the same time, this analysis technique acknowledges the presence of the researcher, through participant observation, within this social construction (Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Muschert, 2007b).

There are several key processes integrated into the ECA methodology. The first is the idea of immersion. In order for researchers to draw meaningful conclusions from the data, they must immerse themselves in the context of the subject's world (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). This differs from the quantitative content analysis technique outlined by Riffe and colleagues (1998), in that ECA places a significant emphasis on the role of the researcher rather than omitting it from consideration (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). A second key process is reflexivity (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Reflexivity must take place when the researcher is highly immersed in the data. It allows researchers to draw constant comparisons between meanings and themes within the context they are examining (Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

The research goal of ECA is not only verification of the findings, but also the discovery process that leads up to the findings (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). A key component of the discovery process is the continual emergence of new themes and concepts rather than solely relying on predefined concepts or categories (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Sampling in ECA is conducted purposively to supplement a

researcher's theoretical orientation (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). ECA not only seeks to quantify findings (similar to quantitative content analysis), such as frequencies of themes, but also examines the narratives and underlying descriptions that lead to a richer and more robust analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

Coding in the current study. The coding process in the present study began with an initial reading of all of the articles. This step was important in that it allowed the researcher to immerse herself in the data and become even more familiar and intimate with the project. A second reading was conducted, during which time the researcher took notes, or memos, about recurrent themes that revealed themselves throughout the data. From there, the codebook (see Appendix C) was constructed. Once the codebook was constructed, the full set of articles was read and coded by the units of analysis, as discussed below. During this time, additional themes or nodes were added. This process was then repeated to ensure that all original and new nodes were thoroughly coded in each individual article. During the analysis phase, as discussed in the following chapters, reanalysis was conducted as needed, and a number of the major nodes were disaggregated into sub-nodes.

Units of Analysis. In the present study, the unit of analysis was individual sentences. Coding full sentences is useful because it provides an element of context when coding for an existent theme (Berg, 2007). When coding for single words, the context or meaning behind the word is lost, as it is nearly impossible to tell without the surrounding words what the actual meaning is meant to be (Berg, 2007). At the same time, using a larger unit of analysis, such as a paragraph, also would not be useful because it is too broad and conveys too many ideas in a single unit, creating a sense of

research "clutter" for the coder (Berg, 2007). As such, the decision to use full, single sentences as the unit of analysis represents a midpoint on a continuum of coding units between too narrow (words) and overly broad (paragraphs).

Coding Reliability. After the lead researcher completed the full coding of the dataset, a second, independent coder reviewed a sample of cases. This sample was drawn from the five most salient cases, as these were found to consume most of the coverage. A total of 55 articles, representing just under 10% of the total coverage, were drawn from these cases – 20 articles each from Adam Lanza and Jared Loughner, and five articles each from James Holmes, Nidal Hissan, and Seung-Hui Cho. Once the number of articles was determined to be drawn from each case, the requisite number of articles was divided by the total number of articles for the case, creating the sampling interval to draw the articles. Starting with the first article (by date) in each case, the *k*th element was then sampled from each.

The reliability coder was asked to code the three existent theme categories – guns, mental health, and violent media. Within the guns category, coding was conducted for both general and specific descriptions of weapons, gun control, and gun rights. For mental health, the subcategories of general references, medications, diagnoses, and prior warning signs were included in the coding schedule. There were no subthemes for violent media. For the three categories of emergent themes, reliability coding was performed on "give the problem a name" (coding the headlines for the shooter, victims, or events), the use of examples (either Columbine or other events), and the use of statistics. A copy of the codebook was provided, and the coders briefly met beforehand to review the schedule.

Table 2. Initial Intercoder Reliability by Node

Node	Mean Kappa Coefficient	Kappa Coefficient Range	Total N Per Node	Ns with Kappa Coefficients <.6
Existent Themes				
Guns				
General Description	.11	-.03 to 1	22	20
Specific Description	.78	0 to 1	15	3
Gun Control	.55	-.08 to 1	15	8
Gun Rights	.30	-.03 to 1	13	10
Mental Health				
Diagnoses	.20	0 to 1	5	4
General Reference	.37	-.03 to 1	26	16
Medications	.00	--	2	2
Prior Warning Signs	.29	0 to 1	6	4
Violent Media	1.00	--	1	0
Emergent Themes				
Give the Problem a Name				
Shooter	.60	0 to 1	10	4
Victims	.20	0 to 1	5	4
Event	.56	0 to 1	9	4
Use Examples				
Columbine	.69	0 to 1	11	5
Other Events	.44	-.03 to 1	28	14
Use Statistics	.61	-.04 to 1	52	23

Table 2 presents the results of the initial coding reliability check. The results are

presented as the mean Kappa coefficients for each category, as well as the range and the

number of articles coded and with Kappa coefficients greater than 0.6, which is the rule

of thumb for acceptable reliability agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). In five categories,

the Kappa coefficient exceeded this benchmark. A cursory examination of the individual

reliability reports by theme provides insight into some of the categories with lower Kappa

coefficients. For example, in the major category of "give the problem a name," the lead

researcher conceptualized this as using the first main word of the headline (as identified

in the codebook), while the reliability coder examined the full headline for direction.

Thus, the disparity in the coding agreement for this category is a function of individual

differences rather than an issue with the theme itself.

Table 3. Initial Intercoder Reliability by Node, Recoded Sample

Node	Mean Kappa Coefficient	Kappa Coefficient Range	Total N Per Node	Ns with Kappa Coefficients <.6
Existent Themes				
Guns				
General Description	0.64	0.19 to 1	6	2
Specific Description	0.84	0.47 to 1	5	1
Gun Control	0.65	0 to 0.87	8	1
Gun Rights	0.61	0.50 to 1	7	4
Mental Health				
Diagnoses	0.64	0 to 1	3	1
General Reference	0.62	0 to 1	13	4
Medications	--	--	--	--
Prior Warning Signs	--	--	--	--

In order to address the lower intercoder reliability, particularly within the guns

and mental health categories, a subsample was drawn from the Adam Lanza and Jared

Loughner coverage (six articles per case), as this is where the majority of disagreement

occurred. The coders met prior to the recoding and discussed potential issues that had

arisen in the first round of coding. Clarifications to the codebook were made in order to

address any discrepancies that may have been unclear to the independent coder. The

second coder then reanalyzed this subset of articles for the themes of guns and mental

health. Table 3 presents the results of the second reliability test. The results indicate that the revisions to the codebook provided for increased reliability among coders, and that intercoder reliability reached acceptable levels of agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Conclusion

Altheide and Schneider's (2013) ECA methodology provided this research project with a strong methodological foundation to examine media documents related to rampage shootings. In addition, the use of purposive sampling outlined by the method supported the use of social constructionism as the theoretical foundation for the study. Specifically, events that are representative of the concept of rampage shootings purposefully were selected for analysis to lend a greater understanding to the social construction of the phenomenon. Further, the constant comparative approach allowed the researcher to examine not only the predefined themes of gun control, mental health, and violent media, but also allows for the emergence of new themes. The latter is particularly relevant as one of the main goals of this study was to explain all forms of mass shootings under a single definition, and therefore it was inevitable that new themes surely would emerge as these events were joined together.

V. SETTING THE SCENE

The Cases

Between 2000 and 2012, there were 91 shootings that have been classified as rampage attacks. The majority of these events (99%) were carried out by a single perpetrator. Only one event, the 2008 shooting at the University of Central Arkansas, involved multiple perpetrators. The youngest shooters were age 14 (n = 4), and the oldest shooter was 88 (n = 1). The mean age of the shooters was 34.47 years. Nearly 95% (n = 89) of the shooters were males, with four individual cases involving female perpetrators (Amy Bishop, Yvonne Hiller, Arunya Rouch, and Latina Williams). In approximately 55% of the events, the shooters committed suicide.

There were a total of 802 victims, with 383 of them (47.8%) being fatalities. The number of total victims by incident ranged from one (Arunya Rouch and James Sheets) to 70 (James Holmes), with an average of 8.8 total victims per incident. Looking at fatalities only, the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting (Seung-Hui Cho) had the largest death toll with 32 victims, which also had the second highest total victim count behind the 2012 Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting (James Holmes). On average, there were 4.2 fatalities per incident. It is important to note that nine cases (9.9%) involved no fatalities, but had multiple wounded victims who survived.

Schools were the most common location for rampage shootings to occur. Within the study's time frame, 26 shootings (28.6%) were carried out on elementary, middle, and high school and college campuses. Workplace shootings were the next most common with 19 events (20.9%). Shootings also occurred at public places, such as bars and

restaurants (n = 8 or 8.8%), malls (n = 6 or 6.6%), and places of worship (n = 5 or 5.5%),

as well as private homes (n = 6 or 6.6%). Three events (3.3%) were categorized as spree

killings, meaning they were carried out over multiple locations. Table 4 provides a

complete breakdown of events by location. The results are presented as a raw count of

references with the percentage of events occurring in each location in parentheses.

Table 4. Location of Shooting Events by Frequency

Location	Events	Location	Events
School	26 (28.6)	Airport	1 (1.1)
Workplace	19 (20.9)	Supermarket	1 (1.1)
Bar / Restaurant	8 (8.8)	Convenience Store	1 (1.1)
Mall	6 (6.6)	Movie Theater	1 (1.1)
House	6 (6.6)	Gym	1 (1.1)
Place of Worship[1]	5 (5.5)	Museum	1 (1.1)
Spree	3 (3.3)	Nursing Home	1 (1.1)
Salon / Spa	2 (2.2)	Post Office	1 (1.1)
Military Space[2]	2 (2.2)	Protest	1 (1.1)
Political Event[3]	2 (2.2)	Immigration Center	1 (1.1)
Other	2 (2.2)		

[1] Includes a church-owned retreat (John Chong).
[2] Includes military base (Nidal Hasan) and recruiting center (Carlos Bledsoe).
[3] Includes a political rally (Jared Loughner) and a city council meeting (Charles Thornton).
NOTE: Descriptives for location are reported as raw count with percentage in parentheses. Frequency percentages may not total to 100.0% due to rounding.

The Coverage

The total dataset compiled from the *New York Times* included 564 articles.

Combined, these articles totaled 489,638 words in print. As noted earlier, the dataset

included only news articles and editorials. Opinion articles, letters to the editor, blogs, and web-only articles were excluded from the dataset.

In examining the number of articles and word count by event (see Appendix B for a full breakdown of article and word counts by event), several interesting findings emerge. First, 21 of the cases (23.1%) received no coverage in *The Times*.   While initial speculation may suggest this is due to lower victim counts, closer examination of these cases refutes it. Two of the shootings (Luther Casteel and David Logsdon) had total victim counts over 10 (18 and 11, respectively), and 10 shootings had total victim counts of greater than five. When examining just the fatalities, 19% of the cases had between four and eight deaths. Further, only 19% of the cases had no deaths, though they each still had two victims. One interesting caveat to the zero fatality cases is that they all occurred in schools, and they all occurred between 2000 and 2006, falling in the period between Columbine and Virginia Tech. Given the high death tolls in both of these latter cases, it may explain why cases with no fatalities were not mentioned in the press, though additional data would be needed to confirm this hypothesis.

Examining the temporal proximity to other events that did receive coverage also fails to provide an explanation for why these cases received no coverage. Only three cases occurred within 30 days of a highly prominent shooting. The May 2007 shooting by David Logsdon occurred 15 days after Virginia Tech, and despite that there were 11 victims, it failed to compete with the coverage of a shooting that killed 32 and wounded over 20 more. Two other shootings, one perpetrated by John Chong and the other by Odane Maye, occurred within 6 and 23 days respectively of the April 3, 2009 shooting by Jiverly Wong at a Binghamton, New York immigration center. Though both shootings

tallied two victims (Chong with one fatality and Maye with none), the Binghamton

shooting had 17 victims, 13 of which were fatalities. Further, it is likely that, given the

close spatial proximity of Binghamton to New York City, as compared to California

(Chong) and Virginia (Maye), the *Times* had a greater interest in covering a story closer

to home and that would be more relevant to its readers. These three incidents aside,

given how both the public and the media flock to stories of rampage shootings, it is

surprising that so many cases of such violence were not covered.

Table 5. Most Prominent Cases by Coverage

Event	Date	Articles	Total Words
Sandy Hook Elementary School	12/14/2012	130 (23.0)	118,354 (24.2)
Tucson / Gabrielle Giffords	01/08/2011	89 (15.8)	91,715 (18.7)
Fort Hood Military Base	11/05/2009	36 (6.4)	35,097 (7.2)
Virginia Tech Shootings	04/16/2007	36 (6.4)	33,473 (6.8)
Aurora, CO Movie Theater	07/20/2012	31 (5.5)	23,715 (4.8)
TOTALS		**322 (57.1)**	**302,354 (61.8)**

NOTE: For both article and total words, results are presented as counts with percentage of total data set (N = 564 articles / 489,638 words) in parentheses.

Additionally, as depicted in Table 5, the total coverage, both in respect to the

number of articles and word count, is being driven by five main shootings. Combined,

these shootings account for over 57% of the articles and almost 62% of the total words

published on these events. This pattern, however, is not entirely surprising. Four of the

shootings are in the top five events in terms of fatalities, and more victims typically

equate to greater newsworthiness (see, for example, Duwe, 2000; Sorenson et al., 1998).

Only one shooting, the 2011 Tucson shooting (Jared Loughner), had a lower fatality

count (n = 6). Yet, at the same time, this event also was an assassination attempt on a Congresswoman, so the heightened coverage of the shooting is not unexplainable.
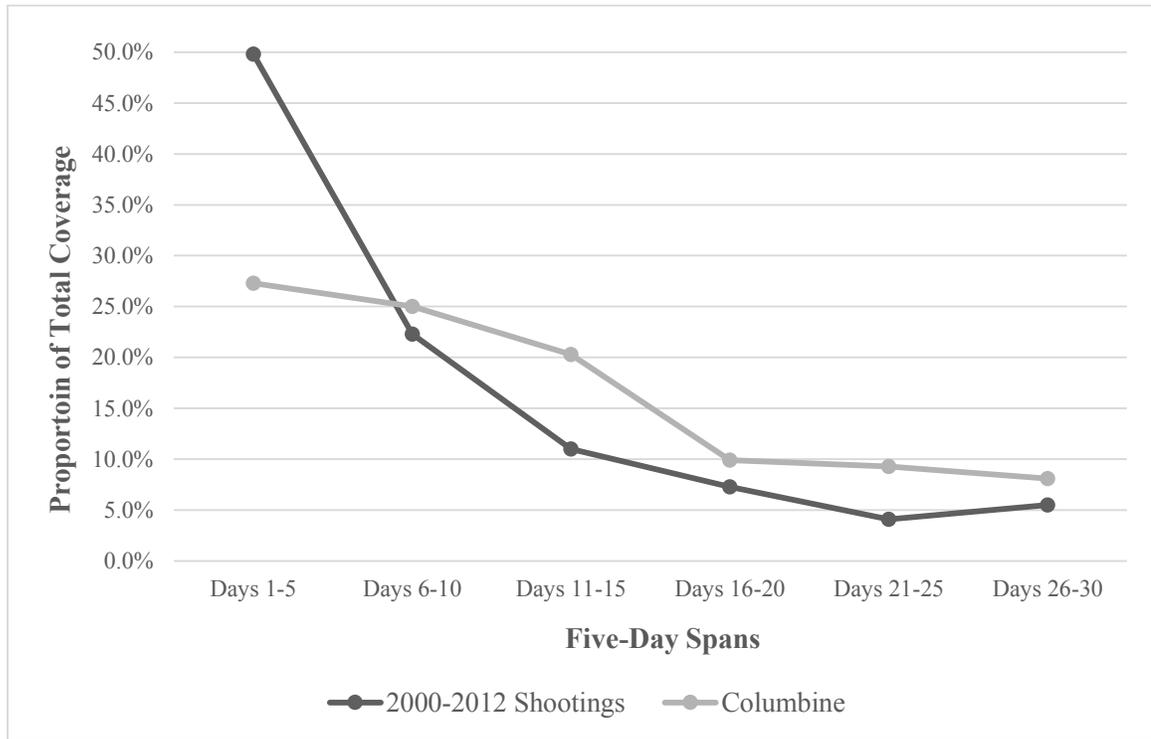
Figure 3. Distribution of Articles by Five-Day Span

Next, consideration must be given to when the articles were published in relation to the shootings. Figure 3 charts the proportion of coverage by five-day period for the articles in this study, and compares it against the coverage of the 1999 Columbine High School shooting.[7] This indicates that nearly half (n = 281) of the articles in the current study were published within the first five days of the event, and then began a sharp decline, in which coverage was cut by more than half in the second five days.

---

[7] Data for Columbine values were imputed from Chyi and McCombs (2004, p. 28).

While both Columbine and the shootings that follow exhibit a decline in coverage from the breaking of the initial story, this illustrates a subtle yet important difference. The decline in coverage of Columbine was more gradual, thus maintaining greater stability and presence over time and expanding the "shelf life" of the event. For the shootings that followed, using Columbine as a precedent of sorts, the *New York Times* took a more explosive approach, inundating viewers with stories in the first five days of the shooting, then dissipating almost equally as fast. Similar to Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) concept of volatility and Downs' (1972) issue-attention cycle, the media inundate consumers from the beginning in order to capture and keep their attention. At the same time, however, as new issues of greater perceived salience emerge, coverage of the initial event, in this case, a rampage shooting, is quickly replaced, though not completely eliminated.

One additional consideration when interpreting this finding also is how readership of newspapers has changed in the 15 years since Columbine. Given the continual migration of newspapers to more digital formats, this may, at least in part, explain the decision to cover these events for a shorter time period in print, when the online format allows for quicker and more continual generation and updating of stories. Additionally, the web-based platforms face less space constraints than do the paper versions, which much decide which stories to highlight in the limited number of printable inches.

Attention also must be paid to where the articles are published in the paper. The majority of the articles (n = 495; 87.8%) appeared in the front section of the paper, denoted as the section 'A.' As illustrated in Table 6, 121 of the articles (21.5%) appeared on the first page. More than half of the stories printed (65.4%) were placed after the

tenth page of the paper, with one appearing as late as page 42 of the front section. Of

those cases with multiple articles published, 16 (29.1%) had their story break on the front

page of the paper.

Table 6. Distribution of Articles by Page Number

Page Number	Articles	Page Number	Articles
Page 1	121 (21.5)	Page 7	4 (0.7)
Page 2	6 (1.1)	Page 8	11 (2.0)
Page 3	9 (1.6)	Page 9	9 (1.6)
Page 4	8 (1.4)	Page 10	17 (3.0)
Page 5	7 (1.2)	Pages 11-20	266 (47.2)
Page 6	3 (0.5)	Pages 21+	103 (18.3)

NOTE: Descriptives for location are reported as raw count with percentage in parentheses. Frequency
percentages may not total to 100.0% due to rounding.

Similar to the overall coverage, front page coverage again was dominated by the

main cases. The 2012 Sandy Hook shooting (Adam Lanza) had the most articles with 40,

representing 30.8% of the coverage of the event that was front page news. The 2009 Fort

Hood shooting (Nidal Hasan) had 20 stories appear on the front page of the paper,

accounting for 55.6% of the event's coverage. There were 19 front-page stories

dedicated to the 2011 Tucson shooting (Jared Loughner), which is 21.3% of the event's

coverage. Interestingly, both the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting and the 2012 Aurora

movie theater shooting had fewer front page articles – five and eight, respectively. This

equates to 13.9% (Virginia Tech) and 25.8% (Aurora) of total coverage of these

shootings.

Table 7. Distribution of Articles by Topical Section

Section	Frequency	Percentage
National Desk	380	67.4
Metropolitan	94	16.7
Editorial	34	6.0
Arts & Cultural	15	2.7
Business & Financial	15	2.7
Week in Review	8	1.4
Sports	5	0.1
Science Desk	5	0.1
Foreign	3	0.1
Sunday Review	2	<0.1
Magazine	2	<0.1
Education	1	<0.1

Lastly, the sections in which the articles appear also can shed light on how these events are presented to the audience. Table 7 presents the distribution of articles by topical section. Not surprisingly, the majority of articles (67.4%) in the dataset appeared under the header of national news. When examining the metropolitan section, three key stories dominated the coverage. The 2012 Sandy Hook shooting (Adam Lanza) accounted for 64 articles (68.1%), followed by the 2009 Binghamton immigration center shooting (Jiverly Wong) with 10 articles (10.6%) and the 2010 shooting by Omar Thornton at a Connecticut workplace with seven articles (7.4%). Thus, it is important to underscore that the heading of "metropolitan" may be misleading, in that it is talking more about the region than the state itself, as only one of the shootings actually occurred in New York. Still, the close spatial proximity of Connecticut to New York City, as well

as the state, may have led to increased saliency among readers, leading to heightened coverage of the events.

Similar to the metropolitan section, editorial coverage also was dominated by four shootings – the 2001 Santana High School shooting (Charles Andy Williams), the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting (Seung-Hui Cho), the 2011 Tucson shooting (Jared Loughner), and the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting (Adam Lanza). Similar to other coverage, editorial pieces were driven by Sandy Hook, accounting for 11 (32.4%) of the articles. There were eight editorials published about the Tucson shooting, accounting for 23.5% of this type of coverage. The shootings at both Santana High School and Virginia Tech each received three articles, accounting for 8.8% of editorials each. This suggests that editors may reserve sharing personal judgments for those shootings of increased saliency – whether in close temporal proximity to Columbine (the Santana High School shooting), highlighting a high-profile target (the Tucson shooting), or highlighting issues of national concern (the Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook shootings).

Conclusion

While simple descriptives may not adequately assess *how* the content of the stories are constructed by the media, they do reflect important choices made during the journalistic process. Indeed, analyzing these statistics can help to answer several of the media's "Ws" – who, where, and when. First, this analysis allows us to see *who* is (or is not) covered, and also *how much* coverage these individuals do (or do not, in many cases) receive. *When* the coverage occurs, relative to the shooting and within the 30-day time frame, can be examined, as well as *where* the stories are being placed in the paper. Each of these decisions is important, as they can help to underscore the level of

newsworthiness of a story, which ultimately can translate into the level of saliency of the

event for both the newspaper and its audience.

VI. THE SOCIAL PROBLEM OF RAMPAGE SHOOTINGS

How is the phenomenon of rampage shootings constructed in the media discourse? One of the best ways to answer such a question is to examine the content of the stories themselves. More specifically, this can be examined using Joel Best's (1987, 2006) three-step model for creating social problems. First, he states that the claims maker, which in this case is the media or politicians via the media, must give the problem a name (Best, 1987, 2006). Next, he notes that claims makers will use examples to contextualize the problem, and often will focus on those that are the most extreme (Best, 1987, 2006). Finally, Best (1987, 2006) suggests that claims makers use statistics or some type of numerical estimate to quantify the magnitude of the social problem. This chapter examines each of these three steps to determine how the narrative of rampage shootings as a collective phenomenon is constructed.

Give the Problem a Name

When a name is given to identify some type of phenomenon, it essentially is defined by claims makers as some type of social problem (Best, 1987, 2006). Whether a new issue or an extension of an existing problem, defining problems allows people to be concerned about the phenomenon (Best, 1987). Further, one way in which claims makers generate this concern is by using vagueness in defining the problem (Best, 1987). This also may signify some element of originality for the problem, even if it is a recurrent issue (Best, 1987). One way in which the media incorporate this element is to report stories in generalities, even when hard-and-fast facts are available to present to the audience. By writing in generalities rather than specifics, the media can add a level of

sensationalism or mystery that entices readers not only to keep reading the initial piece, but to seek additional information.

In the present study, the "name" of the problem was conceptualized as the headline of each story. The headline, or lead, of a story is the first chance that the newspaper has to capture the audience's attention. As such, how they frame this lead likely will influence whether or not someone reads the story. Those headlines that are more sensational are more likely to peak a reader's interest.

Further, how the media structure the headline in terms of word organization also can provide insight into the focus or direction of the article. As such, the coding of the headline into categories was based upon the first main word of the headline. Headlines were coded into one of three categories – shooter, victim(s), or event – based on the focus of the headline. Coding of the headlines was discrete, meaning that they only could be categorized into one of these themes, though not all headlines would fall into any. It is important to note that, in several instances, the lead of the headline was "shooting suspect." Though this may appear that the focus is on the event (shooting), this word is used as an adjective to describe the suspect, rather than the main focus (as a noun). As such, these headlines were coded under the "shooter" node, rather than as "event." Similarly, when the shooter was used as an adjective to describe the victim, such as "the shooter's mother," this was coded as the victim, rather than the shooter. Table 8 presents the results of the headline coding.

In slightly less than 27% of articles (n = 151), the headline led with either the shooter, the victim(s), or the event itself. The shooter was the most common reference

Table 8. Article Headlines by Main Theme

Theme	Coding Frequency	Coding Percentage[a]
Shooter	86	57.0 (15.2)
Victim(s)	42	27.8 (7.5)
Event	23	15.2 (4.1)
TOTAL	**151**	**100.0 (26.8)**

[a] Results for coding percentage are reported as percentage of headline references coded (N = 151) with the proportion of references to total number of articles (N = 564) in parentheses.

within these leads, accounting for 57% of the story headlines. There were roughly half as many references to the victims compared to the shooters, and only about one fifth to the event.

By focusing more on the perpetrators than the victims or the events, the media highlight the deviant nature of the crime (Cerulo, 1998). Such deviance is considered to be less acceptable to audiences, but may have the sensational elements needed to keep their attention. Cerulo (1998) suggests that victim sequences, those that focus attention more prominently on the victim, are more commonly used to highlight deviant violence. Conversely, performer (or perpetrator) sequences are more characteristic of normal violence (Cerulo, 1998).

The patterns emerging in the present study indicate that the media focused more attention on the performer or perpetrator sequence. There are two potential explanations. First, it is possible that, given the extremely violent nature of rampage shootings, along with their high number of victims, these events are considered to be more deviant, as compared to general homicide. By highlighting those who cause the events (the shooters), the media are able to reinforce the deviant nature of the shootings to the

audience. On the other hand, it may be possible that by highlighting the offenders more frequently, the media are reinforcing the "normalcy" of these events (Cerulo, 1998). Despite their rarity, research has shown that people believe these types of shootings are occurring more frequently than they actually are, particularly as they consume more media (see, for example, Elsass, Schildkraut, & Stafford, 2013; Schildkraut et al., 2013a, 2013b).

While examining the prevalence of these different themes provides insight into how these events are given a name, how these headlines are constructed is of equal importance. As such, each of the three themes was reanalyzed to determine what qualifiers, or word choices, were used to describe each category. Tables 9, 10, and 11 present the disaggregated themes for the shooters, victims, and events, respectively.

The shooters. In nearly half of the headlines, the shooter was referred to as "gunman" (Table 9). While in reality, the shooters were in fact gunmen, the use of this word as compared to "suspect," which was the next most common theme, "perpetrator," or "offender" is considerably more sensational. Further, the way in which the use of "gunman" was framed within the headlines helps to further the sensational nature of the term:

Gunman Massacres 20 Children at School in Connecticut; 28 Dead, Including Killer
(Adam Lanza, 12-15-12-07)

Gunman-Arsonist Killer of 9 Had Plans Even Deadlier
(Bruce Jeffrey Pardo, 12-31-08-01)

Gunman Drew Dark Portrait of Loneliness Before Shooting Women
(George Sodini, 8-6-09-01)

Gunman Left a Bloody Trail in Rampage in South Alabama
(Michael McLendon, 3-12-09-01)

Use of the term "gunman" was used more liberally among the shooters, regardless of whether or not they committed suicide. Of the 38 articles leading with the qualifier "gunman," 23.7% (n = 9) referred to shooters who were still alive. Yet when examining the use of "suspect" in headlines, this was reserved only for those shooters who did not commit suicide.

Table 9. Qualifiers Used to Describe Shooters in Headlines

Theme	Coding Frequency	Coding Percentage
Gunman	38	44.2
Suspect	19	22.1
Job Title[1]	12	14.0
Gender[2]	8	9.3
Killer	2	2.3
Other	7	8.1
TOTAL	**86**	**100.0**

[1] Ex: Professor, student, ex-factory worker
[2] Ex: Man, boy, girl

There are two additional patterns that emerge when examining the disaggregated coding of the shooter. The first pertains to female shooters. Of the 42 cases that were coded referencing the shooter in the lead, only two cases (4.8%) had female perpetrators (Amy Bishop and Latina Williams). Similar to how the general discourse on homicide tends to minimize female offenders, suggesting that women kill as the result of mental illness, hormonal instability, or forces outside of their control (Fox, Levin, and Quinet, 2012), the choice of qualifiers for female offenders also represents a disparity when compared to male shooters. Both women were referred to in the headlines as their

professions – professor (Amy Bishop) and student (Latina Williams). More masculine qualifiers such as "gunman," "killer," and "attacker" were reserved for male shooters.

A similar pattern emerged based on the age of the shooter. Younger shooters, particularly as their attacks took place at school, were rarely referred to as "gunmen." In fact, in 10 article leads about juveniles, the qualifier of "gunmen" was used only once (Jason Hoffman, 3-23-01-01). Despite that this event took place at school, however, the suspect was 18 at the time of the shooting. For the remaining articles, qualifiers highlighting the youthful nature of the offenders were more common, as illustrated by the following examples:

> *Teenager* Is Charged In Killing of 3 at a School
> (T.J. Lane, 3-2-12-02)
>
> *Student* Shoots Two Others, One Fatally
> (John Jason McLaughlin, 9-25-03-01)
>
> *Middle School Boy* Shoots His Principal, Then Kills Himself
> (James Sheets, 4-23-03-01)

In a majority of the headlines (51.2% or n = 44), the shooter is discussed in conjunction with the victim. More specifically, these 35 headlines were structured in some permutation of "shooter kills X number of victims." By offsetting a single shooter against multiple victims, it highlights the disproportional violence and heightens the newsworthiness of the event (Sorenson et al., 1998). In an additional 23 headlines (6.7%), when the shooter was talked about alone (not in conjunction with the event or the victims), the main focus was to provide backstory leading up to the shooting, including elements of premeditation or warning signs about the shooters:

> *Suspect* Bought Large Stockpile of Rounds Online
> (James Holmes, 7-23-12-01)

Gunman Hid His Tracks, Officials Say
(Steven Kazmierczak, 2-20-08-01)

Man Charged in Tucson Shootings Had Researched Assassins, Official Says
(Jared Loughner, 1-27-11-01)

The victims. How the victims are framed in story headlines also provides insight into the way in which rampage shootings are defined. By emphasizing the victim, rather than the shooter or the event, it provides a different frame of reference for the audience, typically one that is more relatable (Cerulo, 1998). Further, highlighting the victims also underscores the unspeakable and horrendous nature of the shooting (Cerulo, 1998).

Table 10. Qualifiers Used to Describe Victims in Headlines

Theme	Coding Frequency	Coding Percentage
Numeric (# Killed)	19	45.2
Job Title[1]	12	28.6
Victim	3	7.1
Survivor	3	7.1
Other	5	11.9
TOTAL	**42**	**99.9**

NOTE: Frequency percentages may not total to 100.0% due to rounding.
[1] Ex: Professor, student, officer, mother

Table 10 presents the distribution of themes used to describe the victims in headlines. The most prevalent description of victims (45.2%) is in terms of the number killed or wounded in the event. This is particularly noteworthy because it reduces the individuals to a single number, such as:

12 killed, 31 wounded in rampage at army post; officer is suspect
(Nidal Hasan, 11-6-09-01)

> *8 People* Are Killed in Shooting at a Nursing Home in North Carolina
> (Robert Stewart, 3-30-09-01)
>
> *6 Wounded* in Mall Shooting; Gunman Surrenders
> (Dominick Maldanado, 11-21-05-01)

By reporting the number as an aggregate, rather than offering specific names or characteristics of the individuals, *The Times* is again highlighting the egregious nature of the event. This also can provide an outlet for the reader to perceive their chances of becoming one of those within the number to be greater, particularly with higher victim counts (see also Cerulo, 1998; Mayr & Machin, 2012).

The next most common way that the victims were described was by their occupation, thus emphasizing what they did, rather than who they were as individuals. This includes emphasizing whether the victim was an educator, a student, or even a mother:

> *Professor's* Violent Death Came Where He Sought Peace
> (Seung-Hui Cho, 4-19-07-04)
>
> A *Mother*, a Gun Enthusiast and the First Victim
> (Adam Lanza, 12-16-12-01)
>
> *Security Guard* Is Killed in Shooting At Holocaust Museum in Washington
> (James Wenneker von Brunn, 6-11-09-01)

By reducing the victims down to these occupational roles, it again provides a way in which the reader can relate to the victim (see also Cerulo, 1998). The use of such roles can suggest that people in similar capacities also may be at heightened risk of becoming victims of the same fate.

A victim was directly referenced by name in only two article leads (4.9%). Not surprisingly, this was Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who was wounded (but survived) in the 2011 Tucson shooting by Jared Loughner. Still in another article, despite

91

her high profile status, she was referred to simply as "Congresswoman." In all, the framing of the victims in the story headlines, regardless of age, gender, or race, is done in a vague and ambiguous manner that may further perpetuate the hysteria and sensationalism of these events.

   The event. Finally, how the event itself is described in the story headlines also warrants inspection. Table 11 presents the disaggregation of themes used to describe the events within headlines.

Table 11. Qualifiers Used to Describe Events in Headlines

Theme	Coding Frequency	Coding Percentage
Shooting	13	56.5
Rampage	5	21.7
Bloodshed	2	8.7
Massacre	1	4.4
Other	2	8.7
TOTAL	**23**	**100.0**

   As outlined in the table, qualifying the event simply as a "shooting" is most common, occurring in more than half (56.5%) of the headlines leading with the event. It is the remainder of the headlines, however, that warrant closer scrutiny. In nearly all of the remaining headlines, the articles substitute "shooting" with exaggerated qualifiers of the event – bloodshed, rampage, massacre, and attack – to evoke fear and shock (see also Mayr & Machin, 2012). These qualifiers overemphasize the dramatic nature of the events, particularly when the event is situated opposite discussion of the victim:

   Rampage Took the Lives of a 'Trouper' and of 'the Nicest Guy in the World' (Charles Andy Williams, 3-7-01-01)

Gunfire During a Youth Performance in a Tennessee Church Leaves 2 Dead
(Jim Adkisson, 7-28-08-01)

In six of the headlines (26.1%), including the above quoted lead from a story about the Adkisson shooting, the qualifier of the event is countervailed against the number of victims. In the majority of these headlines, the victim count was offset against the term "shooting"; for only one lead was it situated against the qualifier "rampage." Thus, even when trying to "normalize" the event as a shooting, the countering with statistics can serve to connote the disproportionality of these events.

Give Examples

Another way in which a social problem may be highlighted is through the use of examples (Best, 1987, 2006; Mayr & Machin, 2012). The use of examples provides a point of constant comparison through which the topic or event at hand may be measured (Barak, 1994; Best, 1987). In many instances, these examples are the most extreme cases, which serve to reinforce the seriousness not only of the issue at hand, but also of the example itself. In the case of rampage shootings, the use of examples allows readers to contextualize the event at hand, and compare death tolls or major issues, such as gun control or mental health, to other well-known events. References to other events were coded non-discretely, meaning that a sentence could contain reference to more than one event. Further, references to either the event name or location (e.g., Columbine, Oklahoma City bombing) or the perpetrators (e.g., Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, Timothy McVeigh, Terry Nichols) were coded as other events. Table 12 presents the references to other mass casualty events, as well as the frequency of reference to each.

This analysis reveals a number of interesting patterns. Columbine was the most referenced event in stories about other shootings, despite that several shootings in the

Table 12. References to Other Mass Casualty Events

Theme	Coding Frequency	Coding Percentage
Columbine High School (1999)	164	50.8
Virginia Tech	61	18.9
Aurora, CO Movie Theater	27	8.4
Oklahoma City Bombing (1995)	16	5.0
Tucson / Gabrielle Giffords	14	4.3
Santana High School	12	3.7
Long Island Railroad Shooting (1993)	11	3.4
September 11th Terrorist Attacks (2001)	8	2.5
Dunblane, Scotland Primary School (1996)	5	1.5
Thurston High School (1998)	5	1.5
TOTAL	**323**	**100.0**

NOTE: Only events with five or more references reported in this table. The year of the event is listed for those occurring before the study's time frame or beyond its parameters.

dataset (e.g., Virginia Tech, Aurora, and Sandy Hook) had higher total victim or fatality counts. All of the references to the 2001 shooting at Santana High School (Charles Andy Williams) were made in conjunction with the shooting at Granite Hills High School (Jason Hoffman), which occurred in the same school district nearly two weeks later. Articles about Williams' shootings also referenced the 1998 shooting at Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon, particularly in the context of warning signs and crisis prevention. The Santana and Granite Hills High shootings came at the tail end of the rash of school shootings focused around Columbine, while the Thurston High shooting was situated at the beginning of this cycle. Additionally, the Dunblane, Scotland shooting was referenced multiple times across three articles for the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting (Adam Lanza). Both events occurred in schools, had high victim counts, and were perpetrated by outsiders. Other specific examples are discussed further below.

Columbine. The 1999 shooting at Columbine High School was the most referenced event in 12 years of mass shootings. Altogether, there were 164 references to the event, which equates to an average of every 1 in 3.4 articles reference. Columbine references, however, were more focused across just 16 events, as depicted in Figure 4.
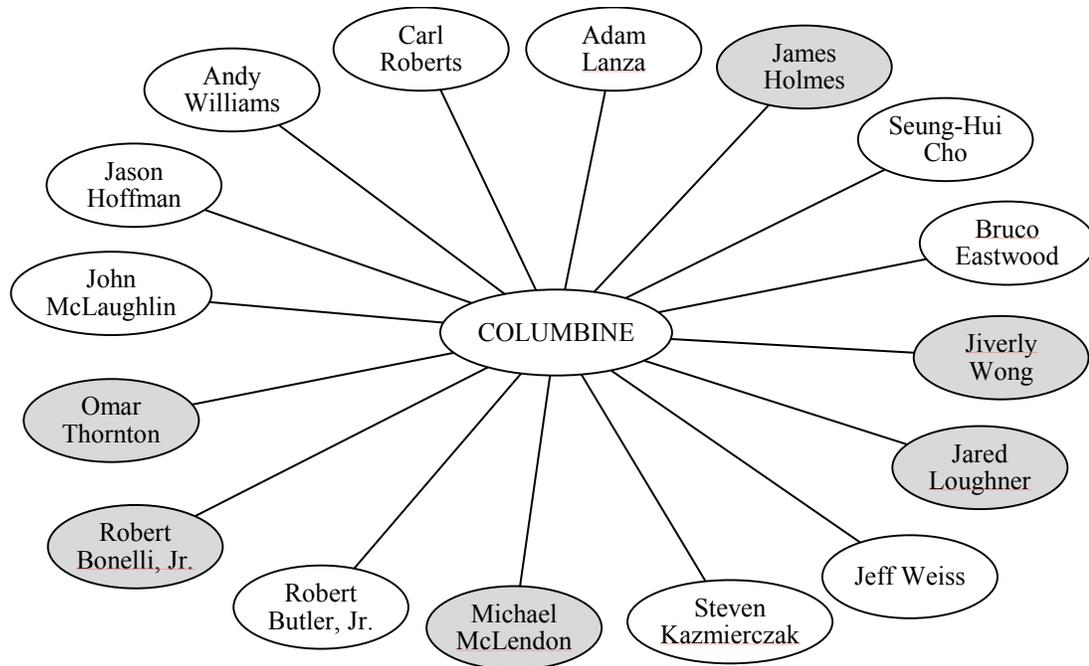
Figure 4. Cases Referencing the 1999 Columbine High School Shooting
NOTE: Cases that are shaded occurred in locations other than schools.

Of the 16 rampage shooting events that referenced Columbine, six shootings – James Holmes, Jared Loughner, Jiverly Wong, Michael McLendon, Omar Thornton, and Robert Bonelli – occurred in locations other than schools. The 2012 shooting by James Holmes occurred less than 20 miles from Columbine, and the spatial proximity of the two events was the primary focus of the 13 references to the latter. An additional reference likened the specific auditorium where Holmes carried out his attack to the library where

Harris and Klebold killed the majority of their victims. Aurora also was repeatedly referred to as Colorado's (but not the nation's) worst mass shooting since Columbine.

Five articles about the 2011 Jared Loughner shooting included six references to Columbine, most of which focused on the long-standing debate over gun control. Similar contexts related to the gun control debate were used in the articles about the 2009 shooting by Jiverly Wong at the Binghamton, New York immigration center (three references in a single article). References to Columbine in articles about both Michael McLendon and Omar Thornton were used to establish a pattern of mass shooting events "since Columbine." Discussions linking the Ulster mall shooting, perpetrated by Robert Bonelli, to Columbine focused on the shooter's fascination with Harris and Klebold, and suggested that he modeled his attack after the two.

Beyond these cases, the remaining ten events occurred in schools.[8] The single reference to Columbine in the article about the shooting perpetrated by Bruco Eastwood highlighted the spatial proximity to the former shooting, as Deer Creek Middle School is situated just several miles from the high school. Similarly, a single article about the NIU shooting (Steven Kazmierczak) focused on establishing a line of cases, of which Columbine was just one. Additional references (n = 18) in other articles, also established a similar pattern of cases. Four other references were made to shootings that occurred leading up to Columbine, including the 1998 shootings in Jonesboro, Arkansas and Springfield, Oregon, possibly to establish the "pattern" of shootings for which this time

---

[8] The school shootings in the study referencing Columbine included: the 2001 Santana High School shooting (Charles Andy Williams); the 2001 Granite Hills High School shooting (Jason Hoffman); the 2003 Ricori High School shooting (John Jason McLaughlin); the 2005 Red Lake Senior High School shooting (Jeffrey Weise); the 2006 Amish Schoolhouse shooting (Charles Carl Roberts); the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting (Seung-Hui Cho); the 2008 Northern Illinois University shooting (Steven Kazmierczak); the 2011 Millard South High School shooting (Robert Butler, Jr.); the 2011 Deer Creek Middle School shooting (Bruco Eastwood); and the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting (Adam Lanza).

period is known (e.g., Schildkraut et al., 2013a). Still, whether the cases occurred before

or after the shooting, emphasis was still added to anoint Columbine as the first:

> As the school shootings have stacked up -- in Pearl, Miss., West Paducah, Jonesboro, Ark., and Springfield, Ore. -- *but especially since Columbine*, local, state and federal education and law enforcement officials have made crisis prevention and planning a top priority. (Charles Andy Williams, 3-11-01-02)

> From the shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999 to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, public grief with all its symbols and trappings has become part of the shared experience, especially on television. (Jeffrey Weise, 3-24-05-02)

Further, of the school shootings specifically referencing Columbine, two events –

the 2001 Santana High School shooting (Charles Andy Williams) and the 2005 Red Lake

Senior High School shooting (Jeffrey Weise) – draw much deeper parallels to their

predecessor, yet do so in very different ways. When references are made to Columbine

in the articles about Williams, they do so by making a constant comparison between the

events, such as in the following excerpts:

> After all, a school shooting in a white, middle-class suburb like Santee -- or at Columbine High School near Littleton, Colo. -- where crime is nearly nonexistent, and students' worries are centered on who is or is not popular and which colleges will or will not accept them, may still provoke shock and disbelief. (Charles Andy Williams, 3-18-01-01)

> "…What happened in Santee or Columbine won't happen here." (Charles Andy Williams, 3-18-01-01)

> Mr. Modzeleski said the killings at Santee provided "a teaching moment," as had those at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999, and that more and more students were receptive to the message of taking threats seriously. (Charles Andy Williams, 3-8-01-03)

> In Santee, as in Littleton, Colo., people point to the low crime rate, the ubiquity of schoolchildren, the dearth of visible poverty or gangs, as if these were all immunizing factors. (Charles Andy Williams, 3-9-01-01)

The way in which these passages are worded suggests that these events could be viewed

interchangeably. It also heightened the potential impact of the Santana High shooting by

likening it to "another Columbine." In fact, despite that the total victim count at Santana

High was nearly half that of Columbine, and the fatality count about one-sixth, it was

reported in one article that "the school shooting in suburban San Diego yesterday that

killed 2 students and wounded 13 students and adults was clearly *the worst since the*

Columbine High School massacre in April 1999" (Charles Andy Williams, 3-6-01-02).

Conversely, when the Red Lake shooting makes reference to Columbine, the

discussion focused more on the shooters rather than the events themselves. In some

instances, the differences between the two locales of the shootings were highlighted.

Littleton is an affluent upper-middle class suburb of Denver, while Red Lake is an

impoverished Native American territory nearly five hours from Minneapolis.

> 'Usually this happens in places like Columbine, white schools, always somewhere else. We never hear that in our community." (Jeffrey Weise, 3-22-05-01)

> While the Columbine killers came from stable families in a well-off suburb, Mr. Weise, who the authorities said was 16, lived on a reservation where 40 percent of the people are poor, and without his parents. (Jeffrey Weise, 3-23-05-01)

> Unlike the aftermath of the Columbine shootings near Littleton, Colo., when affluent suburbs throughout the country shuddered with the shared sense that it could have happened there, Indian country remains a place apart, Indians and non-Indians say. (Jeffrey Weise, 3-24-05-02)

Yet in others, *The Times* highlighted Weise's fascination with Eric Harris and Dylan

Klebold. References to Columbine in the articles about Red Lake focused on warning

signs exhibited by Weise: class papers he had written on the shooting, taking medications

for depression, and even a suspected plan to carry out his attack a year earlier, on

Columbine's fifth anniversary. Yet some went even further, offering physical

comparisons between the shooters:

> Describing Mr. Weise's black, spiky hair and black Goth clothes, Ashley Morrison, a fellow student at Red Lake High School, told The Associated Press,

"He looks like one of those guys at the Littleton school. (Jeffrey Weise, 3-25-05-01)

He [Weise] aped his predecessors in Colorado by wearing a black trench coat.[9] (Jeffrey Weise, 3-27-05-02)

Further, the shootings by both Williams and Weise were referred to as "the worst school shootings since Columbine," up until the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting.

When articles about the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting made reference to Columbine, it did so differently than other shootings had. While Seung-Hui Cho explicitly referenced Harris and Klebold in his multimedia manifesto, coverage of the Virginia Tech shooting appeared to emphasize more of a failure of systems than a comparison. As noted in one article, "Many advocates had expected that the shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999 would transform the politics of gun control" (Seung-Hui Cho, 4-17-07-02). Still, despite that the Virginia Tech shooter showed similar meticulous planning to Columbine, the event still claimed nearly twice as many victims. References suggested that had better gun control measures and warning signs to be aware of could have prevented the Virginia Tech shooting from happening. In a separate article, parallels were drawn between the writings left behind by Cho and Harris and Klebold, and it was suggested that the parents of the Columbine shooters should serve as models for Cho's parents in how to navigate dealing with the aftermath and addressing the victims' families.

Aside from the typical discourse focusing on the gun control debate, discussion following these school shootings emphasized the precedent that Columbine had set for how such events are handled. Columbine, though not the first of its "kind," has been hailed as the archetypal school shooting to which all others are compared (Altheide,

---

[9] Both Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold wore black trench coats on the day of the shooting.

2009b; Kalish & Kimmel, 2010; Larkin, 2007, 2009; Muschert, 2007b; Muschert & Larkin, 2007). As such, it set the bar for how different facets of the school shooting "event" are addressed. For example, five references were made with regards to how the Littleton community chose to memorialize the event. In the aftermath of other shootings, some schools, such as the Amish Schoolhouse (Charles Carl Roberts) and Sandy Hook Elementary School (Adam Lanza) were torn down. Others, such as Norris Hall at Virginia Tech (Seung-Hui Cho), emphasized how the sites should be transformed, rather than demolished.

A more common point of reference were the "lessons from Columbine." Particularly in respect to school shootings, Columbine was referred to as a catalyst for change, from how troubled students were handled to how schools, and administrators more specifically, responded to these rampages:

> Since Columbine, schools have enhanced communication with local police, drawn up emergency plans and packed crisis kits -- Santana's includes aerial photographs of the school, student and faculty rosters, master keys and lists locating every circuit breaker and gas cutoff valve. (Charles Andy Williams, 3-11-01-02)

> Psychological training and increased security that many schools instituted after the killing of 13 people in 1999 at Columbine High School in Colorado have given teachers and principals new tools and insights to spot potential trouble, the experts said. (Charles Carl Roberts, 10-3-06-02)

> What schools can most easily control is discipline, and since Columbine they have imposed so-called zero-tolerance policies against threats, verbal or otherwise. (Jeffrey Weise, 3-30-05-01)

Such policy recommendations often were short-lived in the discourse, both following the particular event and in the years after Columbine. By the 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech, nearly eight years to the day after Columbine, the focus on prevention had shifted away

from preventative strategies, such as zero tolerance and metal detectors, and instead fixated on mental health, particularly as it intersected with gun control.

Despite whether the shooting occurred within or outside of a school, Columbine often served as a point of reference for which other shootings were compared. In 10 separate instances, people who had directly been involved with Columbine – students who had been at the school that day, parents who had lost their children, or first responders – were quoted to give their take on the present shooting and link it back to April 20th. Some comparisons were made indirectly, by situating the event in a line of cases, with Columbine being just one of the events, if not the first. Still others events, such as the following excerpts, directly associated the current event back to the Littleton shooting:

> "I think this is a lot like Columbine," said Jennifer Evans, who lives near Mr. Holmes's apartment. (James Holmes, 7-21-12-01)
>
> That's a Columbine candidate. (Jared Loughner, 1-16-11-04)
>
> "This is like a college Columbine," he [an unnamed student at Virginia Tech] said on MSNBC. (Seung-Hui Cho, 4-17-07-01)

Virginia Tech. The 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech remains, to date, the largest mass casualty shooting in the U.S., with 32 killed and an additional 23 wounded. A total of 44 articles referenced the event, combining for 61 references. Not surprisingly, high profile cases, such as the 2011 Tucson shooting (Jared Loughner), the 2012 Aurora theater shooting (James Holmes), and the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting (Adam Lanza) made reference to Virginia Tech. Additionally, the 2008 shooting at Northern Illinois University (NIU) (Steven Kazmierczak) also consistently referenced Virginia Tech – in 9 out of 13 articles published on the case. This would not be unexpected, however, given

that NIU was the first major shooting on a college campus following Virginia Tech, and occurred in relatively close temporal proximity (10 months apart). What was unexpected is that other shootings of lesser perceived saliency, such as the 2008 shooting at a Kentucky plastics factory (Wesley Neal Higdon), the 2009 shooting at a gym (George Sodini), and the 2010 shooting at Oikos University (One L. Goh), also referenced the event. In total, 14 different shootings made reference to Virginia Tech.

Highlighting the death toll of Virginia Tech was the most common reference to the event. Specific reference to the 32 people killed in the shooting was found 22 times. This occurred in discussions about Adam Lanza, Steven Kazmierczak, George Sodini, Wesley Neal Higdon, James Holmes, Jared Loughner, Jiverly Wong, Latina Williams, Nathaniel Brown, Nidal Hasan, and One L. Goh. Additionally, five of these references were qualified with the descriptor "worst campus shooting in American history" or some permutation (Nidal Hasan, Jared Loughner, Steven Kazmierczak, and Latina Williams).

The next most common reference to Virginia Tech was in the development of a pattern of events. This occurred multiple times across seven cases – Jiverly Wong, Jared Loughner, Michael McLendon, Nidal Hasan, Steven Kazmierczak, Robert Butler, and Adam Lanza. While it was common to link the Virginia Tech shootings to events that happened in a similar time frame, it was even more common to continuously refer to Virginia Tech in conjunction with Columbine. In fact, both shootings appeared in immediate discussion of one another 11 different times, despite that the death toll in the Virginia Tech shooting was more than twice that of Columbine. In addition to specific references to multiple events, patterns of shootings also were constructed by situating the event in current discussion as the "deadliest (or worst) shooting since Virginia Tech."

This occurred multiple times in discussions about Adam Lanza and Jiverly Wong. The Sandy Hook shooting (Adam Lanza) was qualified multiple times as "the second-deadliest shooting" behind Virginia Tech.

Across multiple rampage shootings, gun control was a hot-button issue where Virginia Tech could be used as a reference for why more (or less) restrictions were needed. Discussion following the shootings by Adam Lanza, James Holmes, Jared Loughner, Michael McLendon, and Steven Kazmierczak all focused on strengthening control over automatic and assault weapons and utilized Virginia Tech as an example of why such restraints were needed. Conversely, discussion following the 2010 shooting by Nathaniel Brown, an Ohio State custodian who killed his supervisor and wounded another co-worker, suggested that allowing concealed carry on campuses could help to mitigate death tolls, such as in the Virginia Tech shooting. Background checks were another type of control measure discussed in the Adam Lanza shooting (five references), emphasizing how such checks could have "prevented" the Virginia Tech shooting. Further, it was discussed how three other shooters – Steven Kazmierczak, George Sodini, and Jared Loughner – all purchased their firearms from the same dealer as Seung-Hui Cho.

Several other issues provided for parallels to be drawn against the Virginia Tech shooting. Mental health issues were discussed in articles about Adam Lanza, James Holmes, Jiverly Wong, and Loyer Braden, but specific attention was given to the issues that colleges and universities face when dealing with mentally ill students in discussion about Jared Loughner and Steven Kazmierczak, both of whom were or had recently been college students struggling with such issues. Security at schools also was discussed in

the context of these two events, as well as following the Sandy Hook shooting. The latter discussion, however, focused on the challenges of providing security to a widespread university as compared to a closed-campus primary or secondary school. Parallels also were drawn between Sandy Hook and Virginia Tech with respect to preservation of memorials after the outpouring of support following each shooting.

  Aurora movie theater. Though the July 2012 shooting by James Holmes at an Aurora, Colorado movie theater occurred near the end of the data collection period, it still was the third most highly referenced shooting. Six events occurred between July 20 and December 31, and the coverage of three of them – the August Sikh temple shooting (Wade Michael Page), the December Clackamas Town Center shooting (Jacob Tyler Roberts), and the December Sandy Hook shooting (Adam Lanza) – referenced the Aurora shooting. The shooting by Wade Michael Page referenced Aurora simply as a temporal reference, noting that the events occurred approximately two weeks apart. Similarly, two articles focused on Jacob Tyler Roberts referenced Aurora, again establishing a "pattern" of mass shootings and suggesting that each event was just one in a line of cases.

  It was the Sandy Hook shooting, however, that most consistently referenced the Aurora shooting from nearly five months earlier. In fact, there were 24 references to Aurora in 17 articles about Sandy Hook. Like the articles about Jacob Tyler Roberts, five stories about Adam Lanza also made reference to Aurora in an attempt to establish a pattern of mass shooting events. More commonly, however, the linkage between Sandy Hook and Aurora was focused within the gun control debate. A total of 14 references in 12 articles were made to Aurora. Several references focused on enforcing existing laws,

such as background checks, while others highlighted the need for new policies, such as a renewal of the lapsed assault weapons ban and limits on magazine clips.

Tucson/Giffords shooting. Only two other cases referenced the 2011 shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and 18 others during a Tucson-area political event – the 2012 Aurora movie theater (James Holmes) and Sandy Hook Elementary School (Adam Lanza) shootings. The three references to the Tucson shooting across two articles about James Holmes focused mainly on supporting calls for a renewed gun control debate, and drawing similarities between Loughner and Holmes. Unlike other mass shooting events, Loughner and Holmes both were captured alive (as opposed to committing suicide), and their defenses each have focused on similar issues, such as mental illness and the related culpability.

In the nine articles about Adam Lanza that referenced Jared Loughner, the Tucson shootings also were mentioned in the context of the gun control debate. Seven total references were made in the debate about renewing the Federal Assault Weapons Ban (AWB) that had lapsed in 2004. Tucson, along with other shootings including Aurora and Virginia Tech, were referenced to show a pattern of usage of automatic and assault-type weapons by the shooters that had been prohibited under the AWB but were no longer illegal to own with its lapse, barring mental illness or a criminal record. Two references within this group specifically focused on expanding background checks to keep the guns out of the hands of mentally ill people. This cross-reference is problematic, however, as Lanza's guns were purchased by and legally registered to his mother, and thus he had never been subjected to a background check. Under both state and federal laws, Lanza was not even old enough to own a handgun, one of the four

weapons present at the shooting, but was of age to legally own rifles and shotguns. Loughner, on the other hand, purchased his firearms himself, leading to the issues of loopholes and flaws in the background check reporting systems, particularly as they related to mentally individuals who should have been denied during the sale.

Three additional references to the Tucson shooting also were made in the discussion of the Sandy Hook shooting that specifically focused on Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. These references, coming at the end of the 30-day period, focused on a visit that the Congresswoman made to Newtown to meet with the families of the victims. All three references focused on how she had been wounded and survived, essentially taking the role as a symbol of hope. Interestingly, out of the 14 total references to the Tucson shootings in the context of both Aurora and Newtown, Gabrielle Giffords was specifically mentioned by name in 11 (78.6%) of these. No other victim of that shooting was mentioned by name, and only two (18.2%) of these references even acknowledged that there were any other victims besides the Congresswoman.

Long Island railroad shooting. The 1993 shooting by Colin Ferguson on the Long Island Railroad (LIRR) was referenced 11 times across four different shootings – the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting (Seung-Hui Cho); the 2011 shooting of Congresswoman Giffords (Jared Loughner); the 2012 Aurora movie theater shooting (James Holmes); and the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School (Adam Lanza). What is important to note, however, is the context in which this shooting was discussed. The LIRR shooting was not utilized as an independent example; rather, it was always mentioned when the article referenced or quoted Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy. McCarthy, one of the nation's leading gun control advocates, also has personal ties with the event –

her husband was killed in the LIRR shooting, and her son severely wounded. Thus, references to the LIRR shooting were used to support McCarthy's stance on gun control, rather than to contextualize the events at hand:

> "The time to talk about it should have been after the last shooting or the shooting before that," said Representative Carolyn McCarthy, Democrat of New York, whose husband was one of six people killed in a shooting on the *Long Island Rail Road* in 1993. (Adam Lanza, 12-15-12-02)

> Representative Carolyn McCarthy, Democrat of New York, whose husband was killed in 1993 by a gunman on a *Long Island Rail Road* train, has been pushing House leaders this week to move quickly on a bill that would require states to automate their criminal history records so that computer databases used to conduct background checks on gun buyers are more complete. (Seung-Hui Cho, 4-19-07-03)

Further, these references were only used in high-profile cases, each of which dominated the coverage within this study; cases receiving limited coverage did not include quotes or references to McCarthy or others partaking in politically-charged debates over such issues as gun control.

Domestic terrorism events. Mass shootings are not the only frame of reference for other similar events. Incidents of domestic terrorism, such as the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, also have been used as a point of comparison in the discussion about rampage shootings. By comparing mass shootings with acts of domestic terrorism, *The Times* may substitute one problem within concern of another (see, for example, Mayr & Machin, 2012). Thus, this does not help readers to understand the problem of rampage shootings, but instead situates these events in a broader discourse of safety in the U.S. Additionally, by comparing rampage shootings to events with much higher death tolls, it may, in fact, generate added fear and heightened perceptions that one could become the victim.

When more closely examining the use of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing as a referent, only two events – the 2011 Tucson shooting (Jared Loughner) and the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School (Adam Lanza) – incorporated this into the discourse. Writers did so, however, twice as consistently as using the 2001 terrorist attacks, and most of these references (n = 13) were tied to the Loughner shooting. The main theme interwoven in the comparison of the Tucson shooting to the Oklahoma City bombing was the idea of extremist, anti-government views:

> Not since *the Oklahoma City bombing* in 1995 has an event generated as much attention as to whether extremism, antigovernment sentiment and even simple political passion at both ends of the ideological spectrum have created a climate promoting violence. (Jared Loughner, 1-9-11-01)

Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, the perpetrators of the 1995 bombing, were purported to have carried out the acts as a retaliation to the government's handling of the Branch Davidian case in Waco, Texas. Loughner, whose motive has remained elusive, was found to have made a number of anti-government web postings in the weeks and months leading up to the shooting. Further, given that victims of both attacks were federal employees, discussion also occurred as to whether the same precedents (e.g., the use of capital punishment, federal vs. state trials) would be used in Loughner's case.

Similar to the use of other examples, both the September 11th terrorist attacks and the Oklahoma City bombing were used to develop a line of cases upon which people could relate the current event at hand. In one instance, these two events were discussed in conjunction with one another. In others, they were placed amidst a line of mass shootings (e.g., Columbine and/or Virginia Tech) to help situate these events in the context of mass shootings, or perhaps more aptly, to treat the rampage shootings both in this study and prior to it as events in the longer narrative of domestic terrorism. Beyond

108

just being one of many, these two events were used to draw specific comparisons to

rampage shootings to make sense of the shooting and subsequent loss of life:

> "The only thing that I personally experienced that was similar to this moment was the *Oklahoma City bombing*, where another American killed scores of people," Mr. [David] Chipman said of his 25-year career.[10] (Adam Lanza, 12-15-12-02)

> Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, he [Carson City sheriff Ken Furlong] likened the rampage to *Sept. 11* and said his city of 55,000 would recover just as *New York* had. (Eduardo Sencion, 9-8-11-01)

Despite Sencion's rampage being classified by law enforcement as "random," its timing

in relation to the tenth anniversary of 9/11, coupled with many of the victims being

members of the National Guard, fueled these linkages between the events. Similarly,

when the 2009 Fort Hood shooting (Nidal Hasan) referenced 9/11, it did so by

highlighting violence among Muslims in the U.S.

Use Statistics

The use of numeric estimates or statistics can be used to offer additional context

to the problem or event at hand (Best, 1987). This can occur in somewhat of a two-fold

process. First, by utilizing statistics, claims makers can underscore the magnitude of a

given social problem (Barak, 1994; Best, 1987, 2006; Mayr & Machin, 2012; Sacco,

1995). Additionally, having a numerical estimate attached to an event allows it to be

compared to other events. Based on how high or low the statistic is, the event can be

"ranked" in some type of order against other events. For example, if looking at death

tolls, those that are higher typically are perceived to be more important or salient events.

The higher the death toll, the more importance or emphasis is placed on that particular

---

[10] David Chipman is a former ATF special agent who was interviewed by *The New York Times* following the December 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting.

event. Table 13 presents the findings of how statistics are used by *The Times* in the

context of the social problem of rampage shootings.

Table 13. Use of Statistics by Major Themes

Theme	Coding Frequency	Coding Percentage
Victim Count of Actual Event	677	35.1
Community Statistics	139	7.2
Victim Count of Other Events	121	6.3
Rounds Fired	97	5.0
National Statistics	79	4.1
Spatial Proximity	66	3.4
Number of Weapons	38	2.0
Magazine Capacity	33	1.7

NOTE: A total of 1,930 statistical references were coded. Coding percentages are based on this total number of statistical references. The remaining categories accounted for less than 1% of coding and are not presented.

The most common use of statistics is to report the victim count for the event in the

study – this occurs nearly five times as frequently as the next major theme. In 40.7% of

articles (n = 166) referencing the victim counts, these statistics were used two or more

times in a single article. In 13 articles (3.2%), victim counts were referenced five or

more times, one even as high as seven references in a single article (James Holmes, 8-17-

12-01).[11] Further, victim counts of other events (e.g., Columbine, the LIRR shooting,

etc.), including when events within the study's time frame are referenced by other events,

are reported in an additional 121 instances (6.3%).

_____

[11] The use of multiple statistical references to victim counts in a single article was most common amongst the highly salient cases: For Adam Lanza, there were 84 references in 63 articles; for James Holmes there were 41 references in 25 articles; for Jared Loughner, there were 84 references across 57 articles; for Nidal Hasan, there were 44 references in 26 articles; and for Seung-Hui Cho, there were 41 references in 20 articles.

Victim counts included the number dead (including number of funerals taking place, which can symbolize the number dead), the number wounded, and the number of people present during the shooting.[12] Most commonly, victim counts are reported as aggregations – the total number dead or the total number wounded (see also Mayr & Machin, 2012). Similar to the manner in which victims were characterized in story leads, presenting the victims as an aggregation removes their individuality and treats them as one in the same, a process that Mayr and Machin (2012) characterize as "genericization" (p. 70).

Further, victim counts can be considered as a persuasion technique to underscore just how horrific the event was. Take, for example, the following excerpts:

> A 20-year-old man wearing combat gear and armed with semiautomatic pistols and a semiautomatic rifle killed 26 people -- 20 of them children -- in an attack in an elementary school in central Connecticut on Friday. (Adam Lanza, 12-15-12-07)

> Mr. Roberts shot 10 girls -- aged 6 to 13 -- killing 5 of them and then committing suicide. (Charles Carl Roberts, 10-5-06-01).

Both shootings share a number of similarities – the victims were killed by outsiders, many of them were in the same age range, similar firearms were used in both events, and they all were killed in school. Thus, holding these facts constant, and looking solely at the victim count, one could qualify the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting (Lanza) as being "worse" than the Amish Schoolhouse shooting (Roberts), particularly if ranking these events on a continuum of "worst school shootings."

---

[12] It is important to account for the number of survivors who directly witnessed the attack (e.g., people who were inside Sandy Hook Elementary School or the Aurora movie theater auditorium as it happened). This is a form of direct victimization, which is different than indirect victimization (e.g., people at other nearby schools or who were in other auditoriums at the movie theater or even just resided in one of these communities). The latter is coded as "community statistics," through which context is offered about how many people *could* have been victimized, rather than how many actually were.

Consider, however, the following passage from a separate article about the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting:

> The fact that the Newtown massacre, with 26 killed at the school, along with the gunman, was the second deadliest school shooting in the country's history -- after the 32 people killed at Virginia Tech in 2007 -- once again made this process of examination urgent national business as details emerged from Sandy Hook Elementary School. (Adam Lanza, 12-15-12-04)

When juxtaposing the Sandy Hook shooting against the Virginia Tech Shooting (Seung-Hui Cho), again holding all case facts constant, Lanza's shooting is ranked below Cho's. Interestingly, however, when comparing Sandy Hook and Virginia Tech, this often is done to reinforce how horrific the former is, while suggesting that with several more fatalities, it could have surpassed the latter as the nation's deadliest school and mass shooting. Yet, in the same article, Lanza's rampage shooting at Sandy Hook also was compared to five other events in addition to Virginia Tech: Columbine (13 killed); the 1927 Bath, Michigan schoolhouse massacre (44 killed); the Amish Schoolhouse shooting (5 killed); the 1997 Heath High School shooting in West Paducah, Kentucky (3 killed); and the 1996 Dunblane, Scotland primary school shooting (17 killed). As such, Sandy Hook has become one of the worst school shootings on the continuum. Further, this not only supports Best's social problems model in respect to using statistics to emphasize an issue, but also the use of examples.

The theme of "community statistics" also was used in accentuating the problem of rampage shootings. This theme encapsulated both the population of the city or town where the event occurred, but also focused more specifically on how many people were present in the immediate vicinity of the shooting (e.g., how many people worked in a given company or attended a particular school or church). Again, by aggregating

individuals, regardless of whether or not they were present on the day of the shooting, the use of community statistics implies that someone who falls within the parameters of the community also could have been a victim:

> At least *10,000 people* were in the mall at the time of the shooting, the police said. (Jacob Tyler Roberts, 12-12-12-01)

> There were about *200 people* in the church when the gunman opened fire, church members said. (Jim Adkisson, 7-28-08-01)

> There were about *7,000 worshipers* inside the church when the shooting erupted, a church official said. (Matthew Murray, 12-10-07-01)

> Kevin McEnery, 19, one of the public university's *more than 25,000 students*, was seated in the third row of the class when the man stormed in and "just came out and started shooting." (Steven Kazmierczak, 2-15-08-01)

> The factory in Melrose Park, an industrial suburb about 18 miles west of downtown Chicago, employs *1,200 to 1,800 people* on any given day, said a spokesman, Bob Carso. (William Baker, 2-6-01-01)

In these examples, the use of community statistics suggests that in these churches, malls, schools, and workplaces, the death toll could have been much higher because more targets were present. Further aggregation was presented by reporting the size of the full community, as opposed to just one fraction of it, and the distance of these rampage sites to larger, more metropolitan areas also was consistently reported to contextualize the "where" of the shootings.

Three other statistical themes were utilized to demonstrate how bad the shootings were or could have been – the number of rounds fired, the number of weapons present, and the capacity of magazines for the weapons. With respect to the number of rounds fired, this was typically discussed in the context of witness statements to how many shots they had heard or how many rounds had been found either in the victims or at the scene. In each event where there was more than one weapon present, it consistently was

reported as an aggregate number of firearms. This again creates a sense of collectivity

yet ambiguity, as consistently reporting the total number of weapons present, as

compared to the actual number of weapons used, contributes to the idea that the victim

count or damages could have been greater. For example, in the 2012 Sandy Hook

Elementary School shooting, it was continually reported that shooter Adam Lanza had

four guns, despite that all of his victims were shot with only one of the weapons.[13]

Additionally, while both the total number of rounds present and the number fired

were both reported, though not typically in conjunction with one another, the former was

presented more consistently, suggesting a potentially greater tragedy loomed:

> A 9-millimeter semiautomatic Glock was used in the shooting, Chief Dolan said,
> and investigators found another gun and packaging for *10,000 rounds* of
> ammunition in Mr. Engeldinger's house. (Andrew Engeldinger, 9-29-12-01)

> Sergeant Jensen said two assault rifles and three handguns were recovered, as was
> a backpack stuffed with *1,000 rounds* of ammunition. (Matthew Murray, 12-11-
> 07-01)

> Although he was trained on an M-16 assault rifle in the military, he was carrying
> five handguns and more than *200 rounds* of ammunition when he walked into the
> nursing school and methodically killed three instructors. (Robert Flores, Jr., 10-
> 30-02-01)

When compared to the number of fatalities in each event, reporting the number of rounds

present may seem both excessive and superfluous. For example, Andrew Engeldinger,

who had 10,000 rounds of ammunition on hand, killed five and wounded two. Matthew

Murray killed four and wounded five, despite having 1,000 rounds of ammunition.

Despite having one-fifth the ammunition of Murray, Robert Flores, Jr. killed three. In

sum, while the death toll was deplorable in all cases, it was not necessarily to the

proportion of rounds that could have been fired. Without properly contextualizing the

---

[13] The 20 children and six educators were shot multiple times with the .223 Bushmaster rifle. Lanza
committed suicide with the Glock pistol, which only was fired twice, including the fatal shot.

200, 1,000, or 10,000 rounds of ammunition in terms of the victim count or actual rounds fired, these statistics can generate a disproportional understanding of the events. Similar connotations were made when reporting the number of rounds in a magazine, but this statistic most commonly was referenced to further support the gun control position that magazine capacities should be limited.

While the aforementioned statistics serve to amplify the heinous nature of rampage shootings, there is one group of statistics that is noticeably absent from the discourse – national statistics. By situating the rare phenomenon of mass shooting in national statistics, such as violent crime rates for individual cities or even the nation at large, the unlikelihood of these events would be underscored. Instead, by omitting these much needed statistics, it serves to heighten the claim that these events are occurring rather commonly. National statistics were used quite infrequently, accounting for just over 4% of all statistics in the dataset. When these references are further disaggregated, as in Table 14, the disproportionality of these events is further heightened.

Table 14. Disaggregation of National Statistics

Theme	Coding Frequency	Coding Percentage
Gun Ownership	15	19.0
Gun Deaths	13	16.5
Number of Guns in Circulation	12	15.2
Gun Sales	8	10.1
Mental Health	6	7.6
U.S. Violent Crime Rates	3	3.8

NOTE: A total of 79 references on national statistics were coded. Coding percentages are based on this total number of references. The remaining categories accounted for less than 1% of coding and are not presented.

National violent crime rates, or more specifically the U.S. homicide rate, were only reported three times in 564 articles. Instead, when national statistics were reported, they typically emphasized guns – what percentage of people (including splits across various demographics) own firearms, how many deaths by firearms occur each year, how many guns are in circulation, and how many new guns are sold or are attempted to be purchased each year. When gun deaths are reported, they are reported in raw counts, rather than standardized rates to give an actual contextualization to the frequency of occurrence. In other cases, vague aggregations are reported, such as in this excerpt:

> While he [Representative Mike Thompson] described Sandy Hook as "the worst gun tragedy" in his lifetime, he added that *hundreds* of Americans "have been killed with firearms" in the four weeks since the massacre. (Adam Lanza, 1-12-13-04)

The problem in reporting statistics in this ambiguous manner is that the audience cannot determine just how many people were killed in the month following Sandy Hook. Both 200 and 900 are multiple-hundreds, but are vastly different when talking about the number of gun deaths. Ambiguity is not solely limited to these vague aggregates. Even when an actual number is reported, as in the following passage, it may be ambiguous:

> *Thirty-thousand* Americans are killed by guns every year -- on the job, walking to school, at the shopping mall. (Wesley Neal Higdon, 6-27-08-01)

This selection is problematic in that it does not disaggregate the 33,000 into types of gun deaths for the reader to be able to properly contextualize. For example, if considering the year 2012, there were 14,827 people murdered in the U.S., just under 70% of which were committed by a firearm (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012). Therefore, over 20,000 gun deaths a year, on average, are the result of accidental shootings, suicides, or justifiable homicide, either by law enforcement or private citizens. Yet, by failing to

report this breakdown, it may be inferred that all gun deaths are considered to be homicides.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the creation of the social problem of rampage shootings through Joel Best's (1987, 2006) three-stage model. In the first step, the problem is given a name or defined so that people can make sense of the event. Next, examples are used as a point of comparison so that just how grievous the event is can be determined. Finally, statistics are used to contextualize, or more appropriately, distort, the problem. The findings presented here serve to underscore the disproportional coverage these events have received, both individually and as a collective phenomenon.

When giving the problem a name, qualifiers, such as shooter, event, and victims, could be utilized. Instead, however, the writers employ a technique of substitution, applying sensationalized identifiers that emphasize the horror of the event (see Mayr & Machin, 2012). Further, by emphasizing the shooter when introducing the event, writers at *The Times* focus on the arguably most deviant and feared actor in the story. Even when the victims are discussed, they are reduced to a single number or an occupation or gender role, creating ambiguity about who they were. This can lead to a heightened belief that the reader has a similar chance of becoming a victim. Finally, when the problem is defined in the context of the event, the most ghastly qualifiers – rampage, bloodbath, and massacre – are substituted to sensationalize the event.

When examples are offered, *The Times* most heavily relies on the most infamous case – Columbine. Yet, despite that Columbine occurred at a school, other types of rampages, including those occurring at movie theaters, political rallies, immigration

centers, and workplaces, also refer back to the shooting. This suggests that Columbine has transcended the discourse of school shootings and solidified its place in an even broader narrative about general rampage violence. Further, given the social reaction Columbine generated as the [perceived] "first of its kind," continuing to reference this event, even 15 years after its occurrence, serves to reinforce the visceral reactions and fear felt as if it April 20, 1999 all over again. Beyond Columbine, *The Times* also links rampage shootings to acts of domestic terrorism, again, casting a wider net to reference phenomena that generate the most fear (and readership).

Finally, the overreliance on statistics, both vague and specific, helps to amplify just how much of a "problem" that rampage shootings are for the U.S. First, the victim count, both for the event at hand and with the addition of referencing those from other events, is the most commonly reported statistic. Again, vagueness was employed to heighten the sensationalism of the case, particularly in shootings with higher victim counts. When more specific statistics were used, it was to emphasize how many weapons were present and how many rounds were fired, in a further attempt to suggest how much deadlier these events could have been. Perhaps most importantly though, with regard to the use of statistics, is the absence of any legitimate contextualization of these events relative to national crime statistics. Thus, a relatively rare phenomenon has been heightened to the status of both common and problematic.

Independently, these three components of the social problem already can create a heightened anxiety about a certain phenomenon. Yet when they converge, they create a perfect storm that can capture, keep, and terrify audiences. In the instance of rampage shootings, as constructed by *The New York Times*, this convergence has emerged as a

disaster narrative, with each of the 91 events just a single part of a larger problem

(Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). The coverage, as depicted through the wording of the

headlines, the use of examples, and the overemphasis on statistics, has solidified rampage

shootings as a social problem in the U.S.

VII. THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Following rampage shooting events, there is a seemingly sudden outcry demanding to know why these events have happened. In some instances, this may occur as people look for ways to prevent future events of a similar nature. In others, there is a search for someone or something to criminalize beyond the shooters themselves. For many, the problem appears to be too complex for just one or two "bad apples." Unfortunately, the answer as to "why" is one of the most elusive questions that rarely gets answered (Schildkraut, 2012a).

Still, this does not stop people from attempting to answer such a question. In the aftermath of rampage shootings, politicians, the media, and the public offer possible causes and propose potential solutions. Since Columbine, and even before, three key themes have pervaded the discourse on rampage shootings (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2013). One of the most obvious themes is guns – a constant battle between those who favor gun control and suggest that with stricter regulations, the events would not have happened, and those in support of gun rights, who advocate that more armed citizens may have reduced the lethality of these events. Additionally, discourse emphasizing the role of mental health and classifying violent media as a causal factor also has been consistently present in the coverage of both Columbine and its successors. This chapter explores how the narrative of these "usual suspects" is constructed among shootings after Columbine.

Guns

In the discourse following rampage shootings, one of the first culprits to be named beyond the shooters themselves is guns. It is not uncommon for the media to reference the type of weapon used, either generally or by offering the specific make, model, or caliber. Additionally, there is no more controversial debate than that of gun control versus right to carry. Proponents of gun control typically advocate for stronger regulations, such as banning assault weapons, increasing background checks, and limiting the capacities of magazines and the amount of ammunition consumers can purchase. The other camp, those who support gun rights, often suggest that the presence of armed citizens could have mitigated the lethality of the event. Regardless of which camp one falls in, guns consistently are one of the most prevalent themes in the narrative of these events.

Consistent with this observation, in examining the media discourse following rampage shootings after Columbine, gun references were not only the most prevalent existing theme, but also the second most coded category in the entire study, following the use of statistics (Chapter 6). Three main areas related to guns were coded: the description of the type used in the attacks (both general and specific references), gun control, and gun rights. In total, there were 1,206 references to guns within these three categories. Gun control was the most common reference, with 576 individual mentions (47.8%). The descriptions of the weapons themselves, with general and specific details combined, were the next most commonly coded category, with 453 total references (37.6%). Finally, there were 177 references to gun rights, accounting for 14.7% percent of gun-related codes.

Descriptions of guns used. Part of the common discourse involves identifying the type of weapon used in the shootings. In some instances, a general reference to the presence of a gun may be sufficient enough to instill fear among readers. At the same time, however, specifically identifying the make and model of the weapon or its caliber provides the opportunity to essentially criminalize a particular gun or group of guns. Regardless, it poses the question as to whether such descriptions even are needed, given that these events are shootings, and thus, the presence of a firearm should be taken as a given.

In the present study, offering a general description was the most common way in which firearms were discussed. A total of 271 general references to firearms were made, representing 59.8% of all descriptions of guns. These references included simply identifying that a gun was present or offering a little more specificity regarding the type (e.g., shotgun, pistol, or rifle) without identifying the make, model, or caliber. What is interesting, however, is that these references were made over just 167 individual articles for 51 different shootings. Therefore, for each article, there was an average of 1.6 general references to firearms. In reality, however, just 63 of the articles (23.2%) had multiple references, and one article about the 2012 Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting had 10 general mentions of guns. As such, for articles with multiple references, the mean number of codes was 2.7 per article, and the modal number of references was two. The remaining 104 articles included only single references to general gun descriptors.

Specific descriptions of the types of weapons used in the shootings also were common, though slightly less in comparison to general references. A total of 182

references were made across 128 individual articles for 43 different events. The overall

mean for specific gun references was 1.4 mentions per article, which is slightly less than

for general references. There were 35 articles (27.3%) with multiple references, with one

article also having 10 references. For articles with multiple references, the mean was 2.5

codes per article, just slightly lower than the mean number of general descriptors. The

modal number of references also was two per article.

Taking into consideration that just five cases were driving the overall coverage of

rampage shootings, attention must be paid to where they enter into the expansive

discourse on guns. Table 15 reports the prevalence of references to both general and

specific descriptions of the weapons among these major cases. In considering the five

cases first as an aggregate, 39.5% of the general references and 47.3% of the specific

references to guns are within the coverage of these cases. This is important because it

indicates that there is a wider distribution of cases, as noted previously, that are

incorporating references to weapons used into their coverage.

Table 15. Distribution of General and Specific Gun References by Major Case

Case	General References		Specific References	
	Coding References	Coding Percentage	Coding References	Coding Percentage
Adam Lanza	44	41.1	39	45.3
James Holmes	31	29.0	13	15.1
Nidal Hasan	16	15.0	1	1.2
Jared Loughner	14	13.1	24	27.9
Seung-Hui Cho	2	1.9	9	10.5
TOTALS	**107**	**100.1**	**86**	**100.0**

NOTE: Total percentage may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Examining the individual cases also is telling. Not surprisingly, reference to the type of weapons that were used in the event was most commonly linked to the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting (Adam Lanza). When discussed in the general context, the guns were simply referred to as rifles (referenced either with or without the qualifier "semiautomatic"), pistol, or even just gun. When discussed more specifically, frequent reference was made to the brand (Bushmaster), model (M4 carbine), and caliber (.223) of the main weapon used in the attack. Despite that similar guns were used in other events (e.g., the Glock pistol that was used by Adam Lanza to commit suicide is the same make as one of the guns used in the Virginia Tech shooting), stories about these shootings did not include as many references. It is important to consider, however, that this is most likely an issue of proportionality, in that there were 130 articles about Sandy Hook, as compared to only 36 articles about Virginia Tech. Interestingly, there was a more consistent use of specific descriptions when discussing both the Virginia Tech shooting (Seung-Hui Cho) and the Tucson shooting (Jared Loughner).

Gun control vs. gun rights. As noted earlier, an even more common discourse about guns in the aftermath of these events is the debate between control and right to carry. In the present study, references to gun control occurred at a rate of approximately 3.3 mentions to every one reference to gun rights. More interestingly, however, is that despite the frequency at which this ongoing debate enters the discourse, it does not enter into the media narrative following every single event. Instead, gun control is mentioned in the context of 17 events, and gun rights are discussed in the coverage of just 11 shootings. Table 16 presents the distribution of each of these themes by their individual cases.

Table 16. Distribution of References to Gun Control and Gun Rights by Case

Case	Gun Control		Gun Rights	
	Coding References	Coding Percentage	Coding References	Coding Percentage
Adam Lanza	354	61.5	104	58.8
Jared Loughner	74	12.8	17	9.6
James Holmes	57	10.0	17	9.6
Seung-Hui Cho	22	3.8	4	2.3
Charles Andy Williams	21	3.6	2	1.1
Jeffrey Weise	14	2.4	15	8.5
Steven Kazmierczak	9	1.6	10	5.6
Michael McDermott	7	1.2	0	0.0
Jiverly Wong	5	1.0	2	1.1
Wesley Neal Higdon	5	1.0	0	0.0
Michael McLendon	2	0.3	0	0.0
Bruce Jeffrey Pardo	1	0.2	0	0.0
Ian Lee Stawicki	1	0.2	0	0.0
James Wenneker von Brunn	1	0.2	0	0.0
Kyle Aaron Huff	1	0.2	0	0.0
Nathaniel Brown	1	0.2	1	0.6
Robert Bonelli, Jr.	1	0.2	0	0.0
Robert Butler, Jr.	0	0.0	4	2.3
Wesley Neal Higdon	0	0.0	1	0.6
TOTALS	**576**	**100.4**	**177**	**100.1**

NOTE: Total percentage may not total to 100% due to rounding.

In reviewing the results, several noticeable findings emerge. The 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting (Adam Lanza) again is the case found to continually reference both sides of this controversial debate. Given that the Sandy Hook shooting is the most recent case in the dataset, this is particularly interest. Previous research by Schildkraut and Muschert (2014) found that while the coverage of Sandy Hook, in terms

of framing patterns, was somewhat disparate from that of Columbine, they suggested that

it still represented an important milestone in a longer disaster narrative. Here, the results

also indicate that it represents an important marker in the gun control debate. Despite

that the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting (Seung-Hui Cho) had a higher death toll, the Sandy

Hook shooting is fundamentally different in how the public, the media, and, politicians

responded to the event. The situational characteristics – primarily the loss of six

educators and 20 students aged seven and younger – fueled the gun control debate in a

way that has not been observed since Columbine, as evidenced in the Table 16. Further,

given the political outcry, demand for tougher gun legislation, and passage or

strengthening of assault weapons bans in several states, the right to carry discourse

typically emphasized the implications that such measures would have on firearms owners

nationwide. Hence, as astutely noted in one article:

> "It is apparent that the Sandy Hook tragedy was a watershed event that has raised
> the national debate on gun control to an unprecedented level," Cerberus [Capital
> Management] said in a statement on Tuesday. (Adam Lanza, 12-18-12-10)

Coverage of the 2011 Tucson (Jared Loughner) shooting and the 2007 Virginia

Tech shootings (Seung-Hui Cho) also heavily emphasized gun control over gun rights.

These discourses typically focused on control measures that would keep firearms away

from the mentally ill, and suggested direct limitations on the weapons or ammunition.

Other articles related to cases of lesser coverage, such as those discussing the shootings

by Jiverly Wong, Michael McDermott, and Wesley Neal Higdon, also emphasized the

need to keep guns out of the hands of disqualified owners, such as the mentally ill or

convicted felons. The discourse related to ammunition and magazine regulation was

more consistently found within the discussion of the 2012 Aurora, Colorado movie

theater shooting (James Holmes). In this event, not only had the shooter stockpiled nearly 6,000 rounds of ammunition, but he also used a modified 100-round drum during the shootings, which is designed to facilitate rapid fire with fewer reloads. Also notable in the discussion about Aurora was support for concealed carry in public spaces. Supporters of this camp suggested that had citizens been able to carry their weapons into the theater, the victim count may have been lower.

When examining the distribution of the themes of gun control, one quickly can discern that the top four cases are among the five that are driving the coverage of rampage shootings during the study period. What noticeably is absent from the discussion on both gun control and gun rights is the fifth case – the 2009 Fort Hood military base shooting (Nidal Hasan). Leading up to the rampage, Hasan's behavior had grown increasingly erratic as he tried to avoid deployment to the Middle East, facts which could support the gun control camps' agenda. On the day of the rampage, Hasan was brought down by two armed civilian police officers who had arrived on scene. This series of events could have been used by gun rights advocates to illustrate how the presence of a legally armed citizen could help to minimize the loss of life, similar to the discussion that would later take place after the Aurora shooting. Both of these uses, as well as any other possible employment of references to gun control or gun rights, were absent from the entire discourse about the Fort Hood shooting. This finding, however, is not entirely unexpected; given the availability of weapons for military personnel and the requirement that many of them remain armed, it could be hypothesized that these locales present a completely different set of circumstances that must be considered outside of this

ongoing debate and, as such, this event was not comparable in this capacity to the other events in the study.

Given the overwhelming prevalence of references to gun control, it is important to take a closer examination to determine what specific measures are dominating the discourse. As such, references to gun control were recoded into subthemes encompassing specific types of gun control measures that were prevalent in the discourse. Statements that did not focus on specific measures, but instead more broadly discussed gun control, were coded as general reference. Table 17 presents the breakdown of themes related to gun control measures.

Table 17. Disaggregation of Main Gun Control Themes

Category	Coding References	Coding Percentage
General Reference	353	61.3
Assault Weapons Ban	121	21.0
Limiting Magazine Capacity	39	6.8
Background Checks	32	5.6
Disqualifying Mentally Ill Buyers	23	4.0
Limiting Ammunition Sales	8	1.4
TOTALS	**576**	**100.1**

NOTE: Total percentage may not total to 100% due to rounding.

As one might expect, general references to the broader issue of gun control was the most common category, accounting for just over 61% of all references. The category for assault weapons bans (AWBs) was the next most common with 21%. The earliest references to AWBs was the 2005 shooting at Red Lake Senior High School (Jeffrey

Weise). This, however, is not surprising – the Red Lake shooting is one of the first

events to occur after the Federal AWB lapsed in 2004. Over the years after the lapse, this

issue continued to gain momentum at the federal level, with gun control advocates calling

for its reinstatement after seven individual events between 2005 and mid-2012 with the

Aurora shooting. The largest discourse about AWBs, however, came with the Sandy

Hook shooting. Nearly 75% of the 121 references were linked to the case. One

noticeable shift is that, in addition to discussion about AWBs at the federal level, the

discourse also shifted to the implementation of such laws at the state level. At the time of

the shooting, Connecticut had an AWB in place. After the shooting, New York passed

one of the strictest gun control packages that included a state-level AWB.

Additional gun control measures also appeared in the discourse; however, they

did so at a much lower frequency. Enhanced background checks were continually

referenced, many times in conjunction with gun shows. It was, in fact, the "gun show

loophole" that had helped the Columbine shooters acquire their guns undetected

(Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2013). Disqualifying certain buyers, such as those who have

been deemed mentally ill, also was found to be distributed among the cases, though the

most frequent connection was to the shootings perpetrated by Adam Lanza, Jared

Loughner, and Seung-Hui Cho, where mental health was a key concern. One final

measure, the limiting of magazines, actually was the third most referenced. Notably,

however, this discussion both was more recent and narrower in terms of which cases

incorporated this theme into the narrative than was exhibited by other gun control

categories. In fact, only three cases – Adam Lanza, James Holmes, and Jared Loughner –

made mention of limiting ammunition clips in the related articles. Despite that other

cases occurred in the two years in which these shootings took place, this measure failed to be of concern except in high-profile cases.

Despite that the right to carry discussion received considerable less attention than its gun-control opponent, attention still is warranted into the construction of this portion of the narrative. The most common references to gun rights were general references to right to carry and related advocacy. In other instances, gun rights were framed more as the absence of gun control or merely some rights being infringed upon by gun control, rather than as being their own independent position. In regards to specific gun rights measures, the few that were offered focused on allowing licensed professors and students to carry on campuses and for CHLs to carry in public spaces.

Two additional prominent themes emerged in the discourse about gun rights. The first was the National Rifle Association (NRA). A total of 23 individual references (13%) to the NRA were coded. This included statements related to gun rights and eliminating restrictions made by the groups' members, most commonly its president, Wayne LaPierre. An additional 26 references (14.7%) were made to the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution – the right to keep and bear arms – and how supporters of right to carry wanted to preserve such rights.

Mental Health

The intersection of mental health and rampage shootings often is a major discussion point in the ongoing "disaster narrative" of these events. Many people believe that mental health is one of the leading causal factors precipitating these events, besides the availability of guns. As such, much of the discourse following mass shootings focuses on identifying these underlying proffered causes of rampage shootings, in an

attempt to both allocate blame and answer the "why" that always is lingering, as well as

to create a profile of mass shooters to identify warning signs that can be used to prevent

the next tragedy. In the present study, a total of 547 references to mental health were

coded across 30 individual shooting events. These references were further disaggregated

into four categories – general references, prior warning signs, medications, and

diagnoses.

Table 18. Total Mental Health References by Category

Category	Coding References	Coding Percentage
General Reference	444	81.2
Prior Warning Signs	41	7.5
Medications	40	7.3
Diagnoses	22	4.0
TOTALS	**547**	**100.0**

Table 18 presents the frequency of mental health references across these

disaggregated categories. The findings indicate that most frequent discussion of mental

health is in a broad, general sense. This includes discussion about mental health as an

epidemic in the U.S., problems within the system itself, and even vaguer or unspecified

references to mental health. When the focus is narrowed, such mental health concerns as

prior warning signs, medications, and specific diagnoses (e.g., identifiable illnesses) enter

the discourse. These individual categories are explored more in depth in the sections that

follow.

Table 19. General Mental Health References by Major Cases

Shooter	Coding References	Coding Percentage[1]
Jared Loughner (2011)	141	31.8
Adam Lanza (2012)	104	23.4
Seung-Hui Cho (2007)	65	14.6
James Holmes (2012)	26	5.9
Nidal Hasan (2009)	24	5.4

[1] Coding percentages are of total references (n = 444).

First, however, it is important to consider how general mental health references are distributed across the five most salient events, particularly with the amount of attention these cases generate on key issues (Table 19). As has been found in the examination of other themes, these cases typically occupy a large majority of the references to a particular theme. In fact, just one of these cases (Sandy Hook) accounted for nearly 62% of all gun control references, 59% of mentions about gun rights, and just under 75% of the discussion on assault weapons ban. With mental health, however, the overall frequency of references by these highly salient cases is nearly half that of other themes. The Sandy Hook shooting (Adam Lanza), which has been found to drive nearly every major theme of the study, takes an interesting second place behind the 2011 Tucson shooting (Jared Loughner). Though Lanza was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome at an early age, the mental health discourse in that event fell a distant second to gun control. Loughner, however, exhibited extreme mental illness, and unlike Lanza, was captured alive. Thus, Loughner's mental health issues presented more of an ongoing challenge than Lanza's.

Diagnoses. Similar to the way in which problems are given names, in the spirit of Joel Best's work, mental health also may be qualified by identifying a specific diagnosis. In many instances, however, these diagnoses typically are anecdotal, as medical records are sealed. In rare instances, such as the case of Adam Lanza, the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooter who suffered from Asperger's syndrome, family members or friends may share this type of information. What is more problematic in this case, however, is that Asperger's syndrome is a highly functioning form of autism, and people who suffer from the disease are rarely violent outside of the family and almost never use weapons (Harmon, 2012; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2013). Still, providing any sort of diagnosis can lead readers to label this, and mental health more broadly, as a causal factor for rampage shootings.

Including the five references to diagnoses made in the coverage of the Newtown shooting, a total of 22 mentions were found in all of the coverage. The Virginia Tech shooting received the same five references as Newtown, but instead focused on the finding that Cho was an imminent danger to himself and others due to mental illness. Other referenced mental illness diagnoses included schizophrenia (four references), severe or major depression (five references), bipolar disorder (one reference), and anxiety with compulsive behaviors (one reference). Thus, it appears that despite that general references to mental health were over 20 times more common, writers at *The Times* reserved reporting specific diagnoses unless they could actually be corroborated with credible sources.

Medications. Another issue within the mental illness debate is whether or not prescribed medications could have triggered the attack. As with other components of the

larger disaster narrative about rampage shootings, discussion about medications as a causal factor also emerged out of the coverage of the Columbine shooter. In the course of the investigation, it was revealed that shooter Eric Harris had been taking Luvox, a drug used to treat obsessive-compulsive disorder (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2013). Still, despite that no scientific evidence has proved a causal link between any psychiatric medications and mass shooting events, it has not stopped the press from offering such speculation.

A total of 40 references to medications were made in the course of the 12-year discussion about rampage shooting, accounting for just over 7% of all references to mental health. Interestingly, only single references were made to medications in relation to two of the higher saliency cases (James Holmes and Seung-Hui Cho). Instead, the most commonly linked case to medications was the 2005 shooting at a Red Lake, Minnesota high school (Jeffrey Weise). In fact, one single article referenced medications 19 times. This article discussed how Weise, who suffered from major depression, had his doses of Prozac continually increased up until the time of the shooting. Despite that no scientific causal link exists between the drug and homicidal tendencies (it is more commonly linked to suicides), statements such as the following illustrate how this was just one of many straws grasped to try and explain the rampage:

> "I do wonder," Mr. [Lee] Cook said, "whether on top of everything else he had going on in his life, on top of all the other problems, whether the drugs could have been the final straw." (Jeffrey Weise, 3-26-05-01)

Beyond the Red Lake shooting, 10 references to medications were made in conjunction with the 2008 shooting at Northern Illinois University (Steven Kazmierczak). Though it was reported that the shooter struggled with anxiety, rather than depression,

writers at *The Times* seized the opportunity to point out that he also had previously been prescribed Prozac. Despite these two cases, however, it was more common to use vague references, such as "antidepressants" or even more simply "medications," to again draw the causal link. While specifically naming a drug, such as Prozac, allows for the discourse to pinpoint specific side effects that could have led to the shootings, using vaguer terms may generate greater fear and confusion as to the relationship between these medications and the events.

Prior warning signs. A final component of the mental health discussion was the emphasis on prior warning signs. Prior warnings are perhaps one of the most overt signs that could have, or perhaps more aptly, should have, alerted someone to the impending danger. A total of 41 references to prior warning signs were made across 25 articles about 13 different cases. Interestingly, despite the discussion about Asperger's as a potential cause for the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, and Adam Lanza's increasingly strange behavior in the months and years prior to the rampage, no discussion of specific warning signs was linked to this coverage. Instead, the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting (Seung-Hui Cho) had the most references (n = 17) to this theme.

The most consistent reference to prior warning signs was to strange or bizarre behavior (39%). Coverage of five cases – Ian Lee Stawicki, Jared Loughner, Jennifer San Marco, Jiverly Wong, and Seung-Hui Cho – referenced troubling behavior that not only should have alerted someone of a problem, but also highlighted the increasingly erratic nature of the shooter leading up to their rampages. The majority of references to such behavior again was skewed towards the Virginia Tech case, though this is not entirely surprising given the hundreds of pages of such behavior documented in the

Virginia Tech Review Panel Report (VTRP). Suicide threats and attempts were nearly as common, accounting for nearly 37% of the prior warning signs in six different cases – Asa Coon, Jeffrey Weise, Michael McDermott, Robert Flores, Jr., Robert Hawkins, and Seung-Hui Cho. Unlike previous strange behavior, suicide references were more commonly linked to Jeffrey Weise's coverage.

Compared to the aforementioned warning signs, the remaining two categories received minimal attention – commitments (15%) and violent outbursts (10%). The coverage of the Virginia Tech shooting included five of the six references to commitments, as Cho had been held involuntarily two years before the shooting. Under both state and federal law, this should have precluded him from legally purchasing firearms, but it did not as it was never reported to the background check system (Bonnie et al., 2009; Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2013; VTRP, 2007). Discussion about violent outbursts was couched in the discussion about Amy Bishop (three of four references), suggesting that there were sufficient warning signs that could have predicted the shooting, which also was classified as one in a series of violent outbursts.

Violent Media

Following the 1999 Columbine shootings, violent media in the form of movies, music, and even computer and video games were labeled as one potential reason that the shootings had occurred. The investigation into the event revealed that the shooters had watched such movies as *Natural Born Killers*, *The Matrix*, and *The Basketball Diaries* and drew parallels between the movies' characters and the shooters (Frymer, 2009; Ogle et al., 2003; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2013). It also was reported that the shooters had been fans of "Goth rock" bands, such as Marilyn Manson, KMFDM, and Rammstein

(Schildkraut & Muschert, 2013). Manson's Denver concert scheduled for just days after

the shooting was boycotted and eventually cancelled (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2013).

Concern also was raised over computer and video games when it was revealed that

shooter Eric Harris had spent copious amounts of time playing the game *Doom*, a violent

video game where players kill one another in a wide array of levels (Schildkraut &

Muschert, 2013). In sum, the designation of violent media as a causal factor for the

shooting warrants inspection of its role in shootings that followed.

Given the prominence of attention placed on violent media as a causal factor for

Columbine, it is surprising that such emphasis is not found in the shootings that occurred

after, particularly since these forms of media have continued to evolve and are perceived

to have become more violent. In fact, only 32 total references to violent media were

made in the 12 years after Columbine, and these references were linked to only six

separate events, as illustrated in Table 20.

Of the events referencing violent media, the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School

shooting (Adam Lanza) utilized this talking point the most out of any other shooting.

Table 20. Distribution of Codes Referencing Violent Media by Event

Shooter	Coding References	Coding Percentage
Adam Lanza (2012)	23	71.9
Charles Carl Roberts (2006)	1	3.1
Jason Hoffman (2001)	1	3.1
Jeffrey Weise (2005)	2	6.3
Seung-Hui Cho (2007)	4	12.5
T.J. Lane (2012)	1	3.1
TOTALS	**32**	**100.0**

What is interesting, however, is the difference in how violent media were referenced in discussions about Sandy Hook, as compared to the other events. The remaining nine references about violent media were made in vague and general statements, almost as an afterthought. In the references within the Sandy Hook shooting coverage, however, a more direct association (and proffered causality) between violent media and the shooting was offered. In seven references, for example, the National Rifle Association directly blamed violent media in an attempt to deflect attention away from the ongoing gun control debate, such as in the following excerpt:

> Mr. LaPierre looked wild-eyed at times as he said the killing was the fault of the media, songwriters and singers and the people who listen to them, movie and TV scriptwriters and the people who watch their work, advocates of gun control, video game makers and video game players. (Adam Lanza, 12-22-12-06)

Politicians, such as New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, also fingered violent media, particularly video games, as a cause for the rampage:

> "You cannot tell me that a kid sitting in a basement for hours playing Call of Duty and killing people over and over and over again does not desensitize that child to the real-life effects of violence." (Adam Lanza, 1-12-13-01)

In sum, despite the heightened attention that violent media had received as a purported causal factor for Columbine, such concern was short-lived, and failed to garner equitable attention in the discussion of any mass shooting that followed, including Sandy Hook.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of rampage shootings, an initial reaction is to first ask "why?" and then seek out someone or something to blame in order to answer the question. In the aftermath of the 1999 Columbine shootings, three "causal" factors emerged in this ever-present blame game – guns, mental health, and violent media. Given the predominant focus on these subjects, it was conceptualized during the design of the present study that

these would be considered "existent themes," in that the researcher knew to expect them. Thus analysis was focused more on *how* the themes appeared rather than whether or not they would be present.

Not surprisingly, given the type of crime that occurred, the greatest emphasis in the narrative of mass shootings in relation to these existent themes was guns. Broadly, this was categorized in three parts – descriptions of the guns used, gun control, and gun rights. The latter two, however, are considered to be opposing sides in a single debate. The findings in the present study indicate that, relating to the descriptions of the weapons used, writers at *The Times* used general and specific descriptions of the guns interchangeably, though general descriptions are slightly more common. Both themes are driven by the discourse on the Sandy Hook shooting.

When focusing on the ever-present gun control-gun rights debate, the coverage undeniably emphasizes gun control, more than three times as often as gun rights. For each, a limited number of cases contribute to the coverage of this debate – less than 20% of all of the events in the study reference either control measures or right to carry. Similar to descriptions of the weapons, both gun control and gun rights coverage most frequently is associated with the Sandy Hook Shooting. In fact, the Newtown shooting references these themes more than five times as often as the next event. This, of course, must be interpreted with an element of caution, as other than the Tucson shooting, there also was at least twice as much coverage of Sandy Hook than the next most covered event (Virginia Tech), thereby creating more opportunity for this discussion to take place. Though notably subsidiary to the gun control perspective, the gun rights narrative still

narrows to a couple of key themes, mainly the role of the NRA in driving the discussion and the protection over Second Amendment rights.

Mental health, though an ample part of the discourse, takes a secondary role to gun control. When discussed, mental health is talked about both broadly (as a national problem) and vaguely. Over 80% of codes fall into a "general discussion category." When narrowed, the mental health discourse focuses on three additional key themes that can be used to pinpoint a potential reason these events occurred – prior warning signs (including suicide threats and attempts), medications, and diagnoses. Interestingly, this existent theme is the one theme that has not been dominated by Sandy Hook. Instead, the coverage is more frequently associated with the 2011 Tucson shooting (Jared Loughner).

The final existent theme – violent media – is notably absent from the coverage of rampage shootings. This is particularly interesting given the heavy emphasis placed upon movies, music, and video games as "causing" Columbine. Most commonly, the discourse about violent media centered on the Sandy Hook case, and emphasized how these violent media forms desensitize people and turn them into killers. Such a statement is anecdotal and has yet to be proven scientifically; in the present study, it appears as a somewhat non-existent cog in the media machine of rampage shootings.

What emerges from the overall examination of these existent themes is the notion that certain cases are used to highlight different causal explanations for the shootings. Despite that Sandy Hook, at an aggregate level, appears to be driving most themes, closer examination reveals that alternative cases take the starring role in the discussion of other, more focused issues. For example, the Red Lake shooting (Jeffrey Weise) placed a greater focus on exploring psychiatric medications than did other shootings. The

Virginia Tech shooting (Seung-Hui Cho) emphasized the role of prior warning signs that could have offered clues into the impending rampage. Sandy Hook was integral in exploring how specific diagnoses may be correlated with the discussion of the events. More importantly, what the findings illustrate is that each of these events, in their own right, is a discursive marker in a longer disaster narrative (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2013). The Sandy Hook shooting, however, appears to be a more significant milestone along this journey.

VIII. A CHANGING DISCOURSE…OR NOT SO MUCH

The third research question focused on how the themes within the discourse on rampage shootings change or remain consistent over time. There are several ways in which this question can be answered. The first is to examine how the frames change over the life of the story or coverage period, which in this case is the first 30 days after the shooting occurred. The process of "frame-changing" allows the media to highlight different facets of the news story to keep the content fresh (Chyi & McCombs, 2004). The second way in which the changes in coverage may be examined is to examine the changes in themes over the entire study period (2000-2012). By examining how prevalent the predominant themes, such as guns, mental health, and violent media, are throughout the course of the study period, it enables examination of which issues have been emphasized in the media, and whether this emphasis has held as the narrative about rampage shootings has continued to evolve following Columbine. The present chapter provides both modes of examination to determine whether the narrative of rampage shootings in a post-Columbine era has changed, and if so, how it has differed since 1999.

Measuring Frame-Changing in News

The way in which news stories are framed, and how these frames change over time, is a central point of examination when considering the agenda-setting function of the media. The theory of agenda-setting, according to McCombs and Bell (1996), focuses on "any set of objects – or even a single object – competing for attention," and rampage shootings, both as individual events and a collective phenomenon, certainly are such objects (p. 105). Chyi and McCombs (2004) later suggested that in examining the

coverage of a news story, "space" (where) and "time" (when) are the most important

dimensions to consider (see also Muschert & Carr, 2006; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014).

Figure 5 presents Chyi and McCombs' two-dimensional measurement scheme that

illustrates these two dimensions used to organize and analyze news stories.
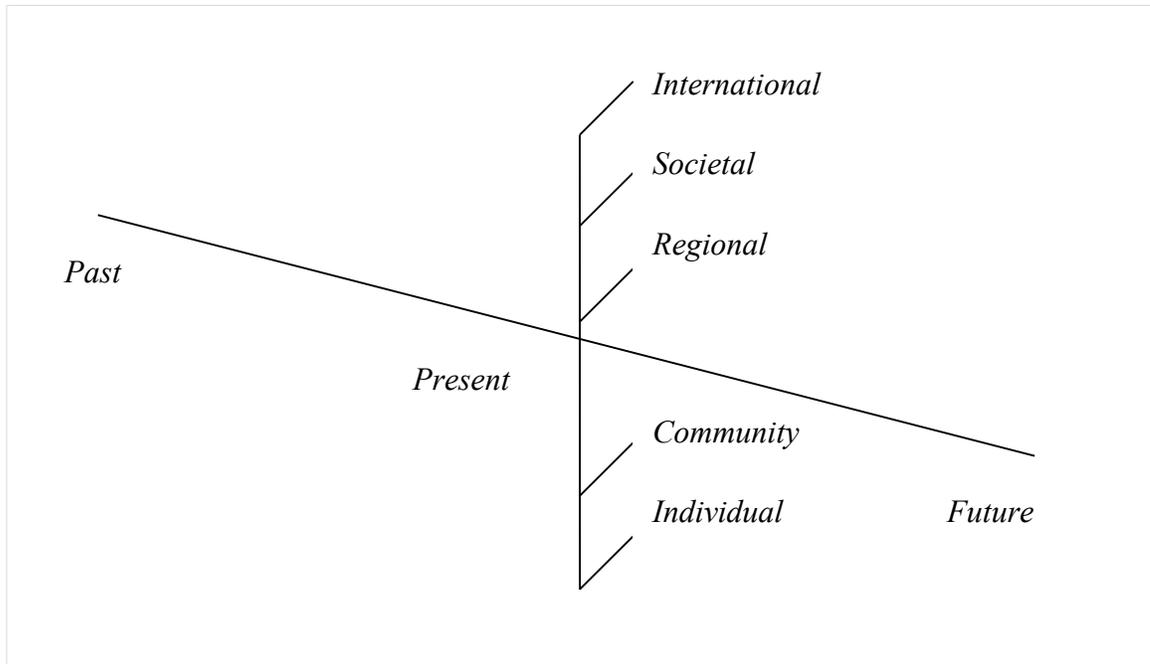
Figure 5. Chyi & McCombs' Two-Dimensional Measurement Scheme Table[14]

The space dimension is comprised of five different levels. These levels exist

across a continuum, ranging from micro (individual) to macro (societal or international).

In the present study, and consistent with previous research (e.g., Chyi & McCombs,

2004; Muschert & Carr, 2006; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014) employing this analytic

framework, the *individual* level focuses on people who were involved in the event, such

as the shooters or their victims. The *community* level is used to examine how the stories

impact a particular group. In the present study, such groups may include the actual

[14] Adapted from Chyi and McCombs (2004).

community (e.g., a town or city) or the groups in which these events occurred (e.g., an individual school or workplace community). The next level is *regional*, which examines the story's impact on a broader audience, such as a metropolitan area or a single state. The *societal* level considers the reach of the story to the nation at large, while the *international* level emphasizes the stories' impact on a global audience, or draws comparison between the event in focus and an international incident.

The time dimension also exists on a continuum, and provides the opportunity to examine the media's temporal focus by situating the event in either the past, present, or future context. While the focus of the media often is telling the story in the present (what is happening "now"), they also may rely on the other temporal dimensions to provide a fuller, more robust account of the event. In the present study, the *past* level includes any discussion that provides backstory or events leading up to the shooting. The *present* frame encompasses coverage within the first 30 days of the event, to allow for examination of the event itself, as well as any short-term implications stemming from it. Finally, the *future* frame allows for examination of the more long-term implications of the event.

In order to assess the level of frame changing in the present study across time and space, three supplementary research questions are proposed:

RQ3a: How were the *space* frames distributed across time? Were there any emerging changes in the framing over the events' life spans?

RQ3b: How were the *time* frames distributed across time? Were there any emerging changes in the framing over the events' life spans?

RQ3c: What was the relationship between the use of space and time frames?

Each article was coded discretely for both space and time frames, meaning that the article could be coded for only one level within each dimension. Determinations were made as to which level the article was coded by examining the body lead, or first paragraph, of each story. Further, analysis of frame changing was conducted for the rampage shootings phenomenon as a whole (e.g., all 91 cases), but also disaggregated by the amount of coverage (high and low levels).
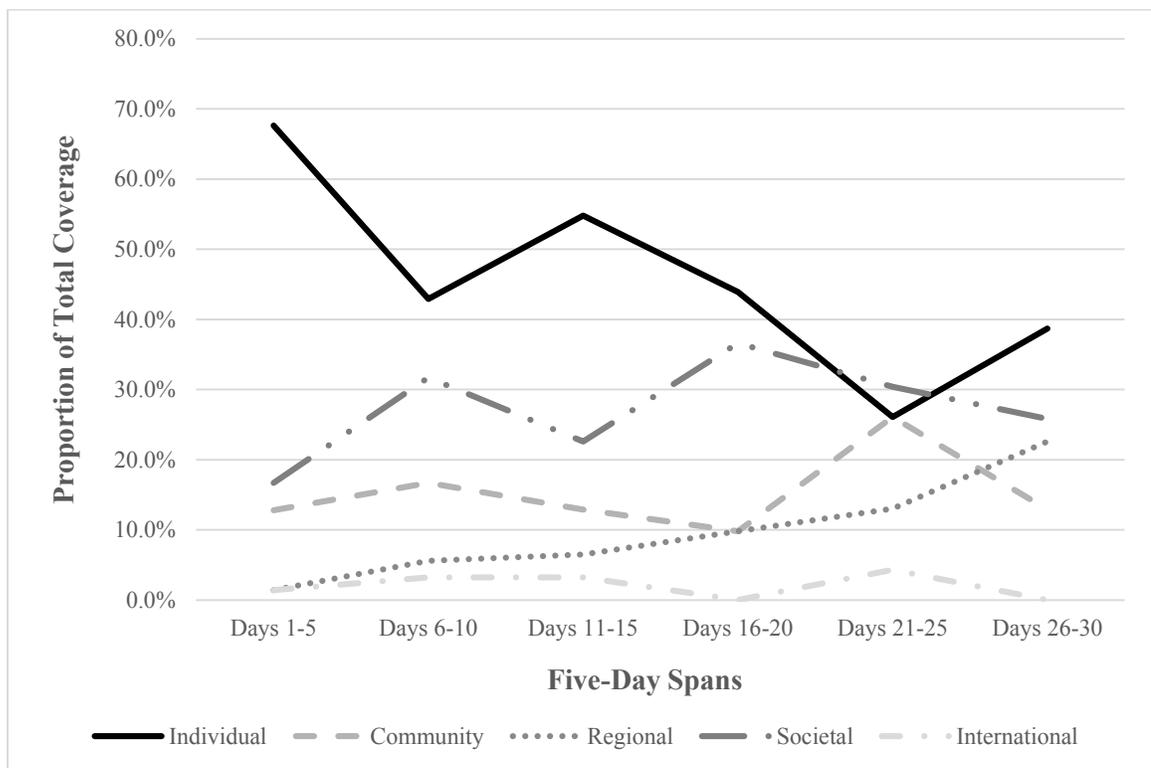
Figure 6. Distribution of Space Frames by Five-Day Period, All Cases

Space frames. In order to address the first supplemental research question pertaining to the changing in distribution of space frames for the phenomenon of rampage shootings, analysis is conducted examining the full 91 cases. The 30-day distributions of the articles covering the shootings are presented in five-day increments, as shown in

Figure 6. In examining the overall distribution across spatial levels, the individual frame is the most predominant. Nearly 56% of articles coded were focused on individuals. Approximately 23% of articles were framed at the societal level, which situates the discourse in a national context. Framing at the community level occurred 14% of the time, and about 5% of articles were framed in the regional context, meaning that the articles focused on the state or metropolitan area. Just under 2% of articles were framed at the international level.[15]

The distribution of coverage across the space frames reveals an interesting pattern. In three other studies (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert & Carr, 2006; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014) examining school shootings, the societal frame was found to be the most prevalent. In the present study, however, the individual frame is more common. This is especially interesting, since Schildkraut and Muschert's (2014) research examined the coverage of Sandy Hook, which is the most covered event in the present study, yet the propensity for framing this event at a societal level did not overtake the overall framing of all rampage shootings at an individual level. Thus, the analysis suggests that when examining the framing of a set of objects (e.g., rampage shootings), as compared to a single object (e.g., Columbine or Sandy Hook), focusing on the impact of the event on the individual participants rather than the nation at large is more common.

In addition to variations in framing for the aggregate coverage, the distribution of these frames across five-day increments reveals that frame-changing did take place in the reporting of rampage shootings. The initial coverage was most heavily framed at the individual level, presumably to tell the story of those who were involved in the event.

---

[15] Due to the low number of articles framed at the international level, and that these were split among high and low salience cases, analysis of the disaggregated article sets excluded this level of the space dimension.

Over time, however, the use of the individual frame gradually decreases. Nearing the end of the coverage period, between Days 21 and 25, the individual-level coverage is matched by the community frame and exceed by the societal frame. This suggests that, in constructing the narrative of rampage shooters as a whole, the focus is first on who was involved in the shootings and then shifts to the broader meaning of the events, both locally and for the nation at large.

Given the considerable amount of coverage (57%) garnered by only five of the shootings, it is possible that the dynamics of framing, when examining the aggregate, are being driven by these select events. As such, it is important to consider how the frame-
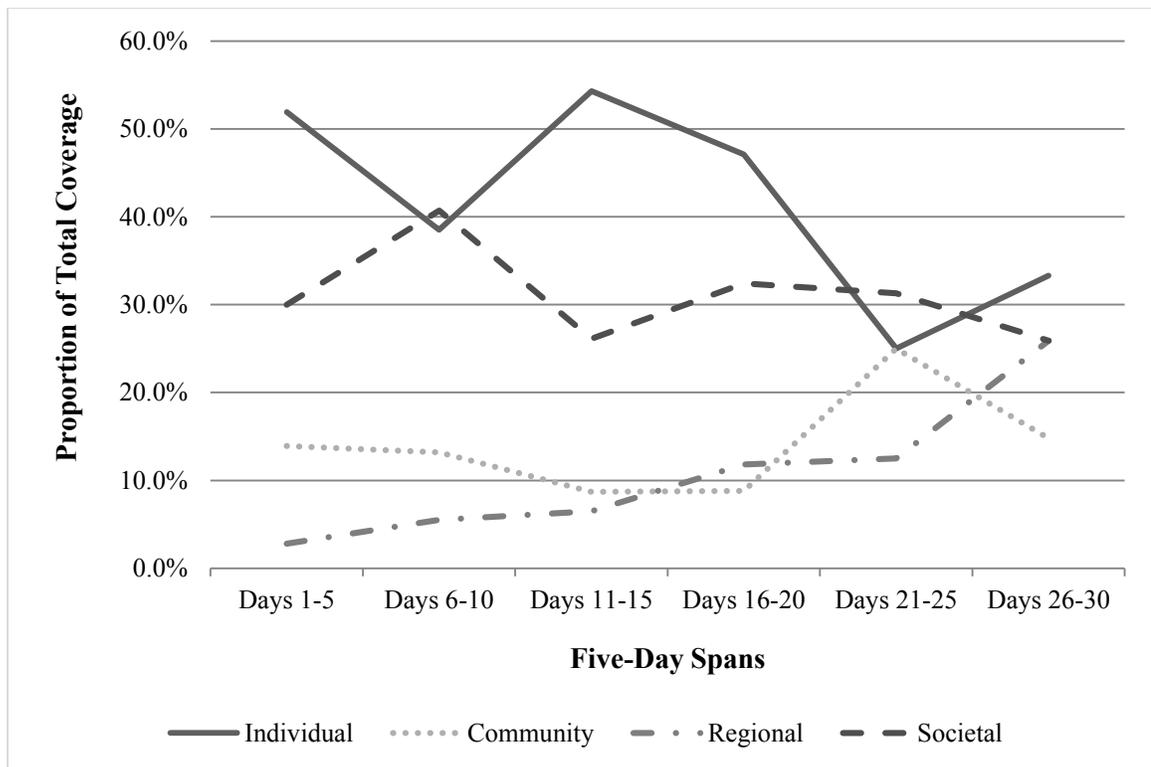
Figure 7. Distribution of Space Frames by Five-Day Period, High Saliency Cases
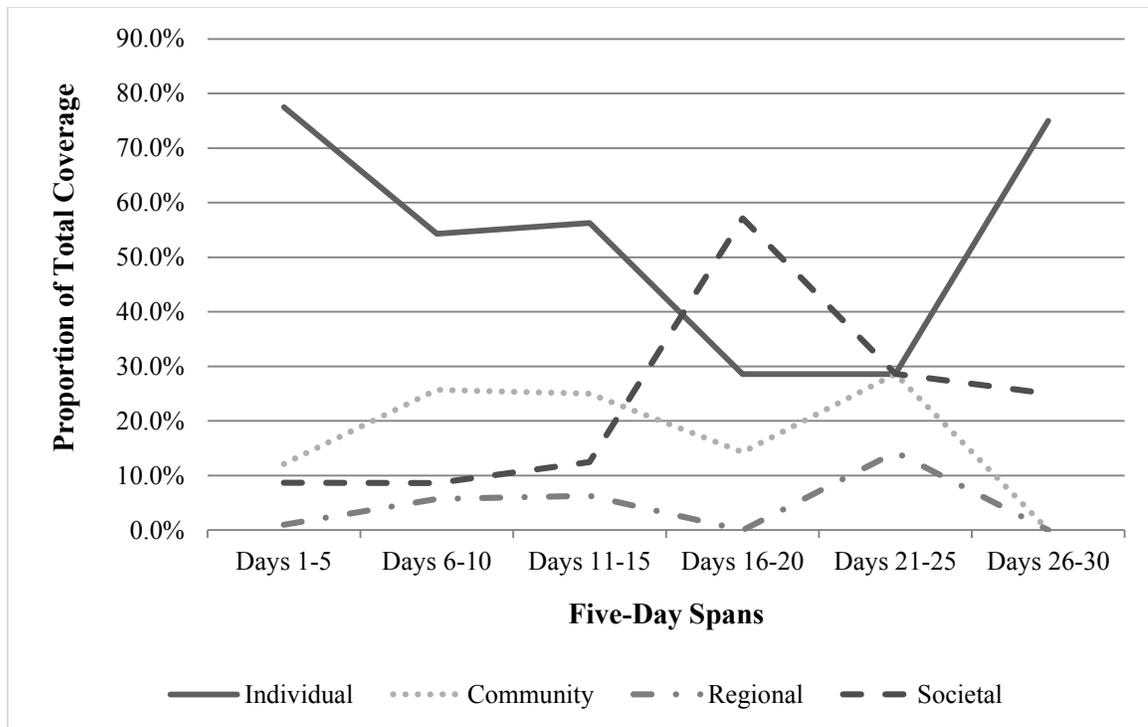
Figure 8. Distribution of Space Frames by Five-Day Period, Low Saliency Cases

changing compares among highly salient events, as well as across those of lesser

coverage. Figure 7 illustrates the framing across the most salient cases – Sandy Hook

(Adam Lanza), Aurora (James Holmes), Virginia Tech (Seung-Hui Cho), Fort Hood

(Nidal Hasan), and the Tucson shooting (Jared Loughner). Figure 8 charts the framing of

the remaining 65 cases that received coverage in *The Times*.

Comparing these two figures provides a number of interesting observations. First,

the coverage patterns of the highly salient cases (Figure 7) appears to be much more

similar to the framing of the total aggregate of cases (Figure 6), thus suggesting that

perhaps it is these five cases that are driving the overall framing of the phenomenon of

rampage shootings. Further examination of the separate levels of space reveal additional

disparities in the framing of these events. The pattern of coverage at the individual level,

for example, appears to be the complete inverse. In the highly salient cases (Figure 7), just over 50% of coverage in the first five days is framed at the individual level, whereas nearly 80% of the initial coverage of lower saliency cases (Figure 8) is framed at this level. While both sets of cases plunge to between 25% and 30% of coverage in this frame, the decline is much more gradual for the higher saliency cases, while the drop in individual framing for the lesser salient cases is more drastic, as is the rebound in the last five-day period.

Noticeably, both sets of cases exhibit spikes in the societal framing of the coverage. In the highly salient cases (Figure 7), this peak comes sooner – between Days 6 and 10, as opposed to Days 16 and 20 in the frame-changing of the lower saliency cases. Additionally, the use of the societal frame in the higher saliency cases is more sustained, as opposed to the drastic increase and decrease in the lower saliency cases (Figure 8). The latter, however, reveals a more consistent use of the community frame than the former, suggesting that the higher saliency cases are used to address societal concerns, while the lower saliency cases are framed in a discussion of what the events mean for the local communities.

Time frames. The second supplemental research question focuses on the frame-changing of the coverage of rampage shootings over the different levels of the time dimension – past, present, and future. As with the examination of frame-changing across space, the aggregated set of 91 cases was charted across five-day increments, as shown in Figure 9, to examine changing across the various levels. The results indicate that unlike the frame-changing across space, which was a clear departure from other studies employing this two-dimensional framework (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert & Carr,
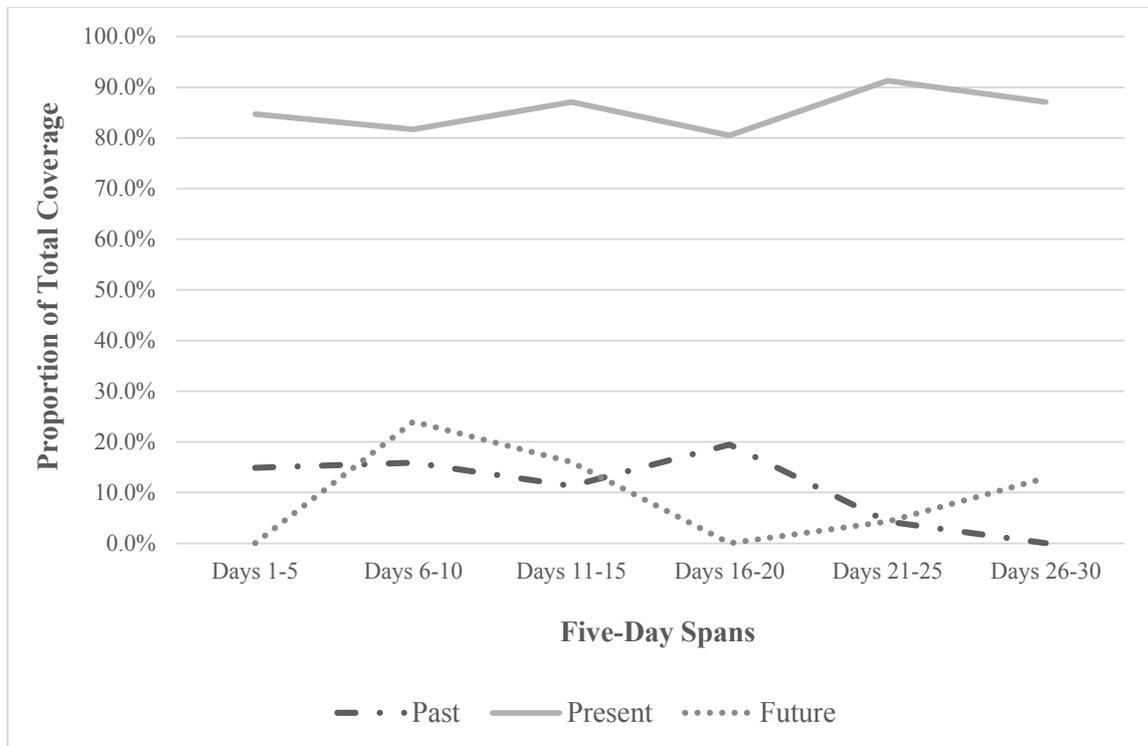
Figure 9. Distribution of Time Frames by Five-Day Period, All Cases

2006; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014), the use of framing across the different time levels was more consistent with prior research.

Specifically, in first examining the framing of each level of time as a whole, it is clear that these stories are most commonly framed in the present. In fact, nearly 85% of the total coverage is framed at the present level. Schildkraut and Muschert's (2014) study found that the Sandy Hook shooting alone was framed at this level approximately 83% of the time. The use of the past frame accounted for just under 14% of coverage. The biggest departure, however, is in the use of the future frame. In the present study, the future frame was used in just under 2% of the total coverage. In Chyi and McCombs' (2004) study, this frame was utilized 13% of the time; it was used 12% of the time in Muschert and Carr's (2006) study, and 8% in the examination of the coverage of Sandy

150

Hook by Schildkraut and Muschert (2014). Thus, when examining rampage shootings as a whole, particularly in a post-Columbine era, the need for considering the long-range impact of these events is not needed when a significant precedent already exists, whereas in the other studies, particularly the studies by Chyi and McCombs (2004) and Muschert and Carr (2006), coverage of Columbine called for this distant speculation as no such antecedent was available.

Similarly, the actual frame-changing across five-day increments both confirms and departs from these studies' prior findings. As noted, the pattern of use of the past and present frames mirror the findings of previous research nearly identically. The changes in framing across five-day increments, however, departs from these previous
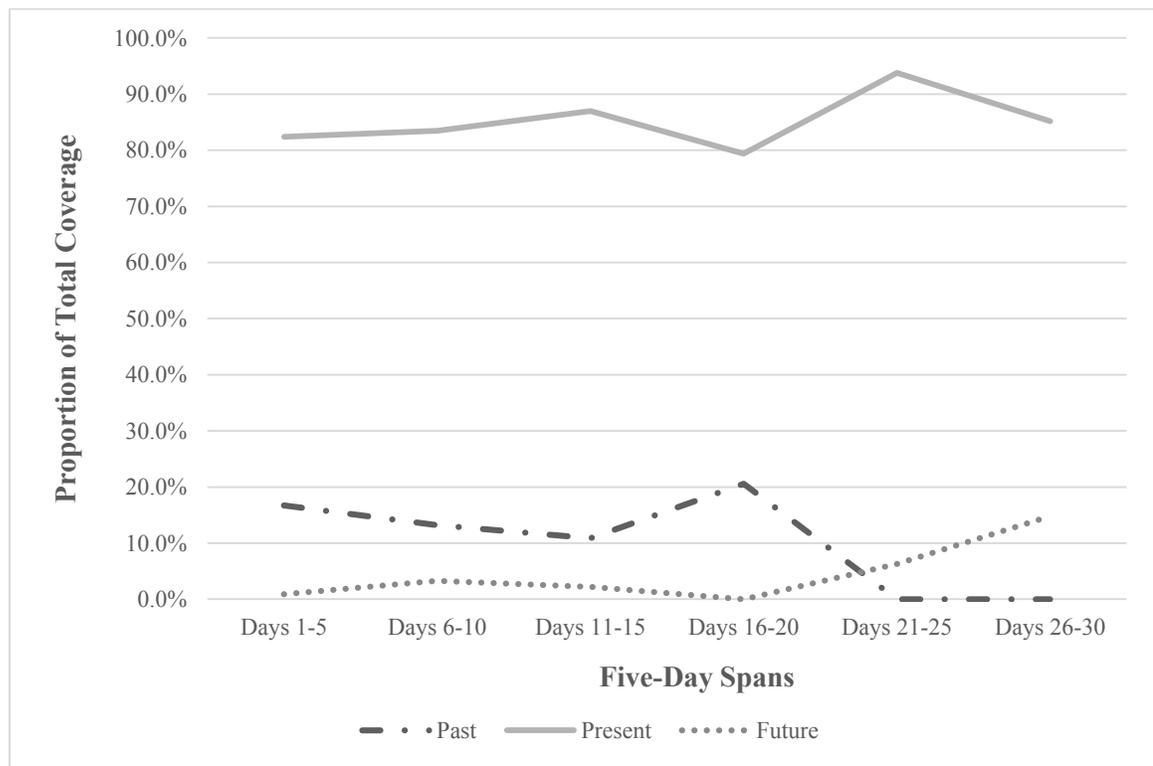
Figure 10. Distribution of Time Frames by Five-Day Period, High Saliency Cases
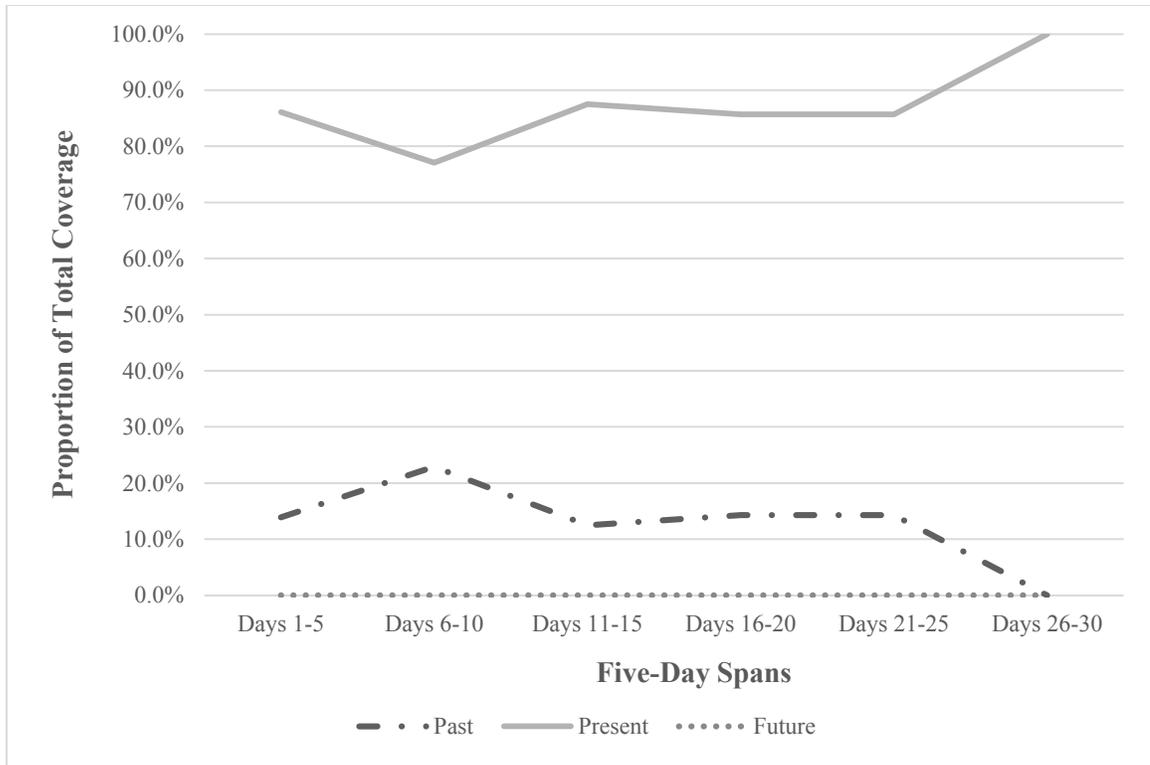
Figure 11. Distribution of Time Frames by Five-Day Period, Low Saliency Cases

results. Presumably due to the low use of the future frame as a whole, there is no major

peak at any of the increments for this level. Incidentally, the previous studies reported

spikes of 40% to 80% of coverage, particularly near the end of the 30-day coverage.

Given these disparities from previous research, consideration again must be paid

to whether or not the highly salient cases are influencing the overall framing pattern.

Figure 10 charts the frame changing of the highly salient cases across time levels, while

the lower saliency cases are charted in Figure 11. When examining the present frame,

both figures follow similar patterns, though the lesser salient cases do gradually increase

to full coverage at this level, while the pattern for more salient cases remains mostly

stable. Both also exhibit fairly gradual declines across the past frame throughout the

coverage period, waning to no coverage in the last five-day period. This is not entirely

unexpected, in that most coverage of the backstory of an event typically comes at the beginning of the story's life when people are looking for answers. The biggest departure between the two groups of cases, however, relates to the use of the future frame. While the future frame is used in a limited capacity, the framing at this level is done exclusively in the high saliency cases. The cases of lower saliency, and lower article counts, do not offer any speculation for what the events mean long term, whether in terms of response strategies, gun control, or other similar issues that focus on the near or distant future.

Framing across space and time. In addition to examining how framing is conducted over space and time frames independently, it also is important to examine the relationship between the two, which Chyi and McCombs (2004) call "core frames" (research question 3c). Table 21 compares the core frames for the aggregate of cases in the present study to Chyi and McCombs' (2004) findings to examine whether changes in the use of core frames have changed since Columbine. Though the results again indicate that core frames situated in the present are more common for both studies, there are several differences in the post-Columbine shootings.

Table 21. Space Frame by Time Frame, Comparing Columbine[16] / All Shootings

		Time Frame		
		Past	*Present*	*Future*
Space Frame	*Societal*	2% / 1%	39% / 23%	13% / 1%
	Community	4% / 1%	24% / 14%	1% / 0%
	Individual	10% / 12%	7% / 47%	0% / 0%

NOTE: Cell entries for all shootings are percent of total (n = 524). Total percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

---

[16] Values for Columbine are drawn from Chyi and McCombs (2004, p. 28).

In Chyi and McCombs' (2004) examination of Columbine, the use of the societal-present frame was the most common (39%). While 23% of the articles in the present study also utilized this core frame, the employment of the individual-present frame was considerably more common (47%). In fact, the use of this frame in the present study was found to occur nearly seven times more than in the study by Chyi and McCombs (2004). Additionally, their study also utilized the societal-future frame considerably more than the present study, 13% of the time as compared to 1%. As previously noted, this supports the hypothesis that Columbine as an event called for more long-range speculation of its meaning for the nation at large as there was no real precedent for how to understand the shooting. In the present study, however, Columbine acts as this precedent for all rampage shootings that followed it and therefore do not require such long-term considerations.

As with examinations of the space and time dimensions individually, it is important to compare cases of both high and low saliency to determine whether the former is driving the pattern of coverage. The results of this comparison is presented in

Table 22. Space Frame by Time Frame, Comparing High / Low Salience Shootings

		Time Frame		
		Past	*Present*	*Future*
Space Frame	*Societal*	1% / 0%	33% / 11%	2% / 0%
	Community	2% / 1%	13% / 15%	0% / 0%
	Individual	11% / 14%	39% / 58%	1% / 0%

NOTE: Cell entries for all shootings are percent of total (n = 291 for high salience cases; n = 233 for low salience cases). Total percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table 22. As the findings show, articles about the more salient cases are three times as likely to be framed in the societal-present frame (33% to 11%). For lower saliency cases, the use of the individual-present core frame (58%) is more common than with the higher saliency cases (39%). Additionally, as previously noted, only the highly salient cases were framed in any permutation of the future level, as also evidenced in the results comparing them with the coverage of the lesser salient cases.

Changing Themes

In addition to consideration of how frame changing occurs across space and time, it also is important to consider how the discourse has evolved since Columbine. One way in which this can be accomplished is to examine the pattern of specific themes over time. Following mass shootings, there are three themes that typically are the focus in the
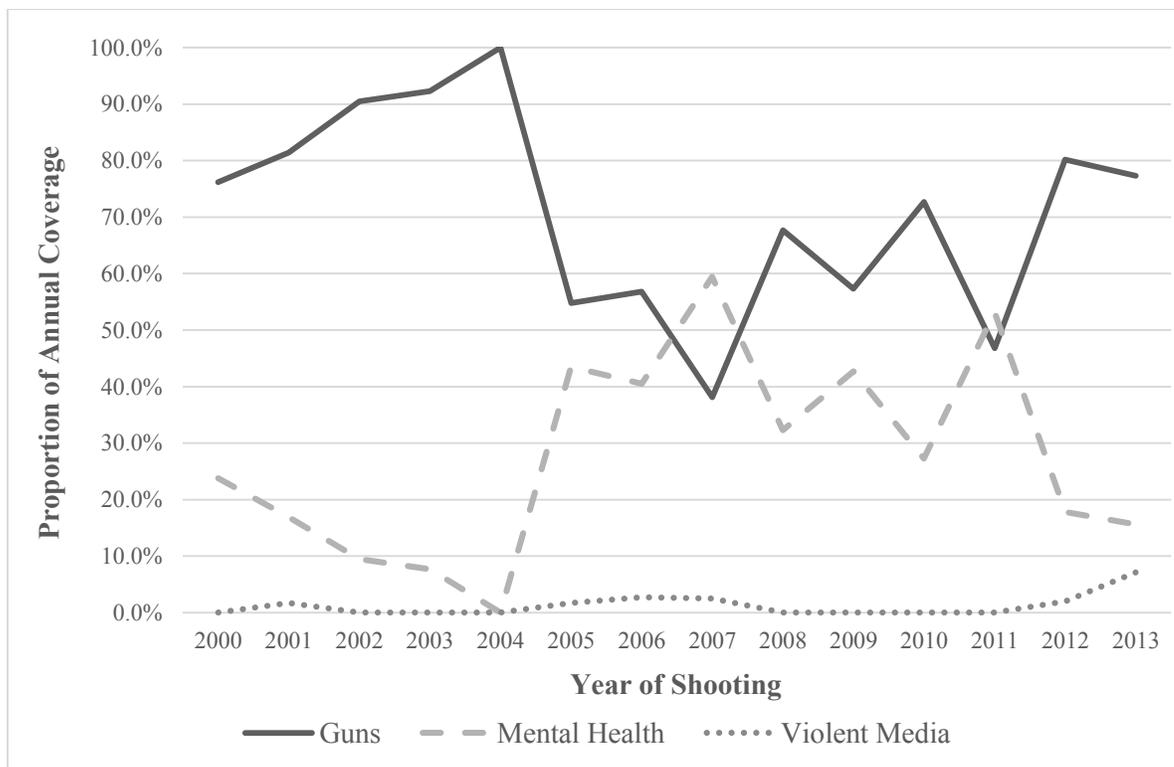
Figure 12. Distribution of Existing Themes by Year, All Cases

ensuing discourse – guns, mental health, and violent media (see, for example, Schildkraut & Muschert, 2013). In the present study, these topics were conceptualized as "existent themes" (see Chapter 7), as they each were present in the discourse following Columbine and have held as consistent staples in the broader narrative of rampage shootings.

Figure 12 charts the distribution of each of these themes for each of the years of the study period. The total number of references for each year were tallied, and then standardized into the proportion of coverage by theme for each particular year. As noted in Chapter 7, the most common of these themes is guns (including both control and right to carry), and there are a number of articles that focus solely on this topic. The above figure shows that this remains the most prevalent theme, and has maintained a high proportion of coverage across the 12-year study period.

There are two years in which references to mental health, the second most common of the themes, overtakes mentions about guns. What is more notable, however, is when this shift occurs – 2007 and 2011. The first, 2007, is the same year as the Virginia Tech shooting, and despite that there was discussion about gun control that followed what remains the nation's most deadly mass shooting, such a discourse typically was held in conjunction with the failure of the mental health system that allowed the weapons to be purchased legally by the shooter. The second, 2011, coincided with the Tucson shooting of Congresswoman Giffords and 18 others. The perpetrator, Jared Loughner, had a long documented history of mental health issues, and was initially found to be too mentally ill to stand trial.[17]

---

[17] After a year and a half of being declared incompetent to stand trial by a judge, he was finally deemed fit to stand trial. In exchange for a life sentence, Loughner pled guilty (Santos, 2012).

Interestingly, discussion about violent media, though a significant contender in the debate over Columbine, did not receive very much attention in the 12 years since the event. There was a very small increase between 2005 and 2007, particularly driven by the Virginia Tech shooter's (Seung-Hui Cho) multimedia manifesto. As the study period neared its conclusion, an increase in this theme is observed. This change is fueled by the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting (Adam Lanza). In fact, 22 of the 31 references about violent media were found in the discourse of this event, both related to Lanza directly, as well as linking the case to the Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting earlier that year, in which the perpetrator, James Holmes, also was a fan of violent video games. Still, even with the increased attention to violent media, coverage of this theme
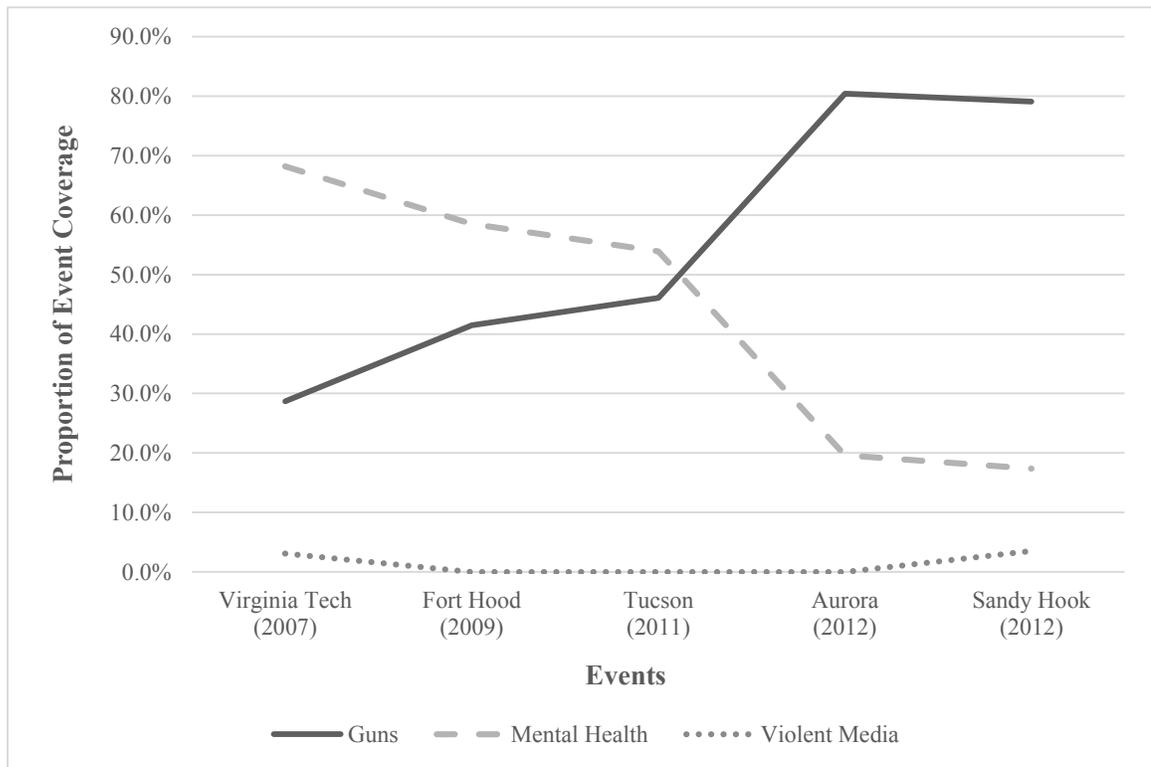
Figure 13. Distribution of Existing Themes by Event, High Saliency Cases

failed to exceed 10% at any point in the study period.

As found earlier in the chapter, fundamental differences exist in the framing of both high and low saliency cases. Given the fact that the mental health themes were driven by two of the most salient cases (Jared Loughner and Seung-Hui Cho) and violent media was driven by one (Adam Lanza), it is important to look at the coverage of these groups of cases separately. Figure 13 charts the distribution of the three existing themes by high saliency event. In order to assess the change over time, the events are presented in chronological order, from oldest to newest. Due to the lack of attention given to mental health in the low salience cases, this disaggregation was not replicated among these events.

Several noticeable patterns emerge in Figure 13. First, despite that the majority (71%) of references to violent media in the entire dataset were coded in the articles about the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, this theme is still relatively infrequent when considering the more prevalent issues of guns and mental illness. The figure also reveals that the patterns for references to guns and mental health are inversed. Discussion of mental health began a gradual decline following the Virginia Tech shooting. At the same time, the discourse about guns continued to increase over time, overtaking the narrative about mental health as the most prevalent just after the 2011 Tucson shooting. Additionally, the gap between these two themes reaches its widest points in 2012 with coverage of the Aurora and Sandy Hook shootings. Looking at the Virginia Tech shooting, these themes were closer, presumably because of the constant discussion about keeping guns out of the hands of the mentally ill. The disparity was

158

virtually eliminated in discussion about the 2011 Tucson shooting, when these themes again were discussed in conjunction with one another.

Conclusion

This chapter explored whether the discourse on rampage shootings has changed or remained consistent over time. In order to address such a question, the coverage of rampage shootings between 2000 and 2012 was examined in two ways. First, consideration was given to how the articles were framed across space and time dimensions. Further consideration was given to whether this framing also was consistent or changed across the study's lifespan. Additionally, the use of existent themes – guns, mental health, and violent media – were examined for similar patterns of change. The results presented in this chapter indicate that writers at *The Times* utilized continual frame changing, both across space and time, as well as in their use of existent themes, in the disaster narrative of rampage shootings.

When first considering how the stories were framed across space and time, several interesting patterns emerged. When examining the distribution of space frames, there was a clear departure from previous studies (e.g., Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert & Carr, 2006; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). Specifically, while previous research emphasized the use of societal frames, that is, discussing a particular event in terms of a national context, the present study relied more heavily on the use of individual frames – that is, focusing on the shooters and their victims. This pattern emerged not only for rampage shootings as "a set of objects" (McCombs & Bell, 1996, p. 105), but also when disaggregated into groups of high and low salience shootings. When societal

frames were emphasized, it was earlier in the 30-day span for high saliency cases, and towards the end of the coverage period for lesser salient cases.

Despite similarities in the framing across the time dimension, the findings again here illustrate a departure from how Columbine was framed. Both as an aggregate and for sets of high and low salience cases, these rampage shootings failed to garner any long-term speculation about the meaning of the events. In fact, no single article about an event considered to be of lesser saliency were framed in the future context. By using Columbine as a precedent, there was no need for distant speculation about the meaning of these events, especially among those that did not reach the level of national concern.

Examining the intersection of space and time also proved to be an interesting departure from previous research. While all three studies employing the Chyi and McCombs' (2004) two-dimensional framework found that the societal-present core frame was the most commonly used, the present study found that, when the cases were aggregated, the individual-present frame was the most prevalent. When disaggregated based on coverage, the lower salience cases also relied more heavily on this core frame. Conversely, the higher saliency cases were three times more likely to use the societal-present core frame than the lesser salient cases. This again confirms that only certain cases were able to reach a level of national concern.

Finally, examining individual themes, such as guns, mental health, and violent media, confirms the use of frame-changing by *The Times*. Guns were the most common theme for the total aggregate of cases, though still exhibiting some frame-changing. At the same time, the discussion of violent media was notably absent, both in general and when examining frame changes over the 12-year span. In only two years, driven by the

160

highly salient Virginia Tech (2007) and Tucson (2011) shootings, discussion about guns was eclipsed by the mental health discourse. Closer examination of the distribution of these themes across highly salient cases illustrated that mental health was the most prevalent theme in the year of Virginia Tech, and then began to wane through the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012. Conversely, at the same time of the decline in the mental health discourse, the use of guns as a discussion point continued to gain momentum, peaking in 2012.

In sum, frame changing was used continually, both across the space and time dimensions as well as with particular themes, throughout the coverage of rampage shootings in a post-Columbine era. By utilizing frame-changing, writers and editors at *The Times* are able to highlight different facets of the story. The findings also indicate that only certain cases reach the height of societal concern, and it is the amount of coverage, coupled with this frame-changing, which drives much of the coverage of rampage shootings as an aggregate. Shootings of lesser perceived importance rarely enter into the societal discourse, and typically focus on what the event means to the community in which the event happened. Still, as a whole, the frame-changing of rampage shootings represents a clear departure from coverage of Columbine (see, for example, Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert & Carr, 2006).

IX. NEW DETAILS ARE EMERGING…

In addition to examining the pre-conceived, or "existent," themes, qualitative research lends itself to the emergence of new themes. When researchers become immersed within their data, a process of discovery takes place (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Within this process, new themes and concepts are constantly emerging. When these new, emergent themes are coupled with the predefined categories (e.g., guns, mental health, and violent media), a fuller and more robust analysis of a particular topic can be obtained (Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

In the present study, emergent themes exposed themselves to the researcher through the several phases of reading through the articles (see Chapter 4, Coding in the current study). Through each read-through of the articles, more themes emerged that helped contribute to the broader narrative about rampage shootings. Some of these emergent themes appeared sparsely during the coding of the data, such as "copycat" shootings (n = 15) and "we never thought it could happen here" (n = 26). Yet others were used quite extensively. In the present chapter, the three most frequently coded categories – description of the event, description of those involved (both the shooters and the victims), and memorials – are closely examined to understand how these themes contributed to the discourse on rampage shootings. These were chosen for this examination, as they provide the researcher with the most opportunity to examine variation within each theme, based on the high frequency of use.

Description of the Event

Similar to the way in which the events were described in the headlines (Chapter 6), it also is important to consider the use of qualifiers throughout the article bodies. These stories are considerably longer – headlines may usually max out around 15-20 words, whereas the stories themselves may reach several thousand words in length. As such, the bodies of the stories allow for increased opportunity to describe the event, both singularly and across multiple references in a particular article. In fact, the 540 references coded, as presented in Table 23, were found over just 319 articles, meaning that, on average, qualifiers were used to describe the shooting 1.7 times per article.

Table 23. Qualifiers Used to Describe Event, In-Text

Theme	Coding References	Coding Percentage
Rampage	171	31.7
Massacre	107	19.8
Shooting	73	13.5
Tragedy	43	8.0
Killings	26	4.8
Carnage	24	4.4
Attack	17	3.1
Spree	16	3.0
Terrorism	12	2.2
Slaughter	7	1.3
Bloodshed	6	1.1
Other	38	7.0
TOTALS	**540**	**99.9**

NOTE: Frequency percentages may not total to 100.0% due to rounding.

The examination of themes used to describe these events reveal a number of interesting patterns. First, the most direct and least-sensationalized qualifier, "shooting," was used only 13.5% of the time. Instead, writers at *The Times* chose to emphasize such qualifiers as "rampage" (31.7%) and "massacre" (19.8%) much more frequently. The problem with the use of these words is that they have a very different connotation than simply calling an event a shooting. When examining the definitions of these three words, even the definitions illustrate that, while they may be used to explain a singular act, they do so in markedly different ways:

> *Rampage*: "violent or excited behavior that is reckless, uncontrolled, or destructive." ("rampage," n.d.)
>
> *Massacre*: "the unnecessary, indiscriminate killing of a large number of human beings or animals, as in barbarous warfare or persecution or for revenge or plunder." ("massacre," n.d.)
>
> *Shooting*: "to hit, wound, damage, kill, or destroy with a missile discharged from a weapon." ("shooting," n.d.)

Further, even more sensationalized terms, such as "carnage," "bloodshed," and "slaughter" also are used interchangeably. Similar to the aforementioned qualifiers, these terms have a connotation to mass shooting events that are similar to words used to describe war zones. These words are highly dramatic, and can evoke fear in readers. Other terms, such as "tragedy," which may be used to evoke sympathy and feelings of sadness, are used around 8% of the time, but are overshadowed by these more fear-inciting qualifiers. Still, looking at the category of "other" qualifiers, encompassing those that appeared fewer than five times, further supports the pattern of using such overly dramatic and shocking language:

On Friday, the biology department at the university lost Dr. Podila, 52, and two other faculty members in a *hail of gunfire* at an afternoon faculty meeting. (Amy Bishop, 2-16-10-01, emphasis added)

The man officials say opened fire at a crowded El Al airlines ticket counter on Thursday was an Egyptian-born owner of a limousine service who apparently went to the airport heavily armed and determined to kill, managing to take two lives before Israeli security guards shot him to death during a *fierce, bloody struggle*. (Hesham Hadayet, 7-6-02-02, emphasis added)

For what seemed like minutes, but was probably no more than 15 seconds, witnesses said, Mr. Loughner kept up his *fatal barrage*, dancing up and down excitedly, turning from Ms. Giffords before firing, apparently indiscriminately, at her constituents, staff and passers-by. (Jared Loughner, 1-10-11-03, emphasis added)

Mr. McLendon's *reign of terror*, staggering to the close-knit communities here, lasted about 50 minutes, said Kirk Adams, the district attorney for Geneva and Dale Counties. (Michael McLendon, 3-12-09-01, emphasis added)

Witnesses told of the sounds of gunfire, screaming and crying and of a *scene of havoc* that lasted almost an hour during dinnertime at the Trolley Square Mall. (Sulejmon Talovic, 2-13-07-01, emphasis added)

Additionally, in 46 of these descriptors about the events, further qualification in the form of "worst" or "deadliest" was offered in an attempt to situate these events as a continuum, similar to as discussed when examining the use of examples (Chapter 6). These were most commonly used with shootings with higher death tolls (e.g., Adam Lanza and Seung-Hui Cho), but still were distributed throughout the study period, indicating the evolution of the "worst" or "deadliest" events since the events of similar description that had come before.

Description of Those Involved

Discussion about the individual participants in these events, both in respect to the shooters and their victims, is highly prevalent within the current study. In fact, when considering just the three subcategories for each group, which are discussed further in the

165

subsequent sections, a total of 564 references about the shooters and 465 about the victims emerged. It is important to note that this does not simply emphasize counts, but instead delves into themes that emerged through the coding and analysis processes. As such, the following discussions are focused on telling how the stories of these participants have been constructed within *The Times* coverage.

The shooters. It is not surprising, given the highly sensational nature of rampage shootings, that there would be an emphasis of coverage on the shooters themselves. These perpetrators often are a focal point of the coverage, as readers both want to know why they carried out the shooting, but also as someone to blame. As noted, not all of the shooters received coverage, but it is important to understand the narrative for those who did. The following sections provide an examination into the shooter narrative by specifically focusing on three prevalent, emergent themes – their personality and behavior, their physical appearance, and finally, whether their race, ethnicity, or religion is discussed.

Personality and behavior. When discussing the shooters, writers at *The Times* often focused on their behavior and personality characteristics leading up to and during the events. Most often, negative actions and behaviors were highlighted (n = 246). Yet for a number of shooters, discussion of positive characteristics (n = 140) also were offered. Casting the shooters in this light is synonymous with what Cerulo (1998) calls "doublecasting." In this perspective, the subjects (the shooters) are cast in competing views, typically as both a victim and an offender, or as both good and bad (Cerulo, 1998). Further, as Cerulo (1998) notes, this technique allows the media to "encourage their audience to consider multiple dimensions of the violence in question" (p. 50).

Table 24. Distribution of Positive and Negative Themes about Shooters by Case

Case	Negative		Positive	
	Coding References	Coding Percentage	Coding References	Coding Percentage
Jared Loughner	61	24.8	10	7.1
Seung-Hui Cho	31	12.6	2	1.4
Adam Lanza	15	6.1	4	2.9
Jeffrey Weise	15	6.1	2	1.4
Nidal Hasan	12	4.9	10	7.1
James Holmes	11	4.5	18	12.9
Amy Bishop	6	2.4	1	0.7
Jason Rodriguez	6	2.4	0	0.0
Peter Odighizuwa	6	2.4	0	0.0
Douglas Williams	5	2.0	1	0.7
Jennifer San Marco	5	2.0	0	0.0
Jiverly Wong	5	2.0	2	1.4
Michael McDermott	5	2.0	6	4.3
Robert Bonelli, Jr.	5	2.0	0	0.0
Charles Carl Roberts	4	1.6	4	2.9
William Baker	4	1.6	3	2.1
James Wenneker von Brunn	3	1.2	0	0.0
Jason Hoffman	3	1.2	2	1.4
Kyle Aaron Huff	3	1.2	1	0.7
Robert Hawkins	3	1.2	2	1.4
T.J. Lane	3	1.2	13	9.3
Tyler Peterson	3	1.2	0	0.0
Asa Coon	2	0.8	2	1.4
Charles Andy Williams	2	0.8	7	5.0
George Sodini	2	0.8	1	0.7
Jacob Tyler Roberts	2	0.8	1	0.7
Michael McLendon	2	0.8	3	2.1
Naveed Haq	2	0.8	0	0.0
Robert Stewart	2	0.8	2	1.4
Steven Kazmierczak	2	0.8	2	1.4
Sulejman Talovic	2	0.8	3	2.1

Table 24 (cont.). Distribution of Positive and Negative Themes about Shooters by Case

Case	Negative		Positive	
	Coding References	Coding Percentage	Coding References	Coding Percentage
Bruce Jeffrey Pardo	1	0.4	1	0.7
Charles Lee Thornton	1	0.4	6	4.3
Hesham Hadayet	1	0.4	4	2.9
Ian Lee Stawicki	1	0.4	0	0.0
Isaac Zamora	1	0.4	0	0.0
Jim Adkisson	1	0.4	1	0.7
Maurice Clemmons	1	0.4	0	0.0
Nathan Gale	1	0.4	4	2.9
Robert Wissman	1	0.4	3	2.1
Terry Ratzmann	1	0.4	9	6.4
Thomas Caffall	1	0.4	0	0.0
Vincent Dortch	1	0.4	0	0.0
Wade Michael Page	1	0.4	4	2.9
William Lockey	1	0.4	0	0.0
Omar Thornton	0	0.0	3	2.1
Daniel Fears	0	0.0	1	0.7
Eduardo Sencion	0	0.0	1	0.7
One L. Goh	0	0.0	1	0.7
TOTALS	**246**	**99.4**	**140**	**99.6**

NOTE: Frequency percentages may not total to 100.0% due to rounding.

During the coding process, specific behaviors discussed (e.g., acting with brutal efficiency, mood swings, being well-behaved) and personality or character descriptions (e.g., being nice, troubled, or socially awkward) were coded as being either positive or negative. Table 24 presents the frequency distributions of both positive and negative personality traits and behaviors discussed by shooters. There are several noticeable patterns. First, for the majority of cases (68.6%) that have coding in both the positive and

negative categories, coding is higher in the negative traits category. In one instance (Seung-Hui Cho), the number of negative references is 15.5 times greater than the number of positive references. Additionally, 12 cases included only negative references, while four (Omar Thornton, Daniel Fears, Eduardo Sencion, and One L. Goh) emphasized only positives about the shooters.[18] This is not to suggest that *The Times* wrote only positive or only negative words about the shooters; these are just the specific references to their behaviors or personality.

Still, there are several cases in which there is a heavier emphasis placed on the positive traits about the offender, seemingly using their good traits to attempt to neutralize the bad. Within the highly salient cases, one case – James Holmes – reveals such a disparity. Despite that he was described by some as socially awkward and a solitary figure, at times speaking incoherently, a greater emphasis was placed on highlighting his academic achievements. Holmes, a PhD student in a prestigious neuroscience program, was described in several excerpts as:

> …kind of quirky, just the way you expect smart people to be… (James Holmes, 7-22-12-02)

> …a bright but quiet and enigmatic student… (James Holmes, 7-30-12-01)

> …a brilliant person that could've done a lot of good. (James Holmes, 7-31-12-02)

A similar disparity of doublecasting also was found in the coverage of less salient cases. T.J. Lane, described as "sad" was cast far more consistently as "very sweet, very nice, very friendly" in the very same article (T.J. Lane, 2-29-12-01). Andy Williams, described in one breath as "an angry young man" was portrayed as "funny, sweet-faced

---

[18] The 12 cases including only negative references to the shooter's behavior or personality were: Jason Rodriguez, Peter Odighizuwa, Jennifer San Marco, Robert Bonelli, Jr., James Wenneker von Brunn, Tyler Peterson, Naveed Haq, Ian Lee Stawicki, Isaac Zamora, Maurice Clemmons, Thomas Caffall, and Vincent Dortch.

and fond of pranks, good with words and able to make people laugh easily" in the next (Andy Williams, 3-7-01-02). Such disparities were not limited to juvenile shooters. Charles "Cookie" Thornton was described as being disruptive, yet more consistently referenced as both "affable" and "friendly" (Charles Lee Thornton, 2-9-08-01). Terry Ratzmann, described by neighbors as the guy who used humane traps to catch rabbits and then drove 20 miles to release them, was doublecast as the man who "stormed" into the same church he attended every week and began firing (Terry Ratzmann, 3-14-05-01). In each of these cases, despite that negative characteristics were reported, a heavier emphasis was placed on casting these shooters in a positive light, or, as one person noted, "a normal Joe, you know, [he's] the guy you'd never suspect to have done this" (Terry Ratzmann, 3-13-05-01).

Physical appearance. In 66 individual articles about 27 different shootings, a total of 108 separate references were made to the physical appearance of the shooter. Approximately 42% of these references (n = 45) emphasized the clothing the shooters wore on the day of the attacks. In many instances, the color of the clothing, usually black, was emphasized. In the references related to the shootings by Asa Coon and Jeffrey Weise, the fact that the shooters wore trench coats, which also had been worn by the Columbine shooters, was repeatedly highlighted. In the case of Bruce Jeffrey Pardo, it was repeatedly emphasized that he had carried out his rampage while wearing a Santa suit.

Interestingly, the clothing of Westroads Mall shooter Robert Hawkins was mentioned in three separate articles, and in each, it was reported that he was wearing different outfits. In the first (12-6-07-01), he was reported to be wearing camouflage,

170

then he wore a black-and-white jogging suit (12-7-07-01), and finally, he was wearing a

hooded sweatshirt (12-7-07-02). The last description is the most accurate, as surveillance

footage captured him wearing this sweatshirt over a black Jack Daniels t-shirt and dark

pants, though later frames indicated he had shed the jacket in the store prior to the

rampage. Still, despite corroboration from the security footage, the first two inaccurate

reporting of his clothing were never corrected.

In a further 19 references, it was reported that a number of the shooters were

wearing combat gear. This occurred in six individual cases. Such equipment included

bulletproof vests or body armor, gas masks, throat protectors, and other ballistics gear. In

other references, writers simply stated that combat gear was worn, without any detailed

explanation of what that meant. Further included was several mentions of bandoliers of

ammunition, likening the shooters to Rambo-esque commandos.

The remaining 41% of references (n = 44) in this category focused on

highlighting the physical descriptions of the shooters themselves. The majority of these

references focused on two broad descriptions – those shooters who either were physically

larger or stronger, and those who were more slender and perceived to be weaker:

> Mr. Williams was *so skinny* that people called him Anorexic Andy, fellow
> students recalled today outside a Jack in the Box restaurant across the street from
> Santana High that serves as a school hangout. (Andy Williams, 3-7-01-02,
> emphasis added)

> Mr. Weise, though just 16, was *taller than 6 feet and weighed 250 pounds*.
> (Jeffrey Weise, 3-26-05-01, emphasis added)

> At *6-foot-3 and more than 250 pounds*, with a shaved head, thick glasses and an
> ever-present skateboard, Mr. Gale was easy to spot and hard to forget. (Nathan
> Gale, 12-10-04-01, emphasis added)

> With minutes left in a class in ocean sciences at Northern Illinois University on
> Thursday afternoon, a *tall skinny man* dressed all in black stepped out from

behind a curtain on the stage of the lecture hall, said nothing, and opened fire with a shotgun, the authorities and witnesses said. (Steven Kazmierczak, 2-15-08-01, emphasis added)

Not surprisingly, there were no references made to the physical descriptions of those shooters who were "normal" or "average."

Race, ethnicity, and religion. Discussion emphasizing the race, ethnicity (or country of origin), and religion of the shooters themselves is notably absent from the discussion in most cases. In fact, despite the heightened emphasis placed on many facets of the story, just 58 references to these three categories were made across 42 articles about 10 of the shootings. Of these references, mentions of the shooter's ethnicity or country of origin was the most common with 27 individual mentions across four cases. These cases included Hesham Hadayet, who had been born in Egypt; Jiverly Wong, who had emigrated from Vietnam; Seung-Hui Cho, whose family came to the U.S. from South Korea when he was a young child; and Sulejman Talovic, who was a native of Bosnia. Though not expressly stated, the continual reference to the origin of these shooters provided a potential cause for the shootings – the strains they faced as outsiders within the U.S. For shooters who were citizens, the fact that they were born in the U.S. was never mentioned.

Despite references appearing in the coverage of only two cases – the 2006 Seattle Jewish Federation (Naveed Haq) and the 2009 Fort Hood (Nidal Hasan) shootings – mention of the shooters' religions was the second most common theme. In fact, 20 individual references were made to the fact that each shooter practiced the Muslim faith. For Naveed Haq, it was suggested that the shooting was caused by his hatred towards Jews, who were the target of the attack, and that his Muslim religion served to fuel his

anger. For Nidal Hasan, it was proposed that his Muslim faith was the reason he opposed the war in Afghanistan, and why he retaliated against a possible deployment.

Notably, the discussion of race was the most limited. A total of 11 references to the shooters' race was found in coverage of four cases – Charles "Cookie" Thornton (black), Jeffrey Weise (American Indian), Omar Thornton (black), and Wade Michael Page (white). What is first important to point out is that others who also were of minority race (e.g., Latina Williams, who also was black, or Biswanath Halder, who was Indian) did not have this characteristic mentioned in the coverage. When the shooter was black, it was suggested that the shootings were motivated by a retaliation against racism. Interestingly, however, in the case of where the shooter was white and this was specifically mentioned (Wade Michael Page), his race was used as a motivation in the absence of a clear-cut motive, particularly as it was reported Page targeted Sikhs. In the case of Jeffrey Weise, his Native American status was used to differentiate "problems on the reservation" from issues framing the rest of U.S. society.

The victims. Examination of how the victims' personal stories are framed, both individually and collectively, provides an interesting departure from how the shooters were covered. In essence, coverage of the victims often is offset against coverage of the shooters in a sort of "good versus evil" framing. Additionally, while there were 94 individual offenders, there were 802 victims within the 91 cases included in the present study. Still, the way in which these stories are told represents a conscious decision-making process by writers at *The Times* in respects to not only how the victims are covered, but which victims are covered. This section examines how the victims were

173

discussed through the related emergent themes – their personal character, race or ethnicity (when mentioned), and why they became victims.

Description of personal character. The largest proportion of coverage of the victims was dedicated to describing who they were. In total, 387 references were made to descriptions of personal character. These references were spread over 86 articles in 37 individual events. The number of references per article ranged from one (n = 30) to 28 mentions (Seung-Hui Cho, 4-18-07-01). On average, there was a mean number of references to personal character of the victims of 4.5 for the full category. When considering just the remaining 56 articles with multiple references coded, there was a mean number of references of 6.3 per article.

The use of the theme "description of personal character" acted, in a sense, as a national obituary for the victims covered. Writers emphasized their roles, particularly within their families, such as doting parents, committed spouses, loving children, and also as devoted friends, employees, and employers:

> She [Victoria Soto] was a sister, a cousin and a friend, someone who had a passion for teaching but also a beguiling "goofball" side that delighted her friends and relatives. (Adam Lanza, 12-20-12-05)

> Ms. [Janice] Hagerty, 46, and the mother of two daughters, was described by co-workers as the kind of indispensable manager who knew where everything was and how everything ran. (Michael McDermott, 12-28-00-01)

> "I know a lot of people say that about their families, but this fellow [Victor James] loved children, and he took such good care of his grandchildren," Mrs. Wilson said. (Omar Thornton, 8-4-10-01)

Their individual passions, things that excited them, things that excited others about them, also were discussed:

174

Sergeant [Miranda] McElhiney, who was single, was a "fast riser," who worked in various medical and administrative roles and made cupcakes for special National Guard events. (Eduardo Sencion, 9-8-11-01)

They told stories about how he [Alexander Boik] had grown from a skateboarding kid to a wisecracking teenager with a scraggly mustache to a young man, still wisecracking but also passionate about art and music and pottery. (James Holmes, 7-28-12-01)

"She [Melissa Moore] just loved meeting the different people, seeing the different costumes, and she loved the music, the beat," Mr. Moore said in a telephone interview. (Kyle Aaron Huff, 3-30-06-01)

Most often, however, the victims were discussed as being genuinely good people:

"He [Daryl Lussier] had a kind heart, and we should know; we've all known him all our lives," Pam Needham, a neighbor, said of Mr. Lussier. (Jeffrey Weise, 3-23-05-02)

"She [Maria Zobniw] never said 'I can't,' " said Iryna Tkhoryk, a friend. (Jiverly Wong, 4-6-09-01)

"He [Brian Bluhm] was a real lovable, genuine, peaceful person," Mr. Marshall said. (Seung-Hui Cho, 4-18-07-01)

In sum, these descriptions of the individuals serve to underscore what was lost in the

shootings – positive assets that were taken by negative actions. Further, by describing

who people were, rather than considering them to be just a number (as in Chapter 6, see

Use Statistics), it enables the reader to make a more emotional connection to the story.

Similar to the majority of findings in the present study, the use of this theme was

most consistently found in conjunction with the most salient cases. Just over 54% of

codes within this theme were linked to these cases. The Sandy Hook shooting (Adam

Lanza) referenced the personal character of the victims 78 times, while the coverage of

the Tucson shooting (Jared Loughner) referenced the victims' character 64 times. The

Virginia Tech (Seung-Hui Cho), Fort Hood (Nidal Hasan), and Aurora movie theater

(James Holmes) shootings' coverage incorporated 41, 15, and 13 similar references, respectively.

This pattern, however, should be interpreted with caution for several reasons. First, in addition to having the most coverage, they also had more victims, and thus, more opportunities to distribute the coverage. Despite that other shootings, such as the Santana High School shooting (Andy Williams) had both victims covered, for a total of 14 references, this was not common. Even when shootings of lesser salience provided coverage of all of the victims, they did so with only a single reference to each. The articles about Virginia Tech, in particular, were the first time that a case with a high death toll included coverage of every single victim (see also Schildkraut, 2012a). Additionally, this event marked one of the first instances where a conscious effort was made to shift from emphasizing the shooter to focusing on the victims, though this shift from "offender-centered" to "victim-centered reporting" did not fully peak until after the Aurora movie theater shooting. Newsworthiness standards also must be considered when interpreting this pattern. As previously noted, Sorenson and colleagues (1998) emphasize that the most newsworthy victims are those who are "white, in the youngest and oldest age groups, women, of high socioeconomic status, killed by strangers" (p. 1514). Thus, given the composition of the victims of the Sandy Hook shooting, it is not surprising that this event would place the most emphasis on covering these victims, all of whom fit this criteria.

Race, ethnicity, and religion. Similar to the discussion of race, ethnicity, and religion as it relates to the shooters, discussion linking these characteristics to the victims also is notably absent. In fact, only 20 total references to the race, ethnicity, or religion

of the victims are made, and this occurs over a limited number of cases (n = 7). Race was

the most commonly referenced category, and mentions typically were used to cast the

shootings as hate-motivated attacks. This was especially common in the shooting

perpetrated by Douglas Williams in 2003, which included seven references to the

victims' race. Williams, who was white, was suspected of specifically targeting blacks in

his rampage, though several of the victims were white.

Ethnicity or country of origin was mentioned in the context of two cases – the

2002 shooting at Los Angeles International (LAX) Airport (Hesham Hadayet) and the

2009 Binghamton immigration center shooting (Jiverly Wong). The LAX shooting took

place at the ticketing counter of an international airline. While the shooting claimed two

victims, the ethnicity of only one was mentioned, as she was an Israeli-born employee of

an airline partner. When referencing the victims of the Binghamton shooting, the

countries of origin were pointed out for all 13 victims, including those who were killed

that were U.S. born. In total, 11 of the victims were foreign-born, and all of their home

countries were reported.

Only one case included the religion of the victim – the 2011 Tucson shooting

(Jared Loughner). Not surprisingly, the focus of the references was on Congresswoman

Gabrielle Giffords. The four total references emphasized the Congresswoman's Jewish

religion. Though there were 19 total victims of this event, the religions of the remaining

victims never were mentioned. Though not unexpected that *The Times* and other media

outlets would report anything "out of the ordinary" or noteworthy about the case, it is

interesting that they would report the Congresswoman's religion, when the shooting was

considered to be an extremist, anti-military attack, rather than a hate crime. Thus, by

reporting her religion, there is the potential to draw inferences that this shooting may have been hate motivated, despite that there is no evidence to substantiate such a claim.

Why they became victims. For many victims of these shootings, the reason they became victims often simply is reduced to them "being in the wrong place at the wrong time." In 58 individual references throughout the coverage of these events, however, other reasons were highlighted for why certain people became victims. In a sense, describing how some, rather than all, of the victims were killed was used as a way to differentiate among them. When someone died because he or she was acting heroically, reporting such a detail tugs at the heartstrings of the reader, more so than simply saying that a person was killed in the gunfire.

Not surprisingly, these references were most commonly tied to the five major cases. In fact, 42 of the 58 references (72.4%) were tied to coverage of the shootings by Jared Loughner, Adam Lanza, Seung-Hui Cho, Nidal Hasan, and James Holmes. Even within these five cases, disparity existed in how this theme was distributed. The Tucson shooting (Jared Loughner) incorporated the most references (n = 17) to why people became victims. Interestingly, besides Congresswoman Giffords, who was the target of the attack, the use of this theme mainly focused on three other individuals – six-year-old Christina Green, a student interested in politics who had come to listen to the Congresswoman speak; Gabriel Zimmerman, Giffords' aide, who was killed as he rushed to help her after she was shot; and federal judge John Roll, who had stopped by to see Giffords on his way home from church, was killed while shielding another of her employees from the gunfire.

The use of this theme in the context of both the 2007 Virginia Tech (n = 6) and 2012 Sandy Hook (n = 13) shootings focused on emphasizing how educators had died while protecting their students. In both cases, despite that five and six educators, respectively, were killed, not all were specifically highlighted. The coverage of Sandy Hook employing this theme focused on four educators – principal Dawn Hochsprung, who was the first killed when she and school psychologist Mary Sherlach (also killed) engaged the shooter in the hallway; teacher Victoria Soto, who was the youngest faculty member killed; and Anne Marie Murphy, who was killed while she shielded Dylan Hockley, a special needs student (also killed), with her body. Similarly, the employment of this theme in the context of the Virginia Tech shooting highlighted two educators – Liviu Lebrescu, receiving the most references (n = 5), who shielded his classroom door with his body so his students could escape (he was the only person in the room killed); and Kevin Granata, who had come downstairs from his office to investigate the shooting and was killed when he tried to warn others. The remaining faculty in the Sandy Hook shooting were referred to collectively, while the other three Virginia Tech professors were not discussed in the context of why they became victims.

The remaining two events – the 2009 Fort Hood (Nidal Hasan) and 2012 Aurora movie theater shootings (James Holmes) – rarely employed this reference, and when writers did, it was to isolate one person who was in the same situation as others. For example, in the four references linked to the Fort Hood shooting, two focused on responding civilian police officer Kim Munley, who was wounded as she engaged the shooter. The remaining two references were about two military personnel who were waiting in line at the medical facilities where the shooting occurred. The latter is

particularly interesting as 10 other people were killed in the exact same line, and 30 others wounded in the identical situation, yet they were not referenced. The coverage of Aurora was even more sparse than Fort Hood (n = 2), referencing only a single person – Alex Teves. Teves was shot and killed when he threw his body on top of his girlfriend to protect her. Yet others who had taken the same action and were met with the same fate, such as Jonathan Blunk, John Larimer, and Matt McQuinn, were not referenced as such.

Memorials

A common theme within the coverage of rampage shootings was to discuss how the victims were being honored. There was discussion of memorials and funeral proceedings for the victims a total of 388 times over 135 articles. These articles, however, were concentrated over just 31 cases. Thus, of those shootings that received any coverage in *The Times* (n = 70), just 44% included coverage of memorials.

Not surprisingly, those events that had the highest victim counts – the 2007 Virginia Tech (Seung-Hui Cho) and the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School (Adam Lanza) shootings – also were among the cases that had the most references to memorials. The coverage of Virginia Tech incorporated 62 separate references to memorials and funerals, including the vigils held at the convocation ceremonies that took place weeks after the shootings. During those ceremonies, each of the 27 student victims were awarded posthumous degrees. Unlike other shootings, where no remembrance of the shooter was present, a memorial to Seung-Hui Cho was set up on the campus' "Drillfield" with the other 32 tributes.

There were an additional 95 references to memorials for the victims of the Sandy Hook shooting. Many of these references focused on the community-centered memorials

and vigils. Unlike most of the other shootings, these memorials had a broader reach.

President Obama flew to Newtown to attend one of the vigils with the families, New

York Giants wide receiver Victor Cruz offered a personal tribute to his biggest fan – Jack

Pinto, and even Pope Benedict offered prayers from the Vatican.

Similar to the coverage of Sandy Hook, the coverage of the 2011 Tucson

shootings (Jared Loughner) also garnered a considerable amount of attention related to

the memorials. In total, 88 references to memorials, tributes, and funerals were made in

the coverage of this event. Also consistent with the coverage of Sandy Hook, an

outpouring of support came from across the nation, particularly from the political

community, as the main focus of the shooting was one of their own. Yet, when covering

the funerals themselves, only those of Christina Green and Judge John Roll were

individually emphasized. The remaining victims were lumped together, similar to the

overall coverage of the victims themselves.

Despite that the 2012 Aurora movie theater shooting drew a reasonable amount of

attention, little of it was focused on the memorials of the victims. Like Sandy Hook, an

outpouring of support came from the Vatican, as well as Hollywood, given that the

shooting had occurred at a movie premiere. Still, despite the high-profile tributes, only

19 total references to memorials or funerals for the victims were included in the

coverage. Similarly, the 2009 Fort Hood shooting also incorporated minimal coverage of

the memorials – just 10 individual references. Most of these references, however,

focused more on how President Obama was paying tribute and less about the individuals

being mourned.

Conclusion

This chapter explored several of the "emergent" themes that revealed themselves during the process of reading the articles, taking notes or memos, and then coding each article multiple times. Examining these categories is important, as they provide a complementary angle to the existent themes of guns, mental health, and violent media (discussed in Chapter 7). Though a number of emergent themes were revealed during the aforementioned process, the three most prevalent in terms of frequency were examined closer. These included descriptions of the event, how the people involved (the shooters and their victims) were framed, and the role of discussing memorials within the coverage. The findings presented in this chapter reveal a number of interesting patterns.

When examining the way in which the event itself was described, a number of interesting findings emerged. First, the term "rampage" is the most frequently used qualifier. While this may be more for shock value than the uniting of a fractured phenomenon (as called for by Harris and Harris, 2012), it is interesting nonetheless that this is the qualifier that is most frequently used. Similarly, other shock worthy terms like massacre, carnage, and bloodshed are used interchangeably, though some at greater frequency than others. Though the term "shooting" is the third most frequently used qualifier, it still appears half as often as "rampage," again highlighting the disproportional use of sensationalism in how these events are discussed.

When the individuals involved in the event are discussed, there is a heavier emphasis placed on discussing the shooter, rather than the victims. When the shooters are discussed, there often is a sense of double-casting – highlighting the good versus evil of the individual, or treating them both as the offender and a victim. In order to further

highlight these individuals, emphasis is placed on what they wore during the shootings, whether it was discussion about specific types of clothing or the presence of body armor and ballistics gear. Similarly, for those who fell at opposite ends of the physicality distribution – either being really small or really large – this also was highlighted in the description of the shooters. Notably absent, however, is a consistent discussion about race, ethnicity, or religion. Despite that there were a number of minority shooters, only a few were singled out to have these attributes discussed, and in many cases, these characteristics were used as an excuse for the rampage.

Similarly, when discussing the victims, the attributes of race, ethnicity, and religion also were absent. In fact, despite that there were approximately 8.5 times as many victims as shooters, thus suggesting that there were more minority victims, there were even fewer references to these characteristics, and they only were typically highlighted when the victim or the shooting itself was high-profile. Instead, a greater emphasis was placed on describing the personal character of the victims, thus reinforcing the tragedy of their loss. Similarly, in cases where the victim's death came as the result of a heroic action, such as using one's body to shield another person, this also was highlighted to offset certain victims from both the shooters and other victims.

Finally, a considerable amount of attention was allocated to discussing the funerals and memorials of the victims. This coverage, however, was not proportionally shared by all of the victims. Instead, as with examination of other themes in the current study, coverage of the memorials was disproportionately driven by the most salient cases, and within those five shootings, Sandy Hook and the Tucson shooting again were most prevalent. Still, disparity between even these shootings exists, as while coverage of the

183

Sandy Hook memorials emphasized all 26 victims, the coverage of Tucson only

highlighted two of the victims more prominently. In sum, the combination of each of

these existing themes adds another level of sensationalism and detail to these cases that

capture the attention of the readers.

X. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has explored the social construction of rampage shootings in a post-Columbine era by the media. This study took an important first step, as called for by Harris and Harris (2012), in rethinking how mass shootings, regardless of location, are discussed. Examining the media narrative about these events is a particularly fruitful way to conduct such an analysis, as the media often are instrumental in agenda setting and claims making. In total, 91 events in the 12 years succeeding Columbine (2000-2012) were examined. The total analysis of these events, as discussed throughout the previous four chapters, provides important insight into this broader disaster narrative.

Though this study began as an examination of shootings between 2000 and 2012, it was not until the researcher was deep within the analysis that it was reconceptualized as occurring in a "post-Columbine era." This revised view emerged from seeing just how prevalent the discourse about Columbine was throughout the articles. Not unexpectedly, Columbine acted as a referent for school shootings – every instance of a mass shooting in a school was related back to its 1999 predecessor. Yet, over the years, as the discourse evolved, so too did the way in which Columbine was both viewed and discussed.

Over time, this shooting has become a referent for all mass shootings, regardless of location. Shooters were constantly compared back to Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, and Columbine became a "how-to" manual of sorts with regards to how the victims were talked about, memorialized, and how this nation responds both politically (e.g., gun control), as well as in practice (e.g., increased security measures). Even shootings like Virginia Tech, which had a death toll of more than twice Columbine, and Sandy Hook,

which was touted as a case of doing everything right (but also still having a death toll twice as high), failed to garner the same level of media attention as Columbine, nor did the Aurora shooting, with an almost identical death toll and situated just 20 miles away. No shooting, regardless of how sensational the characteristics, has eclipsed Columbine. Thus, as we approach the 15-year anniversary of the shootings, the question remains: Why is Columbine still a cultural legacy? Though the findings may not, at present, be able to answer the "why" portion of this question, they do confirm the legacy status of the shooting.

The findings of this study, particularly in the context of existent themes, indicate that claims makers are continually highlighting problems to fuel their own agendas. One place this is evident is in the recurrent gun control discourse. As the findings show, this debate emphasizes restrictions over Second Amendment rights more than three to one. While it is not this researcher's position to support either gun control or gun rights through this dissertation, this is an important disparity that warrants further investigation, particularly given the prominence of *The New York Times* in terms of its coverage reach.

Another area where claims makers are fueling their own agenda is the mental health debate. Following the 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech, President Bush allocated $1.3 billion in federal funds as part of the NICS Improvement Amendments Act (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2013). This was designed to close the mental health reporting loopholes that had enabled Seung-Hui Cho, like many others across the nation, to purchase firearms legally when they should have been disqualified (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2013). In the first five years after the shootings, only about $50 million of

these funds were appropriated, and numerous records of disqualified individuals were missing from the national background check system (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2013).

In the first year following the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, however, 37 states improved their mental health legislation (Ollove, 2013). These same states, in the three years prior, had cut their mental health budgets by $4.35 billion (Ollove, 2013). The U.S. government also allocated $100 million to increase access to mental health services nationally (Boyer, 2013). This flurry of legislation was prompted, at least in part, to the criminalization of Asperger's syndrome, which had been labeled as a cause of Sandy Hook. Persons suffering from the illness, however, rarely are violent, particularly to those outside of their immediate family and almost never use a weapon (Harmon, 2012). Still, the conscious decision to criminalize a non-violent population in order to push mental health legislation through, when none was enacted in the wake of a shooting carried out by someone who exhibited numerous violent and mental-health related warning signs, is a prime example of the agenda-setting function of claims makers, particularly as narrated by the media.

What is perhaps most problematic, as illustrated by this study, is the disproportionality associated with these events, particularly as it relates to the general public's perceptions. Research (e.g., Elsass et al., 2013; Schildkraut et al., 2013a, 2013b) has shown that people believe these events are occurring more frequently than they actually are and that their perceived likelihood of being involved in a mass (school) shooting is quite high. This study, in a somewhat indirect way, supports these findings. The media are contributing to these beliefs.

Throughout the analysis conducted within the present study, it has become clear that there is a disproportional emphasis on the most sensational characteristics of these cases. Victim counts are both emphasized and sensationalized, as are the number of rounds fired by the shooters or the types of weapons they are using. Precipitating factors, such as mental health, are routinely discussed, as are the needs for more stringent gun control and regulations on all different forms of violent media. The media both directly, and indirectly, through the use of quotes by politicians and advocates, perpetuate the disproportionality of these "facts."

Yet, a larger problem exists beyond just the idea of exploiting these facts for profit. As noted at the outset of this project, the media serve as the main source of information for nearly 95% of the general public (Graber, 1980; Surette, 1992). As such, though without thorough research, disproportional reporting equates to disproportional understandings about this and even other phenomena. If the main source of information is not presenting it in an accurate light, how can researchers expect people to understand how common these events are, or rather, are not? How can it be expected for members of the general public to know how likely (or more accurately, unlikely) their risk for this type of victimization is when the media are incorrectly informing them about such odds? Such a line of questioning must be incorporated in the call for research about these events and the public's perceptions of them moving forward.

This is not to suggest, however, that the media should not report on these stories. The public has a right to know and the media have the responsibility to inform them. Yet, at the same time, the media should revisit the roots of journalistic practice – to fact check information before it goes out, to present verified facts rather than sensationalized

hysteria. They should continue to focus on remembering the victims, rather than glorifying the perpetrators for the next would-be shooter to emulate. They should report these stories with restraint and proportionality, and with information the public can use to make informed judgments about rampage shootings and their occurrence within society.

Limitations

Like all research, the present study is not without its limitations. These warrant acknowledgement not as fatal flaws, but as ways to improve the research moving forward. The first limitation is in the source of the data – newspaper articles. This does, as noted throughout, allow the researcher to examine the product that is being presented to the audience, and to do so while not influencing the data themselves. It fails, however, to account for the journalistic processes that lead up to the publishing of each article. As such, because the decision making process is not accounted for, it is impossible for the researcher to definitively say why 21 cases of rampage shootings at a national level received no coverage or why specific facets of the broader narrative are highlighted more than others.

Additionally, the use of only *The New York Times* as a source of data may be considered a limitation. By utilizing only one paper, in essence, only one point of view is offered. Further, many consider the focus of *The Times* to be more liberal, and as such, this may be reflected in what is covered, and how it is framed. Offsetting national coverage against local coverage may have combatted this issue, yet due to time constraints, this was not feasible. Coverage at the local level far exceeds coverage at a national level, and given the scope of the current project, would have proven to not be

manageable within the amount of time available.[19] Still, as previously noted, *The Times*

has been validated in other research as an important source to use, due to its agenda

setting capacity (Altheide, 2009b; Leavy & Maloney, 2009; Muschert, 2002; Wigley &

Fontenot, 2009).

Finally, it is possible that the unit of analysis (sentences) is not correct for the

project at hand. By focusing on sentences, it is possible that the researcher loses context

or meaning of the particular theme, as compared to coding paragraphs. At the same time,

coding paragraphs may have yielded less detailed results, as many themes are represented

multiple times within each paragraph, yet only would be counted once. Thus,

aggregating coding units of analysis up to paragraphs would have caused the researcher

to lose variation. Though some context may have been lost, the use of sentences still

proves beneficial in that keywords and themes may be captured in a different context than

if these words individually were coded. Words are the smallest single unit of analysis,

and would not have been appropriate in the current study to determine the social

construction of rampage shootings, as virtually all context would have been lost.

Future Research

While this research has taken an important first step in understanding the social

construction of rampage shootings, it also has provided a number of avenues for future

research that extend beyond the scope of the current project. First, as noted above, a

potential limitation of the current study is the reliance on a single, national paper. Future

research should replicate the current research using the local paper of record in each city

these shootings occurred, and then compare the results of the two studies. This extension

---

[19] As a point of comparison, *The New York Times* published 170 articles about Columbine in the first 30
days after the shooting. The local paper of record, *The Denver Post*, published over 600. Similar patterns
were observed in the cases included in the present study.

will allow a greater determination of whether the construction of the rampage shootings narrative is consistent across different spatial levels.

It also may be beneficial to present the findings of the current study to writers and editors within *The Times*. In doing so, the researcher could glean more information into the journalistic decision making process. As such, questions left unanswered by the present study, such as why so many cases received no national attention (by way of *The Times*), may be able to be explained. This also may be replicated once an examination of local coverage is performed, to highlight the differences in saliency and newsworthiness at these different organizational levels.

It also would be interesting to examine how the differences amongst the shooters lead to disparities in their coverage. For example, the findings of this study indicated that adult male shooters are discussed fundamentally differently than both adolescent male shooters and also female shooters. Such considerations may have important implications for coverage of future events. In order to make such a determination, however, a more detailed examination of the role of gender differences and its bearing on newsworthiness and the content of related coverage is needed.

Finally, and perhaps more importantly, the cultural relevance of this study needs to be more thoroughly considered. One way in which to do so is to situate the findings in the broader context of cultural criminology. Though the U.S. is not the only country to experience rampage shootings, other countries, such as Germany, Finland, Canada, and Scotland, do not cover these events in the same way as the American media. In essence, these countries do not turn these shooters into folk devils (or, to those who aspire to carry out similar attacks, folk heroes). Thus, it begs the question of why our culture treats

these events as media spectacles (see Kellner, 2003, 2008a, 2008b) and why many of these shooters achieve almost "rock star status" in relation to the amount of press attention they receive.

Further, in line with the cultural meaning of these events, additional examination is needed about the cultural relevance of Columbine. As noted above, despite the higher death tolls, younger victims, and varied locations, none of the rampage shootings included in this study have garnered the same attention or reaction of Columbine. As the 15th anniversary of the shooting nears, it is important to consider the cultural legacy of Columbine. What is it, why are we still talking about it so many years later, and why has no other event eclipsed the legacy of Columbine? Such answers remain to be seen.

APPENDIX A. GLOSSARY OF EVENTS

(Listed Alphabetically by Shooter Last Name)

A

Adkisson, Jim David (58) opened fire during a youth musical at the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church in Knoxville on July 27, 2008. He killed two and wounded seven additional people. He pled guilty and was sentenced to life without parole.

Ayala, Erik Salvadore (24) opened fire outside a Portland, Oregon under-21 nightclub on January 24, 2009. He killed two and wounded 7 others. He then shot himself in the head, though he did not die until two days later.

B

Baker, William (66) opened fire at his former employer, Navistar International Corporation, a Chicago, Illinois diesel engine plant, on February 5, 2001. Baker killed four workers and wounded four others. He then committed suicide.

Bartley, Kenneth Jr. (14), a freshman at Campbell County Comprehensive High School in Jacksboro, Tennessee, killed one assistant principal and wounded the other assistant principal and the school's principal on November 8, 2007. Bartley accepted a plea bargain for one count of second-degree murder and two counts of attempted second-degree murder. He was sentenced to 45 years in prison, with parole eligibility after 29 years.

Bishop, Amy (44) shot and killed three and wounded three others during a faculty meeting at the University of Alabama-Huntsville on February 12, 2010. Bishop, a biology professor, had recently been denied tenure at the university. She later pled guilty in order to avoid the death penalty. Bishop also had previously shot and killed her brother in 1986 (then ruled an accident, but inquiry has re-opened the case due to inconsistencies) and was questioned in a 1993 case involving pipe bombs sent to a professor at Harvard who was Bishop's supervisor.

Bledsoe, Carlos Leon (23), also known as Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad, opened fire on soldiers in front of a Little Rock, Arkansas military recruiting office during a drive-by on June 1, 2009. He killed one recruit and injured another. Bledsoe pled guilty and was sentenced to life in prison.

Bonelli, Robert Jr. (24) entered the Best Buy at the Hudson Valley Mall in Ulster, New York on February 13, 2005 and began shooting. Two people were wounded before Bonelli was tackled by mall employees after running out of ammunition. Bonelli pled guilty and was sentenced to 32 years in prison, with eligibility for parole after 26 years.

Braden, Loyer (18), a student at Delaware State University in Dover, killed one student and wounded another on September 21, 2007. Braden was apprehended three days later in his dorm room. His case was dismissed by a Superior Court judge after the defense filed a motion that prosecutors had withheld crucial evidence.

Brockton, Kawin (19), **Perry, Kelsey** (19), **Toney, Mario** (20), and **Wade, Brandon** (20) shot and killed two students outside of a dormitory at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway on October 26, 2008. A third person was wounded in the attack. The four suspects were charged with the shooting. Perry pled guilty and was sentenced to 40 years in prison. The other three pled no contest to reduced charges – Wade was sentenced to 26 years in prison, and Brockton and Toney were each sentenced to 18 years.

Brown, Nathaniel (51), a custodian at the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, shot and killed his supervisor and wounded his supervisor's boss on March 9, 2010. Brown then turned the gun on himself.

Butler, Robert Jr. (17), a student at Millard South High School in Omaha, Nebraska, killed the assistant principal and wounded two others on January 5, 2011. The shooting occurred after Butler was suspended for driving his car onto the school's football field. Butler then walked two miles to a local parking lot and committed suicide.

C

Caffall, Thomas (35) shot and killed two people near the Texas A&M University campus on August 13, 2012. An additional four people were wounded. Caffall was killed during a shootout with law enforcement.

Casteel, Luther (42) opened fire at a bar in Elgin, IL on April 14, 2001. A bartender and patron were both killed and an additional 16 people were wounded. Casteel was apprehended and later convicted. In 2002, Casteel was sentenced to death, but his sentence was commuted to life without parole in 2003.

Cho, Seung-Hui (23) shot and killed 32 individuals in two separate incidents on the campus of Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg on April 16, 2007. An additional 23 people were wounded. Cho then committed suicide as law enforcement entered Norris Hall. It was later discovered that during the two hour period between events, Cho mailed his detailed multimedia manifesto to NBC News, portions of which were later broadcast.

Chong, John (69) killed one woman and wounded three others during a shooting rampage in Temecula, California on April 7, 2009. The rampage took place at a Catholic retreat. Chong was subdued by one of the victims before being taken into custody. Chong was sentenced to 136 years to life in 2011 at the age of 71.

Clemmons, Maurice (37) was on felony probation when he shot and killed four police officers in a Parkland, Washington coffee shop on November 29, 2009. Clemmons fled the scene and was shot and killed by police in Seattle two days later.

Coon, Asa (14) opened fire at SuccessTech, a Cleveland, Ohio area alternative high school on October 10, 2007. Coon wounded two students and two teachers. He then committed suicide.

D

Dekraai, Scott Evans (42) opened fire at Salon Meritage, a hair salon, in Seal Beach, California on October 12, 2011. Dekraai killed eight people, including his ex-wife (a salon employee), and wounded a ninth. He was stopped a half mile from the scene and arrested. His trial is currently pending and is expected to commence in November 2013.

Dortch, Vincent (44) shot and killed three executives at an investment company in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on February 12, 2007. A fourth person was critically injured in the shooting but was able to escape and call police. Dortch killed himself moments after police entered the building.

Drake, Harlan James (33) shot and killed two men in Owosso, Michigan on September 11, 2009. One of the victims was connected to a pro-life protest and was protesting when he was killed. The other victim was not connected to the protest. Drake was arrested and convicted of the two murders. He was sentenced to two life terms.

E

Eastwood, Bruco (32) opened fire at Deer Creek Middle School in Littleton, Colorado on February 23, 2010 after being denied access to the school for a tour. Two students were wounded before the shooter was taken down by several teachers from the school and then taken into custody by law enforcement. He received an 18-month sentence for a weapons violation, but was credited with time served in a mental institution.

Engeldinger, Andrew (36) walked into his former employer, Accent Signage Systems, in Minneapolis, Minnesota on September 27, 2012 and opened fire. He killed four people at the scene and wounded four others, two of whom died in the days following the shooting. Two others were injured. Engeldinger committed suicide at the scene.

F

Fears, Daniel (18) went on a shooting rampage in Sallisaw, Oklahoma on October 26, 2002. Two people were killed and an additional eight were wounded. Later in the day, Fears surrendered to police and was taken into custody. He was later found not guilty by reason of insanity.

Flores, Robert Jr. (41) was a student at the University of Arizona nursing school in Tucson. Flores shot and killed three of his professors on October 28, 2002before committing suicide. The campus was checked for explosives after an incendiary device was found near the gunman's body.

Foster, Mark Stephen (48) shot two the principal and assistant principal at an elementary school in Knoxville, Tennessee on February 10, 2010 before being apprehended by police. Foster pled guilty and was sentenced to 56 years in prison with the possibility of parole after serving 30% of his sentence.

G

Gale, Nathan (25) killed four people and wounded seven others at a concert in Columbus, Ohio on December 8, 2004. Among those killed was Dimebag Darrell, former member of the heavy metal band Pantera. Gale was killed after being shot by a responding officer.

Goh, One L. (43), a former student at Oikos University in Oakland, California, returned to the school on April 2, 2012 and started shooting. He killed seven and wounded an additional three. Goh was taken into custody, but has not yet stood trial due to multiple findings that he was unfit. Goh was institutionalized with regular competency reviews.

H

Hadayet, Hesham Mohamed (41) opened fire at the El Al ticket counter at Los Angeles International Airport in California on July 4, 2002. Hadayet killed two bystanders and wounded an additional four. The airline's security officer was stabbed by Hadayet, but managed to shoot and kill the gunman.

Halder, Biswanath (62), an alumnus of Case Western University in Cleveland, Ohio, returned to the school on May 9, 2003 and opened fire. Halder killed one professor and wounded a student before engaging in a stand-off for seven hours with law enforcement. Halder was eventually taken into custody and later sentenced to life in prison.

Hance, Michael (51) opened fire in a Copley Township, Ohio home on August 7, 2011 following a domestic dispute. Hance shot and killed seven people and wounded an eighth person before he was killed by a responding officer.

Haq, Naveed Afzal (30) opened fire at the Jewish Federation in Seattle, Washington on July 28, 2006. He killed one woman and wounded five others. Haq was convicted of the shooting, which was classified as a hate crime, and sentenced to live without parole plus 120 years.

Hasan, Nidal (39), a major in the United States Army, opened fire on the Fort Hood military base just outside of Killeen, Texas on November 5, 2009. Hasan killed 13 and wounded an additional 32. The shooting came as Hasan, who was noted as having

increasingly extremist views, was preparing for deployment to Afghanistan. Hasan was apprehended and later convicted on 13 counts of premeditated murder and 32 counts of attempted murder. He is currently awaiting execution on military death row.

Haughton, Radcliffe (45) entered the Azana Spa in Brookfield, Wisconsin where his estranged wife was employed, and opened fire. The October 21, 2012 shooting claimed the lives of his wife and two others in the spa, and four were injured. Haughton committed suicide while still at the spa.

Hawkins, Robert (19) entered the Von Maur department store at the Westroads Mall in Omaha, Nebraska on December 5, 2007. Hawkins took the elevator to the third floor of the store and opened fire. He killed eight and wounded four others within minutes. As police closed in on the department store, Hawkins killed himself.

Hendron, Timothy (51), an employee of the ABB power plant in St. Louis, Missouri, opened fire on January 7, 2010. Hendron killed three and wounded five others. He then killed himself prior to police arriving on the scene.

Higdon, Wesley Neal (25), an employee at the Atlantis Plastics factory in Henderson, Kentucky, shot and killed five people on June 25, 2008. A sixth person was wounded in the shooting. Higdon then committed suicide.

Hiller, Yvonne (43) killed two coworkers at a Kraft-Nabisco plant in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on September 9, 2010. A third plant employee was wounded. Hiller was taken into custody by responding SWAT officers. In 2012, Hiller was sentenced to two consecutive life sentences.

Hoffman, Jason (18) opened fire at Granite Hills High School in El Cajon, California on March 22, 2001. Five people were wounded before Hoffman was apprehended by a police officer on campus. Hoffman was also wounded in the shooting. He committed suicide in 2002 by hanging himself in his prison cell.

Holmes, James (24) killed 12 people and wounded 58 others when he opened fire during a midnight showing of *The Dark Knight Rises* at an Aurora, Colorado movie theater on July 20, 2012. Holmes was apprehended by law enforcement outside the movie theater and is currently awaiting trial. An investigation of his home revealed that Holmes had planted a number of incendiary devices around the dwelling, designed to kill law enforcement officers and other residents of the apartment complex.

Huff, Kyle Aaron (28) opened fire at an after-party for a rave outside of Seattle, Washington on March 25, 2006. Six people were killed and two others injured in the attack. As police confronted Huff, he shot and killed himself.

K

Kalisz, John (55) shot and killed his sister and a co-worker and wounded two others in a January 14, 2010 shooting in Brooksville, Florida. He then fled north in the state and was apprehended in Cross City, Florida after engaging in a gun fight with a local deputy, who was killed. In 2012, Kalisz was found guilty and sentenced to death.

Kazmierczak, Steven (27) shot and killed 5 people and wounded 21 others when he opened fire in a classroom on the campus of Northern Illinois University in DeKalb on February 14, 2008. Kazmierczak committed suicide as law enforcement officers responded.

L

Lane, T.J. (17), a student at Chardon High School in Chardon, Ohio, opened fire on February 27, 2012. Lane killed three and wounded two additional people. He was apprehended at the scene. Lane pled guilty and was sentenced to life in prison on March 19, 2013.

Lanza, Adam (20) shot and killed six adults and 20 first grade students at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut on December 14, 2012. As law enforcement responded, Lanza committed suicide. An investigation of his home revealed that prior to the rampage, Lanza shot and killed his mother, Nancy, while she was sleeping.

Lockey, William (54), a 26-year employee of Bertrand Products in South Bend, Indiana, opened fire on his co-workers on March 22, 2002. Lockey killed four workers and wounded two others. He then led police on a high-speed chase before committing suicide.

Logsdon, David (51) shot and killed two people when he opened fire at the Ward Parkway Center in Kansas City, Missouri on April 29, 2007. Logsdon was later killed during a shootout with police.

Loughner, Jared (22) opened fire during a public political speaking engagement in Tucson, Arizona on January 8, 2011. He killed six and wounded an additional 13 people, including Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. He was apprehended at the scene. Loughner was declared competent to stand trial after a year and a half of being declared incompetent, and pled guilty in exchange for a life sentence.

M

Maldonado, Dominick (20) opened fire at the Tacoma Mall in Tacoma, Washington on November 20, 2005. Six people were wounded before another four were kidnapped and held hostage in one of the mall's stores. After several hours, the hostages were released

and Maldonado surrendered to SWAT officers. He was later convicted and sentenced to 163 years in prison.

Matthews, Richard (53), a former employee of Grady Crawford Construction, opened fire in the company's Baton Rouge, Louisiana offices on December 23, 2009. Two people were killed and a third wounded before being wrestled to the ground by other employees and held until police arrived. Matthews is currently awaiting a sanity hearing to determine if he can assist in his own defense.

Maye, Odane Greg (18), a former student at Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia, shot and wounded three people on April 26, 2009. Maye was later convicted and sentenced to 14 years in prison.

McDermott, Michael (42) opened fire at Edgewater Technologies in Wakefield, Massachusetts on December 26, 2000. McDermott, an employee of the firm, killed seven of his co-workers before being apprehended at the scene. McDermott was sentenced to seven consecutive life sentences, without the possibility of parole.

McLaughlin, John Jason (15), a student at Ricori High School in Cold Spring, Minnesota, opened fire on September 24, 2003. Two students were killed in the shooting before the school's gym teacher stopped the shooting. McLaughlin was convicted and sentenced to life in prison in 2005.

McLendon, Michael Kenneth (28) shot and killed 10 people in a shooting spree in Geneva County, Alabama on March 10, 2009. An additional six people were wounded in the attacks. McLendon committed suicide after engaging in a shooting with police.

Miller, Clifford Jr. (24) randomly shot and five people, killing one, in Gainesville, Florida on October 4, 2010. Miller also killed his father before committing suicide.

Murray, Matthew (24) killed four and wounded five others in two separate shooting incidents on December 9, 2007. In the early morning hours, Murray killed two and wounded two others at the Arvada, Colorado training center for Youth with a Mission (YWAM). Later that day, he killed two and wounded three others outside of the New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Murray was wounded by an armed, former police officer attending the church before committing suicide.

N

Newman, James Scott (14), a student of Pine Middle School in Reno, Nevada, opened fire outside the school's cafeteria. Two students were injured before Newman was arrested. He pled guilty to battery with a deadly weapon (two counts) and was sentenced as a juvenile to house arrest and community service.

Neyland, Calvin Jr. (43) shot and killed two people at Liberty Trucking in Walbridge, Ohio on August 8, 2007. The people who were killed had planned to fire Neyland from

his job on the same day. Neyland was found guilty in 2008 and was sentenced to death the following year.

O

Odighizuwa, Peter (43), a former student at the Appalachian School of Law in Grundy, Virginia, opened fire on the school's campus on January 16, 2002. Three people were killed and three others wounded before Odighizuwa was subdued by other students and held until police arrived. After initially being declared incompetent to stand trial, he was found competent in 2005 but opted to plead guilty. Odighizuwa was given three life sentences without the possibility of parole plus an additional 28 years.

O'Rourke, Brendan (41) opened fire on a crowded playground at Kelly Elementary School in Carlsbad, California on October 8, 2010. Two students were wounded before nearby construction workers subdued O'Rourke until the police arrived. In 2012, O'Rourke was sentenced to life in prison. He would be eligible for parole after serving 167 years.

P

Page, Wade Michael (40) opened fire in a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin on August 5, 2012. Page killed six and wounded four others before being shot in the stomach by a responding officer. Page then committed suicide before he could be taken into custody.

Pardo, Bruce Jeffrey (45) opened fire at a Covina, California Christmas party on December 24, 2008. After the shooting, Pardo set the house on fire and fled the scene to his brother's house about 30 miles away. Nine people were killed and another two were injured. Pardo committed suicide at his brother's house.

Park, Ki Young (54), a convenience store owner, shot and killed three people at a Houston, Texas business on January 10, 2001. The body of his wife was found several hours later in a cooler at the convenience store she and Park jointly owned. Park committed suicide after the rampage.

Peterson, Tyler (20), a deputy with the local sheriff's department, opened fire at a homecoming after party in Crandon, Wisconsin on October 7, 2007. He killed six party goers and wounded a seventh before fleeing the scene. Peterson committed suicide later that morning.

R

Ratzmann, Terry Michael (44), a computer technician, opened fire at the Living Church of God in Brookfield, Wisconsin on March 12, 2005. Ratzmann killed seven people, including the church's minister and the minister's son. Four other church attendees were wounded before Ratzmann committed suicide.

Regalado, Gerardo (38) shot and killed four women, including his wife, at a Hialeah, Florida restaurant on June 8, 2010. Three other women were wounded in the shooting. Regalado then committed suicide.

Reza, Robert (37), a former employee of Emcore Corporation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, shot and killed three and wounded an additional four on July 12, 2010. He then committed suicide. Reza's ex-girlfriend, with whom he was engaged in a custody dispute, was among those wounded.

Roberts, Charles Carl (32), a milk truck driver, entered the Amish schoolhouse in the community of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania on October 2, 2006. After dismissing the boys and several others, Roberts held 10 young girls hostage. The school's teacher, who had escaped, ran to a nearby farm and called 9-1-1. Roberts bound the girls and shortly thereafter, began shooting, killing five and wounding the other five. As state troopers closed in on the schoolhouse, Roberts committed suicide.

Roberts, Jacob (22) opened fire at Clackamas Town Center, just outside of Portland, Oregon, on December 11, 2012. Roberts killed two people and injured a third before committing suicide.

Rodriguez, Jason S. (40) opened fire at a downtown Orlando, Florida architectural firm on November 6, 2009. One person was killed and five others were wounded. Rodriguez was arrested several hours later at his mother's home nearby. He has not yet been declared competent to stand trial.

Rouch, Arunya (42) opened fire at a Tarpon Springs, Florida Publix supermarket on March 30, 2010 after being fired from the establishment. She killed one co-worker before being shot by police and taken into custody. In 2012, Rouch was found guilty and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Russell, Jonathon (25) opened fire at a Jefferson City, Missouri factory where he was employed on July 2, 2003. Three people were killed and an additional five wounded. Russell then committed suicide after exchanging fire with police.

S

San Marco, Jennifer (44), a former police officer and postal worker, opened fire at a Goleta, California mail sorting facility on January 30, 2006. Six people were killed before San Marco committed suicide. She also killed her former neighbor just prior to the shooting.

Sencion, Eduardo (32) walked into a Carson City, Nevada IHOP restaurant on September 6, 2011 and began shooting. Four people were killed and another seven wounded. Sencion shot himself in the head and later died at the hospital.

Sheets, James (14), a student at Red Lion Junior High School, fired several shots in the packed cafeteria on April 24, 2003. The school's principal was killed. Sheets then committed suicide in the cafeteria.

Sodini, George (48) opened fire at a L.A. Fitness health club in Collier Township, Pennsylvania on August 4, 2009. Three people were killed and nine others wounded before Sodini committed suicide.

Stawicki, Ian Lee (40) killed five and wounded one other in a shooting spree that began at Café Racer in Seattle, Washington on May 30, 2012. After carjacking a vehicle to escape, Stawicki later committed suicide in another part of town as police closed in.

Stewart, Robert (45) killed eight people at the Pinelake Health and Rehab nursing home in Carthage, North Carolina. Stewart wounded two others before being shot and subsequently apprehended by police. In 2011, he was found guilty of second-degree murder (eight counts) and sentenced to 149 to 179½ years in prison.

T

Talović, Sulejman (18), who had emigrated from Bosnia and Herzegovina, entered the Trolley Square Mall in Salt Lake City, Utah on February 12, 2007 and opened fire. Talović shot and killed five and wounded four others as he wove throughout the mall. He was killed by members of the Salt Lake City SWAT team, entering in the back entrance, after Talović was cornered by two other officers from local police departments in the Pottery Barn store.

Tapia, Salvador (36), a former employee of Windy City Core Supply in Chicago, Illinois, shot and killed six warehouse workers on August 27, 2003. Tapia, who had been let go from his job six months earlier, was killed by the police at the scene.

Thornton, Charles Lee (52) opened fire during a public meeting at the Kirkwood, Missouri city hall on February 7, 2008. He killed six and wounded two others before being shot and killed by responding police. Among those killed were the town's mayor, two police officers, and two council members.

Thornton, Omar (34), a former employee of Hartford Distributors in Manchester, Connecticut, killed eight people at the company's warehouse on August 3, 2010. He wounded two other employees before committing suicide. Prior to his suicide, Thornton called 911 and told dispatchers that the shooting was a result of racism he had experienced in the workplace.

V

Villagomez, Ernesto (30) shot and killed two men and wounded two others at a bar in Winnemucca, Nevada on May 25, 2008. While he was reloading his gun, another patron with a concealed carry permit shot and killed Villagomez.

von Brunn, James Wenneker (88), opened fire at the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. on June 10, 2009. A security guard was killed and another person was wounded. von Brunn was injured by return fire from two other security guards. He was apprehended and died in prison in 2010 while awaiting trial.

W

Weise, Jeffrey (16) shot and killed his grandfather and his grandfather's companion on the Red Lake Indian Reservation in Red Lake, Minnesota on March 21, 2005. He then went to the reservation's high school, where he killed seven and wounded five. Weise was wounded while exchanging gunfire with police, and then committed suicide.

Williams, Charles Andrew (15) opened fire at Santana High School in Santee, California on March 5, 2001. Two students were killed and an additional 13 people were wounded. Surrounded by police in one of the school's bathrooms, Williams surrendered and was taken into custody. In 2002, Williams pled guilty to avoid a trial and is currently serving a life sentence with the possibility of parole after 50 years.

Williams, Christopher (27), shot and killed his ex-girlfriend's mother before driving to Essex Elementary School in Essex, Vermont on August 24, 2006. At the school, Williams killed a second grade teacher and wounded two others. He then shot himself twice in the head but survived. Williams pled not guilty but was convicted in 2008 and sentence to three life terms.

Williams, Douglas (48), an assembly line worker at Lockheed Martin in Meridian, Mississippi, shot 14 co-workers on July 8, 2003. Six of those shot died. Williams then committed suicide.

Williams, Latina (23), a nursing student at Louisiana Technical College in Baton Rouge, opened fire on the campus on February 8, 2008. Williams killed two before committing suicide.

Wissman, Robert (36) killed one worker and wounded six others at the Nu-Wood Decorative Millwork plant in Goshen, Indiana on December 6, 2001. Wissman, an employee of the plant, had gotten into an argument with his co-workers earlier in the day. He committed suicide at the scene.

Wong, Jiverly (41) opened fire at a Binghamton, New York immigration center on April 3, 2009. Wong had taken English classes at the center and shot students and the teacher in the room where the classes were held. In total, 13 people were killed and an additional four injured before Wong committed suicide.

Z

Zamora, Isaac (28) engaged in a shooting spree near Seattle, Washington on September 2, 2008. He killed six people and injured two others and then engaged in a high speed chase before turning himself in. Zamora had a history of mental illness as well as a criminal record, and was on probation at the time of the shooting. In December 2012, he was transferred to prison from a mental hospital.

APPENDIX B. DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS COVERAGE BY EVENT

Event Date	Event Location	Articles	Word Count
12/26/00	Wakefield, MA	7	5,658
01/10/01	Houston, TX	0	0
02/05/01	Melrose Park, IL	3	1,523
03/05/01	Santee, CA	17	14,045
03/22/01	El Cajon, CA	3	3,259
04/14/01	Elgin, IL	0	0
12/06/01	Goshen, IN	2	1,746
01/16/02	Grundy, VA	2	1,838
03/22/02	South Bend, IN	1	282
07/04/02	Los Angeles, CA	10	8,660
10/27/02	Sallisaw, OK	1	295
10/28/02	Tucson, AZ	1	707
04/24/03	Red Lion, PA	1	297
05/09/03	Cleveland, OH	2	1,649
07/02/03	Jefferson City, MO	0	0
07/08/03	Meridian, MS	3	2,407
08/27/03	Chicago, IL	1	852
09/24/03	Cold Spring, MN	3	1,391
12/08/04	Columbus, OH	4	2,703
02/13/05	Kingston, NY	5	2,181
03/12/05	Brookfield, WI	4	3,995
03/21/05	Red Lake, MN	19	18,519
11/08/05	Jacksboro, TN	1	394
11/20/05	Tacoma, WA	2	571
01/30/06	Goleta, CA	1	647
03/14/06	Reno, NV	0	0
03/25/06	Seattle, WA	4	2,261
07/28/06	Seattle, WA	4	2,334
08/24/06	Essex, VT	0	0
10/02/06	Lancaster County, PA	8	6,080
02/12/07	Salt Lake City, UT	3	2,597

Event Date	Event Location	Articles	Word Count
02/12/07	Philadelphia, PA	1	816
04/16/07	Blacksburg, VA	37	33,473
05/01/07	Kansas City, MO	0	0
08/08/07	Walbridge, OH	0	0
09/21/07	Dover, DE	2	1,035
10/07/07	Crandon, WI	3	1,821
10/10/07	Cleveland, OH	2	1,786
12/05/07	Omaha, NE	5	4,143
12/09/07	Colorado Springs, CO	3	1,994
02/07/08	Kirkwood, MO	2	1,830
02/08/08	Baton Rouge, LA	1	359
02/14/08	DeKalb, IL	12	7,524
05/25/08	Winnemucca, NV	0	0
06/25/08	Henderson, KY	1	791
07/28/08	Knoxville, TN	2	1,615
09/02/08	Seattle, WA	2	893
10/26/08	Conway, AR	2	682
12/24/08	Covina, CA	4	1,627
01/25/09	Portland, OR	0	0
03/10/09	Samson/Geneva, AL	4	2,985
03/29/09	Carthage, NC	3	1,692
04/03/09	Binghamton, NY	11	10,729
04/09/09	Temecula, CA	0	0
04/26/09	Hampton, VA	0	0
06/01/09	Little Rock, AR	3	1,198
06/10/09	Washington, DC	2	1,578
08/04/09	Collier Township, PA	4	2,747
09/12/09	Owosso, MI	5	4,956
11/05/09	Fort Hood, TX	36	35,097
11/06/09	Orlando, FL	2	1,723
11/29/09	Parkland, WA	5	4,793
12/23/09	Baton Rouge, LA	0	0
01/07/10	St. Louis, MO	2	799
01/19/10	Brooksville, FL	0	0

Event Date	Event Location	Articles	Word Count
02/10/10	Knoxville, TN	0	0
02/12/10	Huntsville, AL	12	12,872
02/23/10	Littleton, CO	1	138
03/09/10	Columbus, OH	1	365
03/30/10	Tarpon Springs, FL	0	0
06/08/10	Hialeah, FL	0	0
07/12/10	Albuquerque, NM	1	32
08/03/10	Manchester, CT	7	7,146
09/09/10	Philadelphia, PA	0	0
10/05/10	Gainesville, FL	0	0
10/08/10	Carlsbad, CA	0	0
01/05/11	Omaha, NE	2	390
01/08/11	Tucson, AZ	89	91,715
08/07/11	Copley Township, OH	0	0
09/06/11	Carson City, NV	2	2,454
10/12/11	Seal Beach, CA	0	0
02/27/12	Chardon, OH	5	3,210
04/02/12	Oakland, CA	3	2,645
05/30/12	Seattle, WA	2	1,280
07/20/12	Aurora, CO	31	23,715
08/05/12	Oak Creek, WI	5	5,621
08/13/12	College Station, TX	2	1,552
09/27/12	Minneapolis, MN	1	148
10/21/12	Brookfield, WI	1	1,019
12/11/12	Clackamas, OR	2	1,405
12/14/12	Newtown, CT	130	118,354

- **CHANGING THEMES**
  - **Space** – For this series, the spatial level of the article was determined by reading the article, centering attention mainly on the headline and lead paragraph to identify the predominant focus.
    - Community – Code if the article when the focus is on the community in which the shooting occurred.
    - Individual – Code if the article focuses on individual participants, such as the shooters or the victims.
    - International – Code if the article focuses on the international impact, concern, or discussion about the shooting.
    - Regional – Code if the article focuses on the international impact, concern, or discussion about the shooting.
    - Societal – Code if the article focuses on the national impact, concern, or discussion about the shooting. Articles focusing on broad national issues (e.g., gun control) or framed from the point of view of the President (as a national representative) should be coded in this category.
  - **Time** – For this series, the temporal level of the article was determined by reading the article, centering attention mainly on the headline and lead paragraph to identify the predominant focus.
    - Future – Code if the article emphasizes the long-range implications of the shooting and possible strategies to be implemented over time.
    - Past – Code if the article references events leading up to the shooting, such as the shooters' backgrounds / life histories or editorials incorporating a historical perspective.
    - Present – Code if the article focuses on the event and the immediate (within the first 30 days) impact. Discussion of current social trends also should be coded in this category.
- **CREATION OF A SOCIAL PROBLEM**
  - **Give the Problem a Name (Headline)** – For this series of nodes, code only the headline of the story. Determination of category is based on the first main word of the headline. [Note: Not all headlines will fit this scheme, as some have a totally different focus, so you may not have 55 codes total]
    - Event – The headline leads off with the event itself, using qualifiers such as shooting, massacre, rampage, etc.

- **Shooter** – The headline leads off with the killer as the main focus. There are some instances where it will appear that it is leading off with the event (e.g., "shooting suspect"), but here the shooting is an adjective and the focus is the shooter themselves. This may be explicit (e.g., shooter, killer, etc.) or more covert (e.g., man, boy, or specifically named).

  - *Given Name* – Code if the shooter is specifically referenced by name as the leading word(s) of the headline.

  - *Gunman* – Code if the leading word in the headline is gunman.

  - *Killer* – Code if the leading word in the headline is killer.

  - *Other* – Code if the leading word in the headline is any other qualifier than those listed here.

  - *Suspect* – Code if the leading word in the headline is suspect.

- **Victim(s)** – The headline leads off with one or more of the victims as the main focus. This may be explicit (e.g., victim, wounded etc.) or more covert (e.g., man, girl, or specifically named). Numerical identifiers (e.g., # dead) also may be used to highlight the victims.

- **Use Examples (Reference to Other Events)**

  - **Columbine** – code the sentence if there is a reference to Columbine High School, shooters Eric Harris and/or Dylan Klebold, any of the victims of the shooting, or the event itself (which typically is referred to by name or date – April 20, 1999).

  - **Other Events** – code the sentence if there is a reference to any other mass casualty event besides Columbine. This may include other shootings (e.g., Virginia Tech, Aurora movie theater, etc.) including those that are not expressly listed in this dataset (e.g., the shooting of Webster, NY firemen or the shooting at the Empire State Building). It also may include references to bombing or terrorist events, such as September 11th or the Oklahoma City bombing, as well as events that occurred in other countries (e.g., the Dunblane, Scotland primary school shooting or the knifing in China on the same day as Sandy Hook). Events do not have to have occurred within the study period (2000-2012) to be coded.

    - *Aurora* – Code the sentence if reference is made to James Holmes (perpetrator), Aurora, or movie theater [shooting]. This should only be coded as an example in coverage of other events (e.g., articles directly related to James Holmes should not be coded with him as an "other event" reference).

    - *Dunblane* – Code the sentence if reference is made to Thomas Hamilton (perpetrator), Dunblane, or Scotland primary school shooting.

- *LIRR Massacre* – Code the sentence if reference is made to Colin Ferguson (perpetrator), Long Island, or railroad school shooting.

- *Oklahoma City Bombing* – Code the sentence if reference is made to Timothy McVeigh or Terry Nichols (perpetrators), Oklahoma City, or the Alfred P. Murrah federal building.

- *Santana High School (Santee)* – Code the sentence if reference is made to Charles Andy Williams (perpetrator), Santee, or Santana High School. This should only be coded as an example in coverage of other events (e.g., articles directly related to Andy Williams should not be coded with him as an "other event" reference).

- *September 11 Terrorist Attacks* – Code the sentence if reference is made to the hijackers (perpetrators), September 11th, or the World Trade Center.

- *Springfield (Thurston High School)* – Code the sentence if reference is made to Kip(land) Kinkel (perpetrator), Springfield, or Thurston High School.

- *Tucson (Giffords)* – Code the sentence if reference is made to Jared Loughner (perpetrator), Tucson, or the shooting of Congresswoman Giffords. This should only be coded as an example in coverage of other events (e.g., articles directly related to Jared Loughner should not be coded with him as an "other event" reference).

- *Virginia Tech* – Code the sentence if reference is made to Seung-Hui Cho (perpetrator), Blacksburg, or Virginia Tech. This should only be coded as an example in coverage of other events (e.g., articles directly related to Seung-Hui Cho should not be coded with him as an "other event" reference).

- o **Use Statistics** – For this node, code any use of numerical estimates (including the use of words, like "dozens" or "millions"). This may include, but not be limited to: victim count (both deceased and wounded), number of rounds fired, magazine capacity (how many rounds the gun holds), number of weapons, size of community (e.g., town or city population, how many people attended the school, etc.), distance from a larger city (example of proximity), national crime statistics, how many minutes it took responders to arrive, etc.

  - *Community Statistics* – Code this for references to statistics related to the community in discussion. This may be a school (e.g., total student enrollment), city / town, or state.

  - *Magazine Capacity* – Code this for references to the number of bullets that magazines can hold.

  - *National Statistics* – Code this for references to any statistics that pertain to larger, national figures (e.g., annual homicide totals, the number of mental health patients nationwide, etc.)

- *Number of Weapons* – Code this for any references to the number of weapons that the shooter of the event being coded is carrying. Codes should only be made for specific reference to a number of weapons, not general references (e.g., *a* weapon, *multiple* weapons). References either may be numeric or alphanumeric.
- *Rounds Fired* – Code this for references to the total number of rounds fired by the shooter(s), but not references to an individual shot. References either may be numeric or alphanumeric.
- *Spatial Proximity* – Code this for references made to how close the shooting sit is from another major event or city (e.g., X miles from Y city).
- *Victim Count* – Code this for references to the number of victims (either all or in part, but not individual victims) in the <u>current</u> shooting.
- *Victim Count of Other Events* – Code this for references made to the number of victims in a different event (e.g., the 13 victims of Columbine).

- **DESCRIPTION OF EVENT**
  - **General Qualifiers**
    - <u>Attack</u> – Code the sentence if the qualifier of "attack" is used to describe the shooting.
    - <u>Bloodshed</u> – Code the sentence if the qualifier of "bloodshed" is used to describe the shooting.
    - <u>Carnage</u> – Code the sentence if the qualifier of "carnage" is used to describe the shooting.
    - <u>Killings</u> – Code the sentence if the qualifier of "killing(s)" is used to describe the shooting.
    - <u>Massacre</u> – Code the sentence if the qualifier of "massacre" is used to describe the shooting.
    - <u>Other</u> – Code the sentence if a qualifier other than "shooting" or one of the other categories listed here is used to describe the shooting.
    - <u>Rampage</u> – Code the sentence if the qualifier of "rampage" is used to describe the shooting.
    - <u>Shooting</u> – Code the sentence if the qualifier of "shooting" is used to describe the shooting.
    - <u>Slaughter</u> – Code the sentence if the qualifier of "slaughter" is used to describe the shooting.
    - <u>Spree</u> – Code the sentence if the qualifier of "spree" is used to describe the shooting.
    - <u>Terrorism</u> – Code the sentence if the qualifier of "terrorism" is used to describe the shooting.

- Tragedy – Code the sentence if the qualifier of "tragedy" is used to describe the shooting.

- Worst or Deadliest – Code the sentence if the qualifier of "worst" or "deadliest" is used to describe the shooting. This may be used in conjunction with any or all of the above qualifiers (e.g., worst massacre, deadliest rampage).

- **DESCRIPTION OF THOSE INVOLVED**
  - **Shooter(s)**
    - Behavior
      - *Negative* – Code the sentence if reference is a negative statement is made about the victim or their personality / character (e.g., he acted bizarrely, he was very angry).

      - *Positive* – Code the sentence if reference is a positive statement is made about the victim or their personality / character (e.g., she was a good person, he was really smart).

    - Physical Appearance – Code the sentence if reference is made to the physical appearance of the shooter. This may emphasize clothing they wore on the day of the shooting or their physical build (either height/weight or less specific descriptors, such as scrawny or big).

    - Race or Ethnicity – Code the sentence if reference is made to the race, ethnicity, or religion of the shooter.

  - **Victim(s)**
    - Description of Personal Character – Code the sentence if reference is a positive statement is made about the victim or their life (e.g., she was a good person, he was a good father).

    - Race or Ethnicity – Code the sentence if reference is made to the race, ethnicity, or religion of the victims.

    - Why They Became Victims – Code the sentence when reference is made to why a person became a victim, other than that they were there. For example, if reference is made to how someone died protecting another person, this would be coded in this category.

- **GUNS**
  - **Description of Type Used**
    - General Description – Reference to a firearm is made in a general sense, with no specific information, such as caliber or make/model of the gun. Examples include gun, firearm, pistol, shotgun, etc.

    - Specific Description – A specific description of some characteristic of the gun or guns is offered, including the caliber of the weapon and/or the make or model (e.g., Bushmaster, Glock, AK-47, etc.)

- o **Gun Control** – Code when reference is made to regulating firearms ownership. This may include, but not be limited to, limiting magazine clip sizes, requirements for gun owners (e.g., background checks, registration), banning certain makes/models of guns, etc.

- o **Gun Rights (Right to Carry)** – Code when reference is made to protecting the rights of gun owners, such as right to carry, not limiting magazine sizes, etc.

- **MENTAL HEALTH**

  - o **Diagnoses** – A specific diagnosis (e.g., Asperger's, schizophrenia, etc.) related to the shooter's mental health is offered. The diagnosis must be concrete, not simply that someone thinks the shooter is representative of the diagnosis.

  - o **General Reference** – A catch-all category for any reference to the shooter's mental health that is not directly related to a diagnosis, medication, or prior warning sign. Examples include, but are not limited to, discussion about therapy or counseling, references to their state of mind (e.g., crazy, paranoid, etc.), general references to mentally ill people (in a more macro-level discussion), mental health care, etc.

  - o **Medications** – Specific reference to any type of medication (either generally or by name, such as Luvox, Prozac, etc.) is made. The medication must be related to mental illness, not drugs (e.g., marijuana) more generally.

  - o **Prior Warning Signs** – The shooter has exhibited some form of prior warning sign before the shooting that is mentioned. This may include suicide attempts, specific threats of suicide or of bodily harm to one's self or others, etc.

- **MEMORIALS** – Code this node for when reference is made to memorial events or funerals for the victims, special tributes, or to references to specific memorials (e.g., flags flying at half-staff, shrines, etc.).

- **VIOLENT MEDIA AS A CAUSAL FACTOR** – Code for this node when reference is made to violent media as a causal factor for these shootings, such as blaming video games, music, or movies (either specific titles or more generally) for desensitizing shooters or the public to violence. Some related statements will be very blatant, while others may be more implied.

REFERENCES

Addington, L.A. (2003). Students' fear after Columbine: Findings from a randomized experiment. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology, 19*(4), 367-387.

Agger, B. (1989). *Fast capitalism: A critical theory of significance.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Altheide, D.L. (1987). Ethnographic content analysis. *Qualitative Sociology, 10*, 1065-1077.

Altheide, D.L. (2009a). Moral panic: From sociological concept to public discourse. *Crime Media Culture, 5*(1), 79-99.

Altheide, D.L. (2009b). The Columbine shooting and the discourse of fear. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1354-1370.

Altheide, D.L., & Schneider, C.J. (2013). *Qualitative media analysis* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.

Barak, G. (1994). Media, society, and criminology. In G. Barak (Ed.), *Media, process, and the social construction of crime: Studies in newsmaking criminology* (pp. 3-45). New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Beale, S.S. (2006). The news media's influence on criminal justice policy: How market-driven news promotes punitiveness. *William and Mary Law Review, 48*(2), 397-481.

Becker, H.S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance*. New York: Free Press.

Bell, A. (1991). *The language of news media.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

Berg, B.L. (2007). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Berger, P.L., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge.* Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Berkowitz, D. (1987). TV news sources and news channels: A study in agenda-building. *Journalism Quarterly, 64*(2), 508-513.

Best, J. (1987). Rhetoric in claims-making: Constructing the missing children problem. *Social Problems, 34*(2), 101-121.

Best, J. (1989). Secondary claims-making: Claims about threats to children on network news. *Perspectives on Social Problems, 1,* 259-282.

Best, J. (2006). The media exaggerate the school-shooting problem. In S. Hunnicutt (Ed.), *School Shootings* (pp. 18-27). Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press.

Birkland, T.A., & Lawrence, R.G. (2009). Media framing and policy change after Columbine. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1405-1425.

Bix, B. (2013). John Austin. In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring Edition). Retrieved from http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/austin-john/.

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Bonnie, R.J., Reinhard, J.S., Hamilton, P., & McGarvey, E.L. (2009). Mental health system transformation after the Virginia Tech tragedy. *Health Affairs, 28*(3), 793-804.

Buckler, K. & Travis, L. (2005). Assessing the newsworthiness of homicide events: An analysis of coverage in the *Houston Chronicle*. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture 12*(1), 1-25.

Burns, R., & Crawford, C. (1999). School shootings, the media, and public fear: Ingredients for a moral panic. *Crime, Law & Social Change, 32*, 147-168.

Callanan, V.J. (2012). Media consumption, perceptions of crime risk and fear of crime: Examining race/ethnic differences. *Sociological Perspectives, 55*(1), 93-115.

Carvalho, E.J. (2010). The poetics of a school shooter: Decoding political signification in Cho Seung-Hui's multimedia manifesto. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, 32*, 403-430.

Cerulo, K. (1998). *Deciphering violence: The cognitive structure of right and wrong*. New York: Routledge.

Chermak, S.M. (1994a). Body count news: How crime is presented in the news media. *Justice Quarterly, 11*(4), 561-582.

Chermak, S.M. (1994b). Crime in the news media: A refined understanding of how crime becomes news. In G. Barak (Ed.), *Media, Process, and Social Construction of Crime: Studies in Newsmaking Criminology* (pp. 95-130). New York: Garland.

Chermak, S.M. (1995) *Victims in the news: Crime and the American news media.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Chermak, S.M. (1998). Predicting story crime salience: The effects of crime, victim, and defendant characteristics. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 26*(1), 61-70.

Chiricos, T., Eschholz, S., & Gertz, M. (1997). Crime, news and fear of crime: Toward an identification of audience effects. *Social Problems, 44*(3), 342-357.

Chiricos, T., Padgett, K., & Gertz, M. (2000). Fear, TV news, and the reality of crime. *Criminology, 38*(3), 755-785.

Chyi, H.I., & McCombs, M.E. (2004). Media salience and the process of framing: Coverage of the Columbine school shootings. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 81*(1), 22-35.

Cohen, B.C. (1963). *The press and foreign policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cohen, S. (1972). *Folk devils and moral panics: The creations of the Mods and the Rockers*. London: MacGibbon & Kee.

Coleman, L. (2004). *The copycat effect: How the media and popular culture trigger the mayhem of tomorrow's headlines*. New York: Paraview Pocket Books.

Consalvo, M. (2003). The monsters next door: Media construction of boys and masculinity. *Feminist Media Studies, 3*(1), 27-45.

Couldry, N. (2008). Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling. *New Media & Society, 10*(3), 373-391.

Deacon, D. (2007). Yesterday's papers and today's technology: Digital newspaper archives and 'push button' content analysis. *European Journal of Communications, 22*(1), 5-25.

deYoung, M. (1998). Another look at moral panics: The case of satanic day care centers. *Deviant Behavior, 19*(3), 257-278.

Doob, A.N., & McDonald, G.E. (1979). Television viewing and fear of victimization: Is the relationship causal? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37*(2), 170-179.

Downs, A. (1972). Up and down with ecology: the 'issue-attention cycle." *Public Interest, 28*, 38-50.

Duwe, G. (2000). Body-count journalism: The presentation of mass murder in the news media. *Homicide Studies, 4*(4), 364-399.

Duwe, G. (2005). A circle of distortion: The social construction of mass murder in the United States. *Western Criminology Review, 6*(1), 59-78.

Edmonds, R., Guskin, E., Rosenstiel, T., & Mitchell, A. (2012, April 11). Newspapers: Building digital revenues proves painfully slow. *The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism: The State of the News Media 2012*. Retrieved from http://stateofthemedia.org/2012/newspapers-building-digital-revenues-proves-painfully-slow/.

Elsass, H.J., Schildkraut, J., & Stafford, M.C. (2013). *Breaking news of social problems: Examining media consumption and panic over school shootings.* Manuscript submitted for publication (copy on file with author).

Entman, R.M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 43*(4), 51-58.

Entman, R.M. (2007). Framing bias: Media in the distribution of power. *Journal of Communication, 57*(1), 163-173.

Fallahi, C.R., Austad, C.S., Fallon, M., & Leishman, L. (2009). A survey of the perceptions of the Virginia Tech tragedy. *Journal of School Violence, 8*(2), 120-135.

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2012). Table 20: Murder, by state, types of weapons, 2012. *Crime in the United States*. Retrieved from http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2012/crime-in-the-u.s.-2012/tables/20tabledatadecpdf/table_20_murder_by_state_types_of_weapons_2012.xls.

Ford, J. (2011, December 6). The encyclopedia of Arkansas history & culture: Westside school shooting. Retrieved from http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=3717.

Fox, J.A., Levin, J., & Quinet, K. (2012). *The will to kill: Making sense of senseless murder* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Frymer, B. (2009). The media spectacle of Columbine: Alienated youth as an object of fear. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1387-1404.

Gandy, O.H. (1982). *Beyond agenda setting: Information subsidies and public policy.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Gans, H.J. (1979). *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time.* New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Garofalo, J. (1981). Crime and the mass media: A selective review of the research. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 18*(2), 319-350.

Garrett, P., & Bell, A. (1998). Media and discourse: A critical overview. In A. Bell & P. Garrett (Eds.), *Approaches to media discourse* (pp. 1-20). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Signorelli, N., & Morgan, M. (1980). Television violence, victimization, and power. *American Behavioral Scientist, 23*(5), 705-716.

Gieber, W. (1964). News is what newspapermen make it. In L.A. Dexter & D.M. White (Eds.) *People, Society, and Mass Communications* (pp. 173-191). New York: Free Press.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Goode, E., & Ben-Yehuda, N. (1994). Moral panics: Culture, politics, and social construction. *Annual Review of Sociology, 20*, 149-171.

Graber, D.A. (1980). *Crime news and the public*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Graber, D.A. (2006). *Mass media and American politics* (7th ed.). Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Griffin, P., Torbet, P., & Szymanski, L. (1998). Trying juveniles as adults in criminal court: An analysis of state transfer provisions. Washington, D.C.: Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved from http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/tryingjuvasadult.

Gruenewald, J., Pizarro, J., & Chermak, S. (2009). Race, gender, and the newsworthiness of homicide incidents. *Journal of Criminal Justice 37*(3), 262-272.

Harris, J.M., & Harris, R.B. (2012). Rampage violence requires a new type of research. *American Journal of Public Health, 102*(6), 1054-1057.

Hay, C. (1995). Mobilization through interpellation: James Bulger, juvenile crime, and the construction of a moral panic. *Social Legal Studies, 4*(2), 197-223.

Heath, L. (1984). Impact of newspaper crime reports on fear of crime: Multimethodological investigation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 47*(2), 263-276.

Heath, L., & Gilbert, K. (1996). Mass media and the fear of crime. *The American Behavioral Scientist, 39*(4), 379-386.

Hier, S.P. (2002). Raves, risk, and the ecstasy panic: A case study in the subversive nature of moral regulation. *The Canadian Journal of Sociology, 27*(1), 33-57.

Humphries, D. (1981). Serious crime, news coverage, and ideology: A content analysis of crime coverage in a metropolitan paper. *Crime and Delinquency, 27*: 191-205.

Janowitz, M. (1975). Professional Models in Journalism: The Gatekeeper and the Advocate. *Journalism Quarterly, 52*(4), 618-626.

Jenkins, B.M. (1981). *The psychological implications of media-covered terrorism*. Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation.

Jewkes, Y.E. (2004). *Media & crime: Key approaches to criminology*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Johnstone, J., Hawkins, D., & Michener, A. (1994). Homicide reporting in Chicago dailies. *Journalism Quarterly 71(4)*, 860-872.

Jones, B.J., McFalls, J.A., & Gallagher, B.J. (1989). Toward a unified model for social problems theory. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior, 19*(3), 337-356.

Kalish, R., & Kimmel, M. (2010). Suicide by mass murder: Masculinity, aggrieved entitlement, and rampage school shootings. *Health Sociology Review, 19*(4), 451-464.

Kaminski, R.J., Koons-Witt, B.A., Thompson, N.S., & Weiss, D. (2010). The impacts of Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University shootings on the fear of crime on campus. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 38*(1), 88-98.

Kellner, D. (2003). *Media spectacle*. London: Routledge.

Kellner, D. (2008a). *Guys and guns amok: Domestic terrorism and school shootings from the Oklahoma City bombing to the Virginia Tech massacre*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Kellner, D. (2008b). Media spectacle and the "Massacre at Virginia Tech". In B. Agger & T.W. Luke (Eds.), *There is a gunman on campus* (pp. 29-54). Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Kohm, S.A., Waid-Lindberg, C.A., Weinrath, M., Shelley, T.O., & Dobbs, R.R. (2012). The impact of media on fear of crime among university students: A cross-national comparison. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice, 54*(1), 67-100.

Kupchik, A., & Bracy, N.L. (2009). The news media on school crime and violence. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 7*(2), 136-155.

Landis, J.R., & Koch, G.G. (1977). The measurement of observer agreement for categorical data. *Biometrics*, *33*(1), 159-174.

Langman, P. (2009). Rampage school shooters: A typology. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 14*(1), 79-86.

Larkin, R.W. (2007). *Comprehending Columbine.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Larkin, R.W. (2009). The Columbine Legacy: Rampage Shootings as Political Acts. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1309-1326.

Lawrence, R., & Mueller, D. (2003). School shootings and the man-bites-dog criterion of newsworthiness. *Youth Violence & Juvenile Justice, 1*(4), 330-345.

Leavy, P., & Maloney, K.P. (2009). American reporting of school violence and 'people like us': A comparison of newspaper coverage of the Columbine and Red Lake school shootings. *Critical Sociology, 35*(2), 273-292.

Lindgren, S. (2011). YouTube gunmen: Mapping participatory media discourse on school shooting videos. *Media Culture & Society, 33*(1), 123-136.

Lipschultz, J.H., & Hilt, M.L. (2011). Local television coverage of a mall shooting: Separating facts from fiction in breaking news. *Electronic News, 5*(4), 197-214.

Liska, A.E. & Baccaglini, W. (1990). Feeling safe by comparison: Crime in the newspapers. *Social Problems 37*(3), 360-374.

Liska, A.E., Lawrence, J.J., & Sanchirico, A. (1982). Fear of crime as a social fact. *Social Forces, 60*(3), 760-770.

Lundman, R. (2003). The newsworthiness and selection bias in news about murder: Comparative and relative effects of novelty and race and gender typifications on newspaper coverage of homicide. *Sociological Forum 18(3)*, 357-386.

Macdonald, M. (2003). *Exploring media discourse*. Abingdon, UK: Bookpoint Ltd.

Maguire, B., Sandage, D., & Weatherby, G.A. (1999). Crime stories as television news: A content analysis of national big city and small town newscasts. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture 7(1)*, 1-14.

Maguire, B., Weatherby, G.A., & Mathers, R.A. (2002). Network news coverage of school shootings. *The Social Science Journal, 39*(3), 465-470.

massacre. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved February 15, 2014, from Dictionary.com website: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/massacre?s=t.

Mayr, A., & Machin, D. (2012). *The language of crime and deviance: An introduction to critical linguistic analysis in media and popular culture*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

McCombs, M.E. (1997). Building consensus: The news media's agenda-setting roles. *Political Communication, 14*(4), 433-443.

McCombs, M.E., & Bell, T. (1996). The agenda-setting role of mass communication. In. M. Salwen & D. Stacks (Eds.), *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research* (pp. 93-110). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

McCombs, M.E, & Shaw, D.L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of the mass media. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 36*(2), 176-187.

McCombs, M.E, & Zhu, J.H. (1995). Capacity, diversity, and volatility of the public agenda: Trends from 1954 to 1994. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 59*(4), 495-525.

McCorkle, R.C., & Miethe, T.D. (1998). The political and organizational response to gangs: An examination of a "moral panic" in Nevada. *Justice Quarterly, 15*(1), 41-64.

Meyers, M. (1997). *News coverage of violence against women: Engendering blame.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mink, T. (2006). *Sheriff Ted Mink's statement regarding Columbine tapes*. Golden, CO: Jefferson County Sheriff's Office. Retrieved from http://www.co.jefferson.co.us/jeffco/news_uploads/sheriff_statement_061906.pdf.

Muschert, G.W. (2002). *Media and massacre: The social construction of the Columbine story*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, CO.

Muschert, G.W. (2007a). Research in school shootings. *Sociology Compass, 1*(1), 60-80.

Muschert, G.W. (2007b). The Columbine victims and the myth of the juvenile superpredator. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 5*(4), 351-366.

Muschert, G.W. (2009). Frame-changing in the media coverage of a school shooting: The rise of Columbine as a national concern. *The Social Science Journal, 46*(1), 164-170.

Muschert, G.W., & Carr, D. (2006). Media salience and frame changing across events: Coverage of nine school shootings, 1997-2001. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 83*(4), 747-766.

Muschert, G.W. and Larkin, R.W. (2007). The Columbine High School shootings. In S. Chermak & F.Y. Bailey (Eds.), *Crimes and trials of the century* (pp. 253-266). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Muschert, G.W. and Ragnedda, M. (2010). Media and violence control: The framing of school shootings. In W. Heitmeyer, H. G. Haupt, S. Malthaner, & A. Kirschner (Eds.), *The Control of Violence in Modern Society: Multidisciplinary Perspectives, From School Shootings to Ethnic Violence* (pp. 345-361). New York: Springer Publishing.

Nacos, B.L. (2010). Revisiting the contagion hypothesis: Terrorism, news coverage, and copycat attacks. *Perspectives on Terrorism, 3*(3), 3-13. Retrieved from http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/73/html.

Newman, K.S. (2006). School shootings are a serious problem. In S. Hunnicutt (Ed.), *School Shootings* (pp. 10-17). Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press.

Newman, K.S., Fox, C., Harding, D.J., Mehta, J., and Roth, W. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York: Basic Books.

Ogle, J.P., Eckman, M., & Leslie, C.A. (2003). Appearance cues and the shootings at Columbine High: Construction of a social problem in the print media. *Sociological Inquiry, 73*(1), 1-27.

Ollove, M. (2013, November 21). 37 states increase mental health budgets. *The Pew Charitable Trusts: State and Consumer Initiatives*. Retrieved from http://www.pewstates.org/research/analysis/37-states-increase-mental-health-budgets-85899521967.

O'Neal, G.S. (1997). Clothes to kill for: An analysis of primary and secondary claims-making in print media. *Sociological Inquiry, 67*(3), 336-349.

O'Toole, M.E. (2000). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective.* Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation. Retrieved from http://www.fbi.gov/publications/school/school2.pdf.

Paltridge, B. (2012). *Discourse analysis: An introduction* (2nd ed.). London: Bloomsbury.

Paulsen, D. (2003). Murder in black and white: The newspaper coverage of homicide in Houston. *Homicide Studies 7*(3), 289-317.

Pollak, J.M. & Kubrin, C.E. (2007). Crime in the news: How crimes, offenders and victims are portrayed in the media. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture, 14*(1), 59-83.

Pritchard, D. (1985). Race, homicide, and newspapers. *Journalism Quarterly 62*(3), 500-507.

Pritchard, D. & Hughes, K. (1997). Patterns of deviance in crime news. *Journal of Communication 47(3)*, 49-67.

rampage. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved February 15, 2014, from Dictionary.com website: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/rampage.

Reese, S.D. (2007). The framing project: A bridging model for media research revisited. *Journal of Communication, 57*(1), 148-154.

Richardson, J.E. (2011). "Our England": Discourses of "race" and class in party election leaflets. In J.E. Richardson & J.D. Burridge (Eds.), *Analysing Media Discourses* (pp. 47-61). London: Routledge.

Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F.G. (1998). *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Robinson, M.B. (2011). *Media coverage of crime and criminal justice*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.

Romer, D., Jamieson, K.H., & Aday, S. (2003). Television news and the cultivation of fear. *Journal of Communication, 53*(1), 88-104.

Rothe, D., & Muzzatti, S.L. (2004). Enemies everywhere: Terrorism, moral panic, and US civil society. *Critical Criminology, 12*(3), 327-350.

Sacco, V.F. (1995). Media constructions of crime. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 539*, 141-154.

Scheufele, D.A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication, 49*(1), 103-122.

Scheufele, D.A., & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication, 57*(1), 9-20.

Schildkraut, J. (2012a). Media and massacre: A comparative analysis of the reporting of the 2007 Virginia Tech shootings. *Fast Capitalism, 9*(1). Retrieved from http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/9_1/schildkraut9_1.html.

Schildkraut, J. (2012b). The remote is controlled by the monster: Issues of mediatized violence and school shootings. In G.W. Muschert & J. Sumiala (Eds.), *School Shootings: Mediatized Violence in a Global Age* (pp. 235-258). Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing Group Limited.

Schildkraut, J., & Donley, A.M. (2012). Murder in black: A media distortion analysis of homicides in Baltimore in 2010. *Homicide Studies, 16*(2), 175-196.

Schildkraut, J., & Hernandez, T.C. (2013). Laws that bit the bullet: A review of legislative responses to school shootings. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*. doi: 10.1007/s12103-013-9214-6.

Schildkraut, J., & Muschert, G.W. (2013). Violent media, guns, and mental illness: The three ring circus of causal factors for school massacres, as related in media discourse. *Fast Capitalism, 10*(1). Retrieved from http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/10_1/schildkraut10_1.html.

Schildkraut, J., & Muschert, G.W. (2014). Media salience and the framing of mass murder in schools: A comparison of the Columbine and Sandy Hook school massacres. *Homicide Studies, 18*(1), 23-43.

Schildkraut, J., Elsass, H.J., & Stafford, M.C. (2013a). *Could it happen here? Moral panics, school shootings, and fear of crime among college students*. Manuscript submitted for publication (copy on file with author).

Schildkraut, J., Elsass, H.J., & Stafford, M.C. (2013b). *Moral panics or media panics? Examining the relationship between media consumption and moral panics about school shootings*. Manuscript submitted for publication (copy on file with author).

Schudson, M. (1989). The sociology of news production. *Media Culture Society, 11*(4), 263-282.

Serazio, M. (2010). Shooting for fame: Spectacular youth, web 2.0 dystopia, and the celebrity anarchy of generation mash-up. *Communication, Culture & Critique, 3*, 416-434.

Shoemaker, P.J. (2006). News and newsworthiness: A commentary. *Communications, 31*(1), 105-111.

Shoemaker, P.J., & Reese, S.D. (1996). *Mediating the message: Theories of influence on mass media content* (2nd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers USA.

shooting. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved February 15, 2014, from Dictionary.com website: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/shooting?s=t.

Snider, J.H., & Janda, K. (1998, September). *Newspapers in bytes and bits: Limitations of electronic databases for content analysis*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, MA.

Soothill, K. & Grover, C. (1997). A note on computer searches of newspapers. *Sociology, 31*(3), 591-596.

Soraghan, M. (2000). Colorado after Columbine: The gun debate. *State Legislatures, 26*(6), 14-21.

Sorenson, S.B., Manz, J.G., & Berk, R.A. (1998). News media coverage and the epidemiology of homicide. *American Journal of Public Health, 88*(10)*, 1510-1514.

Spector, M., & Kitsuse, J.I. (1977). *Constructing social problems.* Menlo Park, CA: Cummings.

Springhall, J. (1999). Violent media, guns, and moral panics: The Columbine High School Massacre, 20 April 1999. *Paedagogica Historica, 35*(3), 621-641.

Stafford, M.C. & Galle, O.R. (1984). Victimization rates, exposure to risk, and fear of crime. *Criminology, 22*(2), 173-185.

Stretesky, P.B., & Hogan, M.J. (2001). Columbine and student perceptions of safety: A quasi-experimental study. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 29*(5), 429-443.

Surette, R. (1992). *Media, crime, & criminal justice: Images and reality.* Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Tankard, J.W. (2001). The empirical approach to the study of media framing. In S.D. Reese, O.H. Gandy, & A.E. Grant (Eds.), *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world* (pp. 95-106). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Tanner, C.H. (2000). Arkansas's Extended Juvenile Jurisdiction Act: the balance of offender rehabilitation and accountability. *University of Arkansas Little Rock Law Review, 22,* 647–657.

Tonso, K.L. (2009). Violent masculinities as tropes for school shooters: The Montréal massacre, the Columbine attack, and rethinking schools. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1266-1285.

Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making news: A study in the construction of reality.* New York: Free Press.

U.S. Department of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2012). *Crime in the United States, 2011: Annual Uniform Crime Report.* Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/index-page.

van Dijk, T.A. (1988). *News as discourse*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Virginia Tech Review Panel (2007). *Mass shootings at Virginia Tech April 16, 2007: Report of the review panel.* Arlington, VA: Governor's Office of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Retrieved from http://www.governor.virginia.gov/TempContent/techpanelreport.cfm.

Waddington, P.A.J. (1986). Mugging as a moral panic: A question of proportion. *British Journal of Sociology, 37*(2), 245-259.

Warr, M. (1984). Fear of victimization: Why are women and the elderly more afraid? *Social Science Quarterly, 65*(3), 681-702.

Warr, M. (2000a). Fear of Crime in the United States: Avenues for Research and Policy. In D. Duffee (ed.), *Measurement and Analysis of Crime: Criminal Justice 2000*. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs

Warr, M. (2000b). Public perceptions and reactions to crime. In J. Sheley (Ed.), *Criminology: A contemporary handbook* (pp. 13-31). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Weaver, D., & Elliott, S.N. (1985). Who sets the agenda for the media? A study of local agenda-building. *Journalism Quarterly, 62*(1), 87-94.

Weaver, D.A., & Bimber, B. (2008). Finding news stories: A comparison of searches using Lexisnexis and Google News. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 85*(3), 515-530.

Weaver, D.H. (2007). Thoughts on agenda setting, framing, and priming. *Journal of Communication, 57*(1), 142-147.

Weiss, A. & Chermak, S.M. (1998). The news value of African-American victims: An examination of the media's presentation of homicide. *Journal of Crime and Justice, 21*(2), 71-88.

Weitzer, R., & Kubrin, C.E. (2004). Breaking news: How local TV news and real-world conditions affect fear of crime. *Justice Quarterly, 21*(3), 497-520.

Welch, M., Price, E.A., & Yankey, N. (2002). Moral panic over youth violence: Wilding and the manufacturing of menace in the media. *Youth & Society, 34*(1), 3-30.

Wigley, S., & Fontenot, M. (2009). Where media turn during crises: A look at information subsidies and the Virginia Tech Shootings. *Electronic News, 3*(2), 94-108.

Zatz, M.S. (1987). Chicano youth gangs and crime: The creation of a moral panic.
    Crime, Law and Social Change, 11(2), 129-158.

News Articles Cited

ABC News. (2007, April 19). Gunman mailed package between shootings. Retrieved
    from http://abclocal.go.com/wtvd/story?section=news/local&id=5220434.

Associated Press. (2012, November 16). Blaec Lammers 'Twilight' shooting plot:
    Police foil copycat's shooting plans at Missouri theater. Retrieved from
    http://www.abc15.com/dpp/news/national/mo-man-charged-with-plotting-mass-
    shooting-at-twilight-screening1353107658516.

Barron, J. (2012, December 14). Nation reels after gunman massacres 20 children at
    school in Connecticut. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from
    http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/15/nyregion/shooting-reported-at-connecticut-
    elementary-school.html.

Boyer, D. (2013, December 10). A year after Newtown, WH OKs $100M for mental
    health. *The Washington Times*. Retrieved from
    http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/dec/10/year-after-newtown-white-
    house-oks-100m-mental-hea/.

Brennan, A. (2012, December 20). The list: Despite emotions, little happens
    legislatively after mass shootings. *CNN Politics*. Retrieved from
    http://www.cnn.com/2012/12/20/politics/legislation-after-mass-
    shootings/index.html.

Carlson, S. (2005, October). The Net Generation goes to college: Tech savvy
    'Millennials' have lots of gadgets, like to multitask, and expect to control what,
    when, and how they learn. Should colleges cater to them? *The Chronicle of
    Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/article/The-Net-
    Generation-Goes-to/12307.

Cloud, J. (1999, November 28). The Columbine effect. *Time*. Retrieved from
    http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,35098-1,00.html.

Frosch, D., & Johnson, K. (2012, July 20). Gunman kills 12 in Colorado, reviving gun
    debate. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from
    http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/21/us/shooting-at-colorado-theater-showing-
    batman-movie.html?ref=michaelsschmidt.

Gibbs, N. & Roche, T. (1999, December 20). The Columbine tapes. Retrieved from
    http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,992873,00.html.

Hack, C. (2012, December 17). Former Jersey Journal reporter helped clear up misidentification of Connecticut school gunman. *The Jersey Journal.* Retrieved from http://www.nj.com/jjournal-news/index.ssf/2012/12/confusion_about_killers_name_i.html.

Harmon, A. (2012, December 18). Fearing a stigma for people with autism. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/18/health/fearing-a-stigma-for-people-with-autism.html.

Hoffman, A. (2007, April 20). School threats sweep country. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2007/04/19/AR2007041900918.html.

Johnson, K., & Kovaleski, S.F. (2012, December 12). Series of turning points limited death toll at Oregon mall. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/13/us/oregon-mall-closed-after-deadly-shooting.html.

Roberts, J. (2009, February 11). Gun used in rampage traced to Va. Shops. *CBS News*. Retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500690_162-2695059.html.

Santos, F. (2012, August 7). Life term for gunman after guilty plea in Tucson killings. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/08/us/loughner-pleads-guilty-in-2011-tucson-shootings.html?_r=1.

Soliwon, D., & Nelson, S. (2012, December 14). Was an innocent person wrongly identified as the Ryan Lanza responsible for the Connecticut elementary school shooting? *US News & World Report.* Retrieved from http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2012/12/14/was-an-innocent-person-wrongly-identified-as-ryan-lanza-responsible-for-connecticut-elementary-school-shooting.

Stanley, A. (2007, April 17). Deadly rampage and no loss for words. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/17/us/17tvwatch.html?ref=us.

Tavernise, S., & Preston, J. (2012, February 28). Ohio shooting suspect confesses, prosecutor says. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/29/us/ohio-school-shooting-suspect-confesses-prosecutor-says.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.