BROADCASTING BLOODSHED:
CONCENTRIC MOURNING AND MEDIA FRAMING
ACROSS RAMPAGE SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology

Spring 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank all those who have guided and supported me through this journey. I especially want to thank my committee members, Aaron Kupchik and Anne Bowler, for their continued assistance and encouragement; and my committee chair and advisor, Joel Best, for always offering insight and advice in how to grow as a scholar, and for pushing me to do so. Graduate school and completion of this thesis would not be possible without the love and support of my parents, Sue Beller and Terry Stout. An accomplishment of this nature truly takes a village, and I could not have done this without my dearest friends – Brendon Milne, Chuck Bonadio, Joanna Kovalski, and Kelsey Betz, my gratitude is ineffable. There are many more I could mention, but to all who contributed, advised, edited, and championed this project, thank you.

Dedicated in loving memory of Jamie Nicole Hood

September 23, 1994 – June 26, 2017
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ABSTRACT

Prior research on the media framing of school shootings has largely examined framing within events rather than across events. Further, less attention has been given to how these frames are disseminated – while prior studies have examined the impact of temporal distance on coverage, no study to date has examined how reporting of school shootings is influenced by physical distance. This paper examines coverage of eight school shootings across eight regional publications, focusing on the dissemination of the victim narrative and the impact of this narrative on collective mourning. Proposing my model of concentric mourning, I highlight how theories of collective mourning are limited in their failure to address the impacts of physical distance. Concentric mourning refers to the way emotional sentiments dissipate with larger degrees of separation between the victim and the bereaved. Feelings of mourning become less intense the farther one is from the victim - relationally, physically, or emotionally. I argue that the dissipation of mourning sentiments is influenced by the disproportionate propagation of the victim narrative. Findings highlight that the media attention given to a shooting, and the amount of coverage dedicated to the victim narrative, decrease with distance between publication and event across multiple incidents, thus impacting the way we collectively grieve and collectively remember school shooting episodes.
Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Moments after the last shell casing bounces off the linoleum floor, echoing through the school corridors in which laughter has suddenly been replaced by reverberating gunshots, mourning ensues. As families cope with the sudden loss of loved ones, the media incessantly discusses the rampage school shooting. The heavy news coverage following such events is all too familiar to the American public. While many studies have evaluated how these shootings are covered by the media (McCluskey, 2017; Muschert, 2007a; Muschert & Carr, 2006), few are attentive to (or focus on) differences in coverage across various news publications. Further, almost no research has examined whether media publications pay less attention to certain shootings than others.

Violent crimes, especially homicide, hold high levels of media attention (Chermak 1994, 1995; Huff-Corzie et al., 2014; Maguire, Sandage & Weatherby, 1999; Schildkraut, 2012; Surette, 1992). School shootings have been leading news stories during certain years (Fox & DeLatuer, 2014), and even among some of the most covered events of certain decades (Muschert 2002, 2009; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). The extensive coverage of these events has shaped the belief that
school shootings have been on the rise, however school violence has been declining\(^1\) (Best, 2006; Burns & Crawford, 1999; Muschert et al., 2014; Schildkraut, 2012).

Even with this decline in violence, school shootings continue to be covered diligently by the media time and time again. Part of this unremitting coverage can be attributed to what Downs (1972) refers to as the “issue-attention cycle.” This cycle, according to Downs, explains the way in which the media presents an issue to the public, who immediately become captivated by said topic, and then lose interest as a new story is introduced to recapture their attention (1972). In the case of school shootings, these events hold media salience for a short time before being supplanted by a new issue. Attention is diligently refocused upon the next shooting, thus restarting the cycle.

The attention a shooting incident receives tends to correlate with the number of victims, meaning that shootings with more fatalities will have significantly greater coverage (Duwe, 2007; Johnstone, Hawkins, and Michener, 1994; McClusky, 2017; Wilbanks, 1984). As Muschert and Sumiala state, “School shootings make and break news, and as the victims bleed the news stories lead” (2015, p. xvii). School shootings also receive extensive media attention because they are in schools, which are viewed as a safe gathering place; as Muschert and Ragnedda state, “Because of the symbolic importance of schools as community centers, attacks on schools generate media attention…” (2010, p. 347). It has also been noted that mass violence receives more

\(^1\) While an increase occurred between 2003-2006, school violence has been declining since 1999. 2009 had fewer incidents of violence than 1999-2000 (Robers, Zhang & Truman, 2012).
coverage when it occurs in public spaces (Duwe, 2007). Further, because the shootings are often committed by children against children, the media focuses on these cases to encapsulate or exemplify youth violence (Altheide, 2009; Kupchik & Bracy, 2009; Muschert, 2007b).

Thus far, studies have identified two important findings: 1) that school shootings receive significant media coverage, and 2) that this coverage can be explained by the nature of shootings and their victims. However, to date, no research on school shootings has examined how physical distance between the media publication site and the location of a shooting may influence coverage of these events. This can largely be attributed to the fact that most previous research examines national coverage by relying on the reporting in the New York Times, while ignoring regional coverage (e.g. Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Duwe, 2007; Lawrence, 2001; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). While examining national coverage of these events is important, it is also valuable to assess the way different regions may receive varying amounts and types of coverage, in turn providing disparate narratives across groups. Although prior studies have examined the impact of temporal distance on coverage (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014), no study to date has examined how reporting of school shootings might be influenced by physical distance. The first objective of this paper is to address this empirical gap by evaluating multiple school shootings across different regional publications to determine whether distance impacts coverage.
School Shootings, Media, and Mourning

While the prevalent perception of school shootings is that these tragedies occur frequently and often, these events are uncommon. The average number of homicides occurring between 1992 and 2015 at schools for school age children (5-18) is 23 deaths per year, meaning that there is roughly 1 homicide for every 2.78 million students enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Due to the rare nature of school shootings, the American public relies heavily on the news media for their understanding of these events – this reliance in turn shapes the collective understanding of such tragedies (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009; Chermak, 1995; Duwe, 2007; Graber, 1980; Muschert, 2007a; Schildkraut, 2012). The media is an “ubiquitous agent of socialization” which, given its prominent role, can “cultivate or construct audience perceptions of current event[s] and life realities” (Ogle & Eckman, 2002, p. 155; Best, 1987, 1997a). This occurs through the process of media framing, defined by James Tankard as “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.” (2001, pp. 100-101). Framing of dramatic news events bolsters the social construction of public problems (Lawrence, 2001).

If the public relies on the media to guide its understanding of these events, the media in turn constructs society’s understanding of ‘reality’ in line with the media frames and presentations through the process of mediatization (Hjarvard, 2008; Muschert, 2012; Schildkraut, 2012). “The concept of mediatization refers to the idea that social and cultural life become heavily influenced and shaped by the media on all
levels: private, public, social, and even international” (Muschert & Sumiala, 2015, p. xviii). Thus, the media further influences the public’s understanding of the victims of these shootings, and how this sudden loss of life ought to be collectively mourned (Fast, 2003; Hakala, 2015; Muschert, 2007b; Spencer & Muschert, 2009). Through the victim and mourning frames, the media bridges the gap between the victim and the spectator, expanding the suffering to a distant audience (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki 2004, 2006, 2008; Hakala, 2015).

However, to date there has been no examination in school shooting research as to whether these frames are influenced by physical distance from the shooting. Further, how these changes in distance may influence the mourning sentiments felt and experienced throughout the collective has remained unexplored. When evaluating the emotions about past events, accessing individuals’ unmediated emotional states is not possible. Hence, “Historical relics, such as journals, newspaper articles, and poems contain traces of emotions – confessional and circumstantial evidences by which we can make inferences about people’s emotional state” (Saito, 2006, p. 359). This study will utilize newspapers to analyze the dissemination of mourning sentiments to understand the varying emotional states throughout the collective public following rampage school shootings.

Following Trumbo’s (1995) explanation that attention given to an issue can be measured by the number of news stories it generates, there are two research question I will be answering in this paper. First: does coverage of school shootings dissipate with distance? Second: does distance influence the dissemination of the victim
narrative and mourning sentiments? To answer these questions, it is important to first examine the preexisting research in two areas: the media framing of school shootings and collective mourning.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research on School Shootings

Prior research on school shootings has focused principally on the effectiveness and/or implementation of preventative policies (e.g., Addington, 2009; Fox and Burstein, 2010; Fox and Delateur, 2014); on understanding the shooter’s motives (e.g., Böckler, Seeger & Heitmeyer, 2011; Langman, 2009; Leary et al., 2003); and on the social/political factors that may have contributed to the shooting (e.g., Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Larkin, 2007; Newman et al., 2005; Sullivan & Guerette, 2003;)

Little research has been done thus far to evaluate the way these events evoke a sense of collective mourning, or on the media’s role in disseminating a collective understanding of the victims in these rampages.

Most preexisting research on the media’s coverage of school shootings tends to either examine only one shooting across multiple publications, or examine multiple shootings across one publication (see McCluskey, 2017; Muschert, 2007a; Muschert & Carr, 2006). Stephanie Howells’ (2015) work is the exception to this statement, but her focus is only on school shootings in Canada. Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to examine multiple school shootings in the United States across multiple

2 For a detailed overview of the research on school shootings, see Muschert, 2007a.
For an event to capture the public’s attention, it must be dramatic and uniquely impact individuals (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010; Downs, 1972). Journalists and scholars tend to be drawn to one event when discussing school shootings - the Columbine High School shooting. It has been noted that no shooting has received as much attention as Columbine (Maguire, Sandage & Weatherby, 1999; Muschert, 2007b), thus making Columbine a problem-defining event (Altheide, 2009; Lawrence, 2001; Muschert, 2007a; Muschert & Larkin, 2007; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). The word Columbine itself has become a benchmark for discussing school violence (Kupchik & Bracy, 2009), implying “fear, social control, and above all else, loss.” (Altheide, 2002, p.234). Nichols’ (1997) foundational work in social problems research highlights the formulation of landmark narratives, in which an event can be used as a triggering reference point to encapsulate the problem being discussed. Columbine became a triggering event for the discussion of mass violence, making it a landmark narrative (Duwe, 2007).

Academics have continued to focus on Columbine for other reasons as well. Part of what made Columbine a landmark narrative was that the media was unable to draw on a previous shooting of that magnitude (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). Without any other anchor on how to report on the incident (Muschert, 2009), coupled with how the media documented the Columbine tragedy in real time (Muschert, 2002), Columbine set the precedent for how future school shootings would be discussed and framed by the media. While the issue of school violence had been on the national radar the previous year, Columbine occurred close to a large city, enabling reporters to
document the hours-long unfolding of the event in real time as student fled the school (Muschert, 2002). Coverage of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting 13 years after Columbine showed that the media still utilized the same framing that was fashioned to cover Columbine (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). Though Columbine set the precedent for how school shootings are covered by the media, it is still important to discuss and analyze the potential social impacts of other shootings, or school shootings in general, rather than focusing on one event. Media coverage of Columbine offers valuable lessons to draw upon regarding the media framing of school shootings, however this paper will discuss multiple shootings.

**Media Framing of School Shootings**

Erving Goffman (1974) conceptualized framing as the way individuals make sense of the world around them. This concept has since been refined by multiple scholars to explain the way in which the media discusses and presents social problems. Entman (1993) states that:

>To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (p. 52).

As noted above, Tankard defines a frame as, “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” (2001, pp. 100-101). Or, as Howells masterfully illustrates:

>Frames function to focus the readers’ attention to specific aspects of the story; just as the purpose of a picture frame is to clearly isolate attributes of the picture and to focus the viewers’ attention to what is inside the frame, media frames emphasize how news events will be
perceived…media frames can suggest what a reader should think about, and how to think about it (2015, p. 93).

Therefore, media frames guide the readers’ attention to a point of focus within the issue being discussed. These frames, in turn, shape society’s understanding of reality and socialize individuals (Hjarvard, 2008). Regarding school shootings, the impact of media framing is that it focuses the public’s attention onto certain aspects of the event, shaping how society conceptualizes aspects of the tragedy.

Frame analysis research on the media coverage of school shootings has provided vast amounts of information on what the dominant media frames tend to be, and the way they are presented. While it is outside the scope of this paper to address these findings in their entirety, it is important to highlight some areas of consensus as well as contention within the preexisting literature.

Primarily, prior research has focused on framing within events, meaning that the authors focused principally on exploring how the frames used by the media change through the reporting of a singular event, or by comparing two events. Investigation of these frames have focused on children and fear of victimization (e.g. Altheide, 2002); gun culture and popular culture (e.g. McCluskey, 2017); coverage enabling new shooters/shootings (e.g. Murray, 2017); and discussion of the shooter (e.g. Schildkraut, 2012). Chyi and McCombs (2004), demonstrated the way in which frame-changing (i.e. the media’s use of varying frames across the lifespan of an event) occurred during the Columbine coverage to maintain media salience of the event. Within their work, they were largely unconcerned with the thematic elements of the coverage, instead focusing on the spatial and temporal elements of the story. This work has since been expanded to examine the thematic elements that may be associated with these temporal and spatial frames (e.g. Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014).
through which it was noted that the victim narrative was a prominent theme in both the Columbine and Sandy Hook shootings. The key findings of the research evaluating framing within events has demonstrated that while the initial coverage begins with the specifics of the event, it shifts to discuss broader societal reactions and impacts (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert, 2009; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014).

Only a handful of studies have examined framing across events, in which multiple school shootings are compared to see how framing may vary across shootings. Using the coding scheme outlined by Chyi & McCombs (2004), Muschert & Carr (2006) examined 9 American school shootings that occurred between 1997 and 2001. Their findings indicate that across these events, reporting began by framing the shootings on the individual and community level (“present-tense concerns,” p. 760), before shifting to a focus on the societal implications of the shooting (“both present and future,” p. 760), and then returning to the community frame before dissipating (Muschert & Carr, 2006). Regarding thematic research, Howells (2015) – in her analysis of 27 Canadian school shootings over the course of 25 years – identified that the perpetrator frame and victim frame dominated over 50% of the coverage. Other scholars have noted that the victim frame is often one of the most used frames by the media following these events (Muschert, 2007b, 2009; Muschert & Schildkraut, 2014; Hakala, 2015; Schildkraut, 2012; Spencer & Muschert, 2009).

Therefore, media coverage of shootings is not only higher when there are more casualties, as discussed above, but also tends to focus intently on the victims. Part of the media focus on the victims is that this dramatic element of the event generates or maintains the salience of the tragedy within the news (Chermak, 1995). Cerulo (1998) highlights that violence in the media is often presented through one of four sequences
of narration – the victim sequence, the performer sequence, the contextual sequence, and the doublecasting sequence (p. 5). Within the victim sequence, newsworthiness is influenced by presenting the victims as “unlucky bystanders caught in the wrong place at the wrong time” (Cerulo, 1998, p. 26). Considerable coverage of the victims aligns with what Joel Best (1997b) refers to as the “ideology of victimization” in which the relationships between perpetrator and victim are unambiguous, and that the claims of victimization are to be left unquestioned (pp.10-13). To do so, the media must spend time constructing the deceased in a way that maintains their status as blameless victims, while simultaneously constructing the perpetrator as the blameworthy offender. Muschert (2007) highlights that the victim frame used by the media consists of four elements: identification/description of the victim; details of the victims’ death; memorial services for the victim; and special issues concerning the victim. These victim sequences often make the victims more relatable to the reader (Cerulo, 1998). Thus, the way in which the media portrays these events (i.e. the victim sequence) is important to the way the public receives, interprets, and understands these issues (i.e. as focused on the victims) (Barak, 1994; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

While the preexisting research on school shootings has been thorough in its examination of the media and framing, the impact of distance between shootings and publications has yet to be tested. Research that has evaluated geographic variation in newspaper coverage has presented varied findings. Some scholars have suggested that events will receive more coverage the “closer to home” that they are geographically (i.e. coverage decreasing with distance) (Adams, 1986; Koopmans & Vliegenhart, 2011; Molotch & Lester, 1975). Others have argued that distance does not impact coverage, but rather coverage depends on the perceived newsworthiness of the events
(Brooker-Gross, 1983; Gaddy & Tanjong, 1986; Walmsley, 1980). As noted above, school shootings are indeed newsworthy events—bringing forward my first research question of whether coverage of these shootings dissipates with distance.

Examining the overall coverage in relation to distance, while important, only provides a surface level understanding of what the effects of distance may be. As noted above, framing provides an understanding of events, in turn shaping what the public views as the reality of the incident. Although geographic variation has been observed to have an impact on framing (Bendix & Liebler, 1999), distance has yet to be applied as a variable in evaluating how the media frames school shootings. Furthermore, there has been no research to date examining the victim frame across school shooting events and how distance may impact the victim narrative. It has been noted that the media has the power to influence the way individuals experience the violence of school shootings as “victimizers, victims, witnesses or bystanders” (Muschert & Sumiala, 2015, p. xviii; Lundby, 2009), and affect mourning rituals following these tragedies (Pantti & Sumiala, 2009). Therefore, in evaluating the dissemination of the victim narrative, it is important to address the way in which society collectively mourns.

**Collective Mourning**

Emile Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* presents a paradigmatic statement of the sociological approach to mourning and bereavement. Durkheim maintains that there is a social and communal obligation to mourn. Death diminishes the immediate community, which typically responds by coming together; a process that serves to strengthen its weakened social bonds. The obligation to mourn is imposed by the community on everyone who had any form of contact with the
deceased. Through collective mourning the community itself feels the loss of a member and grieves as one unit rather than only as individuals (1995 [1912]). Robert Hertz’s (1960 [1907]) anthropological work further notes that the social order of a society is deeply disturbed in the aftermath of death, and that the group engages in bereavement rituals to repair the damaged social fabric. These rituals\(^3\) act to reaffirm the existing social order, as well as reassert common sacred values (Pantti & Sumiala, 2009).

Durkheim argues that the death of a community member diminishes the group, which typically responds by assembling together to lament the loss through rites aimed at “communing in sadness” (Durkheim, 1995 [1912], p. 405). These rites “enliven collective feeling,” reaffirming the social bonds of the bereaved and fortifying the group. The sense of loss and the impulse to grieve may emerge spontaneously, particularly among family members most immediately affected by the death. A community’s response to death and diminishment does not, however, merely mirror individuals’ sentiments. There is, Durkheim contends, a duty to mourn the loss of a group member, and this obligation is imposed – and enforced – by the community, so that even persons who feel little or no genuine grief are compelled to comport themselves in a manner consistent with the reigning sense of loss. Durkheim also implies that the intensity of loss and mourning is linked to the social and/or moral status of the deceased and the timing of her or his death. When death strikes high-status or morally-revered individuals or esteemed categories of persons, and when it

\(^3\) “Ritual refers to a form of action that includes dramatic symbolism and arouses emotions through which individuals might think, feel and act as members of a community (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Rothenbuhler, 1998).” (Pantti & Sumiala, 2009, p. 120).
occurs “off-schedule,” departing dramatically from social expectations about the timing of “normal deaths,” the intensity of loss and grieving is heightened. Instances in which young people perish are not expected in modern society, which prompt greater expressions of public grief and ritualization (Pantti & Sumiala, 2009).

Durkheim’s theory of loss and mourning, however, only encapsulated the sentiments and behavior experienced within small, traditional communities where all members were well acquainted and continually exposed to one another. In modern, large, heterogeneous societies, like the United States, citizens are not – and cannot be – connected in the same manner or engage in continual face-to-face interaction with everyone else. In this social context, the media plays a crucial connective role, bringing an otherwise dispersed population together by focusing their attention on events that are, presumably, of common interest. The substantive nature of these events ranges widely, from national elections to holidays, sporting events, and natural disasters.

Several studies have applied Durkheim’s theory of collective mourning to the way society and the media reacted to deaths of publicly prominent figures such as Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and Princess Diana. In his analysis of the media’s role in articulating the public sentiments surrounding the death of Lincoln, Schwartz (1991, p. 358) states, “Deaths that occur suddenly, like Lincoln’s, are shocks that arouse and concentrate strong emotions in a short interval of time”. This study, along with research on the deaths of Princess Diana (Kear & Steinberg, 1999; Walter, 1999) and John F. Kennedy (Kitch, 2000), highlight the important role the media plays in disseminating collective sentiments in large modern societies where the clear majority of members are not personally acquainted with the deceased. Kitch (2000)
argues that the media shapes the collective understanding of the deceased, while drawing individuals closer to the lamented.

When reporting on death and mourning rituals, the media does not just report on the events, but rather ‘performatively enacts’ these mourning rituals (Cottle, 2006). In events of national tragedy, the media have been noted as managing public emotion and guiding public rituals (Kitch, 2000; Pantti & Sumiala, 2009). It has been further noted that “the media’s treatment of mourning rituals offers important discursive resources for ‘doing’ ritual and expressing emotions related to it.” (Pantti & Sumiala, 2009, p. 123). Due to the number of lives lost in school shootings, these events already receive high levels of media coverage. High amounts of coverage also exist due to the symbolic value these victims hold - specifically because they are children who represent the future of society and whose lives have been abruptly ended (Pantti & Sumiala, 2009). Since the death of young people is not expected in modern society, their deaths become more ritualized than other deaths (Walter, 1991), especially through ‘mediatized rituals’ of mourning (Pantti & Sumiala, 2009). Therefore, the media shapes the way in which these events ought to be mourned through their coverage of the victims. The media’s coverage of these potentially galvanizing events revolving around death and loss is central to what I term concentric mourning.

My theory of concentric mourning refers to the way emotional sentiments dissipate with more degrees of separation between the victim and the bereaved. Feelings of mourning become less intense the farther one is from the victim - relationally, physically, or emotionally. This form of relational distance can be termed “circles of mourning,” in which the family of the victim is at the center of collective mourning, while the larger society is positioned on the periphery. The stronger one’s
relationship to the victim, the more central her or his position will be in the circle of mourning. Those closest to the center of this circle are likely to feel much stronger sentiments than those in its outer rings. Therefore, as degrees of separation between individuals and the deceased increase, feelings of loss and sentiments of mourning will decrease. As Durkheim ([1912] 1995) suggests, piacular rites\(^4\) and funerary services act to connect members of the community to the deceased. On those occasions when the modern media broadcasts these rites to the entire society, they serve, temporarily, to reduce the relational distance between the deceased and their families, on the one hand, and the broader social order, on the other (Pantti & Sumiala, 2009). By focusing society’s attention on a particular death, even if only for a fleeting moment, the media enables a nation to mourn.

How the victims are framed, and the frequency in which they are discussed, connects readers not only to the tragedy itself, but also to the feelings of loss (Hakala, 2015). Through the victim frame, readers are exposed to the value of the lives lost in the shooting, and are shown both their heroic nature, as well as their innocence (Muschert, 2007; Schildkraut, 2012). Therefore, the media’s presentation of the victims acts as a bridge, drawing individuals into the lives lost and in turn, a sense of mourning. It is important then to evaluate whether this victim frame is disseminated uniformly, for if it is, then it can be observed how society may mourn these tragedies collectively through the media. Although the media coverage of these events may bring the diminished society closer to the tragedy, invoking mourning sentiments, mourning cannot occur in the way Durkheim witnessed in small communities.

\(^4\) “…rites conducted on the occasion of death, misfortune, or collective crisis that are not expressions of individual feeling” (Fields, K.E.(Trans.) as quoted in Durkheim, ([1912] 1995).
Therefore, it is important to examine how mourning can occur outside the conventional group. Concentric mourning provides a framework for how we evaluate mourning across large, heterogeneous societies, rather than viewing it as equally disbursed collective grief. To test this, I will examine whether physical distance between school shootings and publications impacts the dissemination of the victim narrative.
Chapter 3
DATA AND METHODS

Sampling

To test the hypotheses mentioned above, I collected information across multiple newspapers. Being that the primary focus of this paper is both media dissemination of coverage and mourning sentiments surrounding school shootings, I sought to conduct a two-stage media analysis. Doing so required collecting data from news media organizations – following prior studies of school shootings (see McCluskey, 2017 for further discussion). Print media was selected as the media format of analysis. To understand the process of media diffusion of school shootings, multiple steps were taken to determine which shootings to evaluate, which publications to appraise, the temporal cutoff of coverage, and which articles to include.

While there has been much debate as to how researchers ought to typify a shooting as a rampage, a consensus on the definition has been reached. A rampage shooting can be defined by:

…the fact that they involve attacks on multiple parties, selected almost at random. The shooters may have a specific target to begin with, but they let loose with a fusillade that hits others, and it is not unusual for the perpetrator to be unaware of who has been shot until long after the fact. (Newman et. al., 2005, pp. 14-15).

Similarly, the widely-accepted definition for school shootings states that these shootings: “take place on a school-related public stage before an audience; involving
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” (Newman et al., 2005, p. 50). This study will use the criteria found within the work of Glenn Muschert (2007a) in which he outlines a typology of school shootings, including rampage shootings, mass murder, and targeted shootings.

Muschert and others (e.g. Duwe, 2000, 2007; Fox & Levin, 1998, p. 429) specify that for a shooting to be considered a rampage shooting, there must be 4 or more fatalities, not including the shooter. While some use 3 deaths (e.g. Dietz, 1986; Petee et al., 1997), or even 3 injuries as the criterion for a rampage, the primary reason for aligning this study with the standard of 4 deaths is that prior research using this benchmark have highlighted that it “minimizes the potential for measurement error in the identification of mass killings” (Duwe, 2007, p.16). From this point, to analyze the impact that the number of deaths may have on media coverage, I sought to filter shootings into two categories: large scale rampage shootings, which included more than 9 fatalities, and rampage shootings limited to 4-8 deaths. It then became important to find comparable cases for victims’ age, to evaluate the importance of victims’ age in coverage of the shooting. There is no clear comparison between such events, for categorizing a rare phenomenon with unique components is a near impossible task. However, given the average age of the victims and the number of victims, it is possible to compare cases that are different in their death toll while similar in the average age of the deceased.
The four large-scale rampage shootings selected were the events at Columbine High School, Sandy Hook Elementary School, Red Lakes High School, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Small-scale rampage shootings in which there were 4-8 deaths, excluding the shooter, were the events at the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB), Marysville Pilchuck High School, Westside Middle School, and Heath High School (For further discussion, see Appendix B).

Given the rare nature of rampage shootings, there are not enough events to have identical mirrored comparatives, however notable resemblances make some events similar, allowing for an assessment. Comparing the shootings in the way outlined above allows for an analysis of the impact death toll may have on media salience, and further allows for the claims of concentric mourning and media diffusion to be tested in a more generalizable way. It is important, then, that the way in which the large-scale rampage events selected are comparable with the small-scale rampage shootings using average age. Approached in this way, the comparatives were as follows: Virginia Tech (average age of student victims, 22; victim total, 32) and UCSB (average age of student victims, 20; victim total, 6); Columbine High School (average age of student victims, 16; victim total, 13) and Heath High School (average age of student victims, 15; victim total, 3); Red Lakes High School (average age of student victims, 15; victim total, 9) and Marysville Pilchuck High School (average age of student victims, 14; victim total, 4); Sandy Hook Elementary School (average age of student victims, 6; victim total, 27) and Westside Middle School (average age of student victims, 12; victim total, 5). The comparative of average age of student
victims can be seen below in Figure 1, and the differences between large-scale and small-scale rampage shootings is captured in Figure 2. Thus, these 8 shootings were selected as the episode of rampage school shootings to be analyzed in this study.

Next, I selected the major regional newspapers geographically close to each shooting that also maintained high levels of circulation within the state. I avoided analyzing papers that have been deemed national papers (i.e. *The New York Times* or *The Los Angeles Times*) and focused principally on publications with high state-level circulation close to the incident. The papers selected for each shooting are as follows in Table 1.1:

![Figure 1: Average age of student victims](image)

![Figure 2: Total number of victims in each shooting](image)
Table 1.1: Pairings of Shooting and Publication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shooting Location</th>
<th>Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandy Hook Elementary (CT)</td>
<td>The Hartford Courant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbine High School (CO)</td>
<td>The Denver Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Tech. (VI)</td>
<td>The Virginian-Pilot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCSB (CA)</td>
<td>The San Francisco Chronicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Lake High School (MN)</td>
<td>Minneapolis Star Tribune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marysville Pilchuck High School (WA)</td>
<td>The Seattle Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westside Middle School (AR)</td>
<td>Arkansas-Democrat Gazette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heath High School (KY)</td>
<td>Lexington Herald Leader</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After establishing these pairings, articles were collected using the Access World News database. While most public issues maintain media salience for 18.5 days on average (McCombs & Zhu, 1995), the Columbine shooting had a month-long lifespan (Chyi & McCombs, 2004). Following these prior studies on the coverage of school shootings, articles were collected for the 30 days following the event (e.g. Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014; Muschert & Carr, 2006; Muschert, 2009). Articles were then collected by searching the school name and town name across all publications for each shooting (see Appendix A for the details of each search term and time frame of each shooting).

For each publication and event, the articles were initially read over to determine which content was to be included or excluded. The exclusion criteria consisted of all news briefs, calendar events, TV listings, corrections, picture captions, sports briefs, donation information, duplicate articles, or year/week in review articles (these articles only mentioned the shooting without any substantive information).

5 While the Los Angeles Times (LAT) is the closest publication to the UCSB shooting, it was excluded from the analysis and supplanted with the San Francisco Chronicle (SFC) because the LAT is viewed as a national publication because it has the 4th highest circulation nationally, following the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, and USA Today. Multiple websites provide contradictory information regarding the circulation rate of SFC compared to San Jose Mercury News as being the most circulated. While both are near one another, a limitation of this study is that it does not analyze both.
While data from both articles and editorials was collected, editorials were later excluded from the analysis, rendering the population of articles collected across all events $N=2,816$. The distribution for each shooting is as follows: Sandy Hook = 593; Columbine = 1,178; Virginia Tech = 528; UCSB = 33; Red Lake = 166; Marysville = 57; Westside Middle School = 214; Heath = 47. The data was recorded, stored, and analyzed in Stata with the unit of analysis set as days after the shooting, storing the number of articles distributed each day for each shooting across a 30-day window.

**Qualitative Framing Analysis**

After collecting the 2,816 articles, I began the qualitative framing analysis. To begin this process, I had to first systematically select articles to code. Following Trumbo’s (1995) logic that attention can be measured by the number of articles an issue receives, the articles that had the highest word count demonstrated the aspect of the shooting that the media was giving the most attention to. For each shooting and publication, I selected the article with the highest word count for each of the first seven days of coverage, rendering a sample of 260 articles. This sample was coded and organized using NVivo software.

Each article was read to identify general themes, and from these themes, coding of the prominent frames was derived inductively. After this initial reading, each article was reread thoroughly, and each paragraph was coded separately. If the paragraph focused on multiple frames, whichever frame was the more dominant frame was recorded as being the overall frame. Coding in the manner allowed me to determine the dominant frame of the article by assessing which frame received the most attention on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis. Defining the dominant frame allowed me to create a variable for which frame an article adhered to. Articles were
then read a third time to ensure reliability. The analysis highlighted that across the 8 shootings, and all 8 publications, 12 frames were used when reporting these events.

An overview of these frames is displayed below in Table 2.1, and the number of corresponding articles to each framing category can be found Table 3.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.1: Number and Percentage of Articles Per Framing Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shooter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims/Mourning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplars/Signposts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culpability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resiliency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the “Victim/Mourning” frame is the primary focus of this paper, it is important to discuss this frame in more detail. Articles that fit within this frame primarily focused on discussing the victims’ lives, legacies, and moments leading up to their deaths. An example of the “Victim/Mourning” frame stands out in this excerpt following the shooting at UC Santa Barbara:

Christopher Martinez was an English major who planned to go to London next year and to law school after graduation, his father said.

He pulled out a photo of his son as a child in a Chicago Cubs baseball uniform and said they used to call him “mini-Sammy Sosa,” referring to the former Cubs star.

“Chris was a really great kid,” Richard Martinez said. “Ask anyone who knew him. His death has left our family lost and broken.” (Baker, 2014).
Articles that fit within this frame also displayed sentiments of mourning. These articles highlight individuals talking about the loss of their loved ones, and/or the grief and mourning sentiments surrounding the loss of life – an example of this can be seen in a Denver Post article following the Columbine shooting:

Thousands grieved for the dead at religious services in metro Denver, President Clinton asked for a moment of silent prayer at the White House, and the pope decried the violence from Rome. (Obmascik, 1999).

Expressions of grief were also seen in statements like, “Others who emerged from the day unscathed were torn in a different way.” (Tagami, 1997). This frame also encapsulated articles’ discussion of funeral precessions and the ways in which the victims or the shooting are being memorialized.

It should be noted that the frame of “Signpost/Exemplars” refers to articles in which the shooting was referenced in the discussion of another salient news event. An example of this can be seen in a Denver Post article discussing US shopping trends after the Sandy Hook shooting, in which the shooting was discussed only briefly:

Chris Angell, director of global marketing for Shopper Trak, said sales appear to have been negatively affected by the nearing "fiscal cliff," Hurricane Sandy, and the deadly shootings at the mall in Portland, Ore., and at the elementary school in Newtown, Conn. (Pankratz, 1999).

This code was also applied to articles that used the shooting as an exemplar, in which the shooting was referenced in support of claims being discussed regarding another shooting. As Howells describes it, “Links to previous shootings serve as a pre-existing
description that can easily draw upon feelings or emotions…exemplars are used to convey both similarities and differences between shootings” (2015, p. 105-107).

Some of these articles included topics such as a description of goth culture being misunderstood, a critique on life insurance policies for kids, and a general discussion of work conducted by school psychologists. These articles, whose dominate frame did not fit accurately into the preexisting dominant frames, were classified in the category of “Other”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1: Framing Categories and Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frame</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Events (n=64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impacts (n=35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shooter (n=32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention (n=29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns (n=25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims/Mourning (n=23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplars/Signposts (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media (n=10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culpability (n=8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (n=5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resiliency (n=4) & Articles describing overcoming tragedy, growing from event, healing, becoming stronger from the tragedy, or religious themes/redemption. \\
Mental Illness (n=3) & Articles discussing mental illness, prevention of shootings via focus on mental illness, mental illness of shooter, lack of services/need for more services.

Quantitative Analysis

With days for each event per publication as the unit of analysis, articles distributed each day for each publication were stored as a count variable for each shooting. The dependent variable thus became number of articles – across 8 publications and 8 shootings for a 30-day window, this created 1920 count variables for article frequency. A dependent variable measuring the word count from these articles for each day was created. Tracking the number of articles and word count for each day created a count variable, making a negative binomial regression the applicable test to examine what independent variables may influence coverage. Two separate regressions were conducted to examine these dependent variables.

Distance became the first measure following the research questions presented above. To measure distance, the distance between the location of the shooting and the address of each newspaper publication company was measured in miles. Variables were then created as control variable to determine what may impact coverage other than distance. As noted above, prior research has identified the lethality - number of victims and injuries – as a significant predictor to the amount of coverage an event will receive (e.g. Duwe, 2007; Johnstone, Hawkins, and Michener, 1994; McCluskey, 2017; Wilbanks, 1984). Therefore, variables were created for the number of victims and the number of injuries, respectively.

As Downs (1972) noted, the issue-attention cycle of news leads to stories being replaced by other events in a short period of time. Others have also observed how
coverage of school shootings fades during the first month of coverage (e.g. Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert, 2007b). Therefore, it was crucial to control for the impact that the elapsing of days may have on coverage. To do so, a variable for days after the shooting elapsed was established. It has been observed the victims’ gender and race also impact the amount of coverage a violent crime will receive, specifically that crimes against white victims and female victims receive more media attention (Duwe, 2007; Johnstone, Hawkins & Michener, 1994, pp. 866-868; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997). Disproportionate coverage to these victims made it important to create variables that accounted for both race and gender. To do so, I created variables to represent the proportion of female victims and non-white victims respectively. Lastly, a control variable was added to determine whether a prior mass shooting taking place close to the publication site influenced the amount of coverage.

Two variables were used to measure the salience of the victim frame. First, a dichotomous variable was used based on the dominant frame of the article, where articles in which the victim frame was the prevailing frame = 1, and all others = 0. With the victim frame variable as dichotomous variable, the test used to examine the frame change across distance was a logistic regression with the same independent variables applied. Secondly, having determined the dominant frame on a paragraph-to-paragraph basis, a count variable existed for how many paragraphs across all articles coded fit the victim frame, allowing me to also examine the dissemination of the victim frame using a negative binomial regression. Each publication has its own unique and unmeasured characteristics. To account for this, I ran a fixed effects model for the logistic regression and negative binomial regressions. A fixed effects model was chosen over a random effects model for two reasons: First, it is a more
conservative model; second, the identity of each paper is meaningful and known. In conducting the negative binomial regressions and the logistic regression, I examined the VIF to determine issues of multicollinearity in the final model and identified none. Two separate tests were then conducted: one to evaluate the impact that distance may have on coverage, and the other to examine the impact of distance on the victim frame. Each analysis included the independent control variables mentioned above.

There are some methodological limitations to this study. First, the systematic selection of articles for analysis does not provide an entirely comprehensive picture as to what the dominant frames may be, both regarding each of the shootings represented, as well as in a general sense. Future studies should attempt to create a more comprehensive and detailed sample by examining all the articles for a select period. A second limitation is that the selection of school shootings does not encapsulate all rampage school shootings that have occurred. This limitation may be rectified by creating a sample that includes all mass school shootings. Thirdly, this study does not include national coverage, television broadcasting, or online news sources. Prospective studies should examine the effects of images in these other media outlets to examine the way images of the victims are distributed to evoke mourning sentiments. Lastly, this study only examines the victim frame. The way other frames may be impacted by distance ought to be explored as well.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

Articles and Distance

In evaluating the impacts of distance on coverage, two separate negative binomial regressions were conducted. Table 4.1 (below) highlights these results, showing that distance significantly impacted the amount of attention a shooting received in both article count and word count. Findings in Model 1 (article count) and Model 2 (word count) both demonstrate that each control variable significantly influenced coverage of these shootings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1: Fixed effects negative binomial regression using IRR (robust standard errors) for number of articles and word count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=1,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days After Shooting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White Victims (Proportion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Victims (Proportion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald chi²(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob &gt; chi²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIF Range</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<0.001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05
As prior research has noted, the amount of coverage a shooting receives often lasts no more than a month (e.g. Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert, 2007b), slowly becoming less prominent as the public’s attention is shifted towards a new issue (Downs, 1972). With each day that passes from the time of the shooting, the odds that articles will cover the shooting decreases at a rate of 6.61% and word count decreases at a rate of 7%. Aligning with prior research that white victims hold more media attention (e.g. Duwe, 2007; Johnstone, Hawkins & Michener, 1994, pp. 866-868; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997), the results highlight that for each increase in the proportion of victims who were non-white (proportion in which 0=none and 1=all), coverage decreases at a rate of 91.72% and word count decreased by 96.34%, In contrast with the prior research however, an increase in the proportion of female victims (proportion in which 0=none and 1=all) displayed a decrease in articles published at a rate 97.87% for each female victim – word count decreases at a rate of 98.69%. Given that this finding runs contrary to most research on homicide victim coverage, future studies should examine whether female victims have the same effect when it comes to school shootings as they do in other violent crimes.

Consistent with prior findings that more coverage is given to episodes of mass violence that have more fatalities (Duwe, 2007; Johnstone, Hawkins, and Michener, 1994; McCluskey, 2017; Wilbanks, 1984), this analysis demonstrates that for each individual fatality increase, there is a 4.86% increase in the odds of coverage. Similarly, for each additional fatality, word count increases at a rate of 5.91%. While these same studies have noted that the number of injuries increases the perceived fatality of an event, and in turn increases coverage – the findings above depict a
divergent trend. For each additional injury, the odds of an event being covered decreased at a rate of 3.9% and word count decreases at a rate of 4.64%. This finding can readily be explained by the findings cited above – the media is more drawn to tragic death, therefore, less concerned with injuries. Since those who are injured survived the tragedy, the media is less likely to report on events with a high injury count compared to a high victim count, for “if it bleeds, it leads.”

Contributing to the literature is the finding that when a newspaper publication had experienced a school shooting in the region prior to the shooting they were currently reporting on, coverage decreased. Specifically, if a publication region experiences a shooting in their region prior to the event that is being reported on, the odds of reporting decreases at a rate of 66.26% for article count, and word count decreases at a rate of 54.66% for word count. School shootings have been noted as striking deep psychic blows (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014, p. 24). Experiencing, witnessing, and reporting on these massacres can be traumatizing to all involved in, and exposed to, such violence (Hakala, 2015). Jeff Alexander (2004) presents the concept of cultural trauma, stating:

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group conscious, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable way (p. 1).

Due to the traumatic nature of these events, the media may be less apt to report on future incidents. Rather than reporting on some distant “other,” the tragedy being reported on is one that the community has itself experienced. In this regard, the media may be less likely to cover the shooting to avoid re-traumatizing the community that they represent. Therefore, having had a massacre occur closer to home, it humanizes
Answering the first research question of this paper, as to whether distance influences the amount of attention (coverage) a shooting receives, the findings conclude that the impact of distance is significant. For each one mile increase in distance between a publication and a shooting, odds of the shooting being covered decreases at a rate of 0.07%. These findings indicate that coverage for a shooting will decrease by 7% for every 100 miles increase in distance. Placing this in context, the distance between Sandy Hook Elementary School and the San Francisco Chronicle is 2,597 miles, while distance to the Hartford Courant is 35 miles. Decreasing at a rate of 0.07%, the odds that the shooting at Sandy Hook will be covered decreases at a rate of 179.34% in the San Francisco Chronicle compared to the Hartford Courant. This finding highlights that the dissemination of information surrounding these events is distributed disproportionately – the further a newspaper publication is from the event, the less likely they are to report on the incident. Similarly, this trend can be observed with word count – for each one mile increase, the rate of word count decreases by 0.08%. The impact of distance on article distribution (Figure 3) and on word count (Figure 4) can be seen below:
Figure 3: Number of articles by distance

Figure 4: Word count per article by distance
Distance influencing coverage has two primary implications. First, the belief that school shootings are collectively experienced does not hold true considering these findings. If American school shootings were indeed the national tragedy that preexisting research has framed them as, then there would be little to no disparity in the amount of attention (number of articles) these shootings receive across publications. Second, this lack of uniformity in coverage suggests that the information consumed by readers regarding these tragedies is not distributed equally. If the information of these shootings is not distributed collectively, then the collective memory of these events will vary.

Maurice Halbwachs’ (2011 [1980]) groundbreaking work on collective memory highlights that the groups individuals belong to and the information they consume influence their understanding and memory of events. This memory is shaped and influenced by an orator that shapes the groups’ understanding, feeling, and perception about events. School shootings therefore are orated by the media, who shape the way in which the collective remembers these tragedies. Halbwachs states:

While the collective memory endures, and draws strength from its base in the coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember. While these remembrances are mutually supportive of each other and common to all, individual members still vary in the intensity with which they experience them…that this position itself changes as [their] relationships to other milieus change (p. 142).

Consistent with the findings above, this highlights that while all members of the American collective may remember the same events, the way that the event is recalled and experienced varies among groups. Thus, the way in which coverage of these
shootings decreases with geographical proximity demonstrates that the collective memory may be influenced by different groups receiving different information. Future research should examine how different groups may remember school shootings differently rather than collectively. With this finding, it is important to turn to the second research question of determining if framing of these shootings is also distributed disproportionately, furthering the impact that coverage of these events may have on readers’ collective memory of these shootings.

The Victim Narrative and Distance

Victim framing was evaluated using two variables, the first being a dichotomous variable of whether the dominant frame of the article was focused on the victim narrative (=1), or focused on other frames (=0). A fixed effect logistic regression was used to examine this variable, as depicted in Model 3 (Table 5.1). These findings highlight that, for each 1 unit increase in distance (i.e. 1 mile), the odds of an article using the victim frame decrease by 0.09%. Holding all other variables constant, this finding indicates that distance significantly influences the dissemination of the victim frame – the further a publication is from a shooting, the more the likelihood that the victim frame will be the dominant frame of coverage decreases. Distance therefore not only impacts the amount of attention a shooting will receive, but also what information will be distributed. This finding runs contrary to the collective mourning literature, implicating that while the media may make the public aware of an episode of mass violence, mourning sentiments are not shared uniformly. Therefore, concentric mourning provides a more comprehensive framework for how these tragedies are mourned across the collective.
In examining the count variable of paragraphs fitting the victim frame, Model 4 further demonstrates the significance of distance in framing. However, four additional significant findings were observed regarding the framing of the victim narrative that will be discussed first. Muschert (2007b) has noted that the coverage of victims usually occurs within the first two weeks of coverage, given that the victims’ funerals often mark the end of their narrative within the media discourse. The first significant variable observed is days after shooting, highlighting that for each day that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control variables</th>
<th>Model 3 Logistic Reg. (N=230)</th>
<th>Model 4 Negative Binomial Reg. (N=260)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>0.9991(0.0004)*</td>
<td>0.9994(0.0001)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days After Shooting</td>
<td>1.1319(0.1326)</td>
<td>0.8840(0.0349)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White Victims (Proportion)</td>
<td>0.3975(0.4022)</td>
<td>0.4394(0.1451)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Victims (Proportion)</td>
<td>0.0845(0.1656)</td>
<td>0.2032(0.1153)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim Total</td>
<td>0.9408(0.0283)</td>
<td>0.9970(0.0086)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injuries</td>
<td>0.0610(0.0389)</td>
<td>0.9470(0.0132)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Event</td>
<td>0.8703(0.7083)</td>
<td>0.7178(0.1485)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.3773(5.5539)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald chi²(7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>51.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LR chi²(7)</td>
<td>10.52</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob &gt; chi²</td>
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<td>0.0000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
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<td>-570.1714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIF Range</td>
<td>3.95,1.00</td>
<td>3.95,1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<0.001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

In examining the count variable of paragraphs fitting the victim frame, Model 4 further demonstrates the significance of distance in framing. However, four additional significant findings were observed regarding the framing of the victim narrative that will be discussed first. Muschert (2007b) has noted that the coverage of victims usually occurs within the first two weeks of coverage, given that the victims’ funerals often mark the end of their narrative within the media discourse. The first significant variable observed is days after shooting, highlighting that for each day that

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6 Multiple positive outcomes within groups encountered. 1 group (30 observations) dropped because of all positive or all negative outcomes.
elapses following a school shooting, the rate of discourse surrounding the victims decreases at a rate of 11.6%. These findings align with Muschert’s work, highlighting that as more time passes, the discussion of victims in coverage decreases.

Coverage of non-white victims was observed as significantly impacting the number of paragraphs encapsulating the victim frame – specifically, as the portion of non-white victims increased, the number of paragraphs decreases at a rate of 0.4294 (56.06%). Coupled with the findings above, in which coverage of shootings decreased as the portion of non-white victims increased, this outcome signifies that victims of color receive less media coverage. Not only do shootings receive less coverage when the event has a higher proportion of non-white victims, but these victims dominate less of the victim narrative. This finding contributes to the preexisting research by highlighting that there are racial disparities in the amount of coverage non-white victims receive and the discourse of victims and mourning. The third significant variable was that for each increase in the proportion of female victims, the odds of a paragraph fitting the victim frame decreases at a rate of 79.68%. As noted above, future studies should continue to explore if school shootings are an anomaly to female victims dominating the media frame. Injury count, as the fourth significant variable, was seen to decrease the number of paragraphs within the victim frame at a rate of 5.3% for each additional increase in injured individuals. When individuals are injured during a shooting, the media does not actively construct them as an ideal victim, whereas the legacies of the deceased are discussed in detail. Although the media spends considerable time clarifying the relationship between the victims and perpetrators (Best, 1997b, p. 11), this finding indicates that those injured do not receive as much coverage as those whose lives were lost.
Distance between publication and shooting significantly impacted the number of paragraphs centered around victim framing (see Figure 5). For each mile increase between a publication and the massacre, the odds of a paragraph covering the victims decrease at a rate of 0.06%. Like the findings outlined above, it can be observed that the physical location impacts the information the public will receive surrounding school shootings. Prior research on collective mourning highlights that the media bridges individuals to the tragedy, allowing them to become ‘distant sufferers’ (Boltanski, 1999; Hakala, 2015), however the findings above indicate that this does not happen in the way previously theorized. When spatial proximity to a school shooting increases, mourning sentiments and the victim narrative are circulated disproportionately. This disproportionality impacts the way in which society grieves these tragedies, for it does not provide a cohesive narrative for who should be grieved or how they ought to be mourned, providing further support for my theory of concentric mourning.

An example of this can be seen in the different ways the victims were discussed across publications. Following the Sandy Hook massacre, two publications described the same victim, on the same day, in two vastly different ways. A passage from the *Hartford Courant* reads:

Emilie Parker was a "bright," avid artist who acted as a mentor to her 3- and 4-year-old sisters, her father, Robbie Parker, recalled Saturday.

"Emily's laughter was infectious and all those who met her would agree this world is a better place because she has been in it," Parker, 30, told reporters in Newtown. "She was beautiful; she was blond, always smiling. She was the type of person that could just light up a room."
Emilie taught her younger sisters to read, dance and "find the simple joys of life," Parker said. Her siblings looked up to her and leaned on her for comfort.

Emilie was compassionate, Parker said, and loved to create cards for others. One "special card" she made was even placed in her grandfather's casket.

"She always had something kind to say about anybody, and her love and the strength she gave us and the example she showed us is remarkable," he said.

The last conversation Parker said he had with Emilie was Friday morning, in Portuguese. He had been teaching her the language.

"I was leaving for work," he said. "She told me good morning. She asked how I was doing. ... She told me she loved me. I gave her a kiss and I was out the door."

"She is an incredible person," he said of Emilie, "and I'm so blessed to be her dad." (Carsello, et al., 2012).

While Emilie is described in much detail within the Hartford Courant, an article in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette shows how the amount of attention given to the victim wanes with distance:

On Saturday, as families began to claim the bodies of slain loved ones, some sought privacy. Others spoke out. Robbie Parker, whose 6-year-old daughter, Emilie, was among the dead, choked back tears as he described her as "bright, creative and very loving." (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, 2012).

This contrast highlights both the amount of detail and attention given to deaths that occur closer to the publication. Spanning across publications, victims were not only talked about less frequently the further away the publication was from the event, but the victims were also talked about in less detail.

As Doss (2002) notes, the “locus of tragic death” (p. 69) draws the American public in, and individuals attempt to “‘reclaim’ death, in making death meaningful on personal, individual levels” (p. 63) – the media provides the script to do so. Thus, without the media bridging the collective together as a cohesive whole, individuals are not brought in to the tragedy as intensely as those near the tragedy. This finding
highlights the way mourning ensues in a concentric fashion. Given that mourning sentiments dissipate with geographical proximity to the shooting, it can be observed that society mourns these tragedies in a concentric, rather than collective, fashion. Below, concentric mourning will be discussed in greater detail based on these findings.

Figure 5: Paragraphs covering victim frame by distance
Chapter 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

School shootings have become galvanizing events for the American public. In the wake of each shooting, the media rushes to cover the tragic incident at hand. However, as the findings above posit, this coverage is not broadcast equally. The framework of preexisting research claiming that these events are an American tragedy experienced through the collective may be true to some extent, but appears more complex. As the findings above indicate, coverage wanes with distance. Geographical distance not only impacts the amount of coverage an event will receive, but also shapes the content of the information disseminated. Coverage of these shootings does not occur uniformly – characteristics of the shooting influence the amount of attention an event will receive, as does physical distance.

Cohen (1963) notes that 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). Framing is the way the media draws the reader’s attention to a certain part of the stage in the drama of life, whether it be certain actors or elements, having them focus on a specific component of the issue presented. However, as the findings above demonstrate, these frames are not presented evenly across social groups. The further one is situated in from a shooting influences the news that they will receive, both in amount and information. As distance between shooting and publication increases, the information pertaining to the victims and mourning sentiments decreases. These findings have two potential implications: the way in
which society mourns school shootings, and collective engagement in response to
tragedy.

Durkheim (1995 [1912]) posits that in instances of death, the diminished
community comes together to grieve and mourn collectively as a cohesive unit.
Scholars have highlighted that in contemporary society, where individuals are not in as
close and frequent contact as they were in traditional society, the media acts as the
connective force between groups (Hakala, 2015; Pantti & Sumiala, 2009). The media
has further been noted as shaping the way in which society collectively mourns and
understands these tragedies, providing a script of how individuals can, and should,
mourn and memorialize these acts of violence (Muschert, 2007b, 201; Spencer &
Muschert, 2009). While Durkheim’s theory of collective mourning works well within
conventional groups, in large societies, there are limits to how these mourning
sentiments can spread. Although the media acts as a bridge connecting the public to
these tragedies of loss, the theory of collective mourning does not accurately
encapsulate how these tragedies are grieved through the collective.

This is not to say that mourning simply does not occur for those regions that
receive less exposure to the victim narrative, but rather that the intensity of mourning
sentiments is not experienced homogeneously. With a population of roughly 325
million, and an average of around 7,000 deaths each day, the American public cannot
collectively be brought into the mourning sentiments. Concentric mourning offers a
model that rectifies this by accounting for the way mourning sentiments disperse with
varying degrees of separation. Therefore, through the process of concentric mourning,
the further one is separated from a school shooting, the more the degree in which they
mourn the tragedy will diminish. As indicated above, distance is shown to impact the
victim narrative, highlighting that physical separation disperses mourning sentiments. The importance of this finding is that it opens the door for future research to evaluate how society responds to trauma, providing a new model for how we conceptualize mourning.

Choudiaraki (2004), in his analysis on 9/11, claims that the public becomes moralized as a spectator through the immense media coverage of an event, stating, “It shapes the ethical relationship between spectator and spectacle and so cultivates specific political disposition to action” (p. 186). In response to these tragedies, having been moralized to act by the media’s coverage, individuals often look to political action as a response. Legislative responses to school shootings have often failed to gain traction, specifically gun control policies (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2014). It has been observed in the aftermath of Columbine that, “The passage of such legislation, in the wake of a tragedy such as this, is the nation’s way of acknowledging that the deaths of the children have not been in vain” (Fast, 2003, p. 486). However, if regions of the population are not connected to the tragedy, or to the sentiments of mourning surrounding the lives lost, then they would be less compelled to rally behind such legislation. Future research should examine how distance from a shooting may impact policy implementations put forward to prevent these tragedies.

However, to do so, future studies ought to also examine the dissemination of other frames and how these may change with distance. One limitation of this study is that by only evaluating the victim frame, only one component of the media discourse is evaluated. It is important to also examine the impact distance may have on the gun debate, presentation of shooters, or discussion of preventative policies. A second limitation is that while this study explains the way the victim frame is broadcast, it
does not explore how these victims are presented. While previous research has examined the construction of victims in the wake of mass violence, no study to date has engaged in a qualitative analysis that examine how this discourse may shift over time, across shootings, and throughout publications. Lastly, this study examines the impact distance may have on concentric mourning, but further studies should examine what other factors may contribute to the dissemination of mourning sentiments. Specifically, the impacts of homogeneity across regions should be evaluated to explore whether regional similarities between publications and the area impacted by a school shooting affect the coverage.

In conclusion, this paper establishes the foundation for my theory of concentric mourning. Rather than engaging in mourning sentiments collectively, society does so disproportionately – the theory of concentric mourning helps to conceptualize the way that this occurs. Physical distance influences the dialogue surrounding the victims of school shootings, implicating that the messages of mourning society receives in different regions. As distance increases, mourning sentiments dissipate as does attention to such tragedies. The further removed we are from the tragedy, the less we will grieve – while emotions can be collective, there are limits to how broadly they can spread.
REFERENCES


### Appendix A

**SAMPLING SEARCH TERMS AND TIMEFRAMES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shooting</th>
<th>Search Terms</th>
<th>Timeframes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy Hook Elementary (CT)</td>
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<td>12/15/2012 - 1/13/2013</td>
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<td>Columbine High School (CO)</td>
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<td>4/21/1999 - 5/20/1999</td>
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<td>UCSB (CA)</td>
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<td>5/24/2014 - 6/22/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Lake High School (MN)</td>
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<td>3/22/2005 - 4/20/2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heath High School (KY)</td>
<td>Heath OR Heath High School OR West Paducah OR West Paducah Shooting OR</td>
<td>12/2/1997-12/31/1997</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Heath High School Shooting
Appendix B

DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLING CASE COMPARISONS

The four, large scale rampage shootings selected were the events at Columbine High School, Sandy Hook Elementary School, Red Lakes High School, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The Columbine High School shooting that occurred on April 20, 1999 in Littleton, Colorado, claimed the lives of 13 students, not counting the two shooters who took their own lives. In excluding the shooters, the average age of student victims was 16.25 years old, and faculty victims averaged 47 years old\(^7\). At Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, 26 students and teachers were killed, following the shooting of Nancy Lanza in her home prior to Adam Lanza entering the school, bringing the total to 27 fatalities (not including the shooter’s suicide). The average age of students who lost their lives on December 14, 2012 was 6.2 years old, and the average age of faculty victims 41.86 years old\(^8\). The shooting at Red Lakes High School on the Red Lake Indian Reservation, Minnesota, on March 21, 2015 claimed 9 lives, not including the shooter, with the average age of students being 15 years old and the average age of adult victims being 45 years old.

\(^7\) William “Dave” Sanders was the only faculty member killed during the Columbine shooting, therefore the average simply represents Coach Sanders’ age.

\(^8\) 20 of the victims were students, while 7 of the victims were school teachers, school professionals, and the shooter’s mother.
Prior to the shooting in the high school, the shooter took the life of his grandfather and his grandfather’s girlfriend, before taking the lives of 5 students, a school security guard, and an English teacher. The Virginia Tech shooting on April 16, 2007, in Blacksburg, Virginia, occurred in two locations on campus, resulted in 32 victims (not including the perpetrator), with the average age of students being 22.15 years old and average age of professors being 51.6 years old\(^9\).

Rampage shootings in which there were 4-8 deaths, excluding the shooter, were the events at the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB), Marysville Pilchuck High School, Westside Middle School, and Heath High School. After killing three of his roommates on May 23, 2014, Elliot Rodger proceeded to drive through Isla Vista, California, shooting at members of a UCSB sorority outside of their sorority house, killing two. His rampage continued as he drove around the area shooting at pedestrians and striking them with his car. Not including the shooter’s suicide, the number of fatalities was 6, averaging 20 years of age. On October 24, 2014, 4 students were fatally shot in Marysville, Washington, at Marysville Pilchuck High School, with the victims average age being 14.25 years old – the shooter’s suicide is not included. At Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas, two shooters (both apprehended alive) took the lives of 4 students and one teacher on March 24, 1998. The average age of the students was 11.5 years old, and the teacher

\(^9\) 5 of the victims were professors and instructors, while the other 27 were undergraduate and graduate students.
was 32 years old. Given the unique circumstances of Jonesboro in which the shooters were apprehended and taken into custody, it was important to also have another comparable case – the shooting at Heath High School in West Paducah, Kentucky, which had 3 victims and was included in my sample because it is one of the only other rampage school shootings in which the shooter did not kill themselves\(^9\). The average age of victims at the Heath shooting on December 1, 1997, was 15.33 years of age.

\(^9\) While the Thurston High School shooting in 1998 consisted of 4 victims, only 2 lives were claimed at the school. The other 2 victims were Kip Kinkel’s parents, both killed prior to Kinkel’s entry into the school. The Parkland shooting of 2018 is another example that was unable to be included in this analysis, for the shooting occurred at the time of writing this paper.