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An Examination of Media Accounts Before and After School Shootings: A Content Analysis of Newspaper Articles Pertaining to Firearms on Campus

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The University of Southern Mississippi

AN EXAMINATION OF MEDIA ACCOUNTS BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL
SHOOTINGS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES
PERTAINING TO FIREARMS ON CAMPUS

by John Ronald Harrington

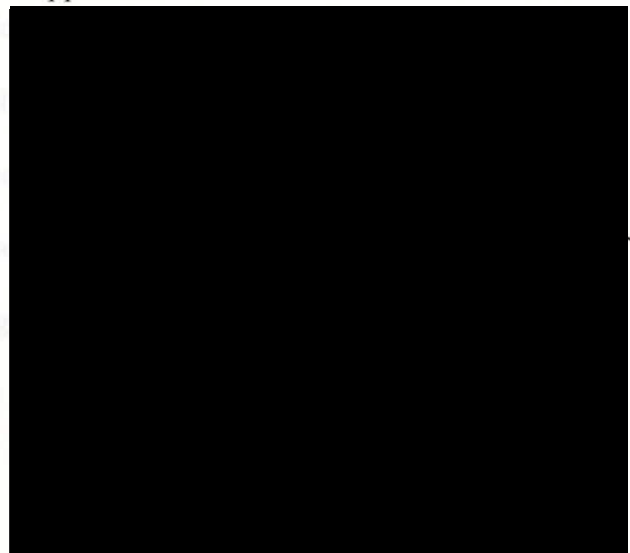
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John Ronald Harrington

A Thesis

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of The University of Southern Mississippi
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ABSTRACT

AN EXAMINATION OF MEDIA ACCOUNTS BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL SHOOTINGS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES PERTAINING TO FIREARMS ON CAMPUS

by John Ronald Harrington

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Very few topics elicit such polarizing responses as that of the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution. Since our country's infancy, firearms have been an integral part of our society. Over the years firearms have undoubtedly become ingrained in the American culture, but their presence has not been unanimously welcomed. While many Americans stand firmly by their right to bear arms, others adamantly oppose the notion that civilians should be able to possess such firearms. This study explores the current literature regarding firearms, concealed carry firearms, and the news media's portrayal of concealed carry firearms on school campuses. A review of the current literature is presented regarding firearms, concealed carry firearms, and the theoretical foundation for the current study. Additionally, the current study presents a content analysis of 55 newspaper articles pertaining to firearms on school campuses during the past 15 years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over the years I have faced many trials and tribulations. Each one of these taught me something about myself and helped me grow as a person. During these times, I found great comfort and support in my family. I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Ronnie and Georgia Harrington, and my brother, Michael Harrington, for providing me with unconditional love and support. I could not have asked for a more dedicated and loving family. Without them, I would not be where I am today. Additionally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the loving memory of my grandmother, Mary Beldekas. She helped to shape my life in so many ways. I have never known a more honest, hard-working, loyal, loving woman. I only wish that she could be here now to see how far I have come.

I enjoyed getting to know her and I greatly appreciate all the time and effort she dedicated to me and my thesis. Her input and expertise were instrumental in the creation and execution of this project.

I would also like to thank all of my friends and fellow students who have stood by my side during our time spent in the department. We spent long hours and countless sleepless nights together working on research, reading summaries, and various assignments. Thank you Vanessa, Marcos, Deirdre, Will, and Pam. Our time spent together meant the world to me. I will never forget any of you.

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I would like to acknowledge and thank everyone who helped me throughout my master's degree and during the writing of this thesis. First I would like to thank Dr. O. Hayden Griffin, III, whose mentorship and guidance were absolutely essential to the creation of this thesis. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time spent working alongside Dr. Griffin and I greatly value the friendship he and I have established over the years. I would also like to thank Dr. W. Wes Johnson, who offered invaluable input throughout the creation, revising, and editing of this project. It has been an honor to have spent time in and out of the classroom with such a distinguished scholar. Last but not least, I would like to thank Dr. Mary Evans. Despite having spent only one year with Dr. Evans, I have undoubtedly enjoyed getting to know her and I greatly appreciate all the time and effort she dedicated to me and my thesis. Her input and expertise were instrumental in the creation and execution of this project.

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Throughout American history, firearms have played an important role in founding our nation as well as shaping our society. Beginning in the 1600s, the use of superior weaponry provided settlers with a distinct advantage over indigenous Americans. The original inhabitants of North America stood little chance of success when faced with European firearms. Firearms gave European settlers an unmistakable tactical advantage during conflicts. This advantage proved to be invaluable as settlers established a permanent presence westward on the American frontier (Chase, 2003; Russell, 1980). As the years passed, armed American settlers relied heavily upon their stock of weapons to fend off threats, both foreign and domestic. Likewise, America's current military supremacy is credited greatly to superiority in both weaponry and military tactics (Chase, 2004; Millis, 1981).

As America emerged from its infancy and began establishing itself as an industrialized nation, firearms continued to play a significant role in the shaping of our

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The issue of gun control has historically been a subject of great debate within American culture. While firearms have undoubtedly been an important aspect of our nation's history, discussions of gun control have become increasingly controversial over the years. Some consider firearms to be synonymous with American culture and firmly believe the right to bear arms is an inalienable right. Others oppose such a notion, viewing firearms as a heinous threat to the safety of the general public. While not all opinions regarding firearms are so clearly dichotomous, very few issues face such polarizing debates as that of gun control.

Throughout American history, firearms have played an important role in founding our nation as well as shaping our society. Beginning in the 1600s, the use of superior weaponry provided settlers with a distinct advantage over indigenous Americans. The original inhabitants of North America stood little chance of success when faced with European firearms. Firearms gave European settlers an unmistakable tactical advantage during conflicts. This advantage proved to be invaluable as settlers established a permanent presence westward on the American frontier (Chase, 2003; Russell, 1980). As the years passed, armed American settlers relied heavily upon their stock of weapons to fend off threats, both foreign and domestic. Likewise, America's current military supremacy is credited greatly to superiority in both weaponry and military tactics (Chase, 2003; Millis, 1981).

As America emerged from its infancy and began establishing itself as an industrialized nation, firearms continued to play a significant role in the shaping of our

society. From the gun slinging cowboys of the *Wild West* to the infamous organized crime movement during Prohibition to the street gangs faced by our nation today, firearms have proven to be an invaluable tool for both enforcing and breaking the law. Settlers braved the untamed western frontier in search of wealth, opportunity, and prosperity. Undertaking such endeavors required a person to be able to defend their family and their property. As such, firearms remained ever-present in American culture, especially on the western frontier. While firearms were undoubtedly present on America's western frontier, scholars have differing opinions on how violent the west actually was (Friedman, 1993). Violence was certainly present during these early days, but the lawless violence romanticized in western films was generally attributed to a limited number of drifters seeking such encounters. Furthermore, such encounters typically only involved men. Women and children were typically left out of such disputes (Friedman, 1993; Hackney, 1969). On the off chance they did become involved, the chivalrous code of the time required a man to fight on their behalf. Simply put, firearms were unmistakably present on the western frontier but the lawless violence romanticized in western novels and movies occurred only in isolated incidents (Friedman, 1993). Moving into the twentieth century, advancements in firearms enabled groups involved with organized crime to wage war in city streets while simultaneously evading law enforcement. These organized crime syndicates formed in response to the federal government's passage of alcohol prohibition. With prohibition in full effect, demand for alcohol grew tremendously across the nation. This provided an opportunity for groups such as organized crime syndicates to profit from the shift of a formerly legalized good to

the black market. Once prohibition ended, organized crime found other criminal endeavors to pursue. Eventually, the government formed special task forces to address the criminal syndicates and other crimes reaching across state lines (Friedman, 1993).

During the 1930s, America watched as a group of infamous bank robbers continually evaded law enforcement on a crime spree that would be talked about for decades thereafter. During this period, law enforcement encountered a variety of weapons including automatic machine guns. These superior weapons gave criminals a distinct advantage over the relatively ill-equipped law enforcement officers. Made infamous on the streets of Chicago, the Thompson submachine gun (commonly referred to as the *Tommy gun*) was effectively used by both the United States military and organized crime operations (Burrough, 2009; Yenne, 2009). The notoriety of such weapons encouraged further advancements in firearms technology as well as changes in gun control legislation. In June of 1934, Congress passed the National Firearms Act (NFA). This legislation implemented regulations and taxation on the manufacture and sale of machine guns and short barreled shotguns. The Act required that all transactions involving these firearms be reported to the NFA registry and placed a large tax on the interstate transport of such firearms (Friedman, 1993; Spitzer, 2009). In 1968, Congress furthered their regulation of firearms. This particular piece of legislation sought to regulate the availability of rifles, shotguns, and ammunition through mail-order purchases (Hackney, 1969).

In recent decades, crime in the United States has become ubiquitous among inner-city neighborhoods. Metropolitan areas proved to be particularly vulnerable to increases in crime during the 1980s and 1990s. For example, Chicago witnessed an increase in

violent crimes by 16% between 1985 and 1988 (Courtwright, 1996). This increase in crime was experienced in large cities across the country. Homicide rates in these inner-city areas increased considerably, but the sheer number of homicides tells only part of the story. Most of the homicides occurring during this period involved offenders and victims who were African American. This intra-racial crime shed some light on the environment in which these minorities were living (Courtwright, 1996). Impoverished, inner-city ghettos provided few opportunities for residents. Youth brought up in these conditions often lived in single-parent households and received little, if any, proper discipline. As a result, these kids turn to the street for guidance. The street culture is one based upon respect and aggressive behavior. When someone is disrespected, they must respond with a show of aggression to defend their reputation (Anderson, 1994; Courtwright, 1996). This show of aggression commonly involves the possession or use of a firearm. Furthermore, inner-city minorities oftentimes turn to street gangs to serve as the family they lack at home. Adding gang affiliation to the already hostile street culture only increases the opportunity for violence to occur. What may have been a simple show of disrespect between two individuals could result in a street war between rival gangs (Courtwright, 1996). In response to the increasingly violent inner-city neighborhoods and rising crime rates, many Americans began taking precautions to defend themselves and their households. People began investing in home security systems and firearms were sold by the hundreds of thousands (Friedman, 1993). Such a significant increase in firearm sales added to the already vast number of firearms present in the United States. With such an enormous number of firearms in the hands of American citizens, gun

even some of the same agents involved in the Ruby Ridge standoff were also involved

control proponents face a daunting task of addressing the already present stock of firearms within society (Kleck, 1991).

Many Americans cling to their guns for defense against a perceived danger much greater than any home invasion or assault on the streets. These gun owners fear a government they believe to be oppressive and too powerful. Events within recent decades have fueled such fears among the American people, creating a movement within certain segments of society to establish and maintain a modern militia of armed civilians. Beginning with the standoff at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, the modern militia movement took root in society and began to grow. In August 1992, a standoff occurred between Randy Weaver (along with his family and a friend) and agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the United States Marshals Service (USMS). Randy Weaver came under the surveillance of federal agents as a result of his alleged association with an extremist group known as the Aryan Nations. Weaver faced charges of selling an illegal firearm to an undercover agent. When Weaver failed to appear for his court date, agents from the USMS and ATF went to his home to serve a warrant for his arrest. Heavily armed, Weaver and his family barricaded themselves in their home on Ruby Ridge. An initial firefight and eleven-day standoff ensued, resulting in the death of one federal agent as well as Weaver's son, wife, and dog. When he finally surrendered, Weaver was acquitted of all charges related to the standoff with federal agents (Crothers, 2003).

Six months after the standoff at Ruby Ridge, another incident occurred between federal agents and a group of citizens in Waco, Texas. Many of the same agencies and even some of the same agents involved in the Ruby Ridge standoff were also involved

with the events in Waco. In February, 1993, ATF agents attempted to conduct a raid on the compound known as the Mount Carmel Center in order to serve a search warrant on the compound occupied by the Branch Davidians. It was believed that the Davidians were in violation of federal weapons laws. The Davidians maintained a large stock of firearms and ammunition as part of their retail gun business. ATF agents, along with members of the National Guard, executed their raid on the compound with the hopes of surprising the unprepared Davidian members. However, days prior to the incident, the Davidians had received a warning of the imminent raid and were prepared for the incoming agents. Initial contact between the federal agents and the Davidians resulted in a two-hour firefight, during which numerous casualties were sustained on both sides. A ceasefire was eventually reached followed by a standoff lasting 50 days. During this time, several individuals were released from the compound, many of whom were women and children. FBI negotiators were unable to reach a peaceful agreement with those members still inside the compound. On April 19, 1993, federal agents utilized military vehicles to pump large amounts of tear gas into the building in an attempt to flush the remaining Davidians out of their compound. Despite continuously filling the building with gas for several hours, the Davidians held their position within the compound. Finally, a fire broke out within the building and began spreading rapidly throughout the compound. Only nine people managed to escape the burning building. The remaining Branch Davidian members died inside the compound. In all, four federal agents and 82 Branch Davidian members were killed in what became known as the Waco massacre (Crothers, 2003).

The debate over gun control has evolved over the years, becoming an elaborate issue requiring specific attention be given to each of its many aspects. One particular aspect of gun control is the notion of so-called gun free zones such as school campuses. Until recent decades, university campuses were considered to be generally safe places where students could develop and grow their intellectual prowess. Campuses were essentially viewed as virtual safe havens for academic studies and growth (Fisher, 1995; Woolnough, 2009). This perception of university campuses has been severely distorted by the media coverage of school shootings and other crimes within the last couple decades (Henson & Stone, 1999; Youstin, Nobles, Ward, & Cook, 2011). The ivory towers of academia were transformed into dangerous arenas where students and professors risk becoming the victims of school shootings, rape, and aggravated assaults (Fisher, 1995).

Among the most notable and deadly cases in United States history are the university shootings at Virginia Tech (VT) in 2007, Northern Illinois University (NIU) in 2008 (Desmond, 2008; Kaminski, Koons-Witt, Thompson, & Weiss, 2010; Midwestern Higher Education Compact, 2008), and University of Texas (UT) in 1966 (Kaminski et al., 2010), all of which received a considerable amount of media coverage. Some researchers believe the excessive media coverage of these shootings contributed substantially to an increased fear of crime among students on university campuses across the nation (Henson & Stone, 1999; Kaminski et al., 2010; Woolnough, 2009). These events served as the catalyst for changes in campus policies as well as legislation on both the state and federal levels. Such changes included the increase of security on university campuses and, in a select few states, allowing students, faculty, and staff to carry

concealed firearms (Bouffard, Nobles, & Wells, 2011; Midwestern Higher Education Compact, 2008; Woolnough, 2009).

In today's information age, members of society find themselves inundated with information regarding a variety of current events. Many Americans rely on one form of news media or another to obtain information about these issues. The manner in which these media outlets present certain issues can have a considerable influence on how they are received by consumers. As such, members of the news media possess a unique opportunity to sway public perceptions based upon the manner in which the news media presents an issue. These reports are especially influential following times of national crisis. During these times, many politicians and policymakers receive pressure to implement new policies in response to whatever crisis is relevant at that time. While the intention may be to prevent such crises from occurring in the future, many times these new policies can have unintended and unforeseen consequences. Such instances of crisis-driven policy illustrate the potential dangers of the news media having such influence over public perceptions. As the news media sways public perceptions, they can indirectly influence which policies and legislation are implemented (Hagan, 2010; Johnson & Cintron, 1996; Kappeler & Potter, 2005; Sample & Kadleck, 2008; Slate, Buffington-Vollum, & Johnson, 2013; Surette, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

As crisis typically drives the creation of policy within our nation, mass shootings occurring on school campuses inevitably provide the perfect catalyst for new gun control legislation. Media coverage following these events typically includes a plethora of statistics pertaining to firearms and their use (or misuse) in the United States. These

portrayals of firearms have the ability to greatly influence public perceptions regarding the gun control debate. As advocates from both sides of the issue fight to have their arguments heard, many Americans develop and formulate their opinions of firearms and their presence within our society. Particular framework for the current study is presented in Chapter 1. Particularly in times of crisis, the news media has the undivided attention of the general public. While seeking information from their chosen media outlets, members of society often encounter reports designed to frame issues in either a positive or negative light. The framing of issues in this manner can potentially sway the opinions of readers and influence their subsequent demands for policy (Hagan, 2010; Kappeler & Potter, 2005; Slate et al., 2013; Surette, 2007). The goal of the current study is to present an exploratory analysis of the news media's portrayal of issues regarding the presence of firearms on campuses in response to eight high profile shootings within the United States. By analyzing the occurrences of high profile shootings, the current study is able to examine how the news media responds in times of crisis. The examination of such newspaper articles is designed to assess the content of the media reports as well as the manner in which the stories are reported. Furthermore, the study seeks to examine which side of the gun debate receives more coverage in the newspapers as well as identifying the speakers most likely to be presented in the news articles. Extant literature is presented pertaining to crime on university campuses, influence of the news media in portraying various issues, students' fear of crime on campus, concealed carry handguns on campus, and relevant policies and legislation (both state and federal). In Chapter II, each topic is addressed individually.

Summary

The goal of the current study is to provide an examination of the news media's portrayal of issues regarding firearms on campuses within the United States. A review of the relevant literature and theoretical framework for the current study is presented in Chapter II. The selected newspaper articles were analyzed based upon their date of publication in relation to several high profile mass shootings. Articles published within six months of a high profile school shooting were considered to be influenced by the respective shooting. By analyzing the influence of these shootings, the current study is able to analyze patterns within the news media's portrayal of firearms on campuses. Variables were established for examination based upon the manifest and latent content within each article. The methodology for the current study is discussed in greater detail in Chapter III. The findings of the study are discussed in Chapters IV and V.

disconnected from the problems faced by the rest of society; rather, they have become "microcosms of the larger communities that surround them" (Wolf et al., 2009, p. 29; see also Barton, Jensen, & Kaufman, 2010). As a result, students face similar risks of becoming a victim of crime while on campus as they do upon leaving campus (Wolf et al., 2009; Woolhough, 2009).

Nobles and colleagues sought to expand the extant literature regarding crime on university campuses (Nobles, Fox, Khey, & Lizotte, 2010). The researchers examined the spatial distribution of crime both on the university campus as well as within the surrounding communities. Furthermore, they analyzed aspects of crimes committed by students versus non-students. Their analysis identified a clustering of crime along the borders of campus, especially in areas near campus gateways. This phenomenon, termed

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Crime Literature

University administrators across the nation have made substantial efforts to keep their campuses secure and their students safe (Wolf, Pressler, & Winton, 2009; Woolnough, 2009). As a result of these efforts, many university campuses have established police departments dedicated solely to the campus and its population (Wolf et al., 2009). These campus agencies have grown over the years, many of them taking cues from their neighboring city and county law enforcement agencies. Today, many campus police departments employ law enforcement tactics and equipment that parallels these off-campus agencies. This evolution of campus police departments is indicative of changes within the campus community itself. University campuses are no longer disconnected from the problems faced by the rest of society; rather, they have become “microcosms of the larger communities that surround them” (Wolf et al., 2009, p. 29; see also Barton, Jensen, & Kaufman, 2010). As a result, students face similar risks of becoming a victim of crime while on campus as they do upon leaving campus (Wolf et al., 2009; Woolnough, 2009).

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“edge effects” (Nobles et al., 2010, p. 8), indicated that students are at a greater risk of victimization along the borders of campus, as well as in the surrounding areas. Likewise, some crimes committed on campus are a function of spillover from these areas surrounding campus. These discoveries are particularly relevant to campus crime statistics that only account for crimes committed on campus. Such crimes statistics may fail to capture a considerable amount of crime and could subsequently give students a false sense of security (see also Henson & Stone, 1999). Nobles and colleagues (2010) call for universities to include crime rates from the surrounding communities in their assessment of campus safety.

Other research has provided further insight into factors that influence a person’s likelihood of becoming a victim of crime (Youstin et al., 2011). The concept of *near repeat crime* refers to trends in crime that can be measured in both space (physical distance) and time. This spatiotemporal analysis enables researchers to identify trends in various crimes that indicate an increased likelihood of victimization of a particular area for a certain amount of time. Research has indicated that different types of crimes have their own unique increase in risk of victimization. These increases differ in their length of duration as well as the physical distance to which their impact reaches (Youstin et al., 2011). These findings are of particular interest when considering the patterns in crime observed by Nobles and his colleagues (2010).

Theory

News Media Influence on Public Perceptions

The national media plays an integral role in influencing public perception of societal issues. Such far-reaching influence often provides media outlets with the ability

to frame various issues in ways which illicit desired reactions from their viewers (Hagan, 2010; Slate et al., 2013; Surette, 2007). In an attempt to assess such influence, social reaction theory provides a unique structure for examining the manner in which the news media frames our nation's gun debate. Social reaction theory, also referred to as labeling theory, was originally developed by Frank Tannenbaum. Tannenbaum (1938) assessed society's role in classifying individuals and groups as being *criminal* and the effect such tags can have on those being tagged. Tannenbaum's theory has served as the foundation for numerous studies regarding the interaction between members of society and individuals/groups classified as delinquent or criminal (Becker, 1963; Friedman, 1993; Hagan, 2010; Lemert, 1951; Quinney, 1970).

According to societal reaction perspective, the ability of a group to conform to societal expectations plays a key role in influencing how the group is perceived by society. How a group is perceived within society determines attitudes towards the group and influences the overall acceptance of the group (or lack thereof) (Becker, 1963; Kappeler & Potter, 2005; Lemert, 1951; Quinney, 1970; Sellin, 1938; Tannenbaum, 1938). Societal expectations, both formal and informal, are established by groups in positions of power within society, whether it be social or political (Becker, 1963; Friedman, 1993; Quinney, 1970). When a particular group does not conform to the expectations of society over time, the group is subsequently labeled as *outsiders* (Becker, 1963). Once such a label has been applied, societal perceptions of the group and its members will be inevitably tainted (Becker, 1963; Kappeler & Potter, 2005; Quinney, 1970; Tannenbaum, 1938).

There are members of society who seek to utilize their position of power to influence the general population in order to advance their own agenda or career. Becker (1963) refers to such persons as *moral entrepreneurs* (see also Hagan, 2010; Kappeler & Potter, 2005). These individuals, or groups of individuals, attempt to prey upon fear within society. By fostering moral panic, moral entrepreneurs are able to sway public opinion in one direction or another. Often these opinions are irrationally based upon misrepresented data and a general lack of information among the members of society (Becker, 1963; Hagan, 2010; Kappeler & Potter, 2005; Surette, 2007). Hagan (2010) points out that fear of crime and actual levels of crime are not necessarily correlated in a rational manner. In other words, societal fear of crime can increase despite actual levels of crime remaining the same or even decreasing. The fear of crime within society is extremely vulnerable to influence from outside sources such as the news media (see also Kappeler & Potter, 2005; Slate et al., 2013; Surette, 2007). These news sources are able to present various issues within certain cognitive and collective frames that are designed to influence public perception regarding specific issues. In some cases, clever framing of an issue can actually form an ostensible relationship between very disparate issues (Hagan, 2010). Our nation's ongoing gun debate is certainly not exempt from such manipulation. As news outlets report on various issues related to the gun debate, these news outlets have the opportunity to frame their stories in ways which will likely garner support for one side of the debate or the other. Furthermore, media personnel are not the only people with the ability to influence public perception. Politicians enjoy a similar power in their positions within government. While these political figures possess the use of social disorganization theory. Although their study did not find support for this

significant power within our society, in order to influence the population, political figures must utilize the news media as a vessel for reaching the masses.

Crime on University Campuses

The generally accepted theoretical basis for studying crime on university campuses is Cohen and Felson's (1979) routine activity approach (Barton et al., 2010; Henson & Stone, 1999). This theory states that the phenomenon of crime is comprised of three essential ingredients: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the lack of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979). According to the authors, for a crime to occur, there must be a "convergence of likely offenders and suitable targets in the absence of capable guardians" (Cohen & Felson, 1979, p. 590). Youstin and colleagues (2011) supported this notion in their study of criminal activity. When studying the patterns of criminal events, such as robbery, research indicates that little foresight is involved in the decision to commit a crime. Rather, the offender will often decide to commit a crime only after encountering a perceived suitable target (Youstin et al., 2011). Following this line of reasoning, if any one of these three aspects is lacking or simply missing, crime is substantially less likely to occur (Cohen & Felson, 1979). This approach takes for granted the motivated offender and focuses rather on the opportunity for crime to occur. With respect to university campuses, the opportunity for crime to occur can be reduced in two ways: increasing the number of capable guardians and/or reducing the suitability of the targets (i.e. students, faculty, and staff) (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

Barton and colleagues (2010) proposed an interpretation of campus crime through the use of social disorganization theory. Although their study did not find support for this

unique approach, the researchers were able to shed some light on numerous aspects of this particular field of study. Among other things, Barton and colleagues (2010) highlighted several shortcomings of prior research (i.e. lack of generalizability, insufficient theoretical foundation, little attention given to the influence of campus community on crime). While they may have found deficiencies in the extant literature, the authors did recognize the proper application of other theories (e.g. routine activity theory) within the extant literature (see also Henson & Stone, 1999). The authors noted that the routine activity approach provides a variety of insights into the victimization of students, as well as the ability of students to protect themselves. The researchers concluded their study by recognizing that routine activity theory provides researchers with a substantial theoretical framework for studying campus crime (see also Henson & Stone, 1999), but they add that other theories should be incorporated as well to provide a better understanding of crime on university campuses (Barton et al., 2010).

A variety of other theories could arguably be utilized to complement the routine activity approach to studying campus crime. As previously mentioned, Barton and colleagues (2010) proposed the use of social disorganization theory for examining crime on university campuses. Within their study, Barton and colleagues noted the importance of residential mobility and economic status; both of which are among the factors influencing community cohesion. As residential mobility and/or economic status fluctuate, the ability of students to establish social bonds within their campus community is affected (Barton et al., 2010). Other researchers have addressed issues such as geospatial examination of crime (Nobles et al., 2010), near repeat crime, boost hypothesis and flag hypothesis of crime (Youstin et al., 2011), shadow thesis explaining fear of

crime (Lane, Gover, & Dahod, 2009; Woolnough, 2009), and concealed handgun licenses (CHLs) on university campuses (Bouffard, Nobles, Wells, & Cavanaugh, 2012; Cramer & Kopel, 1994; Desmond, 2008; Kopel, 2004, 2009). Wells, Cavanaugh, Bouffard, and Nobles (2011) offered a word of warning to other researchers regarding studies of controversial topics. When surveying participants about especially controversial issues, the researcher may run the risk of obtaining biased results due to the nature of the study. This is especially relevant to the research of CHLs on university campuses. Many students are likely to participate in these studies because they have strong opinions about the topic. This can result in polarized feedback with few respondents maintaining a moderate stance on the issue (Wells et al., 2011).

Policies and Legislation

Campus Policies and State Legislation

As with many other high profile crises in the media spotlight, the cry for policy changes came almost immediately after the shootings at Virginia Tech (VT) and Northern Illinois University (NIU). Coverage of these events by the media brought the issue of gun control to the forefront of the policy debate (Bouffard et al., 2011; Midwestern Higher Education Compact, 2008; Slate et al., 2013; Woolnough, 2009). Over time, many state legislatures began loosening the restrictions placed on (CHLs) and some states soon proposed legislative bills that would enable students and/or faculty members to carry concealed handguns on university campuses, provided they possess the appropriate CHL (Bouffard et al., 2011; Midwestern Higher Education Compact, 2008).

Alternatively, many researchers and policymakers focused their attention on policies that strive to ensure that students have access to accurate and up-to-date information

regarding the occurrence of criminal activity on and around their university campuses.

University administrators began altering their current policies in hopes of restoring safety on their campuses and a sense of security among the student body (Midwestern Higher Education Compact, 2008; Woolnough, 2009). These policymakers are faced with a unique set of challenges.

According to some estimates, the number of students enrolled in universities across the United States has increased eightfold since the initial influx following World War II (approximately 2.4 million in 1948 to roughly 17.7 million in 2006; note: the United States population only doubled during this time frame) (Barton et al., 2010). This increase in students brought with it a substantial increase in crimes on university campuses (Barton et al., 2010; Woolnough, 2009). Barton and others (2010) noted some of the consequences of this increase could be detrimental to the students' development both in and out of the classroom. As administrators implement policies for securing university campuses, these new policies could have a counterintuitive effect on the student body. Students may become more fearful of potential victimization and less likely to be involved on campus (Kaminski et al., 2010).

In recent years, many university campuses across the nation have undergone various changes in an effort to increase security and ensure the safety of students (Kaminski et al., 2010; Midwestern Higher Education Compact, 2008). Many of these changes include: mass notification systems (utilizing text messaging, phone calls, and emails); increases in security/law enforcement officers; restricted access to buildings; emergency phones; and educational crime prevention programs (Kaminski et al., 2010; Midwestern Higher Education Compact, 2008; Woolnough, 2009). Despite these efforts

to increase security on university campuses, many universities (primarily those in an urban setting) are essentially open to the public making it virtually impossible to monitor the movement of people to and from campus or university property (Woolnough, 2009). Alternatively, much of the current debate centers on the issue of gun control. Following the VT shootings, advocates from both sides of the debate began calling for changes in the current legislation regarding the sale and concealed carry of firearms. Those who support gun control contended that guns are too easily accessible and the current regulations are too lax, while gun rights activists called for an increase in armed citizens and questioned the constitutionality of any purported *gun-free zone* (Desmond, 2008; Kleck, 2004; see also Kopel, 2009).

Federal Legislation: Clery Act and Assault Weapons Ban

The primary piece of federal legislation regarding campus safety and on-campus crime is the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (Clery Act) (Fisher, 1995; Lane et al., 2009; Nobles et al., 2010; Woolnough, 2009). Originally passed in 1990, the Clery Act has undergone multiple amendments (Nobles et al., 2010; Woolnough, 2009). The primary objectives of the Clery Act are to provide students with readily available information concerning crime on university campuses (Fisher, 1995; Lane et al., 2009; Nobles et al., 2010; Woolnough, 2009) and to encourage administrators to be more attentive to the safety of their campuses (Woolnough, 2009). The Clery Act requires all federally funded institutions to provide annual security reports for crimes committed on campus property (Fisher, 1995; Lane et al., 2009; Nobles et al., 2010; Woolnough, 2009).

Despite the noble efforts on behalf of the federal government, the Clery Act has been met with a great deal of skepticism over the years. Many researchers contend that the Clery Act provides only a limited representation of crime occurring on university campuses. They argue that the deceptive nature of such raw data provides no context for the statistics, and, therefore, the information can be tragically misleading. This information is further distorted by the lack of reporting to university police departments. Many crimes either go unreported altogether or are reported to the municipal law enforcement surrounding the campus (Fisher, 1995; Lane et al., 2009; Nobles et al., 2010; Woolnough, 2009). The researchers note that the Clery Act fails to account for crime that occurs "very near, but technically not *on* university campuses" (Nobles et al., 2010, p. 19). Nobles and colleagues (2010) maintain that the Clery Act falls short in its objective of establishing transparency in the reporting of campus crime rates.

Other pieces of legislation relevant to the current topic have been directed at the issue of gun control. As Gary Kleck (2001) explained, the federal government passed legislation in 1994 that banned the manufacturing or importation of assault weapons. In his response article, Kleck addressed a variety of flaws within the logic behind such a ban, as well as the empirical research supporting it. Such flaws included biased opinions based on anecdotal accounts, insufficient empirical analysis, and misrepresentation of data regarding both gun ownership and the influence of the federal ban on rates of gun ownership (see also Kleck, 2004). According to Kleck, one of the most detrimental mistakes in extant research is that many of the studies provide estimates based on the total number of all assault weapons in the United States, not just the specific models that

unnecessary for them to reload their weapons. In these cases, the shooters maintained a

were outlawed by the ban. This inaccurate representation of the ban's effectiveness results in severely inflated percentages (Kleck, 2001). Additionally, Kleck (2001) noted that all assault weapons in existence when the legislation was enacted were excluded from the ban. This grandfather clause further skews the perceived impact of the ban. According to Kleck (2001), only one in 1,087, or 0.0920%, of guns used in crimes during the first year of the ban would have been new assault weapons covered under the federal legislation. However, even this is an overestimation of the ban's effectiveness. As Kleck (2001) noted, there would be an abundance of functionally equivalent weapons available to criminals that were not banned. These alternative weapons provide comparable rate of fire, magazine capacity, and fire power to that of the banned models. The availability of these weapons further reduces the effect of the ban on homicide rates throughout the country. Kleck (2001) concluded that within its first year (1995) the assault weapons ban would result in a decline of only two homicides out of the 14,686 homicides reported that year. Using current statistical techniques such a miniscule impact could not be accurately identified (Kleck, 2001).

Finally, the author expands his argument regarding the availability of alternative weapons not covered under the federal assault weapons ban (Kleck, 2001). Many researchers contributing to the current literature propose that criminals would be forced to use less lethal weapons when committing crimes. As noted above, this rationale is flawed primarily because the legislation only banned certain models of assault weapons. Likewise, in many mass shooting incidents, the shooters acquired multiple guns making it unnecessary for them to reload their weapons. In these cases, the shooters maintained a

rate of fire that could easily be achieved even with a more primitive weapon (i.e. six shot revolver). Put more simply, banning assault weapons would not necessarily reduce the death toll in these mass shootings. In closing, the author warns that such deceptive statistical analysis could have stark consequences if used as the basis for establishing legislation for gun control (Kleck, 2001, 2004).

Perceptions Regarding Firearms

Many Americans own and carry firearms for purposes of self-protection/defense. Such motivation for having a firearm typically implies that an individual believes they will be safer with a firearm than without. While the safety implications of owning and carrying a firearm are of particular concern, the psychological implications are equally important (Kleck, 1991, 1997). Several prior surveys addressed this issue in one manner or another. One 1989 survey of gun owners specifically addressed the issue of how owning a gun made individuals feel. The results of this survey indicated that 42% of respondents claimed they felt safer because they owned a firearm. Additionally, 56% of respondents reported that owning a firearm made no difference in their perceived safety. This survey also found that 92% of gun owners reported feeling comfortable with a gun inside their home (Quinley, 1990, as cited in Kleck, 1991, p. 119). One shortcoming of this survey is that it failed to account for the respondent's original purpose for owning a firearm. Given that many firearms are purchased for recreational use, it is not surprising that so many individuals reported neutral responses (Kleck, 1991, 1997). A survey in 1990 directly addressed the issue of perceived safety among gun owners while accounting for an individual's original purpose for purchasing the firearm. This survey found that the vast majority (89%) of defensive gun owners reported feeling

safer because they owned a firearm. Of the respondents who did not feel safer, 96% reported they owned the firearm for some reason other than self-protection/defense (Mauser, 1990, as cited in Kleck, 1991, p. 120). Overall, these surveys indicate that most gun owners (defensive or otherwise) feel safer because they own a firearm and are generally comfortable having a firearm in their homes (Kleck, 1991, 1997).

The presence of firearms affects all members of society, gun owners and non-owners alike. As such, researchers have focused on the issue of perceived safety among the entire population with regards to the presence of firearms. Findings indicate that respondents generally feel safer living in an armed society. Specifically, levels of gun ownership in a community have no effect on individuals' perceived safety in their homes. Additionally, individuals in areas with higher levels of gun ownership reported that they felt safer when walking in their neighborhoods at night. A 1994 Gallup poll found that 41% of respondents reported that they would feel less safe if all firearms were removed from society, with the exception of duty weapons carried by law enforcement officers. Only 32% of respondents reported that they would feel safer and the remaining 27% reported neutral feelings. These findings indicate that if firearms were to be removed from society, citizens would generally feel less safe as a result (Kleck, 1997).

Student Perceptions
Crime on Campus

Students' perception of crime on university campuses is a particular field of study that has extensive implications within criminal justice research. Fear of crime on campus can influence students' behavior (Woolnough, 2009) and can affect their development within the campus community both socially and educationally (Barton et al., 2010).

Within the current literature, many researchers have sought to identify factors that influence students' fear of crime and determine what behaviors are consistent with this fear (Kaminski et al., 2010; Lane et al., 2009; Woolnough, 2009; Youstin et al., 2011). By identifying the factors that influence students' fear of crime, researchers can help guide policymakers and campus administrators in their efforts to increase safety on their university campuses (Lane et al., 2009; Woolnough, 2009).

Research has indicated that personal demographics can influence the extent to which a student experiences fear of crime and how they behave as a result of that fear (Kaminski et al., 2010; Lane et al., 2009; Woolnough, 2009). Overall, females report feeling more at risk and more afraid of being victimized than men, and both sexes report increased fear of victimization at night. Given that men statistically encounter more victimization than women, this increased fear of victimization among females requires further examination (Lane et al., 2009). While neither sex perceived sexual assault and/or rape as being the most likely form of victimization, prior research indicates that females feel a significantly greater risk of being raped than their male counterparts. This distinction between the sexes serves as the basis for the "shadow of sexual assault hypothesis" (also referred to as the "shadow hypothesis") (Lane et al., 2009, p. 173). This hypothesis attempts to explain women's increased fear of crime in general by attributing it to their significantly increased fear of sexual assault and/or rape. This fear of sexual assault and/or rape increases women's fear of other violent crimes-against-persons because women believe these crimes could lead to sexual assault and/or rape (Lane et al., 2009; Woolnough, 2009). This hypothesis has been supported within the literature as studies have shown that when controlling for fear of sexual assault, sex

becomes an insignificant predictor of fear. Some research has indicated that the *shadow hypothesis* has a similar relationship for men as well; although it is not as prevalent among men as it is women (Lane et al., 2009). While it seems unlikely that men would be at risk for sexual assault and/or rape, prior studies have found that a person's actual risk of victimization does not serve as a good predictor of their fear (Lane et al., 2009; Woolnough, 2009).

When assessing the behaviors of students in relation to their fears of crime, prior research has indicated that various behaviors are consistent with the students' reported level of fear. Lane and colleagues (2009) found that students who reported elevated fears of crime also reported behaviors designed to prevent such victimization from occurring (see also Woolnough, 2009). These behaviors generally involved a student either taking measures to avoid situations where crime was perceived to be likely or students carrying self-protection devices (e.g. pepper spray). Examples of avoidance behaviors used by students include: avoiding being on campus alone at night, avoiding poorly illuminated areas of campus or areas with excessive shrubbery, and avoiding being out on campus alone (both day and night) (Lane et al., 2009; Woolnough, 2009). Women tend to be more likely to engage in these avoidance behaviors while men more often choose to carry self-protective devices with them. Some research suggests that this may be due to the socialization of women to be particularly aware of their vulnerabilities, both physically and socially. Such self-awareness would logically result in women attempting to avoid potential victimization altogether. Similarly, researchers speculate that even though men may carry self-protective devices (e.g. pocket knife), it may not necessarily be intended for self-protection purposes (Woolnough, 2009).

In her article, Woolnough (2009) called for further research in order to obtain a better comprehension of students' fears of crime and victimization. Additionally, the author postulates that an improved understanding of these matters could guide campus administrators in creating programs designed to improve on-campus safety (Woolnough, 2009). Researchers have proposed a variety of measures to be taken by campus administrators in order to reduce fear of crime on campus. Among these measures are campaigns designed to inform students of actual risks of victimization (Lane et al., 2009; Woolnough, 2009), offering classes on self-defense and self-protective strategies, and providing emergency phones and escort services on campus (Woolnough, 2009).

Concealed Carry Handguns on Campus

Concealed carry on university campuses has justifiably been the subject of many passionate debates. The controversial nature of this subject unsurprisingly elicits strong opinions from both sides of the argument (Bouffard et al., 2011, 2012). Bouffard and colleagues (2012) noted that advocacy groups on both sides of this debate base their arguments on claims that have been subject to little, if any, empirical analysis. Within the current literature on handgun laws, very few published articles address perceptions of concealed carry on university campuses or the likelihood that students will even obtain a CHL and carry on campus if the law permitted them to do so (Bouffard et al., 2011, 2012). Despite the considerably lacking research, a few researchers have attempted to shed light on this topic. In one prior study, Schwaner, Furr, Negrey, and Seger (1999) found that among adults surveyed, several factors were found to influence a respondent's likelihood of obtaining a CHL. The data indicated this desire to be greater for younger

individuals, males, individuals with less formal education, individuals from smaller households, and an increased level of alcohol consumption (Bouffard et al., 2011).

Bouffard and colleagues (2011) conducted a direct analysis of student desires to obtain a CHL and carry a concealed handgun on campus. The researchers found that white, male students majoring in criminal justice were more likely to obtain a CHL and carry on campus if permitted to do so. Also, conservative political beliefs and prior on-campus victimization among students were found to be associated with the intent to obtain and carry. Similarly, students with prior experience in military and law enforcement showed an increased interest as well (Bouffard et al., 2011). Seeking to further fill this void in the current literature, Bouffard and others (2012) surveyed students on a university campus in Texas to assess the extent to which allowing concealed carry on campus would actually result in an increase of handguns on campus. The data from this study indicated that the increase in handguns on campus differed greatly among the groups surveyed within the sample population. Considering the number of CHL holders at the time of the study, it was estimated that between four and thirty-three percent of the classrooms surveyed would have at least one legally concealed handgun if the current ban on firearms was lifted. While their data indicated that removing the current ban of CHLs on campus could result in an increased presence of firearms on campus, the researchers caution that this conclusion could be greatly limited by the willingness of students to follow-through with obtaining a CHL and actually carry their firearm on campus (Bouffard et al., 2012).

Two years prior to the landmark ruling in *Heller* (2008), the Utah Supreme Court handed down a ruling that prevented universities from banning firearms from their campuses. Researchers note that

in the years 1 Concealed Handgun License Holders on University Campuses

As a result of the media coverage of recent school shootings, some states have begun embracing the possibility of allowing CHL holders to carry their concealed firearm onto university campuses (Bouffard et al., 2011; Kaminski et al., 2010; Kopel, 2009). This issue has extended beyond the confines of a debate between special interest groups and has gained traction on both the state and federal levels (Kopel, 2004, 2009). In recent years, the United States Supreme Court handed down rulings in *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008) and *McDonald v. City of Chicago* (2010) that found specific gun control laws to be unconstitutional. These landmark cases represented the first time the Supreme Court ruled against gun control, instead favoring the individual's Second Amendment right to bear arms. Researchers have noted that these rulings simply sustained what many courts have long held; that the banning of all firearms is an unconstitutional violation of the Second Amendment (see also Kopel, 2004, 2009). Despite the considerable insight provided within these rulings, many questions regarding the Second Amendment were left unanswered by the court. Most notably, the Supreme Court declined to address the issue of concealed carry in "gun-free zones" such as university campuses; instead electing to leave that decision up to campus administrators (Bouffard et al., 2011; Desmond, 2008; Kopel, 2009).

While the debate over an *individual* right to bear arms continues on the federal level, some states governments have opted to address many issues of gun control within their respective jurisdictions (Desmond, 2008; Kopel, 2004, 2009). Two years prior to the landmark ruling in *Heller* (2008), the Utah Supreme Court handed down a ruling that prevented universities from banning firearms from their campuses. Researchers note that

in the years following this decision, there have been no negative outcomes from this ruling (Bouffard et al., 2012). Similar legislative efforts have been made, unsuccessfully, in other states to remove restrictions on CHLs, but these efforts have been met with strong opposition from various local groups (see also Bouffard et al., 2011). Despite these failed attempts at legislative reform, support for gun rights has remained high. Several states have chosen to loosen the restrictions on CHLs by modifying the wording of their states laws from *may issue* to *shall issue*. The functional difference between these two phrasings is that the *may issue* laws require CHL applicants to demonstrate a need to carry concealed, with the decision to issue (or not) ultimately being left to designated officials. *Shall issue* only require that applicants meet certain prerequisites for obtaining a CHL. If the applicant meets the prerequisites, the state must issue a CHL regardless of the person's need to carry (Bouffard et al., 2012; Kopel, 2004, 2009).

Within the current literature, a general consensus emerges that CHL holders are generally not responsible for crimes committed either on or off university campuses. Similarly, researchers point out a variety of instances where CHL holders have successfully intervened during shootings. Through the analysis of concealed carry laws, researchers have cited evidence that removing bans on concealed carry could actually reduce violent crime rates (Bouffard et al., 2012; Cramer & Kopel, 1994; Kopel, 2004, 2009). In one study, inmates in ten state prisons were interviewed regarding their prior criminal behaviors. Over half (56%) of the inmates within the sample reported that they would not target a person who they knew to be armed. Approximately 40% of the respondents admitted that they had previously elected to not commit a crime for fear that their intended target might be armed (Cramer & Kopel, 1994; Kopel, 2009). Such insight

suggests that the presence of guns throughout the community might not have the detrimental effects that gun control advocates allege to be the inevitable result (Bouffard et al., 2012; Cramer & Kopel, 1994; Kleck, 2004; Kopel, 2004, 2009). Cramer and Kopel (1994) acknowledge that reform of concealed carry laws is not a perfect remedy for crime, but they contend that “failure to enact carry reform can have deadly consequences” (p. 718).

Through the use of framing techniques, these media outlets are able to present certain stories in a favorable light while portraying others in a less favorable manner (Hagan, 2010; Slate et al., 2013; Surovic, 2007). Such framing techniques can be employed by the media to sway public perceptions regarding the use and availability of firearms within our society. Relying on relevant newspaper articles from the past fifteen years, this study examines the manner in which media outlets frame issues pertaining to the gun debate.

Research Design

The goal of this exploratory analysis is to conduct a content analysis of the media's portrayal of concealed handguns on school campuses. More specifically, two highly circulated newspaper sources, the *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal*, were selected for this qualitative examination. These two newspapers were selected based upon their levels of circulation and readership profiles. From these newspapers, articles published between January 1, 1998, and December 31, 2012, were systematically selected from each newspaper and examined based upon their portrayal of the gun control debate. Utilizing the online database ProQuest Newstand (www.proquest.com), articles were selected using specific keywords within the search parameters. Articles were

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The main objective of this study is to present an exploratory analysis of the news media's portrayal of issues pertaining to the current gun debate. Specifically, this study focuses on how the media portrays the presence of firearms on school campuses.

Through the use of framing techniques, these media outlets are able to present certain stories in a favorable light while portraying others in a less favorable manner (Hagan, 2010; Slate et al., 2013; Surette, 2007). Such framing techniques can be employed by the media to sway public perceptions regarding the use and availability of firearms within our society. Relying on relevant newspaper articles from the past fifteen years, this study examines the manner in which media outlets frame issues pertaining to the gun debate.

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limited to those containing the words *firearm*, *gun*, *pistol*, or *revolver* somewhere in the title as well as the words *university*, *college*, or *campus* anywhere within the article.

Through the analysis, this study sought to examine not only what information was being discussed within the articles but how the information was presented. The publication date of each article served as a reference point by which the researcher could examine the chronological proximity of the articles to school shootings within the United States. A list of mass shootings within the United States was obtained from a nonprofit news organization called Mother Jones (www.motherjones.com). Eight high profile shootings were selected for examination within this analysis. These shootings include: Westside Middle School killings (March 24, 1998); Columbine High School massacre (April 20, 1999); Red Lake massacre (March 21, 2005); Amish school shooting (October 2, 2006); Virginia Tech massacre (April 16, 2007); Northern Illinois University shooting (February 14, 2008); Oikos University killings (April 2, 2012); and Newtown school shooting (December 14, 2012). Articles published within six months following one of the selected shootings were considered to be attributed to the relevant shooting. Articles that were not published within one of these six-month timeframes were considered to be unattributed articles.

Newspaper articles published within six months of each shooting were considered to be a part of the media's response to the respective shooting. By analyzing the publication date of each article in reference to these shootings, the current study is able to examine any potential chronological patterns which might be present within the articles as a whole. Through an examination of the articles on both the individual and aggregate

gun, or twelve or more total were wounded?" (Kleck, 1997, pp. 124-25).

levels, the researcher was able to obtain a complete picture of how the media has chosen to frame the stories pertaining to firearms and their presence on school campuses.

Definition of Terms

The present study focuses on the news media's portrayal of firearms in regard to school campuses. The study examines the manner in which news media outlets portray firearms, specifically in relation to highly publicized school shootings in the United States. Therefore, the following definitions are presented in order to provide a better understanding of terms used within this study.

1. *Concealed handgun license (CHL)*: Many states across the nation provide their citizens with the opportunity to obtain a CHL. This license enables a citizen to legally carry a concealed firearm on their person, however there are limitations placed upon where the citizen can carry their firearm. The specifics of such legislation vary from state to state.
2. *Content analysis*: "A method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables" (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997, p. 112).
3. *Latent content*: Subjective material which requires some form of interpretation or examination by the researcher. This material generally represents a message being subtly suggested by the author(s) (Babbie, 2012; Johnson & Cintron, 1996).
4. *Manifest content*: Information that is readily observable and inevitably quantitative (Babbie, 2012; Johnson & Cintron, 1996).
5. *Mass shooting*: "An incident in which six or more victims were shot dead with a gun, or twelve or more total were wounded" (Kleck, 1997, pp. 124-25).

6. *Most likely speaker:* The person or entity which is given the most coverage within the selected newspaper articles. The amount of coverage given will be determined by the percentage of words allotted to each person or entity.
7. *News media:* Generally, any recognized news outlet providing some form of news information to the general public. This includes television, print, and online sources.
8. *Overall theme:* The manner in which each article frames the gun control issue is assessed. These articles are rated on an eleven-point scale ranging from anti-gun (-5) to objective/neutral (0) to pro-gun (+5).
9. *Social reaction:* Social reaction theory, based upon the scholarship of Frank Tannenbaum (1938), Edwin Lemert (1951), and Howard Becker (1963), provides a theoretical foundation for examining how society reacts to various behaviors. This theory focuses on how society determines certain behaviors to be *criminal*, how individuals committing such behaviors are subsequently labeled, and the impact of applying such labels.

Data Sources

In order to analyze these newspaper articles, a content analysis was used to systematically evaluate the manner in which the news media presents issues pertaining to firearms on school campuses across the nation. A content analysis was deemed appropriate for the particular study as it allows the researcher to examine variables within various forms of communication. This technique analyzes content in a “systematic, objective, and quantitative manner” (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997, p. 112).

Articles were collected from two highly circulated newspapers within the United States: *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal*. These two newspapers were selected based upon their consistently high levels of circulation and comparable readership profiles. As of September, 2012, *The Wall Street Journal* led the nation in total average circulation with 2,096,169. During the same period, the *USA Today* maintained the second most printed newspapers with 1,713,833 ("Top 25 U.S. Newspapers," 2012). The *USA Today* reports readers with an average age of 50 years, nearly half (44%) of which possess at least a college degree. One-third (33%) of these readers maintain professional/managerial positions in their employment and report an average household income of \$89,731 ("USA Today: 2012 Media Kit," 2011). *The Wall Street Journal* reports the average age of its readers to be 49 years. More than three-fourth (79%) of these readers completed a four-year college degree or higher. While only 28% of readers maintain top management positions in their occupation, the reported average household income for these readers is \$271,697 ("Wall Street Journal: Fact Sheet," 2012).

According to Groseclose and Milyo (2005), *The Wall Street Journal* is attributed with having a relatively considerable liberal bias, while the *USA Today* maintains a more centrist/moderate perspective. While this classification of *The Wall Street Journal* may surprise some readers, it is important to note that this finding is due to the specific focus of the researchers' study. Groseclose and Milyo (2005), like the current researcher, focused the scope of their research specifically on news articles and excluded editorial sections of the newspapers. Based solely on the news articles presented within the newspapers, *The Wall Street Journal* received a seemingly counterintuitive, liberal classification (Groseclose & Milyo, 2005). Such a distinction between the news and

editorial sections has been recognized by many prior researchers. Although anecdotal, some evidence exists which supports the distinction between these two sections (Groseclose & Milyo, 2005; Irvine & Kincaid, 2001; Sperry, 2002).

Sample Selection

For the purposes of this study, newspaper articles were obtained from the *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Access to these newspapers was gained through the use of ProQuest Newsstand (www.proquest.com). This resource is an online database which offers access to hundreds of news media outlets, including numerous print newspapers. While utilizing the ProQuest Newsstand database, the two desired newspapers were individually isolated within the search parameters. A search was conducted for articles between January 1, 1998, and December 31, 2012. These dates were selected to include the most relevant and recent school shootings occurring in the United States. The Columbine High School shooting (1999) arguably served as the first high profile shooting to receive extensive media coverage and considerable public outcry. The results were then filtered to only return articles containing the words *university*, *college*, or *campus* anywhere within the article. Furthermore, the search was filtered to only return articles with the words *firearm*, *gun*, *pistol*, or *revolver* somewhere in the title of the article. This particular parameter was set in order to limit the results to only those articles which focused primarily on issues related to firearms. Finally, the search was filtered to only retrieve news or feature articles (as opposed to OpEd, commentary, or editorial articles) from within the United States.

The search resulted in a combined total of 271 articles from both sources (*USA Today*, n= 132; *The Wall Street Journal*, n= 139) which were stored electronically for

purposes of analysis. Once these articles were collected, the researcher conducted a preliminary examination of each article in order to remove any articles that were not directly applicable to the current study. Articles that did not specifically focus on the issue of firearms on school campuses were removed from the sample. These articles happen to contain keywords used within the established search parameters but their primary focus fell outside the scope of the current study. Many of these articles were initially included in the sample because they referenced professors, researchers, or other entities from various universities (e.g. University of Chicago Crime Lab). Following this preliminary examination, a total of 216 articles were removed from the sample leaving 55 articles for analysis. The *USA Today* returned 33 articles and *The Wall Street Journal* produced a total of twenty-two results.

Variables
The text and themes of the selected newspaper articles were examined. Assessing the manifest content, latent content, and key speakers within the articles provided for a more thorough examination of the complete message being portrayed by the reporters. The manifest content within the articles consists of information that is readily apparent and inevitably quantitative. Alternatively, the latent content within the articles is comprised of more subjective material which requires some form of interpretation or examination by the researcher. The key speakers were examined to identify the *influential actors* within the gun debate (Babbie, 2012; Johnson & Cintron, 1996). Through the content analysis, numerous variables were utilized for examining the articles and establishing patterns within the various reports over time.

The most likely speaker was determined based upon the number of individuals

Newspaper source. The Newspaper Source is dummy coded as a dichotomous variable (0= USA Today, 1= The Wall Street Journal).

Date of publication. The Date of Publication for each article is measured as ratio level data. This date will be examined in relation to the high profile shootings incorporated within this study.

Westside Middle School killings. Articles published between March 24, 1998, and September 24, 1998, are dummy coded as a dichotomous variable (0= No, 1=Yes).

Columbine High School massacre. Articles published between April 20, 1999, and October 20, 1999, are dummy coded as a dichotomous variable (0= No, 1=Yes).

Red Lake massacre. Articles published between March 21, 2005, and September 21, 2005, are dummy coded as a dichotomous variable (0= No, 1=Yes).

Amish school shooting. Articles published between October 2, 2006, and April 2, 2007, are dummy coded as a dichotomous variable (0= No, 1=Yes).

Virginia Tech massacre. Articles published between April 16, 2007, and October 16, 2007 are dummy coded as a dichotomous variable (0= No, 1=Yes).

Northern Illinois University shooting. Articles published between February 14, 2008, and August 14, 2008 are dummy coded as a dichotomous variable (0= No, 1=Yes).

Oikos University killings. Articles published between April 2, 2012, and October 2, 2012, are dummy coded as a dichotomous variable (0= No, 1=Yes).

Newtown school shooting. Articles published between December 14, 2012, and December 31, 2012, are dummy coded as a dichotomous variable (0= No, 1=Yes).

Most likely speaker. The Most Likely Speaker was recorded from within the articles. The most likely speaker was determined based upon the number of individuals

or entities from each group presented within the articles. The variable is dummy coded. (1=Citizen, 2= Government employee, 3= Law enforcement, 4= Lobbying group, 5= Other).

Citizen. Citizen is measured as ratio level data based upon the number of citizens, if any, that were presented within an article.

Government employee. Government Employee is measured as ratio level data based upon the number of government employees, if any, that were presented within an article.

Law enforcement. Law Enforcement is measured as ratio level data based upon the number of members of law enforcement, if any, that were presented within an article.

Lobbying group. Lobbying Group is measured as ratio level data based upon the number of members from a lobbying group, if any, that were presented within an article.

Other speaker. Other Speaker is measured as ratio level data based upon the number of other speakers, if any, that were presented within an article that did not fit within one of the previous categories.

Pro-Gun words. Pro-Gun Words is measured as ratio level data within this study. The percentage of words from pro-gun sources is measured for each article. Sources will be identified as pro-gun based upon their public stance on the issue (e.g. stance taken publically by a politician). If such information is not available, identification will be based upon the content of their message.

Neutral words. Neutral Words is measured as ratio level data within this study.

The percentage of words from neutral sources is measured for each article. Sources will be identified as neutral based upon their public stance on the issue (e.g. stance taken

publically by a politician). If such information is not available, identification will be based upon the content of their message.

Anti-Gun words. Anti-Guns Words is measured as ratio level data within this study. The percentage of words from anti-gun sources is measured for each article. Sources will be identified as anti-gun based upon their public stance on the issue (e.g. stance taken publically by a politician). If such information is not available, identification will be based upon the content of their message.

Overall theme. Overall Theme is measured as ordinal level data within this study. The overall theme of each article will be rated using a coding scheme ranging from very strongly anti-gun to objective to very strongly pro-gun (-5= Very strongly anti-gun, 0= Objective, 5= Very strongly pro-gun).

Analysis

Research Questions

After examining the extant literature and theoretical foundation for the current study three research questions were formulated regarding the news media's influence on public perceptions of issues pertaining to the current gun debate. These research questions are as follows:

R1: What effect will the occurrence of high profile school shootings in the United States have on the overall theme of articles published within six months of the event?

R2: Who will the most likely speaker(s) be within the relevant newspaper articles following high profile school shootings in the United States?

R3: Will the occurrence of a high profile school shooting effect how much coverage the news media gives to either side of the gun control debate?

In order to address each of these research questions, results from the data analysis will be presented in a number of charts providing the relevant means, frequencies, and percentages. First, the overall theme for articles attributed to each school shooting will be presented. An average rating of the articles will be presented along with the number of articles for each shooting. This will provide a general overview of the manner in which the news media chose to portray the firearms issue following each of the eight selected shootings.

Second, a breakdown of article word counts will be presented for each shooting. The total number of words in all relevant articles and the average word count will provide an overview of the extent to which the news media chose to address the firearms issue following each of the shootings. Furthermore, the number of words from pro-gun, neutral, and anti-gun sources will be provided as well as the percentage of words allotted to each group. The total word count will serve as the basis for determining these percentages. This breakdown of word counts will provide a summary of the overall views of speakers presented within the articles and the amount of coverage they received within the selected newspapers.

Third, a breakdown of the actual speakers presented in the articles will be provided for each of the shootings. This will offer a list of the number of speakers from each of the established groups (citizens, government employee, law enforcement officers, lobbying groups, and other speakers) that were referenced in the articles. From this list, the researcher will be able to identify the most likely speakers (or influential actors) in the articles following each high profile shooting.

Based on the data mentioned above, an analysis will be presented discussing the implications of the quantitative and qualitative findings within the current examination. The qualitative aspect of the discussion will incorporate any significant quotes, phrases, or trends discovered within the articles during the analysis as well as any other significant findings noted by the researcher. Such trends could include emotional tone of the articles as well as any other aspects of the article which could influence a potential reader's opinion of the issues presented within the articles.

Limitations

Due to the limited focus of this study, the current analysis faces a number of limitations. Although it was necessary to restrict the analysis to only two newspapers, this limited the generalizability of the findings to other populations such as other newspapers, other news media formats (e.g. television or online), and other geographical regions. Furthermore, the limited scope of the study provides only a snapshot of the entire issue. News media coverage of the selected shootings is affected by other high profile events which might have occurred during the same time period. Other events might draw media attention away from the shootings. This in no way diminishes the importance of the analysis of these shootings; it simply represents an outside influence which cannot be controlled. Given the timing of the Newtown school shooting the researcher was unable to obtain articles covering the full six month period following the shooting. This limitation inevitably excludes the Newtown school shooting from this portion of the analysis, but the shooting are included within the researcher's qualitative discussion. Without replicating the analysis using other news sources, the findings presented within this study are limited only to the two newspapers selected within the

present examination. Additionally, the current study is limited due to the lack of inter-rater reliability for latent variables within the analysis.

Summary

The current study sought to examine the news media's portrayal of issues involving firearms on school campuses. A content analysis was conducted to determine any possible patterns in the media's portrayal of firearms on school campuses following eight high profile shootings in the United States. Two highly circulated newspapers were selected within this study. A total of 55 articles were selected from the *USA Today* as well as *The Wall Street Journal*. These articles provided the basis for the current content analysis.

4, 1998); Columbine High School massacre (April 20, 1999); Red Lake massacre (March 21, 2005); Amish school shooting (October 2, 2006); Virginia Tech massacre (April 16, 2007); Northern Illinois University shooting (February 14, 2008); Oikos University killings (April 2, 2012), and Newtown school shooting (December 14, 2012).

Table 1 shows the number of articles attributed to each of the selected shootings. Given that the Amish school shooting had no attributed articles, it will be removed from all subsequent tables.

Table 1
Number of Articles per Shooting

	WMS	CHS	RL	AS	VT	NIU	OU	NS
Attributed Articles	4	4	1	0	9	3	1	9

WMS= Westside Middle School killings; CHS= Columbine High School massacre; RL= Red Lake massacre; AS= Amish school shooting; VT= Virginia Tech massacre; NIU= Northern Illinois University shooting; OU= Oikos University killings; NS= Newtown school shooting

* Only eighteen days of news media coverage were included in the study

CHAPTER IV Articles

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of the current exploratory analysis was to examine the news media's portrayal of firearms on school campuses following school shootings in the United States. A total of 55 articles spanning a fifteen-year period were included within the current analysis. These articles were selected from the *USA Today* (n= 33) and *The Wall Street Journal* (n= 22). Eight school shootings that occurred within the United States during this time period were utilized for the current analysis: Westside Middle School killings (March 24, 1998); Columbine High School massacre (April 20, 1999); Red Lake massacre (March 21, 2005); Amish school shooting (October 2, 2006); Virginia Tech massacre (April 16, 2007); Northern Illinois University shooting (February 14, 2008); Oikos University killings (April 2, 2012); and Newtown school shooting (December 14, 2012).

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Table 1
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WMS= Westside Middle School killings; CHS= Columbine High School massacre; RL= Red Lake massacre; AS= Amish school shooting; VT= Virginia Tech massacre; NIU= Northern Illinois University shooting; OU= Oikos University killings; NS= Newtown school shooting

^a Only eighteen days of news media coverage were included in the study.

Descriptive Statistics of Articles

The combined total word counts for all articles attributed to each shooting provides a general overview of the amount of coverage the news media gave to the issue of firearms on campus following each school shooting (see Table 2). Additionally, the total word counts for articles attributed to each of the shootings served as the basis for percentages presented in Table 2. Based upon this breakdown of word counts, the amount of coverage provided to each side of the gun debate remained relatively constant. These findings indicate a relatively consistent distribution in the news media's coverage of the gun debate. While the average number of pro-gun words was the only category to remain constant among the articles, the average number of neutral and anti-gun words decreased slightly when school shootings occurred.

Table 3 provides a breakdown of the frequencies for each article's overall theme. These findings show that there was a decline in the number of both anti-gun and pro-gun articles when the articles are not directly attributed to a recent shooting. Subsequently, there was an increase in the number of objective articles during the same time period indicating that high profile school shootings tend to polarize the news media's portrayal of firearms on campuses.

As shown in Table 4, the rating of attributed articles ($M = -0.06$, $n = 31$) indicated a slight shift in the pro-gun direction when compared to the articles not attributed to any shootings ($M = -0.46$, $n = 24$). Such a shift in the average overall theme is indicative of an increase in objective and/or pro-gun rhetoric. This shift could be due to increased activism among proponents of gun rights following high profile events involving

Table 2

Breakdown of Word Counts by Overall Themes

Word Counts	Shootings							All Attributed (n= 31)	All Unattributed (n= 24)
	WMS (n= 4)	CHS (n= 4)	RL (n= 1)	VT (n= 9)	NIU (n= 3)	OU (n= 1)	NS ^a (n= 9)		
Per Article									
Total	2,916	2,906	437	6,395	1,685	977	6,968	22,284	18,652
Mean	729	727	437	711	562	977	774	719	777
Pro-Gun									
Total	69	0	0	651	251	262	705	1,938	1,455
Mean	17	0	0	72	84	262	78	63	61
Percent	2.37%	0%	0%	10.18%	14.90%	26.82%	10.12%	8.70%	7.80%
Neutral									
Total	910	667	157	943	310	32	937	3,956	3,608
Mean	228	167	157	105	103	32	104	128	150
Percent	31.21%	22.95%	35.93%	14.75%	18.40%	3.28%	13.45%	17.75%	19.34%
Anti-Gun									
Total	200	128	0	354	264	84	696	1,726	1,909
Mean	50	32	0	39	88	84	77	56	80
Percent	6.86%	4.40%	0%	5.54%	15.67%	8.60%	9.99%	7.75%	10.23%

Note. All averages have been rounded to the nearest whole number. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest hundredth.

WMS= Westside Middle School killings; CHS= Columbine High School massacre; RL= Red Lake massacre; VT= Virginia Tech massacre; NIU= Northern Illinois University shooting; OU= Oikos University killings; NS= Newtown school shooting

^a Only eighteen days of news media coverage were included in the study.

Table 3

Distribution of Articles Based on Overall Themes

Rating	Attributed (n= 31)		Articles Unattributed (n= 24)		Total (n= 55)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Very Strongly Anti-Gun	0	0.00%	1	4.17%	1	1.82%
Strongly Anti-Gun	1	3.23%	1	4.17%	2	3.64%
Anti-Gun	5	16.13%	1	4.17%	6	10.91%
Somewhat Anti-Gun	4	12.90%	4	16.67%	8	14.55%
Slightly Anti-Gun	6	19.35%	4	16.67%	10	18.18%
Objective	6	19.35%	7	29.17%	13	23.64%
Slightly Pro-Gun	0	0.00%	2	8.33%	2	3.64%
Somewhat Pro-Gun	2	6.45%	2	8.33%	4	7.27%
Pro-Gun	4	12.90%	1	4.17%	5	9.09%
Strongly Pro-Gun	0	0.00%	1	4.17%	1	1.82%
Very Strongly Pro-Gun	3	9.68%	0	0.00%	3	5.45%

Note. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest hundredth.

Table 4

Overall Theme per Shooting

	Shootings							All Attributed	All Unattributed	All Articles
	WMS	CHS	RL	VT	NIU	OU	NS ^a			
Average Rating	-1.75 (n= 4)	-2.00 (n= 4)	0.00 (n= 1)	1.22 (n= 9)	-1.00 (n= 3)	3.00 (n= 1)	0.22 (n= 9)	-0.06 (n= 31)	-0.46 (n= 24)	-0.24 (n= 55)

Note. All average ratings are rounded to the nearest hundredth.

WMS= Westside Middle School killings; CHS= Columbine High School massacre; RL= Red Lake massacre; VT= Virginia Tech massacre; NIU= Northern Illinois University shooting; OU= Oikos University killings; NS= Newtown school shooting

^a Only eighteen days of news media coverage were included in the study.

firearms. However, when examining the average overall themes for each individual shooting, such a shift is not as readily apparent.

Speakers within the articles were classified into five different categories: citizens, government employee, law enforcement, lobbying group, and other. Table 5 presents a breakdown of the number of speakers within each category. When examining the number of speakers in articles attributed to shootings as opposed to unattributed articles, there appears to be a shift in the number of speakers from each category. This shift in the frequency of speakers is indicative of the news media focusing on the citizens involved or associated with the shootings and the entities (i.e. government employees and lobbying groups) that influence policies and laws regarding firearms.

Research Questions

This exploratory analysis was guided by three research questions. The findings of the analysis were used to answer these research questions.

Research Question 1: What effect will the occurrence of high profile school shootings in the United States have on the overall theme of articles published within six months of the event?

In order to address the first research question, overall themes were examined for the articles included within the current study. The overall theme of the articles was measured on an eleven-point scale (-5= Very strongly anti-gun, 0= Objective, 5= Very strongly pro-gun). Separate average overall themes were found for each of the selected shootings. Additionally, average overall themes were found for all attributed articles (n= 31), all unattributed articles (n= 24), and all articles combined (n= 55). Overall, the descriptive analysis indicated that the occurrence of a high profile school shooting

Table 5
Most Likely Speakers

Speakers	Shootings							All Attributed (n= 31)	All Unattributed (n= 24)
	WMS (n= 4)	CHS (n= 4)	RL (n= 1)	VT (n= 9)	NIU (n= 3)	OU (n= 1)	NS ^a (n= 9)		
Citizens	16	4	0	8	8	2	6	44	33
Gov't Employee	4	7	0	23	5	4	19	62	41
Law Enforcement	3	2	0	4	0	0	4	13	24
Lobbying Group	1	0	0	11	6	4	15	37	32
Other	15	9	4	23	1	5	25	82	84

Note. WMS= Westside Middle School killings; CHS= Columbine High School massacre; RL= Red Lake massacre; VT= Virginia Tech massacre; NIU= Northern Illinois University shooting; OU= Oikos University killings; NS= Newtown school shooting

^a Only eighteen days of news media coverage were included in the study.

resulted in a slight shift in the overall theme of articles towards objective or pro-gun. However, this finding was not conclusive when the selected shootings were examined individually. Furthermore, a frequency distribution of overall themes indicated that the occurrence of a high profile school shooting increased the number of both anti-gun and pro-gun articles while the number of objective articles actually decreased slightly.

Research Question 2: Who will the most likely speaker be within the relevant newspaper articles following high profile school shootings in the United States?

Speakers from each article were classified as citizens, government employees, law enforcement, lobbying group, or other. The number of speakers from each group was examined for articles attributed to each shooting. While the number of speakers varied among shootings, speakers classified as other (n= 82) and government employees (n= 62) were consistently identified as the most frequent speakers. Law enforcement speakers was consistently the least represented category of speakers among the selected shootings. Similarly, the number of law enforcement speakers decreased most considerably (by almost half) from unattributed (n= 24) to attributed articles (n=13). In the same comparison, the number of government speakers increased from forty-one in unattributed articles to sixty-two in attributed articles while the number of other speakers remained relatively constantly between categories.

Research Question 3: Will the occurrence of a high profile school shooting effect how much coverage the news media gives to either side of the gun control debate?

In order to determine the amount of coverage given to each side of the gun debate, the word counts for each group were examined. While the number of pro-gun, neutral, and anti-gun words varied greatly among articles attributed to the selected shootings, the

combined averages for each category offered a better assessment of the coverage provided. Overall, the amount of pro-gun coverage remained constant between articles attributed to selected shootings ($M= 63$) and unattributed articles ($M= 61$). Both the neutral and anti-gun coverage saw a slight decrease in articles attributed to selected shootings.

Qualitative Analysis

In addition to identifying the manifest content, the researcher also examined the latent content found within each of the selected articles. This latent content included references to the selected shootings within the articles, influential quotes (i.e. power statements) from the speakers, and other aspects of the articles relevant to the current study. Analysis of such content provides a greater understanding of the news media's portrayal of firearms on campuses within the United States.

Referenced Shootings

In addition to identifying articles attributed to each of the selected shootings, the researcher also identified articles that made reference to the selected shootings. While these articles may or may not have been attributed to a particular shooting based upon their date of publication, these articles directly made reference to one or more of the selected shootings within the current analysis.

Table 6 presents a breakdown of the number of articles which made reference to the selected shootings and whether or not the articles were attributed to the shooting they referenced. Table 7 provides a more in-depth breakdown of the articles which were attributed to shootings and made reference to one of the selected shootings. This breakdown provides an overview of the shootings that were referenced in articles

Table 6

Shootings Referenced within Articles

Articles	Shootings							
	WMS (n= 4)	CHS (n= 4)	RL (n= 1)	VT (n= 9)	NIU (n= 3)	OU (n= 1)	NS ^a (n= 9)	
Attributed to relevant shooting	3	2	1	9	3	0	9	
Unattributed to relevant shooting	0	9	0	11	0	0	0	
Total	3	11	1	20	3	0	9	

Note. WMS= Westside Middle School killings; CHS= Columbine High School massacre; RL= Red Lake massacre; VT= Virginia Tech massacre; NIU= Northern Illinois University shooting; OU= Oikos University killings; NS= Newtown school shooting

^a Only eighteen days of news media coverage were included in the study.

Virginia Tech massacre	9	3	1	1	14	6
Northern Illinois University shooting	3	0	0	0	3	0
Oikos University killings	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newtown school shooting	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note. WMS= Westside Middle School killings; CHS= Columbine High School massacre; RL= Red Lake massacre; VT= Virginia Tech massacre; NIU= Northern Illinois University shooting; OU= Oikos University killings; NS= Newtown school shooting

^a Only eighteen days of news media coverage were included in the study.

Table 7

Articles Attributed and Referenced

Referenced Shooting	Articles attributed to:							All Attributed (n= 31)	All Unattributed (n= 24)
	WMS (n= 4)	CHS (n= 4)	RL (n= 1)	VT (n= 9)	NIU (n= 3)	OU (n= 1)	NS ^a (n= 9)		
Westside Middle School killings	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Columbine High School massacre	-	2	0	2	0	0	1	5	6
Red Lake massacre	-	-	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Amish school shooting	-	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0
Virginia Tech massacre	-	-	-	9	3	1	1	14	6
Northern Illinois University shooting	-	-	-	-	3	0	0	3	0
Oikos University killings	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0
Newtown school shooting	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	9	0

Note. WMS= Westside Middle School killings; CHS= Columbine High School massacre; RL= Red Lake massacre; VT= Virginia Tech massacre; NIU= Northern Illinois University shooting; OU= Oikos University killings; NS= Newtown school shooting

^a Only eighteen days of news media coverage were included in the study.

attributed to other incidents. Many of the articles referenced the shooting to which they were attributed. The only two shootings that were referenced in articles attributed to other shootings were the Columbine High School massacre (n=3) and the Virginia Tech massacre (n= 5). This finding is consistent with the overall coverage of these two shootings. Both shootings received a considerable amount of coverage by the news media based upon the number of articles and the total word counts for articles attributed to the shootings (see Table 2). Given the substantially high profile nature of these two shootings, it is expected that these two shootings would be referenced in articles not directly attributed to them. Despite being able to examine only 18 days of news media coverage for the Newtown school shooting, this shooting still received the greatest amount of coverage (i.e. number of attributed articles and total word count) of all the selected shootings within the current study. It is reasonable to expect that this shooting will continue to receive considerable coverage from the news media in the future.

Power Statements

Throughout the articles, many statements from a wide variety of speakers were believed to be of considerable importance to the current analysis. These influential quotes, or power statements, were noted within each of the articles and individually examined. Each of these quotes was classified as either pro-gun, neutral, or anti-gun. In all, there were a total of 57 pro-gun quotes, 36 neutral quotes, and forty-three anti-gun quotes. The most notable of these quotes will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

Pro-gun Quotes. Many of the pro-gun quotes sought to rationalize and justify the presence of firearms within society and on school campuses. Jack Harper, a Republican

state representative from Arizona, said that, "When everyone is carrying a firearm, nobody is going to be a victim" (Johnson, 2011). Similarly, Wayne LaPierre, chief executive officer for the National Rifle Association, posited that, "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun" (Fields, Banchemo, & Nelson, 2012). One citizen speaker, Casey Herrick, claimed that, "We need guns in the USA for two main reasons: to protect ourselves and to protect others" (Herrick, Pourciau, & Shern, 2007). Jack Levin, a criminologist at Northeastern University in Boston noted that, "There has been a proliferation of firearms in this country since the 1970s. Guns are as American as apple pie" (Fields, 1998). Many of these statements offer romanticized notions of an armed populace that can defend itself from possible threats. The general consensus from these statements is that firearms are an integral part of our society and the general public should not be deprived of them.

Other statements focused more specifically on the school campuses. David Burnett, a spokesman for the national, student-led group Students for Concealed Carry on Campus (SCCC) argued, "... allowing students to carry guns can help in situations of sexual assault, armed robbery or other crimes. 'This isn't just about the rare college shooting incidents'" (Crisp, 2011). Kevin Starrett, the executive director of the Oregon Firearms Educational Foundation agreed with this consensus. Starrett stated that, "People legally licensed to carry a gun shouldn't give up their Second Amendment right to bear arms just because they attend a university" (Jervis, 2011). Gary Kleck, a gun-violence expert at Florida State University, furthered the argument for firearms on campuses, claiming, "There's little doubt that the trend for shootings in schools is down. Nothing related to kids and guns is going up" (Wolf, 2000). These statements perpetuate

the notion that school campuses are not safe havens from criminal activity. As such, these speakers believe that students, faculty, and staff should not be deprived of their right to bear arms simply because they have entered the school campus.

Another spokesman for the SCCC, W. Scott Lewis, added that, "... 'arbitrary gun-free zones stack the odds in favor of dangerous criminals,' and leave 'the victims of the shootings with no recourse but to hide under their desks waiting and hoping not to die'" (Leinwand, 2008). Ken Stanton, a Ph.D. student at Virginia Tech at the time of the 2007 shooting, offered support for firearms on campus. "It is not a force field, but it just means that if something bad does happen, we can fight back. At Virginia Tech, no one had a chance," said Stanton (Palazzolo & Eder, 2012). Forrest Knox, a state representative from Kansas, also supported loosening the restrictions placed on concealed carry, stating that, "If you are not going to provide a way to keep illegal guns out, you can't stop legally owned guns from entering a public building" (Palazzolo & Eder, 2012). Utah's attorney general, Mark Shurtleff, said in reference to the University of Utah's ban on firearms, "[T]he school's policy of banning firearms only serves to 'disarm law-abiding citizens' while criminals ignore the policy" (Kenworthy, 2002). A student, Daniel Crocker, at another university questioned policies banning firearms on campus. "We can't understand why we lose that option for personal protection, just because we want an education" (Campoy, 2011). Philip Van Cleave, president of the Virginia Citizens Defense League, argued that "The students were like sheep. If you were in that room waiting to be executed, what would you give to be able to stop that and save the lives of others?" (O'Connell, Fields, & Treftz, 2007). Republican state senator from Utah, Michael Waddoups, offered his support of legislation allowing concealed carry firearms on

campuses. ““But until we take guns away from the criminals, we can't take them away from the law-abiding,’ including students, professors and after-hours cleaning crews” (Kronholz, 2004). These statements offer further support of legislation allowing firearms on campus. These speakers reiterate that school campuses are not immune from crime and citizens should be able to defend themselves while on campus. Some of these speakers go so far as to directly reference specific school shootings, claiming that the presence of armed, law-abiding citizens could have prevented or greatly subdued the tragedy suffered on the school campuses.

Alternatively, other pro-gun statements were directly critical of legislation that attempts to regulate or ban firearms within society and on school campuses. James Pasco, the executive director of the Fraternal Order of Police criticized arguments for gun-control, saying, “We have more guns than we've ever had, and the crime rate and gun-crime rate are dropping. That tells me that what is going on can't just be the prevalence of guns” (Fields, 2000). John Snyder, spokesman for the Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms, was similarly critical of gun-control rhetoric. “[T]he numbers aren't widely discussed because ‘they don't conform to the politically correct philosophy of the government that more guns mean more crime’” (Fields, 2000). Chief lobbyist for the National Rifle Association, James Jay Baker, stated, “The lesson of Columbine is that new gun laws aren't the answer to senseless killings” (Barrett, 1999). Alan Gottlieb, founder of the Second Amendment Foundation, called for a more accurate representation of firearms in society. Gottlieb held that “... too often in gun-control debates, the downsides of gun restrictions get ignored. ‘You never hear about the number of times someone successfully uses a gun to protect himself or his family or property.

That gets completely lost in the debate” (Fields & Jones, 2012). John Lott, economist and author of *More Guns, Less Crime*, offered staunch support of legislation allowing concealed carry, stating that, “[S]tate laws allowing people to carry concealed weapons have significantly reduced violent crime” (Palazzolo & Bialik, 2012). Each of these statements purport that gun-control efforts simply do not help to reduce crime and, alternatively, laws allowing concealed carry enable citizens to defend themselves. These speakers claim that allowing concealed carry on campuses would result in safer, more secure campuses.

Anti-gun Quotes. Many of the anti-gun quotes focused on safety issues involving firearms, claiming that firearms on school campuses would not only make a vulnerable situation incredibly dangerous, but it would also interfere with the primary goal of the educational environment. Randi Weingarten, head of the American Federation of Teachers, a labor union in the United States, stated that “...schools must be safe sanctuaries, not armed fortresses” (Fields, Banchemo, & Nelson, 2012). Daniel Webster, co-director of the Johns Hopkins University’s Center for Gun Policy and Research, offered support of gun-control effort regarding school campuses. Webster argued that, “[I]ntroducing guns to college campuses creates a potentially combustible situation, given the prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse among college students” (Palazzolo & Eder, 2012). President of the University of Utah, Bernard Machen, was equally critical of firearms on school campuses. Machen argued, “...allowing guns on campus ‘would interfere with the essential functions of a university’ and infringe on academic freedom” (Kenworthy, 2002). Such statements focus on both the academic and social environment of school campuses.

Colin Goddard, a survivor of the Virginia Tech massacre who was shot four times, joined the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. “[A] proliferation of firearms would simply add to the chaos during a shooting spree, making it impossible for police to distinguish between good guys and bad,” Goddard remarks (Roth & Haman, 2009). “[E]vents (during the Virginia Tech shooting) unfolded at such a lightning pace during the shootings that even an armed student would have been powerless to prevent them” (Roth & Haman, 2009). Louisiana state representative, Hollis Downs, was critical of proposed legislation that would allow concealed carry on campuses. “I thought that the last thing that law enforcement needed was the fraternity militia to charge the building [in a shooting] with all guns blazing” (Roth & Haman, 2009). President of the University of Texas, William Powers, Jr., furthered the argument against firearms on his campus, citing the dangers of firearms in such an environment. “Moments in which students might need a gun for self-defense are ‘extremely rare.’ ‘Friday and Saturday night come every week on campus’” (Campoy, 2011). These speakers believe that allowing firearms on school campuses would actually have a negative effect. Allowing students to carry concealed firearms would only increase the opportunity for deadly acts of violence to occur. Furthermore, it would make incidents of school shootings even more chaotic when they do occur.

Other anti-gun statements were more dramatic and emotional in their argument for gun-control. Joe Klein, of TIME Magazine, claimed that “If only we could keep the guns out of the hands of the nut jobs, we would all be safe” (Earley, 2012). Kristen Rand, from the Violence Policy Center, a Washington think tank that supports gun control, purported that “[Allowing concealed carry on campus] is ‘ludicrous. It's insanity

to say we should wait for this to happen, and wait for a good guy with a gun to gun down the shooter” (O’Connell, Fields, & Treftz, 2007). Wellington Webb, mayor for the City of Denver, called for action to be taken in response to recent shootings. Webb questioned, “At what point will we decide as a nation that another child must not die because of our national inaction on gun violence?” (Wolf, 2000). Michael Bloomberg, mayor for New York City, offered similar statements following the Newtown school shooting. “Calling for 'meaningful action' is not enough. We need immediate action. We have heard all the rhetoric before,” said Bloomberg (Fields & Jones, 2012). Barack Obama, President of the United States, offered an emotional response to the Newtown school shooting, stating that “The majority of those who died today were children -- beautiful little kids between the ages of 5 and 10 years old. They had their entire lives ahead of them” (Fields & Jones, 2012). The statements provided by these speakers offer a more emotional, sensationalized depiction of firearms on school campuses. Such statements likely seek to invoke an emotional response to the tragedies that have occurred involving firearms on campus.

Lori Haas, the mother of a girl who was injured during the Virginia Tech massacre, attempted to blame the owner of the firearms dealer who sold weapons to the shooter. “I wonder what his motivation is. He's a gun seller. If he had a way to arm more people, he'd sell more guns and make money. I suspect he's motivated by greed,” claimed Haas (Leinwand, 2008). She went on to discuss a proposed effort to allow concealed carry on school campuses. “It's just ludicrous to think that more guns won't result in more injuries. Gun deaths increase every year with the rise of guns in this country” (Leinwand, 2008). Such statements undoubtedly seek to play upon the emotional aspect

of the incident. Omar Samaha, whose sister was killed in a school shooting, was also critical of such efforts to open school campuses for concealed carry. "It's kind of a crazy notion to think about. It takes us back to the Wild, Wild West," said Samaha (Bello, 2008). Suzann Wilson, the mother of a twelve-year-old girl who was a victim in the Westside Middle School killings, offered an emotional statement supporting gun-control efforts. Wilson claimed that her "...daughter would still be alive if those boys didn't have access to guns" (Stone, Watson, Drinkard, & Katz, 1998). Each of these statements offers an emotional, dramatized reaction to the tragedies that have occurred. While they may be effective in eliciting an emotional response from the readers, they do little to advance a rational discussion regarding the issue of firearms on school campuses.

Findings and Discussion

Distribution of News Media Coverage

Even though there was a plethora of articles pertaining to firearms in general, the issue of firearms on school campuses received relatively little coverage. Based upon articles within the current analysis, nearly half (49.09%) of all the articles were found to be anti-gun in their overall theme while only 27.27% were found to be pro-gun (see Table 3). While this is only one measurement used within the current analysis, it provides a general overview of the coverage provided to each side of the gun debate. This ratio of anti-gun to pro-gun articles remains relatively consistent before and after high profile school shootings. Interestingly, the greatest change is seen in the number of neutral articles relative to the number of anti- and pro-gun articles. The occurrence of a school shooting greatly reduced the number of neutral articles from 29.17% in unattributed articles to 19.35% in attributed articles. This shift in the distribution of articles is

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Few issues elicit such a polarizing response as that of firearms in the United States. While gun control has been heatedly debated for decades, the occurrence of high profile school shootings continually brings the issue to the forefront of political debates. The news media maintains great influence over public perceptions regarding issues within society, especially those which are highly controversial. Their portrayal of issues can determine what information reaches the general public and how that information is presented. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings from the current analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Distribution of News Media Coverage

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indicative of the polarizing nature of tragic events, especially those involving firearms. During such times, the frequency of both anti- and pro-gun articles increases proportionately, leaving relatively few articles straddling the proverbial fence.

As would be expected, the number of articles and total number of words increased following the selected school shootings. While the breakdown of articles and word counts varied among the selected shootings, a comparison of all attributed and unattributed articles offers a greater understanding of the news media coverage. Looking beyond the frequency distribution of articles, the breakdown of word counts for anti-gun, neutral, and pro-gun speakers provided a more in-depth analysis of the news media's coverage (see Table 2). The number of pro-gun words was the only category to see an increase following one of the selected shootings. While the average number of pro-gun words per article remained relatively consistent, the total number of pro-gun words increased considerably.

Although the increase in pro-gun words may seem counterintuitive based upon the aforementioned distribution of overall themes this breakdown of words does not account for the tone or framing of the article. Despite an increase in the word count, many of the articles presented pro-gun speakers in a negative light. This negative framing of pro-gun speakers undermined their message and credibility. Such framing included the use of negative connotations when presenting pro-gun speakers. One article used phrases such as "assailed" and "lashed out" when citing a pro-gun speaker (Johnson, 2011). Other articles framed pro-gun speakers in a skeptical, cynical manner. Some articles even used negative visual imagery of events such as "sprayed the school with more than 30 rounds" (Kasindorf & Bowles, 2001). Alternatively, these same articles

presented anti-gun speakers as progressive pioneers offering hope during these tragic times. This type of negative framing undoubtedly elicits a negative reaction from readers in regards to firearms on school campuses.

Influential Actors

Throughout the articles within the current study, a variety of speakers were presented (see Table 5). While many of these speakers were referenced only a limited number of times, some speakers were present in numerous articles and received a considerable amount of coverage. These speakers represent the most influential actors in this aspect of the current gun debate. The most frequent of these influential actors were speakers from the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence (40 citations and 653 total words) and the National Rifle Association (NRA; 39 citations and 632 total words), both of which are large lobbying groups focusing specifically on legislation regarding firearms. This comes as no surprise given that these groups arguably represent the largest anti- and pro-gun lobbying groups in the United States. Both groups received relatively the same amount of coverage throughout the articles, based upon the number of citations and total word counts for each group. Additionally, high ranking officials from each group received considerable amounts of coverage individually throughout the articles. Paul Helmke, president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, had fourteen citations and 199 total words. Similarly, Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president of the NRA, had eight citations and 172 total words. Another lobbying group that received a considerable amount of coverage was an internet-based organization called Students for Concealed Carry on Campus (SCCC). This student-run group supports laws allowing

concealed carry on university campuses. Within the current analysis, the SCCC received sixteen citations and 267 total words.

Government and law enforcement groups frequently presented within the articles included the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the United States Department of Justice, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (BATFE), and various law enforcement entities. Speakers from the FBI were cited twenty-three times (507 total words) regarding investigations of school shootings and various statistics pertaining to firearms (e.g. Uniform Crime Report). The Justice Department was most often cited for various statistics and reports regarding firearms (13 citations and 187 total words). The BATFE was often referred to for statistics regarding the prevalence of firearms in society and various laws pertaining to firearms (10 citations and 147 total words). Speakers from various law enforcement agencies were frequently cited due to their involvement with investigations regarding the school shootings (17 citations and 287 total words). These law enforcement speakers consisted of two federal officials, twenty-seven local or state officials, five unspecified officials, and three speakers representing various law enforcement organizations (e.g. Fraternal Order of Police).

Among the speakers classified as citizens, certain groups were of particular interest within the current analysis. These speakers included a wide range of individuals with various relationships to the school shootings. Family and friends of shooting victims were regularly cited within the articles (28 citations and 355 total words). These individuals served as a representation of those affected by school shootings. Unsurprisingly, these speakers regularly offered passionate statements regarding the victims. Subsequently, their presence in the articles often drew upon the emotional

aspect of such tragedies. Similarly, the actual victims of the shootings were cited throughout the articles (12 citations and 263 total words). These victims offered firsthand accounts of the shootings, oftentimes providing vivid details of the horrific events. These narratives undoubtedly elicit an emotional response from the readers. Interestingly, the family and friends of the shooters received considerably more coverage (40 citations and 599 total words) than those of the victims. Such extensive coverage is indicative of the desire to understand the motivating factors behind such deadly events. These speakers provided some level of insight into the history of the shooters and the events which led up to the shooting itself. Many of these speakers discussed various aspects of the shooters which, in hindsight, could have provided warning signs of the desire to harm others.

Moral Entrepreneurs

The high profile and controversial nature of school shootings provides some individuals the opportunity to advance their own personal or political agendas. Such *moral entrepreneurs* (Becker, 1963; Hagan, 2010; Kappeler & Potter, 2005) were noted within the qualitative components of the current analysis and many of the power statements discussed in Chapter IV illustrated such individuals. Despite the tragic nature of the school shootings, these speakers sought to play upon the emotional nature of the events in order to disseminate their own messages/ideologies. Unsurprisingly, government and lobbying group speakers from both sides of the gun debate utilized school shootings as an opportunity to advance their political platforms. Many of the pro-gun speakers from these groups used the shootings as an example of why there should be more trained, legally armed citizens throughout society. According to these speakers, the presence of firearms on school campuses would have a

deterrent effect on future potential shootings. Additionally, when such incidents do occur, armed individuals would be able to defend themselves and others. Subsequently, these speakers sought to garner support for legislation allowing concealed carry on university campuses.

Alternatively, anti-gun speakers from these two groups used the school shootings to illustrate the dangers of firearms within society. These speakers sought to perpetuate the notion that increased gun-control measures could reduce the likelihood of future tragedies. As such, increased regulations regarding the sale and possession of firearms could purportedly keep firearms out of the hands of criminals. Despite convincing arguments from both sides of the debate, such polarizing positions considerably lack factual support. Nevertheless, speakers from both sides hastily seize the opportunity to remind the readers of the dire situation at hand while offering a solution to the problem.

Similarly, many of the citizens speaking out during their time of grief make claims which are largely unsupported. Oftentimes, statements from these speakers mirror those of politicians and lobbying groups, calling for legislative action in response to tragedies. Such demands for legislative action epitomize the notion of crisis-driven policy. Additionally, some citizen speakers within the current analysis sought to place blame for the tragedies on individuals indirectly involved with the shootings. Many of these citizens attempted to demonize the individual business owners who legally sold firearms to the shooters.

Other High Profile Events

The current exploratory study focused on eight high profile school shootings within the United States. While these events were prominent within the ongoing debate

over gun control, they were not necessarily the sole focus of the news media. Other high profile events occurred during the same time period as these shootings. These events undoubtedly had some influence on the media's coverage of the selected shootings. Examples of such events are outlined in Table 8. While some of the other high profile events likely deflected attention away from the shootings, other events may have actually increased the news media's coverage by creating a heightened sensitivity to such tragedies. It would be impossible to determine the influence of these events on the news media's coverage of the shootings with the data in this study and is beyond the scope of the current analysis. Through the current examination considerable variation was found in the coverage of each of the selected shootings. These outside events could likely account for some of this variation.

Table 8

Other High Profile Events

Westside Middle School killings- March 24, 1998

August 17, 1998 - Monica Lewinsky scandal

August 20, 1998 - U.S. embassy bombings

Columbine High School massacre- April 20, 1999

May 3, 1999 - F5 tornado in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

July 16, 1999 - John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife, and sister-in-law die in plane crash

Red Lake massacre- March 21, 2005

Mar 23, 2005 - Court refuses to order the reinsertion of Terri Schiavo's feeding tube

April 24, 2005 - 265th Pope of the Roman Catholic Church inaugurated

May 10, 2005 - Hand grenade thrown at President George W. Bush in Tbilisi, Georgia

June 6, 2005 - U.S. Supreme Court ban medical marijuana in *Gonzales v. Raich*

July 10, 2005 - Hurricane Dennis slams into the Florida Panhandle

August 18, 2005 - Dennis Rader sentenced to 175 years for the BTK serial killings

August 28, 2005 - Hurricane Katrina hammers coastal Mississippi

September 11, 2005 - Israel completes unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip.

September 24, 2005 - Hurricane Rita makes landfall in the United States

Table 8 (continued).

Amish school shooting- October 2, 2006
November 5, 2006 - Saddam Hussein sentenced to death
February 12, 2007 - Trolley Square shooting in Salt Lake City killing 5 people
March 1, 2007 - Tornadoes swarm across the southern United States, killing at least 20
March 9, 2007 - FBI scandal illegally using the Patriot Act
Virginia Tech massacre- April 16, 2007
April 20, 2007 - Johnson Space Center Shooting
May 4, 2007 - Greensburg, Kansas is devastated by a 1.7m wide EF-5 tornado
July 27, 2007 - Phoenix News Helicopter Collision
August 7, 2007 - Barry Bonds breaks Hank Aaron's all-time homerun record
Northern Illinois University shooting- February 14, 2008
February 24, 2008 - Fidel Castro retires as the President of Cuba
March 17, 2008 - Eliot Spitzer resigns after a scandal involving a high-end prostitute
May 15, 2008 - California legalized same-sex marriage
June 25, 2008 - Atlantis Plastics shooting in Henderson, Kentucky.
June 26, 2008 - U.S. Supreme Court rules in <i>District of Columbia v. Heller</i> that the ban on handguns in the District of Columbia is unconstitutional
Oikos University killings- April 2, 2012
April 15, 2012 - US Secret Service inappropriate conduct scandal
June 14, 2012 - Explosion at an Indian steel plant kills 11 and severely injures 16
July 17, 2012 - 17 people are wounded in a bar shooting in Tuscaloosa, Alabama
August 5, 2012 - Gunman opens fire on Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin
August 28, 2012 - Mitt Romney nominated as the Republican Party's candidate
September 6, 2012 - Barack Obama accepts the Democratic nomination for President
September 11, 2012 - The US is warned that its AAA credit rating is at risk
Newtown school shooting- December 14, 2012 ^a
December 30, 2012 - 9 killed and 26 injured in a tour bus crash in Oregon

Source: "Historical Events by Year" (www.HistoryOrb.com)

^a Only eighteen days of news media coverage were included in the study.

Conclusion

The current exploratory analysis sought to examine the news media's portrayal of firearms on school campuses following eight selected high profile school shootings within the United States. The findings of this examination illustrate the polarizing effect school shootings have on news media coverage. The distribution of overall themes and

word counts of the articles within the current analysis were noticeably less neutral following the selected shootings. Additionally, the articles following the selected shootings presented an increased number of speakers who were either associated with the shootings (i.e. citizens) or those who were involved with legislation regarding firearms (i.e. government employees and lobbying groups). Many of the speakers within the current analysis offered statements which demonstrated the notion of crisis driving policy. These speakers utilized the tragic events as opportunities to call for legislative action or to advance their own platform regarding firearms.

Following each of the selected shootings, there were a variety of legislative responses. These responses differed greatly between the federal and state levels. Additionally, responses varied considerably among the states legislatures. Legislative responses occurred much more rapidly on the state levels. State governments passed a variety of laws regarding firearms and the concealed carry of firearms. Some of these laws placed further restrictions on firearms, while others expanded gun rights for their citizens. Alternatively, legislative response on the federal level moved with a much slower pace and, at the time of the current study, no substantive changes have been made to the existing federal laws regarding firearms. The current study also indicated a disconnect between public perceptions and reality. Many of the speakers within the articles called for increased gun control in response to the alleged increases in gun violence. Such distorted opinions are often based upon misrepresented data and a general lack of information among the members of society. This disconnect can lead to legislative policies that do not effectively address the issues at hand. While this

undoubtedly applies to all forms of crisis-driven policy, it is especially true of laws regarding firearms.

While the current analysis contributed to the literature regarding the news media's coverage of firearms, further research must be conducted to examine this coverage on a larger scale. Future research of this topic should strive to examine the effects of outside events which influence the news media's coverage of school shootings. Additionally, future research should examine the news media's portrayal of firearms on school campuses following other high profile shootings. This research should also examine other digital forms of news media such as television and online sources. The news media possesses the ability to influence public perceptions of events occurring within society. Understanding how the news media portrays such controversial issues enables researchers to better understand how crisis can indeed drive legislative policy.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 12081902

PROJECT TITLE: An Examination of News Accounts Before and After School Shootings: A Content Analysis of Newspaper Articles Pertaining to Firearms on Campus

PROJECT TYPE: Thesis

RESEARCHER(S): John Handberg

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Science and Technology

DEPARTMENT: Criminal Justice

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Initial Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 08/20/2012 to 08/21/2014

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.6820 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **13061102**

PROJECT TITLE: **An Examination of Media Accounts Before and After School Shootings: A Content Analysis of Newspaper Articles Pertaining to Firearms on Campus**

PROJECT TYPE: **Thesis**

RESEARCHER(S): **John Harrington**

COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Science and Technology**

DEPARTMENT: **Criminal Justice**

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: **N/A**

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: **Exempt Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **06/12/2013 to 06/11/2014**

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

HARRINGTON THESIS:

CONTENT ANALYSIS CODING SHEET

Harrington Thesis:
Content Analysis Coding Sheet

Classification**A. Identification Number**

[ID_NUMBER] _____

B. Newspaper Source

[NEWSPAPER] _____

The variable was used to classify in which newspaper source the article was found.

- 0 USA Today
1 The Wall Street Journal

C. Title of the article

[TITLE] _____

D. Date of article publication

[DATE] _____

- Year: _____ (yyyy)
Month: _____ (mm)
Day: _____ (dd)

Word Counts**A. Total for entire article**

[WORD_COUNT] _____

This variable provides the total number of words in the entire article.

B. Number of pro-gun (highlighted green)

[WORDS_PRO] _____

This variable provides the total number of words representing a pro-gun viewpoint.

List of pro-gun speakers and respective word counts:

—
—

C. Number of neutral (highlighted yellow)

[WORDS_NEUTRAL] _____

This variable provides the total number of words representing a neutral viewpoint regarding guns.

List of neutral speakers and respective word counts:

—
—

D. Number of anti-gun (highlighted red)

[WORDS_ANTI] _____

This variable provides the total number of words representing an anti-gun viewpoint.

List of anti-gun speakers and respective word counts:

—
—

Harrington Thesis:
Content Analysis Coding Sheet

Influential actors

A. Speaker: Citizen

[SPEAKER_CITIZENS] _____

Total number of citizen speakers and a list of those speakers with a description if applicable.

List of citizen speakers, description (if applicable), and number of citations:

Very Strongly Oppose Strongly Oppose Oppose Somewhat Oppose Slightly Oppose Neutral Slightly Supportive Somewhat Supportive Supportive Strongly Supportive Very Strongly Supportive

B. Speaker: Government

[SPEAKER_GOVT] _____

Total number of government speakers and a list of those speakers with a description (if applicable) and the number of times each source was cited.

List of government speakers, description (if applicable), and number of citations:

—
—
—

C. Speaker: Law Enforcement Officers

[SPEAKER_LEO] _____

Total number of law enforcement speakers and a list of those speakers with a description (if applicable) and the number of times each source was cited.

List of law enforcement speakers, description (if applicable), and number of citations:

—
—

D. Speaker: Lobbying Group

[SPEAKER_LOBBY] _____

Total number of lobbying group speakers and a list of those speakers with a description (if applicable) and the number of times each source was cited.

List of lobbying group speakers, description (if applicable), and number of citations:

—
—

E. Speaker: Other

[SPEAKER_OTHER] _____

Total number of other speakers and a list of those speakers with a description if applicable.

List of other speakers, description (if applicable), and number of citations:

—
—

Harrington Thesis:
Content Analysis Coding Sheet

Qualitative Variables

A. Overall Theme

[OVERALL_THEME] _____

This variable provides an overall evaluation of the theme of the article.

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Very Strongly Anti- gun	Strongly Anti- gun	Anti- gun	Somewhat Anti-gun	Slightly Anti- gun	Neutral	Slightly Pro- gun	Somewhat Pro-gun	Pro- gun	Strongly Pro-gun	Very Strongly Pro-gun

B. Power Statements

[POWER_STATEMENTS]

This variable provides any "power statements" found within the article.

—
—

C. Notes

[NOTES]

This variable provides notes regarding any other aspects of the article not captured within the other variables.

Referenced shootings:

— <http://search.proquest.com/login/lynx.lib.usm.edu/newstand?accountid=13946>

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