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Framing Terror: The Strategies Newspapers Use to Frame an Act as Terror or Crime

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Abstract

The study identifies seven rhetorical strategies newspapers use to frame the acts of violence as terrorism or crime by comparatively analyzing the news coverage of the Ft. Hood and the Washington, D.C., Navy Yard shootings in three major newspapers. It examines the framing of the incidents, the strategies used to constitute the frames, the functions these strategies serve, and the media's contribution to the discourse of terror.

Keywords

framing, terror, crime, Muslims, rhetoric, discourse, mass shooting

On November 5, 2009, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, a U.S. Army psychiatrist, walked into the processing center at Fort Hood, Texas, where soldiers receive medical attention, and opened fire, killing 13 people and injuring 42. Seven minutes later, Hasan was captured, wounded at the scene.

Four years later, on September 16, 2013, Aaron Alexis, a Navy contractor and former Navy reservist, entered the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C., using his contractor identification, went up to the fourth floor in Building 197, and opened fire into the central atrium, killing 12 and injuring three. Thirty minutes later, he was shot dead at the scene.

The attacks were almost identical. Both were committed by a single gunman, using privately purchased guns. Both were premeditated, took place on military bases in the

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United States, and targeted American soldiers. Both resulted in 13 deaths, including the shooter, and both attackers were quickly stopped—one wounded and the other dead.

The coverage of the two attacks, the characterizations of the attackers and the incidents, and the subsequent discourses each incident invoked in the media, however, were radically different from one another. The newspapers portrayed Hasan as an "extremist," framed the Ft. Hood shooting as a "terrorist attack," and discussed Islamic terrorism. The same newspapers, however, portrayed Alexis as a "mentally ill individual," framed the Navy Yard shooting as a "crime," and discussed mental health, gun control, and base security issues. Calling Alexis a "homicidal maniac," and attributing his behavior mainly to mental illness, the newspapers dismissed his identity from the discussion, offering little information on his cultural, ethnic, professional and family background, or upbringing. The newspapers struggled, however, with Hasan's complicated identity as an American, Muslim, soldier, and doctor. Searching for answers perhaps, the newspapers provided a great deal of information on Hasan's religious identity, his family's immigrant background, and ethnic and national origins. Some questioned the role of this background in the shooting and explored Hasan's possible ties to known terrorists. Others cautioned the public not to rush to judgment, calling it workplace violence, offering job-related stress or the Muslim-unfriendly Army environment as possible explanations. Consequently, the arguments following Ft. Hood went back and forth between Islamic terror and stress, eventually settling on the first.

When the media frame and cover two exceptionally similar cases of mass shootings in two different ways, it sparks scholarly curiosity, inviting questions of why and how. The "why" question might be answered by attributing it to the media's anti-Muslim bias, but the "how" questions remains. This study focuses on, specifically, the "how" question. It aims to contribute to our understanding of how terrorism is constructed in the mainstream media by identifying the key strategies employed in framing violent attacks as "terrorism" or "crime," and comparing them. The main question the study attempts to answer is: What are the key strategies the media use to frame an attack as "terrorism," and how do these strategies differ from those of "crime"?

To that end, this study compares the news coverage of the Ft. Hood and the Navy Yard shootings. It examines the framing of the incidents, the strategies used to constitute the frames, and the media's contribution to the discourse of terror. Previous studies on mass shootings have mainly examined the portrayal of the perpetrators in the media (e.g., Chuang, 2012; Chuang & Roemer, 2013, 2014; Holody, Park, & Zhang, 2013; Powell, 2011; Szpunar, 2013). This study adds two additional dimensions to the discussion by also examining the construction of the incidents in the newspapers and the subsequent discourses the incidents generated.

Terrorism, Media, and Framing

The words we use to name and define things matter, because words are not neutral agents. Naming is an important function of language, and every label comes with its own perspective that influences perceptions (Burke, 1969). Words do not just describe

the world but create it. This is because words in and of themselves have no inherent meanings; rather, they attain meanings in their own historical and discursive settings through a long process of repetitive, selective, and careful usage within specific contexts (Jackson, 2005).

The words "terror" and "terrorism" have long histories. They have been defined, debated, and re-defined again and again within the particular political and historical conditions of different polities to designate and describe various groups and their actions. "Terror" originally was used to describe "the actions of states against their own people," such as "the Nazi terror" or "Stalin's purges," but since the 1960s, many have employed the term "to characterize the use of violence by small groups of dissidents or revolutionaries to intimidate or influence the state" (Jackson, 2005, p. 23).

Terrorism is but one form of violence in a wide spectrum of political violence that ranges from targeted killings to indiscriminate vandalism. Unlike other forms of political violence, however, terrorism is defined neither by the political view or the agenda of its actors nor by the legitimacy or illegitimacy of those views and agendas. Terrorism is "a method, a modus operandi, not an ideology or worldview" (Armbrost, 2010, p. 422). It is defined in the act.

Terrorism is a violent communicative act. Unlike other forms of violence, its target is not its immediate victims, but a larger audience. Its main goal is not to harm or punish the immediate victims but to send an intimidating message to a target population, state, or organization. As Schmid and Jongman (1988) put it, "Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby—in contrast to assassination—the direct targets of violence are not the main targets" (p. 28). The immediate victims of terrorism "serve as message generators," and the violence inflicted on them functions "to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention" (Schmid & Jongman, 1988, p. 28).

In the contemporary context, terrorism, media, and politics have developed a symbiotic relationship. Terrorists need spectacular media displays of their activities to achieve their goal of terrorizing as many as possible; the media need ratings to survive in the increasingly competitive 24/7 news environment; and governments need justification and public support for their counter-terrorism measures and policies. Although it is unrealistic to expect the media not to cover terrorist acts, it is through the "media spectacle" that terror spreads "beyond the immediate vicinity" of the attacks, enters into our living rooms, and impacts "our everyday sense of security" (Featherstone, Holohan, & Poole, 2010, p. 174). The fear of Islamic terror that spread through Western countries after the 9/11 attacks is an example of this relationship and its consequences.

The Fear of Terror, Islam, and Muslims

Associating Muslims and Islam in general with backwardness, ignorance, incivility, irrationality, and violence has a long history in Western cultures, dating back to 19th-century European colonization (Said, 1978). Orientalism was a hegemonic discourse, "a style of thought based upon the ontological and epistemological distinction made

between 'the Orient' and . . . 'the Occident,'" which constructed the Orient as the West's inferior "other" and justified the Western dominance over the exotic and darker-skinned others (Said, 1978, p. 2). The media have built on these constructions to represent Muslims as "potential terrorists" since at least the 1979-1981 Iranian hostage crisis (Said, 1981). Such representations, however, have taken on much darker and dangerous colors since the 9/11 attacks. Beyond the magnitude of the attacks themselves, the U.S. government's framing of the attacks and its response to them as a "war" (Jackson, 2005), the media's uncritical internalization of the government's "war on terror" discourse (Lewis & Reese, 2009), and the staggering displays of the attacks on the media have contributed to the climate of fear, helped justify the U.S. foreign policy of "war on terror," and given it a strong "Islamic connotation" (Freedman & Thussu, 2012, p. 2).

No more than 10 days after 9/11, President George W. Bush announced the official Global War on Terror and "the phrase the 'war on terror' was snapped up by the U.S. media," which have played a crucial role, with its global reach and influence, in giving the term a worldwide currency and legitimacy (Freedman & Thussu, 2012, p. 2). The "war on terror" discourse has "established the West as the civilization that spreads democracy" and Islam as "spawn[ing] terrorism" (Kumar, 2010, p. 254). The repetitive use of Orientalist framing has invoked Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* narrative (Chuang & Roemer, 2013). "The supposed cultural values of a unified and homogeneous 'West' are set in opposition to those of an essentialized and homogeneous 'Islam' and we are told that there is a clash of civilizations" (Williamson & Khiabany, 2011, p. 175). The frequent use of "anti-Islamic stereotypes" has created "something of a tradition of covering Islam, Muslims, and Arabs" (Schiffer, 2011, p. 211). The portrayal of Muslims as "irrational, primitive, belligerent and dangerous" fanatics has become a "clearly observable" pattern of news framing (Shadid & van Koningsveld, 2002, p. 174).

Framing refers to the way that information is selected, organized, and presented in the media. Framing is "how news stories are made" and "how pieces of information are selected and organized to produce stories that make sense to their writers and audiences" (Ryan, 1991, p. 53). Frames are the "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time" and "work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (Reese, 2001, p. 11). News frames influence how audiences interpret the messages by providing a perspective and context in which audiences can negotiate, manage, and comprehend the messages and their meanings (Goffman, 1974). While episodic news frames focus exclusively on the immediate event, thematic frames link several newer or older stories together under one broad theme and present them as parts of a pattern (Iyengar & Simon, 1993).

The news coverage of Muslims and Islam in the United States has become thematic in the sense that this coverage almost always presents, represents, and interprets such news within a larger frame of the U.S. "war on terror." Within this frame, the acts of individual Muslims become associated with the acts of terrorist groups whether the individual is associated with them or not. As Powell (2011) put it, the media tend to represent Muslim perpetrators differently: If a perpetrator is a non-Muslim

U.S. citizen, media individualize and humanize the attacker, depicting him or her as mentally ill or exploring his or her reasons for the act. If the perpetrator is a Muslim, regardless of his or her citizenship, media tend to depict the act as the work of larger terror organizations and a part of Islamic jihadism, terrorism, or extremism.

Method

Aiming to contribute to our understanding of the media's role in perpetuating the discourse of terror, this study examines the framing of the Ft. Hood and the Washington, D.C., Navy Yard shootings in three major national newspapers with the highest daily circulation rates between 2009 and 2013: *The Wall Street Journal*, 2,378,827; *The New York Times*, 1,865,318; and *USA Today*, 1,674,306 (Media Alliance for Audited Media, 2013). These newspapers published the highest number of stories in both cases, and had different ideological viewpoints and national readership. Using newspapers with different ideological viewpoints allowed a more balanced view of the coverage. The extensive coverage, nationwide readership, and high circulation rates of the newspapers offered valid observation points for the overall national discussion that took place following the incidents. Although other local and specialized newspapers—such as the *Washington Post*—also covered the incidents, they were excluded based on their low circulation rates, local focus, or limited coverage.

The news stories were collected through a keyword search in the LexisNexis and *Wall Street Journal* databases. The keywords included Fort Hood; Ft. Hood; Hasan; Nidal Malik Hasan; shooting; Washington, D.C. Navy Yard; Navy Yard; Alexis; and Aaron Alexis. The initial search revealed that the press covered both incidents intensely during the first three weeks. The coverage of both cases became sporadic and moved primarily to editorial columns after three weeks. Considering the pattern, the study focused only on the first 30 days of coverage of the incidents.

After the elimination of duplicates, reprints, and stories with high similarity, the search resulted in a total of 156 news stories—102 reporting on Ft. Hood and 54 the Navy Yard shooting. The data were analyzed through a mixed method approach. "Mixed methods data analysis consists of analytic techniques applied to both the quantitative and qualitative data as well as to mixing of the two forms of data concurrently and sequentially in a single project or a multiphase project" (Creswell & Clark, 2010, p. 213). "Researchers can enhance a quantitative design by adding qualitative data or by adding quantitative data to a qualitative design. In both of these cases, a second method is embedded, or nested, within a primary research method" (Creswell & Clark, 2010, p. 10).

Pan and Kosicki's (1993) "qualitative framing analysis" guided this study. Framing analysis allows the researcher to examine all four dimensions of news frames in depth: The "script structures" refer to the narrative structure of the news story; "thematic structures," the issues or topics the news story addresses; "syntactic structures," the word choices reporters make; and "rhetorical structures," the stylistic decisions of the reporters in constructing their arguments. Accordingly, the study first examined the narrative structures of the stories, then the themes that dominated the narratives, and, finally, the syntactic and rhetorical elements of the stories.

Framing analysis is especially effective when analyzing a single or small number of news stories in depth. The large number of news stories collected from multiple sources made it necessary to verify that the patterns identified during the analysis were, in fact, common among all stories; that they occupied significant space in the coverage; and that they appeared frequently enough to deserve the attention. Consequently, the method was complemented with quantitative data providing information on how frequently the coded categories appeared and how much space each theme occupied in the total coverage.

Two coders coded and cross-coded the data using NVivo software. The first phase involved the analysis of the script structures of the stories. "Script structures" refer to the conventional narrative structure of news stories, organizing the information around who, what, when, where, how, and why questions. Among them, "who" refers to the actors involved in a case, while "what, where, when, and how" concern the event (act) itself, and "why" includes the arguments the stories provide for why the event took place, hence, the discussions the event prompted. Accordingly, the analysis of the narrative began by organizing the data for each incident under "the actor," "the incident," and "the subsequent discourse" categories. Both coders read all the stories in each case and coded all the relevant information published in respective categories. These categories nicely aligned with the study's goal of comparing the framing of two incidents by providing common, consistent, and valid comparison points based on long-established traditions of journalistic reporting. The categories also helped see the overall narratives the stories generated on the agent, incident, and discourse for each incident.

The second phase of framing analysis involved the discovery of the common patterns/themes within these narratives. By employing an emergent coding procedure, each researcher read and tagged the data coded under three broad categories above, creating sub-themes for each. Then the researchers compared their observations, refined, and finalized the coding categories. Once the coding categories were finalized, both coders coded and cross-coded all the data, achieving a 0.82 kappa value of cross-coder consistency.

The sub-themes that emerged under the "agency" included the general (demographic) information on the attackers, cultural/religious identity, family background, professional background, social relations, and the labels used to refer to the individuals within the coverage. The sub-themes for the "event" were what happened and how it was labeled. In the Ft. Hood case, the "subsequent discourse" themes included mental health, Islam/Muslims, and terrorism. In the Navy Yard shooting, these themes were gun control, mental health, and base security.

The last stage of framing analysis involved examination of the syntactic and rhetorical elements of the frames. At this stage, the word choices, argument structures, and reasoning used in each theme and sub-theme were examined.

Overall analysis revealed significant differences in the framing of the incidents. Framing one as "terrorism" and the other as a "crime," the newspapers defined and described the incidents and their perpetrators differently, emphasized different issues about what happened and how, used structurally different story lines, provided

different arguments for possible motives behind the attacks, labeled them differently, and invoked different discourses (see the appendix).

Findings

The Agency: The Perpetrator

The depiction of the perpetrator constituted the first building block of the framing in both incidents. Previous studies on mass shootings have shown that if perpetrators are immigrants, or from what is considered to be foreign racial or ethnic origins (such as Asians, Arabs, or Jamaicans), the media tend to disregard their citizenship status, resort to negative racial stereotypes, conflate racial/ethnic/religious identity with foreignness, and represent them as permanent foreigners (e.g., Chuang, 2012; Chuang & Roemer, 2013, 2014; Holody et al., 2013; Powell, 2011; Shahin, 2015; Szpunar, 2013). The portrayal of Major Nidal Malik Hasan in the newspapers after the Ft. Hood shooting as a "perpetual other" based on his ethnicity (Arab), religion (Muslim), and immigrant family background supported these findings. The depiction of Aaron Alexis after the Navy Yard shooting, however, showed that the newspapers used mental illness to other him.

Hasan: Othering based on ethnicity, religion, and immigrant background. In the Ft. Hood case, the newspapers devoted 21% of the total coverage to Hasan's identity. A total of 80% of this coverage (17% overall) concerned Hasan's religion, Islam. The stories identified Hasan as a Muslim 163 times. They portrayed him as a "son of Palestinian immigrants" and "a devout Muslim" who "worshipped regularly" at a nearby mosque, and discussed whether this background might have motivated the attack (Berger, 2009, p. A1).

In the stories, Hasan emerged both as a model and a perfidious immigrant. He was the epitome of the American dream. He came from an immigrant family, made the best of the opportunities the United States offered to him, worked hard, excelled in his studies, graduated with honors, became a doctor, achieved advanced degrees in medicine, and served in the Army of his adopted country. Hasan "graduated with honors from Virginia Tech in biochemistry in 1995," wrote the *New York Times*. After graduation, he enrolled in medical school, finished his degree in 2003, completed his internship and residency, and earned a master's degree in public health, specializing in "disaster psychiatry" (Krauss & Dao, 2009, p. A1).

However, Hasan was also an "other within" in these stories. "Born and reared in Virginia, the son of immigrant parents from a small Palestinian town near Jerusalem, he joined the Army right out of high school, against his parents' wishes," wrote the *New York Times*. As if the reasons for the family's opposition to Hasan's decision were self-evident, the story offered no further explanations. Instead, an implicit construction of a benevolent host country followed the statement: "The Army, in turn, put him through college and then medical school, where he trained to be a psychiatrist." Hasan had "two brothers, one in Virginia and another in Jerusalem," his "parents had both been American citizens who owned businesses, including restaurants and a store" in

Virginia, and "the family, by and large, prospered in the United States" (Dao, 2009, p. A1). An accepting and generous image of the United States as the land of opportunity clashed starkly in the story with an image of an unassimilatable immigrant who betrayed the country that granted him and his family citizenship, a good life, and ample opportunities.

Other stories contributed to this image by introducing to the readers Hasan's inability to make friends, his social awkwardness, and opposition to the war. His former teachers and fellow residents defined Hasan as a strange, unhappy, and "not very personable" man who "sat alone in the front of the class and rarely socialized with other students, other than to debate the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan," which he opposed "strongly" (Krauss & Dao, 2009, p. A1). Similarly, his neighbors described Hasan as a kind but lonely man who "kept to himself," "never had any visitors," "kept his apartment sparse," and had "nothing memorable on the walls" (Newman & Brick, 2009). He attended the mosque regularly, but even there, "formed no lasting friendships" (Shane & Dao, 2009, p. A1). The people "he interacted with at the mosque saw him as a strange figure" and "never fully accepted into their circle" (McKinley & Dao, 2009, p. A1).

In short, Hasan was an "other within" in these stories. He was a misfit, a loner, at his school, work, mosque, and neighborhood. He had conflicting identities and divided loyalties.

Alexis: Othering based on mental illness. The stories covering the Navy Yard shooting provided comparatively fewer details about the perpetrator. The discussion of Alexis's identity made up only 11% of the total coverage. The primary characteristic defining Alexis in the stories was his "mental illness." The other identity markers, such as his family background, ethnicity, and citizenship status, which were used widely in the Ft. Hood case, were absent in the Navy Yard coverage. There were only two attributions to Alexis's family background in the entire coverage. Both described him as a boy who grew up in Queens, and only one of them specified his ethnicity as an African American (Fernandez, 2013; Jervis, Johnson, Michaels, & Vanden Brook, 2013).

Similarly, the space devoted to the discussion of Alexis's religion, Buddhism, was small (3.9%), compared with the Ft. Hood case (17%). According to the stories, Alexis "had an abiding interest in Buddhism and Thai culture," he "dated a Thai woman," attended services "regularly" at the temple, and spoke fluent Thai (Fernandez, 2013, p. A14). The stories depicted Buddhism positively as a refuge for Alexis from his troubled mind: His life was "an odd combination of Buddhist calm and paranoia, friendliness and sudden rage" (Jervis et al., 2013, p. A1). "Perhaps in an effort to keep his more violent emotions in check, Mr. Alexis practiced Theravada Buddhism" (Goode, Nir, & Fernandez, 2013, p. A1). "When he came here and prayed and chanted, that made him feel better" (Ex-Sailor's Rampage, 2013, p. A1).

The major identifier of Alexis in the stories was mental illness. The discussion of mental health made up 27.56% of the total coverage. The reporters argued that Alexis suffered from undiagnosed mental illness, and took it upon themselves to diagnose him. They argued that Alexis heard "voices," had "trouble sleeping," and that he

reported this to his employers, but they believed he was "describing an actual noise" and moved him "to two different hotels." Alexis visited a hospital, complaining about insomnia, but the doctor prescribed him a "small amount" of antidepressant, detected no signs of his "having thoughts of hurting himself or others," and declared him "alert and oriented" (Gabriel & Shanker, 2013, p. A20). Challenging the medical opinions, the reporters tallied Alexis's past misbehavior to prove his enduring mental illness. His misbehavior included shooting the tires of a car that belonged to a construction crew working in his neighborhood in 2004, being arrested for disorderly conduct at a nightclub in Atlanta in 2008, and firing a shotgun through his apartment's ceiling in 2010 after a confrontation with his upstairs neighbor. Due to his "pattern of misconduct," the stories concluded, Alexis received a "discharge" from the Army (Dorell, 2013, p. A9).

Whether every misconduct or violent act is a sign of mental illness is a question worth pondering. However, depicting them as such in this case transferred the responsibility and the blame for the crime from Alexis to the medical community and the Army in the stories. The former was guilty of misdiagnosing him, and the latter of judging him correctly but then ignoring its own judgment.

Functions of othering. In both cases, careful constructions of the attackers' identities provided footing in the stories for the following arguments on why these crimes occurred. Othering was a common convention used in these constructions. In both cases, the identities of the attackers were constructed against an implicit backdrop of what was considered the "norm," and "normal" (a sane member of a largely Judeo-Christian American society). Against this backdrop, Alexis appeared an oddity with his adherence to Buddhism and Thai culture, and Hasan an outsider due to his immigrant heritage and Muslim faith. Othering deepened further through the depictions of the attackers as socially dysfunctional or mentally ill individuals. This way, othering worked to distance the "normal society" from the acts of violence.

The Incidents

The newspapers depicted and labeled the two incidents differently. They provided different details about the incidents and constructed structurally different story lines to tell their stories.

The Ft. Hood case and the lengthy story line of the "terrorism" frame. The stories covering the Ft. Hood case constructed a lengthy story line, stretching all the way from Hasan's family's immigration to the United States to the day of the shooting. The major portion of this story line included details about Hasan's life prior to the shooting, personality, and cultural background, and made up 21.32% of the total news coverage. The space allotted to what actually took place at the base on the day of the shooting, meanwhile, was small (3.3%), and included brief details about the day prior to the shooting and the shooting itself.

According to the stories, Hasan gave away most of his belongings to his neighbors a day before the shooting and told them that he would be gone for a while. On the morning of the shooting, he attended morning prayer at the mosque, and said goodbye to a few friends there. "I'm going travelling," Hasan said. "I won't be here tomorrow." At 1:20 p.m., Hasan entered the processing center at Ft. Hood. He sat "quietly at an empty table," then drew his pistol, and began shooting (McKinley & Dao, 2009, p. 1A).

The stories labeled the incident as an attack, massacre, mass shooting, mass murder, shooting rampage or spree, carnage, workplace or soldier-on-soldier violence, and terrorism. Among all, "terrorism" was the most discussed label. In 109 stories published, there were almost twice as many (198) references to terrorism. In all, 22 of them explicitly identified the incident as a terrorist act. For the rest, terrorism served as a background where the possible motives behind the shooting were discussed.

The discussion of terrorism was where the story line of the incident swelled with details about Hasan and his prior life. Stories moved away from providing answers for "what, when, where, and how" the shooting happened, and delved into Hasan's past, personal, professional, and spiritual life and identity, making explicit or implicit connections between them and the shooting.

Analyzing the immediate public reactions to the Ft. Hood news on the *New York Times* website, Szpunar (2013) revealed that the readers instantly made connections between the shooting and Islamic terrorism based on Hasan's name and religion. However, similar connections existed in the stories themselves. The total coverage contained 386 references to the Islamic faith: 223 of them made references to Islam or Muslims in general, and 163 identified Hasan as a Muslim. These stories also included 198 references to terrorism. Among the 198 references to terrorism, 179 of them (90%) associated it with Islam or Muslims. To put it differently, the discussion in these stories of Muslims and Islam did not always include a discussion of terrorism, but a discussion of terrorism almost always included Islam and Muslims.

On the first day of coverage, the foci of the terror discussion entailed Hasan's religion, his public opposition to the war in Afghanistan, and his legal battles to stop his deployment. "Maj. Hasan, a Muslim, hired a military lawyer and had been trying since September to avoid deployment to Iraq and leave the Army," reported the *Wall Street Journal* (Dreazen & Campoy, 2009, p. 1A). Referring to a PowerPoint presentation Hasan made at school, reporters attempted to explain Hasan's "disenchantment" with the Army. His faith was either explicitly mentioned or implied in these explanations. The stress he may have experienced over his upcoming deployment was explained through the idea of fighting against (or possibly killing) fellow Muslims:

> Part of his disenchantment was his deep and public opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a stance shared by some medical colleagues but shaped for him by a growing religious fervor. . . . In that presentation, Major Hasan argued that the Koran forbids

> Muslims to kill other Muslims, placing Muslim American troops in an impossible position. Such soldiers should be allowed to receive conscientious objector status, he concluded. (Shane & Dao, 2009, p. A1)

The next day, a report appeared in the news from an eyewitness who heard Hasan reciting "Allahu-akbar" as he began shooting. The stories began questioning Hasan's possible ties to known terrorists. Unconfirmed Internet postings and the email exchanges between Hasan and Anwar Al-Awlaki became the focus of the stories.

An interesting rhetorical strategy became apparent as the stories discussed the Internet postings. On the one hand, the reporters stated that the author of the posts cannot be confirmed; on the other hand, they probed the postings. "The Federal Bureau of Investigation earlier became aware of Internet postings by a man calling himself Nidal Hasan," the poster "compared the heroism of a soldier who throws himself on a grenade to protect fellow soldiers to suicide bombers who sacrifice themselves to protect Muslims . . . It could not be confirmed, however, that the writer was Major Hasan" (Dao, 2009, p. 1A).

The same rhetorical strategy persisted through the stories exploring Hasan's possible ties to Al-Awlaki. The reporters first quoted from the authorities insisting that Hasan had no co-conspirators, then interrogated Hasan's connections to Al-Awlaki. "U.S. was aware of suspect's tie to Yemeni cleric," read the headline of a front page article in the *New York Times*. According to the story, Al-Awlaki was "the inspirational leader at a Virginia mosque that Hasan once worshipped at," and Hasan exchanged "10 to 20 e-mails" with him in 2008. Although the emails were intercepted, they were found "consistent with a research project the psychiatrist was then conducting" and were not investigated further (Johnston & Shane, 2009, p. A1). "Any contact with Mr. Awlaki should have raised red flags" (Shane & Johnston, 2009, p. A24).

Although these discussions quickly set the frame as terrorism, a second line of argument also appeared in the newspapers during the early days of the coverage. A small portion of the stories labeled the shooting as "workplace violence," or "soldier-on-soldier violence," and attempted to frame it within the mental health narrative. Four stories explicitly labeled the shooting as such and devoted the entirety of the article to this discussion. An additional 21 stories granted varying amounts of space to the psychological stress argument without explicitly labeling the incident. Approximately 5.7% of the total coverage concerned this issue. These stories discussed the mounting numbers of soldiers needing psychiatric care, the psychiatrist shortage in the Army, and the demands of the job as the sources of stress. Quoting from military doctors, the stories reported that the Army has only "408 psychiatrists" serving about "553,000 soldiers all around the world" and "if it turns out that Major Hasan did in fact break partly under the stress of the job and impending deployment, many veterans would not be surprised" (Carey, Cave, & Alvarez, 2009, p. A1).

Although they constituted a small portion of the coverage, these arguments are worth noting, because they showed that a resistance to framing Ft. Hood as terrorism existed at least during the early days of the coverage. However, the attempts to frame Ft. Hood differently received harsh criticism and faded to the background quickly. Referring to such attempts on November 10, 2009, "The conversation in the first few days after the massacre was well-intentioned," wrote David Brooks, but it was "a willful flight from reality," for it "played down the possibility of Islamic extremism" (p. A35). Five days after the shooting, the terror frame was firmly in place.

The Navy Yard shooting and a short story line of the "crime" frame. The newspapers devoted 7.86% of their coverage to the incident in the Navy Yard case. They depicted the shooting as an isolated crime, and used general labels to define it. The most frequently used labels for the incident in the news were "shooting" and "mass shooting." "A former Navy reservist killed at least 12 people on Monday in a mass shooting at a secure military facility," announced the *New York Times* (Shear & Schmidt, 2013, p. A1). "Ex-Sailor's Rampage Leaves Dozen Dead, Stuns Capital" read the headline of the *Wall Street Journal* (Ex-Sailor's Rampage, 2013, p. A1). Other labels, such as attack, madness, massacre, and violence, also appeared in the news. "Terrorism" appeared only twice, and both times to claim that the authorities found no "connection to terrorism" (Ex-Sailor's Rampage, 2013, p. A1).

The story line constructed for the Navy Yard shooting in the newspapers was shorter and structurally different than that for Ft. Hood. The Ft. Hood story began with Hasan's family's immigration to the United States and ended with the day of the shooting. It emphasized Hasan's past and convictions, and devoted little space to the incident itself. The Navy Yard's story line, however, began with Alexis's first recorded misconduct in 2004 and ended the day of the shooting, heavily focusing on the latter. This story line presented as inconsequential facts many other details, such as Alexis's background, family and upbringing, his beliefs and convictions. Instead, a minute-by-minute account of what actually happened at the scene dominated the coverage of the incident: Alexis "drove a rental car to the base and entered using his access as a contractor," "assembled his gun in the bathroom in Building 197," "made his way to a floor overlooking an atrium, took aim. . ." and began shooting (Shear & Schmidt, 2013, p. A1). "The first 911 call came in to a police dispatcher between 8:15 a.m. and 8:20 a.m.," "within two minutes . . . two police units responded," "within four minutes, five to seven additional police units" arrived, "the police locked down the Navy base around 9 a.m.," and "for more than 30 agonizing minutes," the responders and Alexis exchanged fire (Leger-Leinwand & Johnson, 2013, p. A8).

The stories described the scene as "chaos" with military helicopters circling above, emergency vehicles and police rushing to the scene, and the victims being lifted from the roof of the building. According to the stories, the shooting was nothing other than one of Alexis's irrational eruptions of violence, but on a bigger scale, in his long and well-documented pattern of delinquency.

Functions the story lines served. While the shorter story line constructed for the Navy Yard shooting made it possible to frame the incident episodically, the lengthier story line created a thematic framing for the Ft. Hood case. The episodic framing of the Navy Yard shooting presented the incident as an act of one mentally ill person. Even within a mental health context, only four articles discussed the incident in relation to other shootings. The thematic framing of Ft. Hood, on the contrary, placed the incident on the larger canvas of terrorism by using Hasan's Muslim background, his opposition to the war, his attempts to avoid deployment, his unconfirmed Internet postings, and connection to Al-Awlaki as pinning points. This placement functioned to ward off the reasonable questions the readers might have had when presented with evidence yet to be verified. It also served as a persuasive mechanism influencing the possible end reactions. When an act is framed as a crime of one mentally ill individual, it demands apprehending or treating that individual. Framing it as a part of larger systemic hatred, however, demanded a collective response from all those who did not share that hatred.

Subsequent Discourses

The taxonomy developed by Richard Jackson (2005) helps analyze the discourse the Ft. Hood shooting prompted. Studying the "war on terror" discourse that emerged after 9/11, Jackson (2005) identified four major characteristics of it. He argued that this discourse (a) defined the attacks as exceptional tragedies and assigned America a victim status; (b) constructed them as acts of war rather than as crimes or mass murders; (c) described them in ways that allow them to fit into other preexisting popular meta-narratives, such as the Pearl Harbor attack; and (d) constructed them as national attacks as opposed to local (New York) violence.

The "terror" framing of the Ft. Hood case in the newspapers aligned nicely with Jackson's (2005) characterization. Similar to his arguments, this framing assigned the shooting an exceptional status based on the nature of the shooting (the first deadly terror attack in the United States since 9/11), its place (an Army base on American soil), and its lethal power. To use the words that appeared in the news stories themselves, the shooting was exceptional because it was "the most destructive terrorist act to be committed on American soil since 9/11" (Berger, 2009, p. 1A); it brought "the nightmare of mass murder into the sanctuary of a military base on American soil" (Herbert, 2009, p. 23A), and was "the most lethal rampage on an American military base in history" (Robertson & Rivera, 2009, p. 1A).

Also aligning with Jackson's (2005) arguments, this framing placed the Ft. Hood shooting in the existing narrative of Islamic terrorism, constructed it as a national attack, assigned the nation a victim status, and identified those who died as heroes. Such symbolic construction was perhaps most apparent in the memorial ceremony organized for the victims of the attack and the speech the president delivered. Speaking to 3,000 people gathered at Ft. Hood on November 10, 2009, President Obama was reported saying, "Here, at Fort Hood, we pay tribute to thirteen men and women who were not able to escape the horror of war, even in the

comfort of home." Thirteen pairs of boots for 12 "slain soldiers" and one civilian stood at the end of the stage, along with "thirteen combat helmets perched on M-16 assault rifles" and the "portraits of those" who were killed (Jervis, 2009, p. A2). "This is a time of war," Obama said, "yet, these Americans did not die on a foreign field of battle. They were killed here, on American soil. . . . It is this fact that makes the tragedy even more painful and even more incomprehensible" (Obama, 2009). Perhaps by granting an official approval for the construction of the shooting as an act of war, the ceremony permanently fixed the framing of the Ft. Hood shooting.

The discourse that emerged after the Navy Yard shooting was simpler. It focused on mental health, gun control, and base security issues. The stories asked why the existing gun laws failed to prevent Alexis from purchasing a gun, and why his repeated signs of mental problems were ignored while he was receiving clearance from the Army. "Obviously, something went wrong, and we would hope we will find some answers to how can we do it better," Chuck Hagel, the secretary of defense, was reported saying (Gabriel & Shanker, 2013, p. A20).

The eulogy President Obama delivered during the memorial service on September 22, 2013, mirrored the news framing. Obama characterized the incident as "an epidemic of gun violence," and appealed for a change in gun laws:

> These mass shootings occur against a backdrop of daily tragedies, as an epidemic of gun violence tears apart communities across America—from the streets of Chicago to neighborhoods not far from here. . . . We don't take the basic common sense actions to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and dangerous people. . . .We are going to have to change. (Obama, 2013)

The Navy Yard shooting was the second deadliest attack after Ft. Hood. It targeted American soldiers at an American base on American soil. It brought similar chaos, death, and destruction, violating the same sacred norms, spaces, and principles. Yet, not even in the early days of coverage did anyone ask if it could be terror-related. No one questioned if it could be a symbolic or politically motivated act. No one perceived it as an attack on the Army or the nation, and no one felt collectively threatened.

Discussion

The analysis revealed the rhetorical strategies used in the framing of an act as "terrorism" or "crime." Below, I outline these strategies as they appeared in the analysis of the Ft. Hood and Navy Yard shootings, hoping that they may offer starting points for future studies and contribute to theory building.

Othering

The framing of the incidents begins with identifying the shooters. Othering the perpetrator is a common rhetorical convention used in both crime and terror frames, and

serves the same function of distancing the self from the villains and their violence. Yet each frame others the perpetrator differently. When the incident is framed as an act of terror, the perpetrator is othered mainly based on his religious and ethnic (immigrant/foreign) background. When it is framed as a crime, othering occurs through pathologizing the perpetrator.

The Story Line

The length and the structure of the story line differ between the two frames. The terrorism frame constructs a lengthy story line. This story line heavily focuses on the perpetrator's past life, provides extensive details about it, and grants the incident itself a brief space. The crime frame has a shorter story line. It focuses more on the immediate incident, describing it in vivid detail. It is selective about the details it presents about the perpetrator's past.

Labeling

The terror frame constructs the act as an act of war rather than a crime, and interrogates at length the possible connections between the perpetrator and other terrorists or organizations by presenting confirmed or yet to be confirmed evidence. The crime frame depicts the incident as an isolated act of one maladjusted or mentally unstable individual.

Contextualization

The crime frame depicts the act as local violence, while the terror frame depicts it as a national attack in which the violence is understood as a symbolic act whose real target is the entire nation, its institutions, or policies.

Victims and Heroes

The terror frame assigns the entire nation a victim status, while constructing the immediate victims of the violence as heroes. Conversely, the crime frame depicts the victims as innocent targets of an unexpected or irrational violence.

Exceptional Versus Unique Incident

The terror frame describes the attack as exceptional. The exceptional status of the attack may be assigned based on the lethal or destructive power of the violence, where it occurred (in the United States/abroad; sacred/non-sacred grounds; military/public spaces, etc.), norms or beliefs it violated, its target or victims, the nature or the method of the attack, and so on. The crime frame makes no such claims even if it meets all the criteria listed above (as it did in the Navy Yard shooting).

Meta-Narratives

Planting the incident on a larger canvas of existing meta-narratives is a common strategy used in both cases. While the canvas in the terror frame is the U.S. war on Islamic terror, in that of the crime frame, it is mental health.

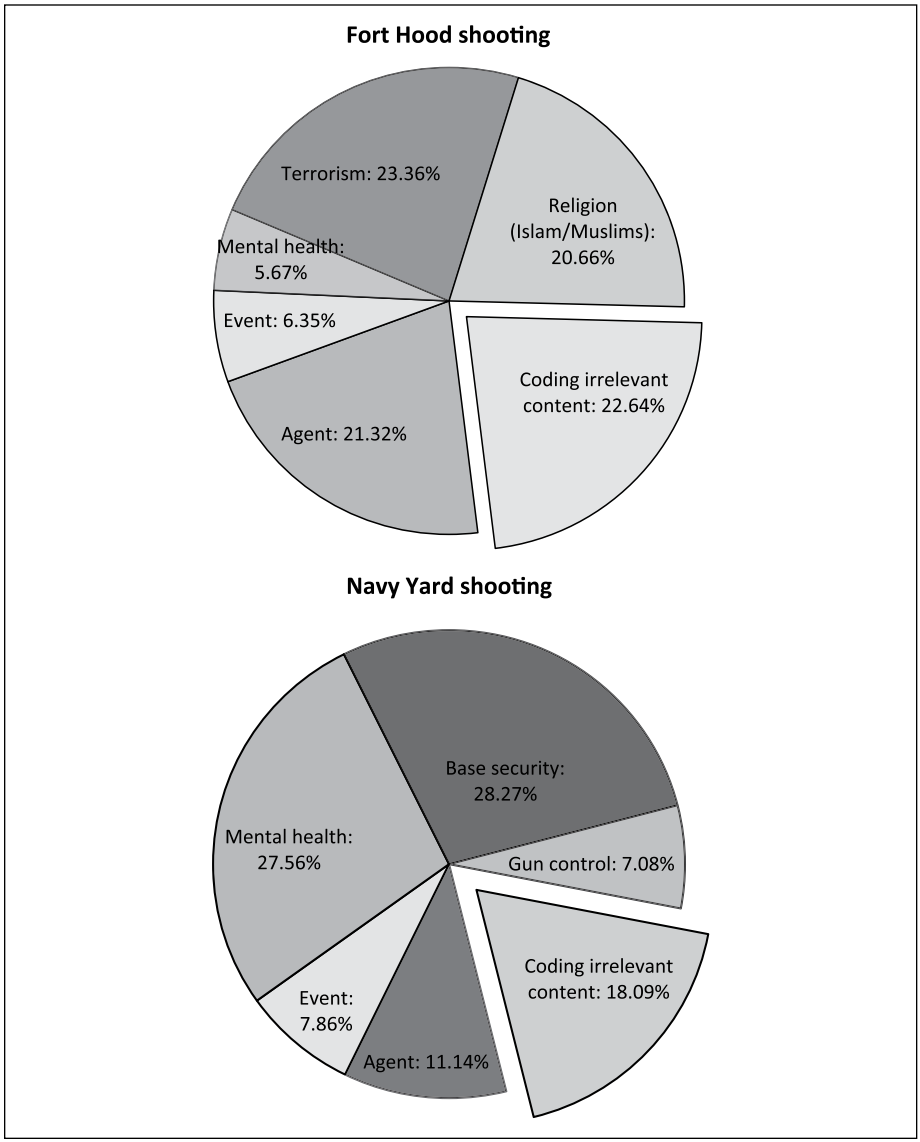
The relationship between the first six rhetorical strategies and their meta-narratives seems symbiotic. The six rhetorical conventions become meaningful only when the incidents are understood within the narrative logic each meta-narrative provides. In other words, the canvases deliver the necessary underlying reasoning for the stories to make sense. Yet, at the same time, the canvases themselves are constituted through these discursive strategies; they come into existence only through depicting, describing, explaining, and constructing numerous events in the same or similar ways by using the same strategies. Hence, the strategies the media professionals choose—knowingly or unknowingly—to tell their stories contribute significantly to the creation and perpetuation of such meta-narratives.

Within the larger narrative, these strategies function to redress its major weaknesses. For example, the war on terror discourse that emerged after 9/11 proclaimed that America was under attack. It defined the enemy as the terrorists with jihadist aims and global ambitions, predicted imminent future attacks, and reasoned that America had to respond militarily to preempt the terrorist plans. Although it looked sound on the surface, the argument lacked critical pieces. Most important of these was the absence of a tangible target. The threat from terrorism defied specificity and complicated the issue of presenting the public an identifiable enemy (Winkler, 2007). Who were these terrorists? The perpetrators portrayed as "terrorists" in the media have since functioned to grant a face to the faceless and elusive enemy, populated the public imagination, filling the critical void in the discourse of terror.

Similarly, providing convincing evidence of future terrorist plans and the magnitude of the threat was challenging. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI; 2005) statistics showed that 94% of deadly attacks in the United States between 1980 and 2005 were committed by non-Muslim Americans. Including the 9/11 attacks, Muslim-linked violence made up 6% of deadly attacks in the United States (FBI, 2005). In Europe, this number has remained under 2% since 9/11 (Ahmed, 2015). Under these circumstances, the media properly performed the crucial task of magnifying the threat. It did so, as this study demonstrated, by covering the events deemed terrorism more extensively and thematically, linking them to other terrorist acts and organizations. Beside the significant differences in their framing, the fact that the newspapers published twice as many stories about the Ft. Hood shooting as that of the Navy Yard within the first 30 days is telling.

Today, statistics show that since 9/11, Muslim-linked violence in the United States has claimed a total of 64 lives and in that same period, more than 200,000 murders took place in the United States (Kurzman, 2015). Yet, the perception of Muslims as the main threat to the United States continues. While every death is tragic, one cannot help but wish that impartial numbers and realities, instead of partial representations and discourses, guided our decisions, policies, and judgments.

Appendix



Percentage of space devoted to each main theme in the total coverage (based on word counts).

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