

RACIALIZATION OF THE VIRGINIA TECH SHOOTINGS

A comparison of local and national newspapers

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This study investigated differences between how local and national newspapers framed race in their coverage of the 2007 Virginia Tech (VT) shootings. The results showed a local newspaper, with geographic and social ties to the VT community, published more stories about the shootings than did national newspapers and continued to publish articles well after the national newspapers had stopped. Further, national newspapers mentioned the shooter's race more often than did the local newspaper, despite having published fewer articles. The results also showed that national newspapers racialized the shooter more often and more prominently than did the local newspaper, but that the two newspaper types did not differ according to the levels of racialization each used (i.e., attributing the crime to the shooter himself rather than attributing it to his race), according to how racialized discussion of the shooting was, or in their use of implicit racialization.

KEYWORDS Asian; framing; race; racialization; school shootings; Virginia Tech

Introduction

On April 16, 2007, Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 and injured 25 students and faculty members at Virginia Tech (VT) before taking his own life. Although a highly complicated incident like the VT shootings can be studied from multiple perspectives, understanding how different news media covered the race of the perpetrator can be particularly important in the current sociopolitical environment in which race continues to be a point of contention in media coverage of shooting-related crimes. Because crime-based news stories that emphasize race have been shown to influence people's judgment of the crimes (e.g., Mastro et al. 2009), it is important to understand how Cho's Asian race was presented in news stories.¹ In doing so, the current study takes a comparative approach between national and local newspapers.

The traditionally held view is that journalists at small- and medium-sized news outlets follow the example of the elite/national news media in their coverage of major news stories (Gans 1979; Harry 2001; Trumbo 1996). What has not been examined closely, however, is whether this would be still the case for a crime/incident/event that originated from a locale and was then brought to national attention. It is possible that local media with close geographic and social ties to the key figures of a news story have different perspectives or access to more diverse sources, and thus would not follow the national media in their coverage of the particular incident. Investigation of this potential difference can have a wider implication in the current news business environment because primary

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local newspapers with geographic proximity to the origin of a national news story have gained more significance in recent years due to the diminishing number of original sources for news organizations in general.

A critical review of media coverage suggested that overall coverage of the VT shootings first emphasized Cho's "other-ness" and his status as a resident alien from South Korea, and only later presented his personalized, individual characteristics (Kellner 2008). A recent content analysis corroborated this view by revealing that more than one-third of national newspaper articles covering the story contained racial or ethnic references to the perpetrator (Park, Holody, and Zhang, 2012). The present study follows this lead by comparing national newspapers (represented by the *New York Times* and *USA Today*) and the primary local newspaper for the geographic area surrounding VT (*The Roanoke Times*) in terms of their usage of the race frame.

Framing Differences between National and Local Media

Whereas a great deal of journalism research has been devoted to analyses of news content, studies examining differences and similarities across different types of media outlets are not as common. The area of research examining the relationship between community homogeneity—often operationalized as the size of a media market—and media coverage of community conflict stands as one rare example that has received steady scholarly attention (Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien 1980) and is now considered to have established the "structural-pluralism model theory" of journalism (Harry 2001). Other than this, however, it is difficult to locate studies focused on whether and how similar events were covered differently by different media outlets, let alone a significant body of research that would lead to a similar theoretical development.

Comparisons between local and national media may be one such area that warrants more focused attention. It has been widely accepted that elite national media influence other news organizations in terms of both what and how issues are covered (Gans 1979). The proposition has also been at least partially supported by inter-media agenda-setting research that demonstrated that local media adopted agendas set by elite national media, often represented by the *New York Times* (Trumbo 1996). At the same time, for the most part it still remains an open question whether the consonance between national and local media holds in coverage of events that originated from a locale but became national or international news. If single news events are covered differently by national news organizations and local news organizations, this could significantly influence the ways those events are understood by the public.

This question may become more important in light of the ongoing struggle that news organizations have been experiencing ever since the digital revolution. On the one hand, national news organizations may become even more crucial in the public's understanding of incidents of a local origin because many local news organizations have either gone out of business or significantly reduced their independent reporting capacity. On the other hand, local media may become more prominent sources of such news because many national news organizations have restructured their news-gathering process, resulting in increased percentages of news stories outsourced from wire services, freelancing writers, and other media organizations, including local media.² Direct availability of local media websites to national audiences also expanded the reach of

local media beyond traditional geographical boundaries set by either circulation routes or Direct Market Areas.

Although research has examined differences in how elite and non-elite newspapers in the United States covered national or international news stories (Carpenter 2007), there exists only one study to date that systematically compared local and national newspapers in their coverage of a locally-originated story (Holt and Major 2010). Somewhat related to the current study, the locally-originated story examined by Holt and Major was the “Jena Six” controversy, in which six Black students were charged with attempted murder in a case that many felt reeked of racism. Understandably, the authors of this study did not provide a fully developed rationale for the local and national comparison because there was simply not enough prior research on the subject. From content analysis, however, Holt and Major found that local newspapers used all of the frames examined more often than national newspapers did, a result speculated to have been caused by the fact that local reporters had more access to different sources and thus were able to find more diverse perspectives in covering the story than did reporters at national newspapers. Another important finding was the more frequent usage of thematic frames—often associated with social attribution—than episodic frames—often associated with individual attribution—in both national and local newspapers.

Hence, the local and national comparison of “Jenna Six” coverage can be a good starting point for the current study that is more squarely focused on the race frame in media coverage of the VT incident. Because Holt and Major (2010) did not compare local and national newspapers in terms of their usage of episodic versus thematic frames, however, it is difficult to predict whether there would have been any differences between the two, or how they would have been different, if there were any. In addition, the broad categorization of what constituted *national* and *local* newspapers—including, respectively, both truly national newspapers and more regional newspapers at one end and several local papers from various areas surrounding the community in which the crime took place at the other end—might have complicated Holt and Major’s findings. Therefore, the current study makes the distinction between national and local newspapers more firmly and clearly.

Asian Stereotypes in the Media

Although Asians are the third-largest, fastest-growing minority in the United States, systematic research on the media portrayal of Asians is scarce. With the limited amount of evidence, it can be summarized that Asians are mostly underrepresented in the mainstream media and, when they are represented, they are stereotyped with highly limited social roles and personality characteristics. For example, in the fall of 1996, there were too few Asian characters in primetime network television programs to even merit further analysis of their personal and communicative attributes (Mastro and Greenberg 2000). Six years later, the situation had changed little, with only a slight increase in the percentage of Asian characters from 1 percent in 1996 to 1.5 percent in 2002 (Mastro and Behm-Morawitz 2005).

In more recent years, gradual improvements have been made both in the sheer number of Asian characters and in the significance of their roles. The AAJC (2006) reported that 16 Asian characters were featured as regulars in 2005, accounting for 2.6 percent of all

regular characters on primetime television. This upward trend appears to have continued into the 2009–10 season, yielding 37 regularly featured Asian characters (AAJC 2011). However, the report also pointed out that Asians were less likely than any other groups to be featured in primary roles.

Advertising appears to be the only area in which Asian representation is more common. Although earlier studies reported that Asians were underrepresented or represented only in minor roles (Mastro and Stern 2003; Taylor and Stern 1997), more recent updates indicate that Asians have achieved, at least in magazine advertising, quantitative equity (Lee and Joo 2005; Paek and Shah 2003). Still, a problem persists in the way Asians are stereotyped. In earlier studies, Asian models in both print and television ads were mostly portrayed in business settings and rarely featured in domestic or social relationships (Taylor and Lee 1994; Taylor and Stern 1997). Professional, technologically savvy, and financially successful Asian stereotypes were also reported in later studies (Paek and Shah 2003). The most recent studies concurred that the idea of “model minority” continues to thrive along with its not-so-complementary twin, the notion that Asians are physically inactive, socially isolated, lacking communicative skills, and not fun to be around either as a friend or family member (Lee and Joo 2005; Mastro and Stern 2003).

The scarcity of realistic and appropriately comprehensive images of Asian Americans, combined with persistent, narrow stereotypes, appears to have unfortunate consequences in terms of how they are perceived. In a recent survey, Asian Americans were considered by respondents to be the most likely to achieve academic success, yet the least good at communication and social skills, and the most likely to be rejected by peers. The survey participants, most of whom were Whites, also expressed the least desire to initiate friendship with Asian Americans in comparison to other groups such as Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics (Zhang 2010).

Race in Media Coverage of Crimes

Much media research has examined minority representations in crime news and their effects on race-based attribution of crimes. The vast majority of studies concur that crime news portrays African Americans and Latinos in a highly negative light, often resulting in inflated assessments of their criminality and heightened culpability to the reported crimes (Dixon and Linz 2000a, 2000b) as well as perceptions of racial/ethnic outgroups featured in the stories (Dixon 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008; Dixon and Azocar 2007; Dixon and Linz 2000a, 2000b; Dixon, Azocar, and Casas 2003; Gilliam and Iyengar 2000; Johnson et al. 1997; Mastro et al. 2009; Oliver and Fonash 2002; Oliver et al. 2004; Peffley, Shields, and Williams 1996).

Based on a relatively small number of studies, on the other hand, violence or aggressiveness does not appear to be the major theme in news coverage of Asians. Instead, the notion of “invisible minority” applies here as well, along with other stereotypes that cast Asians as a group that is hard to read and thus untrustworthy. Poindexter, Smith, and Heider (2003) found that Asians were virtually invisible in local television news and were rarely, if ever, shown as perpetrators or police officers. A content analysis of newspaper photos also revealed that Asians were vastly underrepresented (in only 1.8 percent of images) and the few featured in the photographs demonstrated emotional states consistent with common stereotypes of Asians: neutral as opposed to

happy or sad, calm as opposed to excited or neutral, submissive as opposed to dominant or neutral (Rodgers, Kenix, and Thorson 2007). Against these general findings that Asians are either invisible or stereotyped in media content, the VT incident renders itself high significance as a subject of news content analysis because it was an extremely high-profile crime involving an Asian perpetrator.

While clearly the driving force behind the flood of media coverage that occurred in the weeks after the VT shootings was the intense and tragic loss of life, it can be argued that Cho's Asian race, which is not usually associated with such violence, also contributed to the story's newsworthiness. As Kellner (2007) argued, television news pundits specifically focused on Cho's "other-ness," including short-lived misidentification of him as a Chinese national or a Pakistani terrorist, labeling him a resident alien or foreigner, or even emphasizing that he was "Korean, not American." If a criminal's race or ethnicity—an easily referable marker of inherent difference for minorities in a multi-cultural society—is emphasized repeatedly in the media beyond the point of necessity (e.g., identification in cases of runaway criminals), this may influence audience members to assume that this other-ness applies to all Asians/Koreans and that Cho's innate differences (i.e., being Asian or Korean) significantly explain his crimes.

This criticism was subsequently supported by a quantitative content analysis that demonstrated that 38 percent of national newspaper articles about the shootings identified Cho's race as a factor worthy of attention. Ten percent of the whole VT coverage even included the race information in the headline, suggesting the information is of particular importance (Park, Holody, and Zhang, 2012). The national coverage also mentioned Cho's race, ethnicity, and immigration status prominently, and his role as the sole perpetrator of the egregious crime was generalized to the whole ethnic or racial group to which he happened to belong by birth.

Thus far, nothing has come out of the FBI investigation that even remotely connected the VT incident to the perpetrator's race or ethnicity. In other words, Cho's crimes had more to do with his own mental state rather than any social or racial groups to which he belonged. This is unlike other shootings perpetrated by Asians, such as the 2004 Wisconsin deer hunter shootings by Chai Vang and the 2009 Binghamton immigrant center shootings by Jiverly Wong, in which the shooters' race-specific physical features or immigration-related social situation played a pivotal role (Chuang 2012). The VT shootings actually had more in common with the 2011 Grand Prairie, Texas roller rink shootings, in which the shooter Tan Do's Asian race had nothing to do with his crime.

Research Questions

The following research questions concern the framing of Cho's race in news coverage of the VT shootings by two national newspapers and one local newspaper. First, any differences in the salience and prominence of the race frame between the national and local newspapers are examined.

- RQ1:** Were there differences between national and local newspapers in how frequently the race/ethnicity of the perpetrator was identified?
- RQ2:** Were there differences between national and local newspapers in how prominently the race/ethnicity of the perpetrator was identified?

Subsequently, specific ways in which the VT incident was racialized by the media are examined. First, any differences in the level of generalization of the race frame between the newspaper types are gauged at five levels: individual, family, ethnicity, race, and all minorities. Second, any differences in the racialization of the perpetrator are examined. Third, comparisons are made in the racialization of the crime. Finally, national and local newspapers are also compared in terms of racialization via implicit stereotyping.

- RQ3-1:** Were there differences between national and local newspapers in how broadly the minority status of the VT perpetrator was generalized?
- RQ3-2:** Were there differences between national and local newspapers in how detailed the description of the VT perpetrator's racial/ethnic minority status was?
- RQ3-3:** Were there differences between national and local newspapers in how close the connection was made between the crime and the race/ethnicity of the VT perpetrator?
- RQ3-4:** Were there differences between national and local newspapers in how commonly Asian stereotypes were used to describe the VT perpetrator?

Method

The major purpose of the current study was to compare newspaper coverage of the VT incident at the national and local levels. The unit of analysis was newspaper articles published during a one-month period following the date of the incident—April 16, 2007 to May 15, 2007—found using the Lexis-Nexis database, based on the keywords: "Virginia Tech," "Virginia Polytechnic Institute," "Blacksburg," and "Seung-Hui Cho." Articles from the *New York Times* and *USA Today* were included to represent national news coverage of the incident. Articles from *The Roanoke Times* were included to represent local news coverage.³ The final number of articles analyzed was 434, with 136 for the national newspapers (*New York Times*, $N = 70$; *USA Today*, $N = 66$) and 298 for the local newspaper.

Three coders analyzed the newspaper articles and went through multiple inter-coder reliability training sessions and tests. By analyzing a random sample of 10 percent of all the articles, the coders achieved Krippendorff's α reliability estimates of 0.81 or higher for all coding categories.

Coding of Race Salience and Prominence

RQ1: Salience of race frame. As the first step, newspaper articles were categorized according to the presence/absence of a race frame. A newspaper article was determined to have a race frame as long as it contained a reference to the perpetrator's race or ethnicity.

RQ2: Prominence of race frame. Prominence of the race frame was determined by the location(s) of the reference(s) to Cho's race/ethnicity. Each article was coded for its references to the perpetrator's race/ethnicity in different locations: its body text other than the first paragraph, any quotes, its first paragraph, and its headline. A prominence index was created by assigning 0 to no reference, 1 to a reference(s) in the body text and/or a quote, 2 in the first paragraph, and 3 in the headline, with a higher score representing higher prominence. When an article contained racial references in more than one place, it was assigned with the highest registered score.

Coding of Racialization of the Incident

Four indices, one each for the following *racialization of the incident* sub-frames, were used to analyze newspaper articles that featured a race frame.

RQ3-1: Racial generalization of criminal culpability. The race frame included five levels: individual, family, ethnicity, race, and all minorities, with a higher score representing greater generalization. A story with no race frame was coded as 0 for this variable. A story was categorized at the *individual* level and coded as 1 if it referred to Cho's race or ethnicity (e.g., Asian American, South Korean). A story was categorized at the *family* level and coded as 2 if it contained information about Cho's immigrant family. A story was categorized at the *ethnicity* level and coded as 3 if it covered the reaction of an ethnic community (e.g., Korean American church) or a nation (e.g., general public in Korea). A story was categorized at the *race* level and coded as 4 if it discussed reactions from various Asian ethnic communities—not only the ethnicity of the perpetrator—or backlash against Asian Americans throughout the country as a result of the shooting incident. A story was categorized at the *all minorities* level and coded as 5 if it covered the incidents from a perspective that encompassed other, non-Asian minorities as well as Asians. Each story was coded at its highest level of generalization measured (e.g., a story featuring the family and race levels would be coded at the race level).

This variable is distinct from *racialization of the perpetrator*, which measured how specific and detailed information about the perpetrator's minority status was revealed, and instead measured how his racial/ethnic classification was extrapolated to broader minority groups.

RQ3-2: Racialization of the perpetrator. The extent of detail each newspaper article revealed regarding the perpetrator's race was measured using three items. The first item examined whether Cho's race was identified as "Asian." The second item examined whether Cho's ethnicity (Korean) was identified. At the most detailed level, newspaper articles were examined to see if they reported on the status or history of Cho's immigration (e.g., permanent resident, immigrated at a young age, etc.). This last level was considered most detailed because reporting on it would have involved the most amount of investigation by journalists and because it was a detail specific to Cho and his family, rather than to Asians or Koreans in general. On the overall racialization of the perpetrator index, an article with "no" to all three questions was ranked at 0; an article with "yes" to race, but "no" to ethnicity and immigration status questions was ranked at 1; an article with "yes" to ethnicity, but "no" to immigration status was ranked at 2, regardless of its answer to the race question; an article with "yes" to the immigration status question was ranked at 3, regardless of its other answers, with a higher score representing greater racialization.

RQ3-3: Racialization of the crime. The extent to which each newspaper article linked the crime to the perpetrator's race was measured using three items. For example, if an article described how mental health issues are stigmatized in Korean culture, it was considered as suggesting the perpetrator's crime could be explained in part by his ethnicity and thus was marked as "yes" for this coding category. If an article described how the crimes were similar or different to other crimes committed by an Asian(s) shooter, it was considered as implicitly suggesting the perpetrator's crime could be explained in part by his race and was marked as "yes" for this coding category. If an article explicitly

suggested the perpetrator's crime could be explained in part by a categorical nature of his race or ethnicity, it was marked as "yes" for this coding category. Each of these categories was independently coded to form the racialization of the crime index. An article coded as "no" for each category was ranked at 0 for racialization of the crime. An article coded for any single one of these categories was ranked at 1, an article coded for any two categories was ranked at 2, and an article coded for all three categories was ranked at 3, with a higher score representing greater racialization.

RQ3-4: Racialization via implicit stereotyping. Even in cases when journalists avoid direct racialization of the crime and/or the perpetrator, they could still engage in racialization consciously or subconsciously by using common Asian stereotypes when describing Cho. Therefore, each article was checked for the presence, regardless of whether the use of any was explicitly acknowledged, of the following common Asian stereotypes: *asocial, good student, hardworking, asexual, untrustworthy, family honor, and small physique* (Lee and Joo 2005). A higher score on this index, determined by the number of times each news article was marked "yes" for including one of these stereotypes (0–7), represented a greater amount of implicit stereotyping.

Results

Preliminary Analysis: Volume and Pattern

The local newspaper generated more than four times the number of articles centrally focusing on the VT incident ($N = 298$) than either of the two national newspapers (*New York Times*, $N = 70$; *USA Today*, $N = 66$). Between the two national newspapers, the amount of coverage was comparable. Another noticeable difference between the national and local newspapers was duration of the coverage. Whereas the national newspapers virtually stopped paying attention to the incident after the 16th day, the local newspaper continued its coverage until the end of the examined period (see Figure 1).

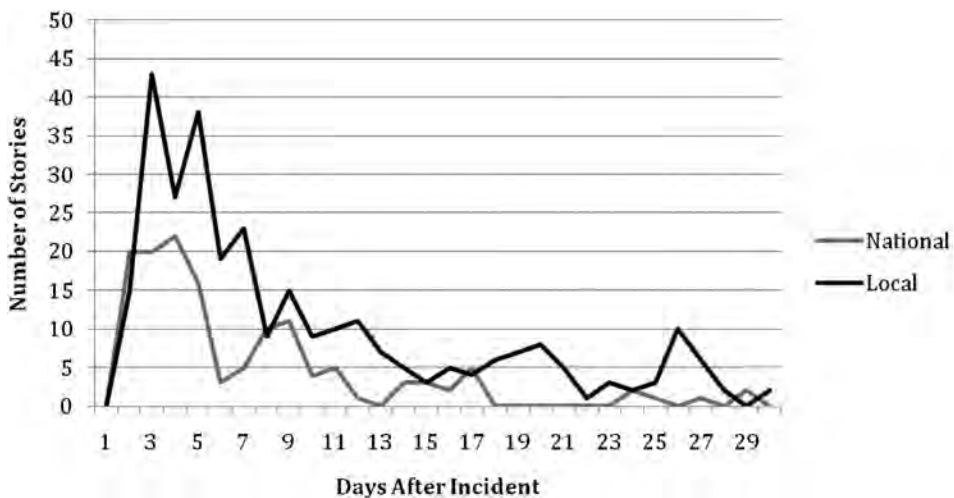


FIGURE 1

Thirty-day coverage of the Virginia Tech shootings in national and local newspapers

Race Salience and Prominence

RQ1: Salience of race frame. As seen in Table 1, over the course of the entire period of news coverage about the VT shootings examined here, a higher percentage of national newspaper articles (37.5 percent, $N=55$) than local articles (18.5 percent, $N=51$) contained some information identifying the race or ethnicity of the perpetrator, $\chi^2(1, N=434) = 18.347, p < 0.001$.

When salience of the race frame was examined after dividing the examined period into two halves, the difference was mostly concentrated during the first half. In the first 15 days of coverage, a higher percentage of national newspaper articles (39.2 percent, $N=49$) than local articles (20.5 percent, $N=49$) contained a race frame, $\chi^2(1, N=364) = 14.584, p < 0.001$. In the second 15 days, there was no statistically significant difference between how often the national newspaper articles (18.2 percent, $N=2$) and local newspaper articles (10.2 percent, $N=6$) contained some information identifying the race or ethnicity of the perpetrator, $\chi^2(1, N=70) = 0.588, p=0.443$. As news coverage on the incident began to wither, attention to the perpetrator's race or ethnicity also declined in both national and local newspapers.

RQ2: Prominence of race frame. Of the national articles featuring a race frame, 64.7 percent did so in body text or quotes, 25.5 percent in the first paragraph, and 9.8 percent in the headline. Of the local articles featuring a race frame, 87.3 percent did so in body text or quotes, 7.3 percent in the first paragraph, and 5.5 percent in the headline.

When this variable was treated as ordinal, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed the national newspapers employed a race frame significantly more prominently (mean = 1.45, $SD = 0.67$) than did the local newspaper (mean = 1.18, $SD = 0.51$), $F(1, 104) = 5.417, p=0.022$.⁴

Racialization of the Incident

RQ3-1: Racial generalization of criminal culpability. Of the national articles, 68.6 percent generalized the race frame at the individual level, 3.9 percent at the family level, 21.6 percent at the ethnicity level, and 5.9 percent at the race level. Of the local articles, 61.8 percent generalized the race frame at the individual level, 3.6 percent at the family level, 29.1 percent at the ethnicity level, and 5.5 percent at the race level. Neither newspaper type utilized the race frame at the all minorities level.

When this variable was treated as ordinal, an ANOVA revealed the national newspapers and the local newspaper were not significantly different in their racial generalization of criminal culpability, $F(1, 104) = 0.450, p = 0.504$. See Table 2 for summary statistics.

TABLE 1
Salience of race frame in national and local newspaper coverage of the VT shootings (%)

	National (N = 136)	Local (N = 298)	χ^2
Day 1 to Day 30	37.5	18.5	18.35***
Day 1 to Day 15	39.2	20.5	14.58***
Day 16 to Day 30	18.2	10.2	0.59

Figures are percentages out of the 136 national and 298 local newspaper articles about the VT incident.
*** $p \leq 0.001$.

TABLE 2

Prominence of race frame and usage of four sub-frames of race in national and local newspaper coverage of the VT shootings

	National (N = 55)	Local (N = 51)	F
Prominence of race frame	1.45 (0.67)	1.18 (0.51)	5.417*
Racial generalization of criminal culpability	2.65 (1.02)	2.78 (1.05)	0.450
Racialization of the perpetrator	2.20 (0.45)	2.13 (0.51)	0.540
Racialization of the crime	0.98 (0.50)	0.02 (0.13)	1.301
Racialization via implicit stereotyping	0.24 (0.71)	0.07 (0.26)	2.518

Figures are mean scores (standard deviations) out of the 55 national and 51 local newspaper articles featuring a race frame on the following scales: prominence of race frame, 0–3; racial generalization of criminal culpability, 0–5; racialization of the perpetrator, 0–3; racialization of the crime, 0–3; racialization via implicit stereotyping, 0–7.

* $p \leq 0.01$.

RQ3-2: Racialization of the perpetrator. Of the national articles, 2.0 percent identified Cho's race, 76.5 percent identified his ethnicity, and 21.6 percent discussed his immigration status. Of the local articles, 7.3 percent identified his race, 72.7 percent identified his ethnicity, and 20.0 percent discussed his immigration status.

When this variable was treated as ordinal, an ANOVA revealed the national newspapers and the local newspaper not significantly different in their racialization of the perpetrator, $F(2, 104) = 0.540$, $p = 0.564$. See Table 2 for summary statistics.

RQ3-3: Racialization of the crime. Of the national articles, 96.1 percent included no racialization of the crime, 0.0 percent described Cho using acknowledged Asian stereotypes, 2.0 percent mentioned similar crimes committed by other Asians, and 2.0 percent explicitly attributed the crime to Cho's race. Of the local articles, 98.2 percent included no racialization of the crime, 1.8 percent described Cho using acknowledged Asian stereotypes, 0.0 percent mentioned similar crimes committed by other Asians, and 0.0 percent explicitly attributed the crime to Cho's race.

When this variable was treated as ordinal, an ANOVA revealed the national newspapers exhibited a higher mean than the local newspaper. However, the difference was not significantly different, $F(1, 104) = 1.301$, $p = 0.257$. See Table 2 for summary statistics.

RQ3-4: Racialization via implicit stereotyping. Of the national articles, 82.4 percent featured no commonly known Asian stereotypes, 9.8 percent contained one, 5.9 percent contained two, 0.0 percent contained three, and 2.0 percent contained four. Among the pre-identified stereotypes, 15.7 percent of national articles used *asocial*, 5.9 percent used *family honor*, 3.9 percent used *asexual*, and 3.9 percent used *small physique*, while *good student*, *hardworking*, and *untrustworthy* were not used at all in national articles.

Of the local articles, 90.9 percent featured no Asian stereotypes and 9.1 percent contained one. Among the pre-identified stereotypes, 5.5 percent of local articles used *asocial* and 3.6 percent used *family honor*, while *good student*, *hardworking*, *untrustworthy*, *asexual*, and *small physique* were not used at all in local articles.

When this variable was treated as ordinal, an ANOVA revealed the national newspapers and the local newspaper were not significantly different in their racialization via implicit stereotyping, $F(2, 104) = 2.518$, $p = 0.116$. See Table 2 for summary statistics.

Discussion

The core question of the current study was whether and how major sources of original reporting on the VT shootings framed the incident as a racially relevant crime, with the specific goal of determining if these frames differed between national and local newspaper coverage. The results revealed that the national newspapers used the race frame more often than did the local newspaper, despite the local newspaper having produced a greater number of stories about the incident. The national newspapers also utilized the race frame more prominently, suggesting to their larger audiences that Cho's race was a significant factor in the shooting story.

Aside from the race frame, national and local newspapers also exhibited somewhat different patterns in their coverage of the VT incident as a whole. Over four times more articles on the incident were found in the local newspaper than in each of the two national newspapers. The local newspaper also demonstrated more prolonged attention to the incident, which means that any news outlet or audience member interested in learning more about the VT shootings after the 16th day following the incident had to rely on *The Roanoke Times* because there were virtually no articles published by the national newspapers about the shootings.

A possible explanation for why the national newspapers used the race frame proportionally more often than did the local newspaper, even if the two types used the frame in similar ways, could have been a matter of access. Local journalists could have had better access to VT or Blacksburg town officials—or perhaps victims and family members were more willing to be interviewed by the local newspaper first—and could thus have had access to information about Cho sooner than the national newspapers. As speculated by Holt and Major (2010) in the Jena Six case, the national newspapers might have a greater total budget for covering stories, but the local newspaper may have had better existing knowledge about what sources to seek out first because of journalists' familiarity with the university and surrounding region (e.g., perhaps local journalists knew to first contact the VT police department rather than the local town department). Having quicker access or better existing familiarity could have either helped local journalists examine a wider variety of potential explanations for the shootings or offered them facts or stories other than the perpetrator's race or ethnicity on which to focus.

It is also possible that the local journalists felt a responsibility to tell a fuller version of the VT shootings story to their local audience—those people who would continue to live with the direct effects of the incident—and that the national journalists did not feel such a responsibility to their audiences, who would be less likely to be and/or remain a part of the community directly affected. As such, the local newspapers both here and in the Jena Six case may simply be addressing different audiences than the national newspapers, and as such reported on the stories differently.

One such consequence might be the larger amount of attention paid to the VT incident for a longer period of time by *The Roanoke Times* than by the two national newspapers combined. This disparity can be explained through the issue competition construct in agenda-setting research. Because the capacity of news media to cover public issues and the capacity of audiences to pay attention to those issues are limited, various public issues are always in competition with one another and newer issues constantly replace older ones in both media and public attention (Brosius and Kepplinger 1995; Zhu 1992). The results of this study indicate that media type could determine the level of issue competition. Because national or elite newspapers reach audiences nationwide—and even

worldwide—they have significantly more issues to report on than do local newspapers. Accordingly, issue competition in national newspapers can be stronger than in local newspapers.

The sheer volume of VT coverage in the local newspaper also appears to have contributed to its lower percentage of articles with the race frame. With more sources to gather information from and with readers who have a larger attention capacity for the incident, journalists in the local newspaper might have been both obliged and equipped to cover the incident more frequently with a wider scope beyond the perpetrator.

The higher prominence of the race frame in the national newspapers than in the local newspaper also warrants discussion here. This difference may be more disconcerting than the more frequent references to the perpetrator's race or ethnicity because mere references may be considered as a byproduct of simple criminal identification whereas usage of race frame in headlines and first paragraphs suggests that Cho's race is of vital importance to the story that follows, and the national newspapers did this more frequently than did the local newspaper.

Although the newspapers were not significantly different in this regard, racialization of Cho's crime was less prominent in overall newspaper coverage than racialization of the shooter himself. In other words, Cho was highly racialized—in discussion of his own ethnicity or how his characteristics compared to Koreans or Korean Americans in general—but his crime was not. Very few newspaper articles overall attempted to attribute the crime to innate qualities shared by people of Asian or Korean descent; Cho's particular race, ethnicity, qualities, or background were discussed as possible explanations, but this discussion did not often expand to suggesting that all people with a similar race or ethnicity might be capable of such a horrific crime. Similarly, common Asian stereotypes were only sparingly used to describe the perpetrator, which should be taken for granted and yet is still reassuring.

Because Asians are rarely present in media content in general and crime news content specifically, and because media portrayals of Asians tend to be stereotypical, there is a legitimate concern that the public could conclude from the fact that Cho was a little understood "other" that all Asians or Koreans share similar characteristics with him. While it remains concerning that Cho's race was so heavily emphasized in news content, especially by national newspapers, the concern that negative stereotypes associated with Asians could be reinforced by the VT shootings coverage is somewhat assuaged, for the coverage so rarely racialized any elements of the story aside from Cho himself.

While previous research has found national or elite newspapers tend to offer more balanced coverage of news events than local/non-elite newspapers (Grotta, Larkin, and Du Plois 1975; Lacy, Fico, and Simon 1991), the results of the present study show this trend may not hold true for news framing of race. In light of Holt and Major's (2010) research, the findings of the current study can be considered to have forwarded research one more step toward a general statement (or a set of statements) about differences between local and national sources of original information on events or incidents of a local origin. Holt and Major found that local newspapers covered a single story using more diverse frames than did national newspapers, while still maintaining as much systems-based attribution as national newspapers rather than making individual-based attribution of the crime. In the current study, the local newspaper was found to have devoted more attention to the incident and sustained the attention longer than national newspapers. It was also less

likely than the national newspapers to use a frame—race, in this case—which was not always warranted, and was less likely to feature that frame prominently.

The relative strengths of local newspapers *vis-à-vis* national newspapers with more perceived prestige and resources discovered in these two studies can be ascribed to the fact that local journalists were probably more able to access a wider variety of sources and to have more intimate background knowledge concerning the local incident that became high-profile national news. Reporters at the national newspapers, on the other hand, must have learned about the area and place only after the incident occurred and thus were more likely to have depended on heuristic information to a greater extent than did local reporters.⁵ Due to the limited amount of study on differences between local and national media's coverage of locally-originated news events and to limited understanding of any differences in journalistic practice that might exist between the local and national levels, further speculation regarding why such differences exist is not deemed prudent here. However, this is certainly an important issue that demands more scholarly attention.

Another promising area of future research is the expansion of the types of national and local media for the comparison. The current study examined newspaper content only, and not content from a wider variety of other news media. It is possible that news coverage found in other media besides newspapers would not follow the same trends found here; such a possibility demands further investigation. In doing so, application of other relevant frames will also provide more comprehensive understanding of the differences between local and national coverage of incidents or events with local origins.

NOTES

1. It must be acknowledged that using the terms "Asian race" and "Korean ethnicity" can be problematic and reductive. The terms are defined here, however, as they were used in the news coverage examined in the present study and by Kellner (2007, 2008). In other words, we utilized the definitions of "Asian," "race," "ethnicity," and "Korean" found in content describing Cho, rather than applying perhaps more comprehensive definitions to the content (such as distinguishing between South Korea and North Korea or using a more accurate definition of "Asian" to include East Asians, as well as Southeast Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Asians from the Indian subcontinent).
2. For example, NPR.org, NYTimes.com, and USAToday.com all published stories in the weeks after the VT shootings either written by journalists from *The Roanoke Times* or featuring them as sources.
3. Only articles that squarely focused on the shooting incident were included in the analysis. When the criteria devised by Park, Holody, and Zhang (2012) were applied, approximately 15 percent of newspaper articles were screened out.
4. It should be noted that only the 55 national and 51 local newspaper articles that included a race frame were included in this and all subsequent statistical tests.
5. For example, both the *New York Times* and *USA Today* referred to the site of the shootings as "Virginia Tech University" and *The Roanoke Times* did not. This indicates journalists at the local newspaper were more aware that the university is properly referred to by its full name, "Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University," or simply as "Virginia Tech."

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