

# Finishing the story: Narrative ritual in news coverage of the Umpqua Community College shooting

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## Abstract

This article applies Victor Turner's schema of 'social drama' to examine narrative rituals and the roles performed by a local and national newspaper in their coverage of the Umpqua Community College shooting that took place in October 2015. Textual analysis is used to compare stories from The Roseburg News-Review and the New York Times in terms of the narrative's movement from breach, crisis, redress and finally to either reintegration or separation. This study finds that narrative patterns for the local and national newspapers do not parallel, suggesting differences in role perceptions. Instead, journalistic ritual is subject to the crisis, proximity to the tragedy and audience. The local outlet reinforces consensus with authority by focusing on victims and the grieving process to achieve the social good of healing and recovery; and the national newspaper challenges the status quo by focusing on the shooter and legislative reform. While the News-Review reaches reintegration by achieving a sense of normalcy, the New York Times stalls in a state of liminality. Both papers move the discourse on school shootings toward a societal ideal though neither narrative reaches the transformative discourse that has invoked national reflexivity noted in past instances of tragedy.

## Keywords

Comparative research, crisis/disaster, journalism, local journalism, mass media, morality, narrative, new media, research methods: qualitative

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## Introduction

The number of school shootings in the U.S. has risen dramatically in recent years. Since 1970 there have been 1640 incidents of school shootings (Naval Postgraduate School, 2019). The numbers per year, which initially hovered in the high teens to low twenties, skyrocketed in 2019 to 118 incidents, the highest number recorded yet. Many of these fatal events are taking place in small towns around the country. In fact, nine out of the top 10 deadliest school shootings took place in towns of 75,000 residents or less (Pane, 2018). Small-town newspapers covering the daily life of that community may find themselves competing with major national news outlets for coverage of a story that is both locally and nationally newsworthy.

Citizens rely on journalists to make sense of chaotic and remote happenings, especially in times of crisis when public concern is heightened (McCombs, 2005; Molotch and Lester, 1974). In response, newswriters rely upon the media ritual of narrative to assign meaning and prescribe an understanding of past and future direction (Kitch, 2003; O'Connell and Mills, 2003). How the media presents a story has the power to affect public perception of complex issues (Holody and Daniel, 2017) and social policy formation (Duwe, 2000). Yet research has shown that news content may differ depending upon size of the outlet, respective audience and proximity to the event (Harry, 2001) raising questions of how and why journalists choose one narrative over others, and to what effect?

This study applies Turner's (1980) schema of social drama as an analytic lens. The heretofore under-utilized theoretical framework allows for exploration of how journalists from different newspapers make sense of tragedy through performed meaning-making in narrative ritual. A textual analysis of coverage on the 2015 Umpqua Community College shooting from *The Roseburg News-Review* and the *New York Times* was conducted to assess the theoretical implications of narrative ritual. This comparative analysis will clarify how journalists of vastly different news outlets capture the ideological dynamics of the crisis. In doing so it will also elucidate how during times of crisis media outlets conceive of their roles, how meaning is made and how communities with access to different news publications come to understand and experience this type of trauma. The research, therefore, poses the following broad question: How do the narratives employed by journalists at a local newspaper and a national newspaper compare in the event of a mass school shooting, and how do these narratives change over time?

## Mass shootings in the news

While academic interest on media coverage of school shootings has increased over the years little work has specifically focused on the UCC shooting. Scholarly work on the UCC shooting, in particular, has consisted of examinations of 'alternative narratives' (Nied et al., 2017; Starbird, 2017) and media frames (DeFoster and Swalve, 2018). Thus, there is ample room for further analysis.

Through the UCC case study, this research seeks to fill two gaps in the literature on media coverage of school shootings: (1) application of narrative analysis, and (2) comparison of local and national coverage. Extant literature on the mediatization of school

shootings in general has focused on newsworthiness (Lawrence and Mueller, 2003; Schildkraut et al., 2018), the discourse of fear and moral panic (Altheide, 2009; Burns and Crawford, 2000; Kupchik and Bracy, 2009), and the ethical response of journalists (Blackholm et al., 2012). Many assess attribute-agenda setting and framing of stories in the media (Chyi and McCombs, 2004; Elsass et al., 2016; Kwon and Moon, 2009; Muschert and Carr, 2006; Peelo, 2006; Wondermaghen, 2013) but frame analysis is not the same as narrative analysis. While media frames refer to the mental schemes for presenting and comprehending news (Scheufele, 1999) narrative ritual analysis is concerned with the function of symbolism and storytelling devices journalists rely upon to make sense of the world (Kitch, 2003). Narrative frameworks establish significance to news events that serve to unify and orient society via moral appeals (Cottle, 2005). Turner's theory of social drama is a useful lens for the study of school shootings because it highlights the narrative form and ideological agency of journalists expressed in dynamic phases of social conflict (Cottle, 2005; McDevitt et al., 2013). These phases that parallel the beginning, middle and end of a traditional story are described by Turner (1980) as breach, crisis, redress and separation or reintegration. Narrative analysis and the application of social drama thereby open up a new way of understanding school shootings in the news by looking at how journalists activate their agency to place the issue within broad, familiar narrative structures through the use of cultural symbols.

Secondly, insufficient attention has also been given to differences between local and national coverage of school shootings. Only a handful of studies have conducted such comparative analyses (Gutsche and Salkin, 2017; Holody, Park, and Zhang, 2013; Leavy and Maloney, 2009). In their study of the media's response to the 2005 Red Lake Indian Reservation and 1999 Columbine school shootings Leavy and Maloney (2009) performed a content analysis of the *New York Times*, and the two local papers finding that Columbine received more coverage at the national level than did Red Lake. They conclude that extensive national coverage is necessary in marking an event as 'significant' in the country's collective memory (Leavy and Maloney, 2009: 288–289). Other studies compared framing and/or attribute agenda setting among local and national news, finding that a heavier focus is placed on the gunman by national news, as opposed to that of the victims by local outlets (Holody and Daniel, 2017). This research adds to the conversation by examining the narrative rituals employed by both papers following the UCC shooting.

## Local versus national news

Differences between local and national news coverage holds implications for how diverse audience groups come to understand tragedies. In their study comparing local and national coverage of the Virginia Tech shooting Holody et al., (2013) found that although the race frame was used in similar ways by both outlets, it was made more prominent and salient in national coverage than local coverage. This suggests to the larger audience that the shooter's race was a significant part of the story. Usher (2009) indicated that during crises the tradition of local mimicking national media may at times be suspended, giving rise to differences in terms of the professional norm of objectivity, which she urges must be considered contextually. She finds that in times of local tragedy

national newspapers adhere more closely to the norm of objectivity while local media, viewing themselves as a voice for the community, take on an advocacy role (Usher, 2009). Thus, collective memory and public response may be informed differently depending upon the primary news source.

An understanding of differences between local and national coverage is contingent upon an assessment of journalistic routines, proximity to the crisis and perceived expectations of audience members (Reese and Shoemaker, 2016). Bourdieu offers insight on this point. His field theory understands modern society in terms of differentiated, semi-autonomous and specialized spheres of action, such as journalism, that are sites of struggle and competition (Benson, 2006). The power of these intermediate-level institutions is accumulated in two ways: economic (e.g. circulation or advertising revenues) and/or cultural (e.g. prestige via press awards) capital. While economic capital is the more powerful, cultural capital *legitimizes* success (Benson, 2006).

Cultural capital may be accumulated as journalists follow a set of prescribed 'doxa' that includes 'accepted institutional roles, ethical standards and epistemological frameworks' that constitute truthful reporting (Vos and Craft, 2017: 1506). Such unstated and stated routines allow newswriters to achieve standards of professionalism (Vos and Craft, 2017), but can result in homogenized news narratives (O'Connell and Mills, 2003; Reese and Shoemaker, 2016). However, the above review of mass shooting literature hints at discrepancies in coverage patterns between local and national news outlets. Usher (2009) found that local coverage of Hurricane Katrina was bound to the needs of the audience and proximity to the disaster. National and local newspapers have also been found to differ in source use, as the former tends to favour elite official sources compared to the latter's use of unofficial, local sources, often due to issues of access (Carpenter, 2007). Therefore, source access, specialized knowledge and a sense of responsibility are key to understanding local coverage (cited in Gutsche and Shumow, 2019: 447; Holody et al., 2013).

For Bourdieu (1984) sites of cultural production parallel spaces of reception. In other words, news organisations will consciously or unconsciously seek out audience members shaped by a particular education, wealth and social background that predisposes it to accept proposed information and ideas (Benson, 2006). Other research has found that professional standards that dictate newsworthiness are shaped according to socio-political geographies and reinforce socially approved values and behaviours (Gutsche and Shumow, 2019; McBride and Rosenstiel, 2014). This means that local news content reflects local, more homogenized perspectives and values. On the other hand, we may expect the *New York Times*, which caters to a diverse and abundant population, to be more critical of the status quo.

## Narrative as media ritual

This analysis draws from the theoretical conceptualisation of narrative as a journalistic ritual, in which news is socially constructed from the routines, practices and norms born out of the professionalisation of newswork. Rather than unbiased representations of an objective reality, news is an articulated symbolic structure, in which facts tap into ideology to impart some larger meaning (Eason, 1981). At the heart of narrative, is the notion

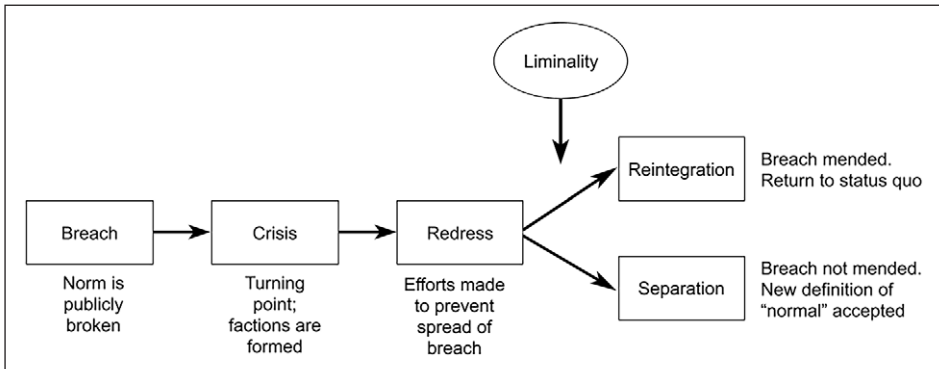
of morality. Narrators of society are those expert elites to whom the public looks for messages of rationality and morality (Fisher, 1984). In this way media ritual moves beyond the dichotomous production-consumption tradition of news to one of cultural resonance through patterned routines (Durham, 2008). Carey (1975: 6) elaborates: 'A ritual view of communication is not directed towards the extension of messages in space but the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs'.

Ritual is fluid and difficult to conceptually define due to its contradictory nature. Couldry (2005: 7) departs from Carey's Durkheimian, functionalist framework to define media rituals as actions that transcend isolated events to 'stand in' for 'frameworks of understanding connected with the media' and broader values that tie members of society together. Cottle (2006: 412) also finds Carey's definition limiting in its understanding of media ritual as 'sacred ceremonies' that invoke a sense of fellowship. He defines media-tized rituals as 'those exceptional and performative media phenomena that serve to sustain and/or mobilize collective sentiments and solidarities on the basis of symbolisation and a subjunctive orientation to what should or ought to be' (Cottle, 2006: 415). In this sense, journalists may be understood as 'counselors' of society, subject to the demands of narrative ritual to tell coherent stories that guide public belief and action. Similarly, Zelizer (1992) compares journalists to shamans. Distinguished by their status as outsiders they legitimize certain emotions for society, and act as 'stabilising agents, who solidify consensus and reinstate social order' (Zelizer, 1992: 21). Journalists as shamans thereby expose the tension between 'what is' and 'what could be' (Zelizer, 1992: 23).

The above definitions leave interpretive room for understanding ritual in terms of consensual or hegemonic power, and the media's role in creating a reality that is either affirming or disruptive of the social order. Ritual is thus an agent of both stability and change (Ettema, 1990). Its contradictory nature is embodied in the opposing Durkheimian and neo-Marxian traditions. In Durkheim's sociology the power of ritual is realized in driving collective sentiments towards a sense of higher moral purpose that generates feelings of a collective social identity (Cottle, 2006). For the neo-Marxist ritual is a tool to legitimize and maintain the interests of hegemonic powers (Cottle, 2006; Ettema, 1990). Cottle (2006) finds both perspectives limiting: if narrative as a media ritual is to be fully understood, it must be recognized in its capacity for both cultural contradiction and unification (cited in Ettema, 1990; Slack, 1989). This study assesses the potential of ritual to foster consensus, disruption or transformation of the status quo in the coverage of a school shooting.

## Social drama

While studying the Ndembu people of Zambia, Turner (1980) expands upon the idea of narrative ritual, which he calls 'social drama'. Social drama is a spontaneous occurrence of social process that is a story made up of distinct, inaugural, transitional and terminal motifs – in other words, a beginning, middle and end (Turner, 1980). He describes this narrative arc as proceeding through four phases (see Figure 1): *Breach* indicates the moment a norm, law or custom is intentionally or unintentionally broken in a public space. This is the moment when an infraction has occurred amongst a group of persons



**Figure 1.** Tumre's four phases of social drama.

The figure demonstrates Turner's (1980) phases of social drama that progresses until reaching reintegration or separation, or becoming stalled in a state of liminality when the outcome of the drama remains uncertain.

with shared values, interests and a common history (Turner, 1980). This phase manifests in news coverage as those initial stories immediately following a schism of social values. *Crisis* is the turning point when factions form between those directly involved. During this phase, latent cultural differences are made visible and the limits of consensus are reached and realized (Turner, 1980). *Redress* refers to the measures enacted by the involved groups to prevent the spread of breach, ranging from the less formal options of personal advice, to the more formal judicial and legal interventions. In the redressive phase society is at its most reflexive state, when pragmatic and symbolic actions are most fully developed (Turner, 1974). Finally, success or failure of the redressive measures will result in either *reintegration* (reconciliation is achieved) or *separation* (the breach is irreparable). Whereas with reintegration there is a return to the status quo, with separation change in the system occurs (Cottle, 2005; McDevitt et al., 2013). His concept of 'liminality' refers to the indeterminate phase of transition when the outcome of the drama is still uncertain (McDevitt et al., 2013; Turner, 1980).

Social drama emphasizes performance and performativity. In terms of media ritual, performance is illustrative of the ideological agency of reporters in their balance of creativity and constraint, and their relationship with other cultural institutions (Cottle, 2005). Newswriters perform their work by fulfilling 'roles' throughout a mediatized public crisis (Cottle, 2006). Reporters may shift from one role to another, and they may differ entirely according to varying newspaper size and platform (Elliott et al., 1986). Therefore, local and national newspapers may take on different roles according to their respective audience, urging a sense of moral solidarity and reflexivity through narratives that expose cultural fault-lines (Cottle, 2005).

This study contends that school shootings must be interpreted as 'mediatized public crises', proceeding through the phases of social drama, if we are to understand the media's role in shaping related discourse. A 'mediatized public crisis' as outlined by Cottle (2006: 416) is an 'exceptional' ritual event that is performative, symbol-laden and

salient ‘in terms of high-level media exposure and collective media performativity across different media outlets in space and time’. Unlike routine news coverage, mediated public crises speak to deeper societal values and point to moral fissures that demand closer scrutiny. Such news stories demonstrate a narrative progression that unfolds over a period of time in discernible phases, and to which Turner’s schema of social drama fits nicely (Cottle, 2005). Moreover, his associated concept of ‘liminality’ captures the nuance, temporal dynamics and potentially transformative impacts of the mediated public crisis.

## Method

Textual analysis was employed here as the most suitable method. Over the years, it has been favoured by researchers concerned with explaining narrative media content as myths, rituals and archetypes (Fürsich, 2002, 2009; Kitch, 2003). Fürsich (2009: 239) argues that ‘only textual analysis can elucidate the narrative structure, symbolic arrangements and ideological potential of the media content’. Evaluating a society’s texts is useful in that it allows researchers to uncover, not one dominant ideology, but multiple interpretations of a socially constructed reality (Brennan, 2017). To do so, textual analysis takes into account all elements of presentation, including tone, linguistic details, visuals and omissions (Fürsich, 2009; Painter and Ferrucci, 2019) as meaning can only be understood in the context of the ‘total system’ of textual elements (Fürsich, 2009).

For this study a textual analysis was conducted of all news stories on the Umpqua Community College shooting published in October 2015 from both the *New York Times* and *The Roseburg News-Review*. A search of relevant online content for both newspapers demonstrated a significant decline in coverage of the shooting after 4 weeks and so only those stories published between Oct. 1, the date of the shooting, and Oct. 31 were included in the study. In line with Hall’s (1975) approach of taking a ‘long preliminary soak’ (p. 15) in the content, this researcher spent time thoroughly reading through each article, paying attention to dominant themes, use of archetypes and symbols, and what may have been omitted from the storyline. All forms of text, including headline, deck-head and body were included in the analysis. Visuals, such as graphics and photographs, attached to any stories were not taken into consideration as their presence was not consistent throughout all stories. Gathering all relevant published content from the *Times* was facilitated using the database Proquest. An initial search yielded a total of 153 stories, which, after eliminating duplicates, editorial pieces and letters to the editor, was pared down to 35 stories representing all hard news and feature coverage of the shooting. Stories from *The News-Review* required accessing the organisation’s e-edition, from which pdfs of the printed version were downloaded. A total of 52 stories comprised of hard news and feature stories, as well as 1 accompanying sidebar, were included in this study. Because this research is concerned with the narrative patterns of *news* stories, which would find a wider audience than other sections of the paper more tailored to a specific audience (e.g. sports), only stories from the A section were analyzed. Although it is advisable for there to be at least two coders, exceptions for a single coder can be made when the coding scheme contains only a few well-described categories (Kuckartz, 2013). The clear definitions provided by Turner (1980) of his four phases and the



typology's successive application to journalism (see Cottle, 2005; McDevitt et al., 2013) makes single-coder analysis possible.

The public crisis that unfolded followed a general chronology of the dynamic representation and performance of social drama. Once the articles of both papers were read and themes coded, they were categorized according to Turner's four phases. For example, *breach* stories 'announced' the upending of broken social norms – that is, school no longer a safe space – and emphasize questions of 'why?' *Crisis* was coded in terms of the social factions that form in the wake of breach. Stories that expanded the scope of discussion among new actors (political factions) beyond those at the scene of the event were categorized here. *Redress* stories were coded based on proposed solutions (e.g. gun control). Finally, *separation* and *reintegration* were coded in terms of whether the journalist referenced a return to normalcy or not.

## Findings

### *Social drama*

*Breach.* Of the four acts, breach contained the most varied amount of information. These stories 'announced' the breach of social norms, attempt to make sense of the event, and indicate key actors. In the immediate aftermath of the shooting at UCC, both newspapers published articles that could be termed 'straight news stories', which adhered to the journalistic convention of covering the 5Ws (who, what, when, where, why) and how. In this way stories from both the *Times* and *The News-Review* were strikingly similar. For example, on Oct. 1, when word of the shooting first broke, the lede for the *Times*' story began, 'A 26-year-old man opened fire on a community college campus here in a rampage that left 10 people dead and seven wounded and turned this rural stretch of southern Oregon into the latest American locale ravaged by a mass shooting'. Likewise, *The News-Review* began with, 'A gunman opened fire at 10:38 this morning, injuring at least 20 people at Umpqua Community College. Early reports from the scene suggest he may have killed as many as 13 of them'. Both papers move on to describe in detail the event as it unfolded inside the classroom. *The News-Review* and the *Times* employ identical language and rhetoric to describe the breach: reversal of the social norm that American schools are safe spaces.

Descriptions and first-hand accounts from within and around classroom 15 also serve as an attempt by the writers to come to terms with the moment of breach. Reporters make known the key actors in the drama – the victims and shooter. Each set of stories implicitly asks 'why?' but for different reasons. In stories on the shooter, the question is meant to investigate motive and stimulate solution-oriented discourse; the former set of stories initiates the grieving process. The *Times* devoted 8 out of the 34 articles to the shooter while *The News-Review* published only 2 articles out of their 52. These stories focused primarily on the shooter and were dominated by themes that included the shooter's background, actions during the event, evidence, or his position in relation to the phenomenon of mass shootings. This question of 'why?' is emphasized throughout each set of stories for both papers. At the bottom of the *Times* article 'Oregon gunman smiled, then fired, student says,' from Oct. 9 the reporter writes, 'Ms. Heu still does not have any idea what



Mr. Harper-Mercer's motive was. 'I would ask him: Why? Why he did what he did,' she said'. In less explicit terms, the question is raised in stories about the killer's background, character, mannerisms and habits.

Conversely, this pattern of probing for answers by investigating the shooter was not followed as closely by *The News-Review*, which dedicated a majority of its coverage to stories on the victims. Stories of the victims reemphasize the senselessness of the violence, the incongruity between society's present reality and idyllic past. Journalists from both papers write in the general tone of 'shock, anger and uncertainty' (Kitch, 2003) by humanising the victims as unique individuals. The Oct. 3 story 'In remembrance' profiles each of the victims from the UCC shooting and starts with 'The victims who died in Thursday's Umpqua Community College shooting were far more than a list of names'. By painting a picture of each victim's life, the writer invariably demands 'why this life lost?' This article also offers an opportunity to begin the process of moving from horror to healing as its structure mimics that of a mass wake with the victims being introduced one by one in name and story. The *Times* article from Oct. 2 follows a similar format, introducing the reader to each victim in turn.

During this first phase of social drama, the local and national newspaper parallel in topics covered (recounting actual event), key actors (victims and shooter), and tone (shock, disbelief, outrage and grief). Coming to terms with the initial shock of this upending of normalcy, precedes the phase of crisis at which point the publications begin to diverge in coverage. For *The News-Review*, mention of the shooter all but ceases as the rhetoric shifts to public mourning and communal unity in an effort to stem the tide of pain. The *Times* maintains its attention on the shooter, moving from questions of 'why?' to 'how?' as reporters explore the UCC shooting in broader contexts.

*New York Times: Crisis and Redress.* Turner (1980) writes this phase of 'mounting crisis' may spread like a 'contagion', and that, to contain the breach from spreading mechanisms must be put in place that may be informal and formal and are as diverse as the critical situations that arise (Turner, 1980). For the *Times* the conversation almost immediately turns to social ills (mounting crisis), the gun debate and gun legislation (redressive measures). These topics are discussed closely together, sometimes within the same 24-hour news cycle. It is also at this point that the UCC shooting is no longer reported in its own right and is instead used primarily as a point of reference in the discourse on other shootings and in terms of social and political issues.

This phase of crisis is characterized by the use of symbolic phrases such as 'contagion' and 'epidemic' to describe the mounting crisis of an unhealthy society. Reporters echo the audience's need for answers by investigating similarities and/or differences between instances of violence, shooter backgrounds and weapons of choice. In the Oct. 7 story 'Mass killings are seen as a kind of contagion', the reporters rely upon expert sources in violence prevention to discuss the UCC shooting as just one in a series of rampages characterising American school life. The reporters write, 'The potential for cultural contagion, many experts say, demands a public health response, one focused as much on early detection and preventive measures as on politically charged campaigns for firearm restrictions'. This use of public health language hints at a problem with

symptoms that may be both diagnosed and prognosed, and that may spread if not treated quickly.

During this redressive phase, the conversation is opened to a wider circle of political actors, and the narrative turns to the debate and moralisation of gun control. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo was the first politician to voice his opinion. He is followed by Nancy Pelosi, Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, and Hillary Clinton. In 'Cuomo, citing Oregon shooting, criticizes failure to pass gun control laws' from Oct. 2 the reporters write, 'Echoing emotional comments made on Thursday evening by President Obama after the killings at Umpqua Community College in Oregon, Mr. Cuomo was sharply critical of the political response to such attacks – 'It really is a disgrace,' he said – and argued that the electorate should force elected officials and candidates to address it'. Much of the commentary from major political actors is reactionary, emotional, but without concrete proposals for ways of moving forward. This is evident in a quote from Oregon governor Kate Brown, 'Oregon's gun debate goes beyond liberals vs conservatives'. Here the problem of shootings is placed in greater cultural context:

'But safety is paramount and should cut through the usual divides,' Ms. Brown said. 'Oregon and other states,' she said need to figure out 'how we can come together around this tragedy and future tragedies and figure out a way to build healthier communities where our children, whether they're in community college or in kindergarten feel safe going to school. . .'

The discourse is heavy with moral imperative, calling for action based upon the need to return to normalcy. This moral discourse is continued in the story 'Rampages in Australia, Britain and Canada prompted steps to regulate weapons', which throws the legislative failings of America into relief against the successes of others.

*The News-Review: Crisis and Redress.* Following the breach of the UCC shooting, is the brief but mounting crisis of pain and uncertainty. Unlike the *Times*' coverage, in which politics forms a central discursive thread, the *News-Review* contains this narrative to a brief window before attention is turned towards redressive stories of public mourning. In fact, the shooting's politicisation prolongs the crisis of pain and uncertainty and is resented by the community. The feeling of having been unwillingly thrust onto the national stage is communicated in the Oct. 9 story 'City in the spotlight: City leaders try to help community while under national scrutiny'. Shortly after the shooting President Obama announced his decision to visit families of the victims in Roseburg, which led to a public stirring against and for his politics and presence. This stirring of political fervor was repeatedly denounced as interfering with the grieving process of the community. In the story 'County commissioners look forward to president's visit', the author writes, 'In their statement, the commissioners keep their focus squarely on rebounding from the events, thanking those who have played a part in helping the community and the families heal in any way'.

Narratives of mourning, compared to those of grief, are more ceremonial, transcending individual differences to allow for communal catharsis (Kitch, 2003). In the redressive phase the newspaper becomes a 'symbolic structure in which facts function to disclose a larger meaning' (Eason, 1981: 125). The story 'United in Grief', is heavy with

themes of communal mourning, and ritual. The story highlighted the ceremonial elements of a vigil and combined anger with the resolve to heal. The narrative of tragedy is replaced by the narrative of healing and community strength.

The news closely covered the memorial and funeral service of each victim allowing the community vicariously to take part in the process of grieving and consoling with those directly affected. In this way readers can both celebrate and collectively remember the lives lost during the shooting. Stories of the funeral services were published in tandem with coverage of impromptu civil-religious events by community members. Some took place simultaneously with the services, as community members gathered outside the locations of funerals and memorials, as was the case in the Oct. 9 story, 'Uniting in support of those lost',

The supporters were of all ages and creeds, some with connections to UCC victims and some without. Regardless of their connections, they all had one thing in common: They came to support the families of those affected by the shooting.

The impromptu civil-religious behaviour also took place aside from the victims' services as community members responded through their own ritual acts. Stories, such as these, included coverage of spontaneously created shrines near the UCC campus meant to demonstrate camaraderie and sorrow (Kitch, 2003). Stories of the memorial mention the presence of both the American flag and a banner with the silhouette of the state of Oregon with a heart indicating Roseburg's location. Scholars note the American flag to have taken on the civil religious function during national tragedy and mourning in the past (Kitch, 2003), and combined with the symbol of Roseburg's suffering and strength, inspires a sense of civic pride that is tied to both patriotism and religious experience.

*The News-Review: Reintegration.* In the final week of October coverage the ceremonial function of the newspaper begins to transition to one of returning to 'normalcy' indicating reintegration. Greater sustained focus on both fundraising for survivors and victim families, as well as stories emphasising the future of the campus, school administrators and students moves the narrative tone from death to life. In 'Warm welcome: UCC students greeted on first day back to class' from Oct. 13 the reporter quotes the UCC president: 'She said the first need Monday was to get students back to class and teachers and the campus up and running in a normal way. 'This isn't quite normal, but we're trying,' she said'.

In another story 'UCC project on schedule' from Oct. 16 refers to construction that had been put on hold throughout the chaos of the shooting and aftermath. Construction of the new health, nursing and science building, here, becomes symbolic of the school's progress demonstrating not only a return to normalcy, but pointing also to a community strengthened in the aftermath. This sentiment is reiterated in one of the final stories of the month on a hero-survivor, honored at a UCC benefit concert. Although the benefit was meant to raise funds for the victims, the focus throughout the story is on Chris Mintz, who was praised for attempting to block the gunman from entering the classroom. The reporter writes, 'In spite of the tragedy that spotlighted Mintz's heroics in the first place, he was optimistic. . . . Before the incident, he had been seen taking citywide jogs

throughout Roseburg. 'Soon enough you'll see me running again,' he said'. The language of hope and resilience, and the focus on the symbol of 'hero' that emerged from the tragedy shifts the narrative rhetoric from death to life, sadness to strength and finally to civic duty and patriotism.

## Discussion

The case of the UCC shooting entered into the public consciousness as a mediatized crisis, through which its ideological dynamics were symbolically ritualized and enacted to summon cognitive and affective meaning making (Cottle, 2005). This ritual and performativity gives rise to questions of agency (Cottle, 2005) and the exercise of power by the press as a cultural institution. Through ritual the power of media practitioners is found in its ability to restore democratic impulses in times of historical change and moral upheaval (Cottle, 2006) while defining morality in terms of cohesion or dissent. Based on this study, however, the journalistic ritual and doxa relied upon to restore democratic order is not homogenous across organisations but rather, subjective to the crisis, proximity to the tragedy and audience. For *The News-Review* coverage is characterized by public mourning while the *Times* is marked by public moral outrage. *The News-Review* echoed the audience's values of consensus and unity, trading the more traditional role of objective mediator for community advocate. This narrative ritual is manifest in the use of symbolic language such as 'help', 'community', 'support', and 'unity'. In fulfilling this role, *The News-Review* entered a 'sphere of consensus' that depended upon harmony with local officials (Durham, 2008: 95). In line with Durkheim, ritual became the instrument of social solidarity that revitalized a unified effort towards greater moral purpose (Cottle, 2006; Durham, 2008).

For the national paper appeals to morality and social solidarity was performed with a sense of outrage that sought to defy national failings in an approach that is more conflicted and politically disruptive. They challenged the status quo by first tapping into symbol and emotion found in stories on the shooter. This dissent is evident in symbolic words such as 'outrage', 'conscience', 'gun debate', 'epidemic', and 'public'. Articles point to unpassed legislation and compare the U.S. to other countries more responsive to crises. However, the paper produced narratives of consensus when quoting politicians favouring gun reform. Because their audience is more heterogeneous and their economic base wider the *Times* can take on multiple roles to address different facets of the issue, pushing back against those in power without risking insensitivity or severe financial repercussions. The *Times* coverage is also distinguished from the local paper's narrative in its lack of a final solution phase. This may indicate that the narrative has become stalled in a state of liminality. Because either reintegration or separation cannot be achieved the national narrative must continue to cycle between stories of crisis to redress and back again.

It is perhaps due to a number of industry-related pressures that neither paper serves as a source of transformation. While they move the discourse on school shootings towards an ideal of how society should function and are equipped to push the discourse towards moral dissent (the national press through their scope and distance from the tragedy and the local through the issue's greater relative newsworthiness) they are

hampered by the relationship with the audience. The *Times*' rapid 24-hour news cycle fails to finish the narrative before other newsworthy stories take precedence, while *The News-Review*'s role as civil-religious leader resists dissent and political discourse. This artificial truncation of the conversation stifles the progression of discourse needed to achieve resolution. By taking on the advocate role the local paper may be acting on the audiences' immediate wants, but such an insular and protective approach may be a dis-service to the community's needs in the long run by failing to place the shooting within the broader context of U.S. gun violence and gun control. In other words, a local paper in times of tragedy may be less likely to question authority or serve as a source of social transformation because of its immediate proximity to the event and audience. This may constrict the community's view of the problem and prevent residents from having the necessary information to respond broadly and take political action. They may also be affected by source use. In line with past research (Carpenter, 2007) the local paper relied primarily on local sources quoting community members, victims of the shooting and local officials. Lack of access to outside voices can serve to limit the scope of the conversation, while the use of elite expert sources or national public figures by the *Times* relates the topic to broader social issues.

The race to attain cultural and economic capital may also prevent transformation. Ritualisation and enactment of the dynamics of the shooting for either consensus or dissent, serves to elevate, protect and enhance the ideological status of journalism in the field of cultural production (Cottle, 2006; McDevitt et al., 2013). This is manifest in the different roles embodied by the two papers that depends on proximity to the crisis and relationship with the audience, allowing for the attainment of cultural capital. This is more difficult for the local outlet that is doubly dependent on its base for public support and financing and may therefore be loathe to move counter to popular sentiment by engaging in political discussions on gun control. On the other hand, national elite papers wield the economic and cultural capital to become normative leaders of the field – symbolically powerful institutions, with greater ideological agency to establish or modify existing 'rules' of practice in journalism (Benson, 2006: 190), and challenge broader issues. Since cultural meaning is relationally produced (Benson, 2006) internal changes to the system have the potential to produce new narratives of discourse that push back against the status quo and reach a concluding phase of the drama that reifies morality in the functioning of a 'normal' democratic society.

Transformative narratives have been championed by national papers in the past, as was the case in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Durham, 2008) and the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence (Cottle, 2005). In both instances the activation of media ritual resulted in institutional reflexivity and cultural change. Like racial killings school shootings signal cultural fault lines that demand deeper and extended scrutiny. At issue for both papers is the need for deeper and more extensive coverage facilitated by greater context. This does not necessarily mean both papers must parallel in coverage. On the contrary, each paper serves a vital position within their respective community. *The News-Review* performs the dual roles of advocate and civil-religious leader, whereas the *Times* takes on more of a dissenting watchdog role. In serving these roles, news outlets still must fulfill their central purpose of 'providing citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing' (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014: 17). Context combined with

the emotional and moral appeals of narrative ritual may serve to energize civil discourse and social efforts towards transformation across and within a more diversified set of communities. In this way ritual may be enacted and performed while facilitating a functioning democratic society.

Although it is beyond the scope of this study differences between local and national news coverage of shootings also holds implications in the rise of news deserts. Over the past 15 years technological and financial upheaval has led to the shuttering of one in every five newspapers across the US, with most closures occurring in small towns (Abernathy, 2018) leaving national press or social media to fill the void. Communities without a local newspaper would lack the civil-religious institution through which they might grieve, while losing dedicated reporting that moves beyond the immediate aftermath and insight national sources can provide. Moreover, if national narrative patterns remain the same a sense of normalcy may be harder to achieve for smaller communities in the aftermath of traumatic events since reintegration cannot be achieved by elite newspapers. However, a more homogenous portrayal of the event may invoke stronger dissenting reactions at the local and national level if local readers subscribe to national outlets in place of community news. Future research should endeavor to expand upon this particular topic, in addition to exploring how and why certain role conceptions differ at the local and national level. Finally, while this study looked at local and national coverage with regards to news text future research may expand upon this comparative work by taking into consideration related photographs and visuals.

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