

REPORTING ON MASS SHOOTINGS: AN ANALYSIS OF JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS
OF MASS SHOOTING COVERAGE AND THE IMPACT IT HAS ON THEIR
PROFESSIONAL WORK AND PERSONAL LIVES

by

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Dedication

For my mother, father, and brother.

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Reporting on mass shootings: An analysis of journalists' perceptions of mass shooting coverage and the impact it has on their professional work and personal lives

Abstract

In nearly 10 years the number of deaths from mass shootings in the United States has more than tripled, with the number of individuals killed rising from 160 people (2000-2009) to 512 people (2010-2019) (Follman et al., 2020; Wilson, 2019). Mass shootings, thus, have occurred with such regularity that the field of journalism needs to re-evaluate this type of coverage and the impacts it has on news gatherers, producers, and others in the field. This exploratory study (November 20, 2019 to February 19, 2020) sought to analyze journalists' perceptions of the coverage of mass shootings and the effects it has had on their professional work and personal lives. An 18-item questionnaire was completed by 33 journalists from various platforms who had covered 11 different mass shootings. Using firsthand accounts from in-depth semi-structured interviews, the findings demonstrate that journalists have many concerns about the coverage of mass shootings related to not having planning and protocols to reduce occupational stress and other means of minimizing the impact of covering traumatic news events. Many participants in the study said that news media organizations could do more to protect their journalists following mass shooting coverage by providing professional resources, such as therapy and counseling, following mass shooting coverage. Coverage of mass shootings largely focused on getting the facts right and providing more coverage of the victims and survivors of these attacks rather than coverage of the shooter/s. Future research should focus on what is being done by newsrooms to combat the trauma that journalists might face following mass shooting coverage.

Keywords: mass shootings, news media, journalists, coverage, social media, gatekeeping theory, trauma, resilience, United States

Introduction

Mass shootings are considered “rare violent behaviors” that affect society as a whole yet have become the norm for heightened news coverage by United States media outlets (Lin, 2018, para. 1), as journalists are tasked with covering such tragedies with professionalism and accuracy. Often the amount of media coverage following a mass shooting is determined by factors such as the number of casualties and the potential motives behind the attack (Thompson, 2017). According to reporter Derek Thompson (2017), mass shootings have “inherent” and “unambiguous” news value, and journalists should report on mass shootings with caution and awareness, for this type of coverage could encourage others to follow suit with violence (para. 6).

It is clear, now more than ever, that journalists are rethinking how mass shootings should be covered by news media organizations. Two journalists wrote that the news media industry has not “reckoned with its responsibility to cover mass shootings with the discretion they require” (Kohrman & Reed, 2019, para. 3). Shooters often crave attention from the news media, and thus coverage has received much scrutiny about whether it has contributed to incentivizing more violence, especially in this new age of mass shootings on the rise (Kohrman & Reed, 2019). This has created additional pressure on journalists. Other journalists, such as Shaydanay Urbani (2019), have noted that newsrooms are changing the way they are reporting on mass shootings with policies that include not naming the shooters or solely focusing news reports on the victims of these tragic events.

The goal of this study is to deepen understanding about how professional journalists have covered mass shootings over more than a decade and the impact this type of coverage has had on

them, given that mass shootings have become a frequent type of news media coverage and the number of mass shootings has risen during the decade studied.¹ This study seeks to better understand how this type of coverage affects the professional work and the personal lives of journalists who are responsible for reporting on these traumatic events. This study uses the American Bar Association's (2016) definition of a mass shooting as four or more people killed or injured as a result of the shooting. The study builds on mass shooting coverage research (Bruce, 2015; Dahmen, 2018; Lankford & Madfis, 2018; McCluskey, 2017; Meindl & Ivy, 2018; Mingus & Zopf, 2010; Murray, 2017; Knoll, 2013; Ruiz-Grossman, 2017; Schildkraut, 2017); professional norms literature related to mass shooting coverage (Allsop, 2017; Biasotti, 2018; McBride, 2018; Towers et al., 2015); journalism, trauma, and resilience literature (Brayne, 2007; Masten, 2001; Novak & Davidson, 2013; Ochberg, 1996; Simpson & Bogg, 1999; Smith et al., 2015); and gatekeeping theory (Bro & Wallberg, 2014; Bruns, 2003; Haas & Wearden, 2003; Lewin, 1947; Schwalbe et al., 2015; Shoemaker, 1991; Shoemaker et al., 2001; Soroka, 2012; Tandoc & Vos, 2016; White, 1950), the latter of which will be applied to reporting on mass shootings.

This thesis research uses the framework of gatekeeping theory and the concepts of journalism, trauma, and resilience, to examine the overarching research question of how mass shootings have affected the professional and personal lives of journalists. This study fills a gap in the scholarly literature focused on mass shooting news coverage by showing how it has changed over time as well as how the coverage of mass shootings may affect journalists' professional work and personal lives. The following sections examine the literature on mass shooting

¹ There were 21 mass shootings from 2000 through 2010 compared with 62 mass shootings from the 9-year period of this study (2011-2019), which began with the Safeway shooting in Tucson, Arizona, in 2011, and ended with the West Texas shootings in Odessa, Texas, in 2019 (Follman et al., 2020; Wilson, 2019).

coverage; professional organizations and mass shootings; journalism, trauma and resilience; and the rich body of literature on gatekeeping theory.

Literature Review

Research on mass shooting coverage

Journalism and communication scholars take several approaches when studying mass shootings. Lankford and Madfis (2018) examined how major news media organizations covered mass shootings and whether the coverage increased the risk of future attacks (Madfis, 2018). Murray (2017) studied how media coverage often inspires future mass killers. Dahmen (2018) examined media influences and contagion effects, otherwise known as “copycat” effects, following a mass shooting. Dahmen (2018) found that journalists recognized that news coverage of shooters could cause copycats to seek the same type of public attention. Some scholars argue that mainstream media can inspire a contagion effect, which refers to the ways that “some people who are exposed to a given behavior may become more likely to behave similarly themselves” (Lankford & Madfis, 2018, p. 264). It can be thought of as the news media rewarding those who want fame with extensive, and often sensationalized, media coverage (Lankford & Madfis, 2018). Meindl and Ivy (2017) suggest that behaviors can be “contagious” and may spread (p. 368). These individuals who seek fame have become a concern for scholars and pose a threat to society because they are more likely to kill and wound more victims while competing for attention and maximizing the number of deaths (Lankford & Madfis, 2018). There is concern that giving news media attention to shooters can “influence others to commit copycat crimes of a similar nature” (Bruce, 2015, p. 31). Research even suggests a correlation between mass shootings and those who seek out attention (Bruce, 2015).

McCluskey (2017) provides research insight on media coverage of school shootings since 1999 the year of Columbine in his book titled *News Framing of School Shootings: Journalism and American Social Problems*. He outlines nine problem areas – “guns, popular media, religion, school security, parents/adults, teen life, criminal justice, mental health and drugs/alcohol” – that influence the theoretical approach known as frame building (p. 175). His work suggests that it is important to “evaluate news coverage patterns” as a way to understand “public discourse on pressing social, cultural and political issues” (p. 11). Moreover, news value often is determined by events “with more extreme effects on society,” such as mass shootings (p. 42).

Mass shootings receive a considerable amount of coverage by news media organizations because of their sensational nature (Schildkraut et al., 2017). Shootings differ from other forms of gun violence because victims are generally targeted at random by the shooter (Mingus & Zopf, 2010). Some scholars even note that media coverage of these shooters sends the message that committing a spectacular act of murder is a great way to get attention (Knoll, 2013). Most researchers say it is important for news outlets to avoid “glorifying” or “demonizing” the shooter (Knoll, 2013, para. 13). In the case of the Las Vegas, Nevada, mass shooter Stephen Paddock, journalist Ruiz-Grossman (2017) wrote that the media attempted to humanize him by using phrases like “lone wolf” and “not fitting the mass shooter profile” to describe him in early coverage (para. 3). Journalists, at times, are unaware of the “potential consequences of mass shooting coverage” (Dahmen, 2018, p. 164). The most infamous mass killings are subject to significant media coverage (Murray, 2017). With the advancement of technology, now more than ever, journalists need to be aware of how this type of coverage could affect any and all audiences. The internet enables anyone to access information with a Google search. A dilemma proposed by Lankford and Madfis (2018) involves whether journalists should omit certain

aspects of coverage, such as the name or image of the shooter, in hopes of preventing future attacks.

Professional journalism organizations and mass shootings

Over the years, professional journalism organizations have offered insights and counsel on methods and considerations for journalists covering mass shootings. The nonprofit Poynter Institute's senior vice president, Kelly McBride (2018), considered an expert in media ethics by the institute, said it is important to name the shooter infrequently and to do so only if and when it is critical in understanding the context behind what has happened. Often, public officials and advocates for victims ask journalists to refrain altogether from naming the suspected shooter, which McBride (2018) offers that this is not a good idea because naming the shooter is important when giving news context. To add to this, *Columbia Journalism Review* freelance journalist Tony Biasotti (2018) argued that media organizations should always identify the suspected shooter because correctly identifying the suspect can stop the public and the press from making false accusations.

In an Arizona State University study, researchers found that after a public mass shooting, the probability of another such attack increased over the next 13 days (Towers et al., 2015). Researchers said the link between such attacks had to do with the media's coverage of the shooting, suggesting that when media outlets focus on the shooter, it sends a message to at-risk individuals that they might become famous by committing acts of violence (Towers et al., 2015). As a result, the project concluded that media organizations should be encouraged to refrain from covering mass shootings altogether (Towers et al., 2015).

A difficult question posed by scholars is whether media organizations should incorporate images of the suspected shooter when covering a mass shooting. According to McBride (2018),

the answer is no. She said media organizations should avoid publicizing these images because they tend to be overused, which can glorify the suspect, and in return, might encourage others to commit similar acts of violence. Instead, according to *Columbia Journalism Review's* freelance journalist Jon Allsop (2017), media organizations should provide “respectful media coverage” following a mass shooting, provide proper training for their staff, and establish clear protocols when covering such tragedies (Allsop, 2017, para. 7). According to the Society of Professional Journalists Codes of Ethics, it is crucial for journalists to verify information before incorporating it into their professional coverage (McBride, 2018).

Journalism, trauma, and resilience

Journalists who cover mass shootings may be affected by the trauma they are exposed to on the job. Similar to other first responders, journalists often bear witness to human suffering, and this type of work may affect their overall health and well-being (Smith et al., 2015). According to Ochberg (1996), journalists are likely to be exposed to post-traumatic stress disorder while on the job. Research suggests that 92 percent of journalists say they have experienced at least four traumatic situations during their career in journalism (Weidmann et al., 2008). Ochberg (1996) stated that PTSD can be thought of as three reactions at one time – “recurring intrusive recollections, emotional numbing and constriction of life activity, and a physiological shift in the fear threshold, affecting sleep, concentration, and a sense of security” (para. 3). In order for PTSD to be medically diagnosed, symptoms need to last for at least one month (Ochberg, 1996). Research has shown that the longer a journalist covers traumatic stories, the more likely it is for the person to demonstrate symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Simpson & Bogg, 1999).

Despite repeat exposure to work-related traumas, most journalists exhibit some form of resilience (Smith et al., 2015). Resilience is often defined as the ability to bounce back from trauma or other difficult situations (Masten, 2001). Resilience often follows exposure to trauma. Often, journalists are able to perform their duties in highly traumatic scenarios while experiencing a low rate of reported PTSD and other psychiatric disorders (Smith et al., 2015). However, research is still needed for better understanding of the factors protecting individuals against the development of PTSD, stress, and stress disorders following exposure to trauma (Novak & Davidson, 2013). According to the New York-based nonprofit Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, it is important for journalists to establish a standard routine of healthy habits to maintain resilience while covering trauma (Brayne, 2007).¹

Gatekeeping theory

This exploratory research uses the theoretical framework of gatekeeping to study the influence of mass shootings on journalists' perceptions of the coverage and its impact on their personal and professional lives. Gatekeeping is one of the oldest theories in the field of mass communication research (Lewin, 1947; Shoemaker, 1991; Shoemaker et al., 2001; White, 1950). Shoemaker (1991) defines gatekeeping as the "process by which the billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day" (p. 57). In this framework, gatekeepers control all aspects of the content by creating "mass media or interpersonal channels"; information is then "filtered" to the public by media organizations (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 57). For Vos (2015), gatekeeping is

¹ Scholarship suggests that journalists should consider eating at least three meals a day, obtain adequate sleep, take breaks, and talk through the emotions they might be experiencing with an editor or a trusted peer (Brayne, 2007). Other forms of self-care include exercising and meditation. Individualized self-care plans are recommended to bolster, build, or maintain resilience while covering trauma (Brayne, 2007).

“remembered for its importance in those early attempts to give early journalism and mass communication scholarship a more systematic and scientific objectivity” (p. 3).

The original conception of gatekeeping theory arose from the work of social psychologist Kurt Lewin, who published his work on community dynamics in 1947 and coined the term “gatekeeper” (Soroka, 2012). According to Lewin (1947), the gatekeeper ultimately decides what information pass through what he refers to as channels, and what information does not. Outside factors, such as how messages are shaped, could affect the gatekeeper’s decision regarding what information is allowed to move through the gatekeeping process (Shoemaker et al., 2001). David Manning White (1950) incorporated gatekeeping theory into a newsroom setting and stated that gatekeepers control the flow of words and images in news that is disseminated to the public (White, 1950). In the traditional news model, editors played the role of the gatekeeper by deciding what kinds of news items would be published and what would not (Soroka, 2012).

Scholarly research suggests that early gatekeeping theory focused more on the selection of news (Soroka, 2012). Historically, editors had the authority to select from a wide range of stories that are often newsworthy and will capture the audience’s interest (Soroka, 2012). Gatekeepers also had the job of monitoring the content so only “suitable information is allowed through to be transferred to the audience” (Bruns, 2003, p. 32). In a sense, gatekeepers had complete control over what information would pass through these “gates” and be filtered out to the public (Shoemaker et al., 2001, p. 234).

However, the traditional role of gatekeeping has, in a sense, shifted from the producers of content to the consumers of that content (Haas & Wearden, 2003). Widely available information on the internet allows the public to “bypass gatekeepers altogether and turn directly to primary information sources” (Bro & Wallberg, 2014, p. 447). Schwalbe et al. (2015) suggest that a new

form of gatekeeping has emerged with the rise of the internet and social media. The conceptualization of gatekeeping by using so-called “gatecheckers” has been a way to “select, verify, and curate visuals” while providing content and transmitting the news content to the public the way that traditional gatekeepers once had (p. 476). The current study examines all of these factors on journalists, the historical gatekeepers, and how it affects coverage of mass shootings and journalists’ professional and personal lives.

Research Questions

Based on this review of literature, this exploratory study examines journalists’ perception of the repeated coverage of mass shootings and the impact this type of coverage has on their work and lives.

RQ1: How have journalists’ concerns about news media coverage of mass shootings changed over time?

RQ2: How has the frequency of mass shootings affected journalists’ perceptions of the coverage, if at all?

RQ3: How have professional normative practices changed, if at all, toward the coverage of mass shootings?

RQ4: How has technology, such as social media, affected journalists' coverage of mass shootings?

RQ5: What practices, if any, do journalists use to cope with the impact of covering mass shootings?

Methodology

This study analyzed first-hand accounts of how professional journalists view the recent coverage of mass shootings and how this type of coverage may affect their reporting as well as their everyday lives. The researcher focused on journalists who had covered some of the deadliest and most recent mass shootings in the 21st century. The study was approved by the University of Arizona Institutional Review Board. The researcher started with a list of the five deadliest mass shootings and the five most recent mass shootings from [CNN](#)'s "Mass Shootings in the US Fast Facts" (2019). (See Table 1 and Table 2.)

The researcher compiled a census list of journalists based on the news coverage of the top five deadliest mass shootings and the five most recent mass shootings in the last decade. The researcher retrieved articles from the internet using the following keywords: "mass shootings in 2019," "best practices when covering mass shootings 2019," and "norms when covering mass shootings 2019." (See Appendix A.) The purposive sample of journalists recruited to participate in the study was contacted by phone, email and/or social media private messaging.¹ Participants recruited for this study had reported and written news reports related to mass shootings in the last decade.

The study was launched on November 20, 2019 and ended February 19, 2020. The researcher asked each participant 18 questions to get a better understanding of professional and personal perspectives on the coverage of mass shootings. (See Appendix C.) About a month into the study, the researcher realized the response rate was low. From the list of 33 journalists the researcher initially compiled for the study, only four journalists agreed to participate. As a result,

¹ The organizations include Journalist's Resource, *First Draft News*, *The Intercept*, *Mother Jones*, *The New York Times*, Education Writers Association, *Pacific Standard*, *The Atlantic*, *The Arizona Daily Star*, News 4 Tucson, NBC News, The Associated Press, *The Los Angeles Times*, Living Labs Radio, *Quill Magazine*, CNN, Refinery 29, *Desert Valley Times*, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *Houston Chronicle* and Vox.

the researcher began to contact other journalists from around the U.S. who had covered mass shootings in the last decade. In total, the researcher contacted 171 people with journalism experience in either print, television news, cable news, online news, longform magazine, radio, and/or audio as well as academics who worked as journalists. The researcher found these participants by looking up news media organizations that had covered one or more of the following mass shootings: Dayton, Ohio; Tucson, Arizona; Odessa, Texas; Las Vegas, Nevada; El Paso, Texas; San Bernardino, California; Virginia Beach, Virginia; Parkland, Florida; Orlando, Florida; Clovis, New Mexico; and Highlands Ranch, Colorado. (See Appendix B.) The researcher also used a convenience sample in the study by reaching out to local news media organizations in Tucson, Arizona. This researcher's effort resulted in 33 journalists who agreed to participate in the study.

All participants in this study were granted anonymity to help to ensure open responses. This study covers a nine-year period that witnessed the largest increase of mass shootings from the Arizona Safeway shooting in Tucson, Arizona, back in 2011, to more recently, the West Texas shootings in Odessa, Texas, that occurred in 2019.¹ From the years 2000 to 2009, a total of 20 mass shootings occurred resulting in 160 people killed and 128 others wounded (Follman et al., 2020; Wilson, 2019). From 2010 to 2019, a total of 63 mass shootings occurred resulting in 512 people killed and 865 others wounded (Follman et al., 2020; Wilson, 2019). These numbers show an increase of 43 mass shootings, 352 more deaths, and 737 more wounded from the previous decade (Follman et al., 2020; Wilson, 2019). During this period, journalists began to question how mass shootings were being reported.

¹ An article published in *Time* magazine utilized a database of mass shootings compiled by *Mother Jones* (Wilson, 2019). According to *Mother Jones*'s definition of a mass shooting, at least three people had to have been killed, not including the gunman (Follman et al., 2020).

All participants in this study chose how they wanted to answer the questionnaire – by email, phone, Skype/Zoom or social media. (See Appendix C.) Interviews by phone or Skype/Zoom were recorded with the permission of the study participant and transcribed by the researcher.

The 18-item questionnaire started with items about the journalist's career, then moved into more substantive areas. This flow allowed a better understanding of each participant's personal experience covering mass shootings as well as their opinions on how this coverage has changed or not changed over the last several years. The researcher also asked questions related to coping mechanisms the participant used. The researcher analyzed the responses of the professional journalists recruited into the study by using the framework of gatekeeping theory and the concepts of journalism trauma and resilience.

Findings

Two-thirds of the 33 journalists recruited into the study were women (66.7%) and 11 were men (33.3%). Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 69 years with a mean age of 45.06 years ($SD = 14.71$) and a median age of 44 years. Participants' journalism experience ranged from 1.5 years to 45 years with a mean of 21.29 years ($SD = 14.42$) working in the field. All 33 participants in the study had a higher education degree. Twenty-seven journalists had bachelor's degrees (81.8%) and six had master's degrees (18.2%).

The number of organizations that participants had worked for ranged from one news outlet to 12 organizations with a mean of 3.45 ($SD = 2.18$). Thirteen of the 33 journalists in the study had done some freelance work (39.4%), 10 had not done freelance work (30.3%), and 10 did not respond to this question (30.3%). Participants' varied in the types of organizations where they had worked for. Fourteen of the 33 journalists in the study worked for local organizations

(42.4%), two worked for regional organizations (6.1%), 16 for a combination of organizations (48.5%), and one journalist did not specify (3.0%). Participants worked on a variety of platforms – 20 in print (60.6%), one in audio (3.0%), and 12 in broadcast television news (36.4%).

Eleven mass shooting locations were included in the study. Nine of the 33 journalists covered the mass shooting in Dayton, Ohio (27.3%), six journalists covered the mass shooting in Tucson, Arizona (18.2%), four journalists covered the Odessa, Texas, mass shooting (12.1%), four journalists covered the El Paso, Texas, mass shooting (12.1%), three covered the San Bernardino, California, mass shooting (9.1%), two covered the Las Vegas, Nevada, mass shooting (6.1%), and one each (3.0%) covered the shootings in Virginia Beach, Virginia; Parkland, Florida; Orlando, Florida; Clovis, New Mexico, and Highlands Ranch, Colorado.

In the following sections I will address the five research questions in this study. The sections describe journalists' perceptions of practice of coverage of mass shootings and how it has impacted them personally and professionally in their work. To keep participants anonymous, numbers one through 33 will be used following quotations to distinguish who said what throughout the findings. Study participants were promised anonymity by the researcher for their participation in this study.

Professional coverage of mass shootings

The first two research questions asked about journalists' concerns regarding the news media coverage of mass shootings, how this type of coverage has changed over time, and how the frequency of mass shootings has affected journalists' perceptions of the coverage, if at all. The study participants indicated that they have had conversations with colleagues in the field of journalism over the years about how to vet information, how to find credible sources, how to cover the shooter without glorifying the act, and how to report on victims without retraumatizing

them. Still, journalists noted that it is difficult to adequately prepare themselves to cover a mass shooting. Others said that some of the reporting work is done on the spot and that there are no real newsroom or universal protocols being employed. According to an anchor who covered the August 3, 2019, mass shooting at an El Paso Walmart, “We had internal conversations about our coverage – what, if anything, would we have done differently? We pretty much agreed that there is no set plan to cover a mass shooting. But you do have to remain calm and present the facts, even if there aren’t many facts to present at the time.” [7] The attack was known as one of the deadliest mass shootings on Latinx people in modern U.S. history, killing 22 people and injuring 23 others.

Major issues brought to the researcher’s attention by study participants included concerns with vetting information and sources in the chaos of the coverage, including finding ways to confirm information through multiple channels to use in news reports. Participants in the study agreed that it was a top priority for journalists to confirm the facts with credible sources before publishing anything in news reports. “Lots of conversations about how to report accurately and sensitively when there’s minimal information.” [8] Noted a print journalist who covered the May 7, 2019, mass shooting that killed one student and injured eight others in a targeted attack on classmates at STEM Highlands Ranch school in Highlands Ranch, Colorado:

We speak a lot about how we have a duty to make sure everything we report is confirmed before it goes out to the public. During mass shootings and other breaking news situations, editors and reporters double-and triple-check everything. During some close calls and shootings, themselves, my newsroom follows a “no notoriety” policy that many public radio stations hold themselves to. If [the name of the shooter] is not absolutely

necessary, we refer to shooters by “the suspect” or something like that instead of their name. [24]

Another print journalist who covered the January 8, 2011 mass shooting at a Safeway in Tucson, Arizona, where six people were killed and 13 others were injured, including then Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords who was hosting a Congress at Your Corner event, pointed out, “Conversations are all over the map, but the reporters agree it’s good to have a plan in place, and while time is of the essence it’s important not to get so wrapped up in competing with other outlets that you make mistakes.” [29]

Several participants in the study stated that journalists need to be ready at a moment’s notice for coverage and to prepare themselves for the immediate impact that this type of coverage may have on them professionally and, oftentimes, personally. According to a print reporter who covered the December 2, 2015, San Bernardino, California, mass shootings, where a married couple attacked a holiday party for county employees resulting in killing 14 people and injuring 22 others,

I think news organizations are, by and large, doing the best they can with the resources they have. We have to measure their success on a case-by-case basis. I think less of outlets that rush to publish information seen on social media before independently confirming it or that prominently feature shooters in their coverage in a way that prioritizes them over their victims. But I also think most organizations have moved away from such practices. [28]

News organizations debate whether they need to name and report the background of the shooter in their ongoing coverage. A major concern among participants in the study that they continued to mention the issue of potentially glorifying the shooter in news reports and thus

unintentionally minimizing the trauma of victims and their families. Other questions that were brought up in the study included, “How often do you show his [the shooter’s] picture? Do you mention his name? How do you count the dead when he is one of them? These sorts of things were big in our coverage.” [4] Study participants consistently spoke about the issue of naming the shooter in news reports. According to an anchor who covered the October 1, 2017 Las Vegas, Nevada, mass shooting where Stephen Paddock fired countless shots at concert goers during the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival, there were “mixed feelings on whether a shooter should be named. It’s necessary to report on what happened, but I do think more attention needs to be focused on the victims and not on the shooter. It’s important to tell these stories as humanistic[ally] as possible because people lost their lives in such a horrific way.” [5] Fifty-eight people were killed, and more than 500 others were injured in the hail of bullets. To date, it was the deadliest mass shooting in modern history. Another participant who covered the mass shooting in Las Vegas, Nevada, said reporters are documenting history with their news reports and that it is important to include all the facts, including the name and occupation of the shooter.

Most of the participants in the study agreed that talking about how they should incorporate the shooter into news reports is a very difficult and active conversation, but one that needs to be had. However, a majority of the study participants expressed concern about incorporating too much information about the shooter in the coverage. According to a broadcast television journalist who covered the Dayton, Ohio, mass shooting, which occurred outside of a bar in the early morning hours of August 4, 2019,

Some argue that you are giving the gunman a voice. Others choose not to say the gunman’s name to be sensitive to the victim's families. With any of the mass shootings

I've covered there is the need to cover every angle. I think sometimes people get fatigued with tons of stories focusing on the shootings. So, when is enough, enough? [21]

Some study participants also said the coverage of the shooter should not be omitted entirely from news reports because they play a key role in telling the public what happened. According to a print reporter who covered the San Bernardino, California, mass shootings, "We shouldn't ever omit a shooter's identity entirely, because certainly that person and their motivation is a central part of the story. But leaving that out of the headlines and making sure that the biggest photo on the page isn't theirs has a big effect in shifting the focus to the victims." [28]

Several journalists in the study stated that coverage should be approached with sensitivity because so many people are suffering from a great deal of trauma after a mass shooting.

According to a print reporter who covered the February 14, 2018, mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, in Parkland, Florida, where expelled student Nikolas Cruz opened fire on his former classmates killing 17 individuals and injuring 17 others, "Respect for the victims should be a primary concern for any journalist covering mass shootings. And just as important as providing stories that are focused on how these tragedies occur and what can be done to prevent them." [27] A major concern noted by study participants was reporting mass shootings accurately and sensitively without retraumatizing victims in the process. One print journalist said, "We're having conversations about what's of value to report versus what might re-traumatize a victim/survivor." [8] Study participants repeatedly stated that victims need to be a priority in the coverage with the goal of not desensitizing the public's view of those most vulnerable following a mass shooting.

Media organizations are slowly trying to change how they cover mass shootings, but there is much more to be done. Coverage usually centers on death and victim toll,

timeline, witnesses, the suspect and his/her motive. I think organizations need to start thinking outside the box and find ways to present this type of stories in fresh ways. Why? Because audiences grow desensitized. As we continue covering one mass shooting after the other, the frequency normalizes trauma, and journalists are part of that. [25]

Another point that several study participants made was the issue of whether reaching out to victims of a mass shooting and/or their family member is appropriate, and if it is, when to do it. “We want to always try and focus on victims and their legacies, but that requires family input. How much do you reach out to these people who are going through the worst days of their life?” [4] According to a broadcast television reporter and anchor who covered the Dayton, Ohio, mass shooting,

The criticism we face is primarily driven by viewer fatigue, not by inadequate coverage. We need to continue being sympathetic, responsible reporters while also trusting our judgment of what's newsworthy. I think the “if it bleeds, it leads” mentality is outdated, and we're seeing much more coverage with a conscience. [12]

Several participants in the study mentioned that mass shootings are becoming inevitable and part of everyday life in the U.S. One journalist who covered the mass shooting in Tucson, Arizona, noted that newsrooms need to have a plan in place for how they should cover a mass shooting.

I think there is also a sense that such events are inevitable so newsrooms must have a plan, as we would for covering a natural disaster or other major event. We also have to be aware that we are reporting on victims who are incredibly vulnerable in the moment and be careful not to exploit that and do them more harm. [2]

A major concern brought up by several participants had to do with the lack of resources they currently have when covering a mass shooting. According to an assistant news director who covered the August 31, 2019, mass shooting that began with a traffic stop and evolved into a drive-by rampage mass shooting in Odessa, Texas, “We all do the best we can do based on the resources we have on any given day. We know these are huge stories and need to be aggressively but respectfully covered.” [9] In that shooting, seven people were killed, and 22 others were injured.

Several journalists in the study said graphic images and content as well as unconfirmed information should be omitted from coverage. One participant who covered the mass shooting in front of a Safeway supermarket in Tucson, Arizona, said it is important that journalists are, “not jumping to conclusions, but at the same time reporting the complete story and not extrapolating or theorizing about what ‘might’ have been the motive, etc. And remember, always, that this is a human situation not something for ratings.” [2] Several participants cautioned against speculating in their coverage in order to avoid spreading false information and gossip. A news director who covered the mass shooting in Odessa, Texas, stated that “the only things that should be omitted would be negative things about victims, as well as graphic images. When choosing what NOT to cover, I think the victim’s families should be thought of first and foremost.” [4] Other journalists suggested that newsrooms should consider omitting from coverage graphic videos of bodies, blood and close ups of grieving individuals.

Professional normative practices and mass shooting coverage

The third research question asked whether professional normative practices have changed over time as the number of mass shootings has increased. More and more, journalists in this study say they are seeing the coverage of mass shootings as routine. Some participants mentioned the

similar patterns that journalists tend to follow when covering a mass shooting. According to a participant who covered the mass shooting in Las Vegas, Nevada, “A lot stays the same – witness statements, community fundraisers, stories of victims.” [15] An anchor who covered the mass shooting in Dayton, Ohio, noted,

We’ve heard the same words. Seen the same patterns repeating themselves over and over again. It was surreal hearing my local mayor and police chief on a major news organization. It was my city and my people. I hope we never become desensitized to mass shootings. I cannot accept this as a society or as journalists and somehow this needs to be addressed. [16]

Journalists must get this information out to the public once it is confirmed by sources as well as pushing content directly to online platforms, such as social media. According to an anchor who covered the mass shooting in Las Vegas, Nevada, “We need to focus on the facts and on the reporting with a great deal of empathy and sympathy. In that moment of time, we need to get out information and deal with our own emotions at a later date.” [5] Journalists noted that it is important that they get to the scene quickly, gather information from official sources, and interviewing those who witnessed the shooting. One participant in the study said journalists need to stay with the story as long as they are needed in order to accurately inform the public. According to a broadcast television reporter and anchor who covered the Dayton, Ohio, mass shooting:

Reporters flock to the scene as anchors take to the desk. Unfortunately, at this point it's becoming routine across the country. Confirmed information is at a premium in the early moments, which leads to repeating what limited information we know. A perimeter is set up around the scene, and reporters are left talking to bystanders or witnesses. After an

hour or two the local government will hold a news conference with what they know about the narrative. Motive is usually unknown for a while as we work to connect with the shooter's family and friends. [12]

A broadcast television reporter and anchor who covered the mass shooting in Highlands, Colorado, said the stakes can be much higher for journalists who are covering mass shootings than other news reports. Study participants said journalists need to be extra vigilant about the language they use in news reports.

The key for me is discerning what's valuable information. Not everything we learn needs to be reported. It's important to establish what happened and how it happened, but too often we've seen mistakes made in the rush to be first. Accuracy is everything in these situations. [12]

Several journalists said coverage should be less about who gets it first and more about who gets it right. They said it is also important that all the facts are presented as truth with very little (if any) information omitted from news reports to maintain credibility with the public. However, some journalists in the study said the industry is still trying to figure out what "typical" reporting practices should look like when it comes to covering a mass shooting. According to an anchor who reported on the Odessa, Texas, mass shooting, "The number of (shootings) that have happened in recent years has made us all become more sensitive to how we cover events like this, but every news organization still goes about their coverage very differently." [17]

Social media and mass shooting coverage

The fourth research question asked how and to what extent social media has affected the coverage of mass shootings. The use of technology, such as social media, was studied from the perspective of how it has affected journalists' coverage of mass shootings. Several participants in

the study said social media has created a way to push out content to the public as well as use it in news reports. A reporter who covered the Dayton, Ohio, mass shooting said social media accounts of the shooter and of the victims may be used to help fill in the details of their background. Journalists in the study said they often use social media as a way to notify the public about breaking news and to update them in real time throughout a developing news story. When breaking news occurs, journalists' report on information based on what is confirmed by law enforcement. News reports are typically published first on digital platforms and then covered more extensively in news reports. One broadcast television journalist who covered the August 28, 2017, mass shooting at a public library in Clovis, New Mexico, which resulted in two deaths and four injuries, stated, "I was tweeting, going live on Facebook, posting on Facebook, etc., non-stop. I also used video on air from someone's smartphone from inside the scene once." [3] A participant who reported on the mass shooting in Dayton, Ohio, said that after the breaking news coverage, reporters should,

Dig into the why and fill in details about the victims and the shooter(s) and the bystanders. In the following days, capture more about the reactions to the shooting – proposed policy changes, debate over gun policy, trauma to the victims' families, the injured and the bystanders. [1]

Participants in the study noted that social media can provide a way for journalists to reach out to potential sources including witnesses, victims, and people connected to the shooter. A former reporter who covered the mass shooting in El Paso, Texas, stated, "Social media is a way to stay on top of a much larger conversation about what happened, including profiles of attackers and victims and location. Social media can be a tool to meet sources. It can also be dangerous, when relied on without rigorous verification." [14] A reporter who covered the May 31, 2019,

Virginia Beach, Virginia, mass shooting stated, “Social media was part of our coverage. We used social media to communicate urgent information. We used social media to honor the victims of the shooting. And then the typical role of social media to share stories with people in our community.” [23] In that shooting, DeWayne Craddock had resigned from his position on the morning he gunned down 12 people at a local office and injured 4 others. A participant who covered the shooting in El Paso, Texas, noted, “Social media platforms have also changed the way outlets learn about shootings because once someone posts anything about a potential shooting situation, outlets start monitoring or contacting police in that area to confirm any events.” [25] According to a print reporter who covered the mass shooting in Tucson, Arizona, social media can also be “more immediate and that immediacy can be helpful, but it also requires journalists to slow down and use our ethics and reporting and editing skills in the moment.” [2]

Several journalists in the study noted the negative side of using social media in news reports because it can be used as a platform for gossip, misinformation and trolling. According to a reporter who covered the Dayton, Ohio, mass shooting:

Social media is a means to collect and distribute information about a shooting, the shooter and victims. But it can also be a source of misinformation as well as glorification of the shooter. Responsible, ethical journalists must take care to vet the information being used. [1]

Several participants in the study said it is up to each journalist to vet content found on social media before using it in their own news reports.

Coverage of mass shootings, trauma, and resilience

The last research question asked what practices, if any, do journalists use to cope with the impact of covering mass shootings. The field of journalism has come a long way in the last

decade when it comes to understanding the trauma and impacts of covering a mass shooting, according to participants in the study. Those in the journalism field have been made aware that news outlets have, in the past, been criticized for inaccuracies, rushing to be first, using shooters' names, unintentionally glorifying shooters, provoking copycats, and so forth. What participants noted in this study is that journalists are learning from these mistakes and improving their news reports by focusing on the victims, communities, and those most affected by these tragedies. However, there is still a long way to go in knowing how journalists should best cover these acts of violence and minimize harm to the reporter. Several journalists in the study said they are often forced to compartmentalize trauma and deal with the effects well after the coverage has come to an end. A participant who covered the Dayton, Ohio, mass shooting said the cumulative effect of covering so many shootings has affected behavior in social gatherings.

I am not one much for crowds these days. I'd rather be in small groups. I get more nervous around lots and lots of people, especially when it is indoors. I don't go to concerts very often. I look for exit doors when I'm at an event. I also feel more for the families who have to go through the trauma. [19]

Nearly all of the participants in the study said the mental health and well-being of journalists is something the public should be aware of. Several journalists suggested they talk to someone, like a therapist, colleague, editor and/or leader, about the potential traumas they may have been exposed to while covering mass shootings. They also stated that it is important for journalists to understand the support systems they have in place while figuring out triggers and how to cope in the days, weeks and months following the mass shooting. According to a reporter who covered the mass shooting in Tucson, Arizona, "Covering mass murder is traumatizing and journalists

need to recognize that and take time and care necessary. Newsroom leaders need to set that tone, because journalists won't do it for themselves in the moment." [2]

More often than not, journalists in the study stated that they are becoming almost numb to this type of coverage. According to a participant who covered the mass shooting in El Paso, Texas, "While it doesn't happen 100 percent of the time, I've felt like that pretty often, and it's not only with mass shootings. Journalists are exposed to a wide range of traumatic events on a daily basis that you have to develop a defense mechanism. I feel for journalists who cover mass shootings on site and those who cover these events for extended periods of time." [25] Much like first responders, journalists coping with the aftermath of mass shootings are more likely to demonstrate symptoms of secondary post-traumatic stress disorder. According to journalists in the study, there is no right or wrong way to go about dealing with the emotional and psychological impacts they might experience after covering a mass shooting. Several participants said they often seek professional help, like therapy or professional counseling, and resources as a way to cope with the potential impacts reporting on trauma may have on them personally and professionally. A print reporter who covered the mass shooting in Tucson, Arizona, said, "I went to therapy and took a short trip about three months after the shooting, once I realized how much it had been affecting my emotional and mental health." [2] Another participant in the study said that, "Talking to people about it is so incredibly important. Seeing a therapist is so helpful. I had one counseling session (I need to go back) and that alone was so important." [4] Another respondent noted: "Seeking a mental health professional is key. We are always 24/7 and thinking about everything but ourselves but mental health should be a priority. When your bosses ask whether you need anything, journalists should take on their offers." [25] Another participant

even suggested that journalists wait several weeks following a mass shooting to see a therapist because not everyone will know right away whether they are having prolonged feelings of stress.

Other respondents said emotional support animals were brought into the newsroom which helped them decompress. According to an anchor who covered the mass shooting in Dayton, Ohio, “The station brought in therapy dogs and counseling into the newsroom. Journalists are not police, [but] we are still in some ways first responders. We were right there in the middle of it. Don’t be afraid to ask for help. This type of coverage can impact you on an emotional and psychological level. Go get help. It’s not just another day at work.” [16] Other journalists in the study said they often relied on each other for guidance and support. A news director who reported on the mass shooting in Odessa, Texas, said, “We brought counselors in to speak with anyone that needed to just talk things through. We were surprised to see how many other news organizations in other states/cities, sent us food, cards, etc. ... letting us know they were thinking of us.” [10] Many journalists in this study said it is common for people to go home and process what they saw and heard, but this needs to be done in a healthy way. A participant who covered the Dayton, Ohio, mass shooting said, “There are a wealth of resources available for journalists who struggle. Personally, I’ve learned to appreciate slow news days.” [12]

Several journalists in the study said they discovered resources through professional journalism organizations, news media think tanks, trade organizations, and social media groups and used them as a way to cope. According to a participant who covered the mass shooting in Dayton, Ohio, “We discovered a FB group and are now a part of it called Journalists Covering Trauma.” [10] A reporter who covered the Dayton, Ohio, mass shooting relied on the Radio Television Digital News Associations, the Poynter Institute, *Columbia Journalism Review*, Facebook, psychologists, and “organizations and groups who recognize the need for trauma

therapy and counseling for journalists. Our station made a psychologist available at the station. Therapy dogs were brought in. Journalists who've been through this before reached out almost immediately. The stigma is disappearing as these shootings become more common. We need to keep talking." [12] According to a reporter who covered the Dayton, Ohio, mass shooting, "Like anyone, journalists need time and space to process trauma and tragedy. Talking with friends and/or professionals is a healthy step that should be encouraged and supported." [1] Another stated, "Journalists should take time to decompress. It's important that they have an opportunity to talk about the experience with each other and professionals, to express how they feel and to learn how others feel." [14] A participant who covered the mass shooting in Tucson, Arizona, acknowledged, "This is very tough to handle during the breaking news coverage. I think you kind of separate your professional duty from your personal feelings. It's important to debrief with someone after the event, like a coworker or family member. I think more journalists should have trauma training BEFORE it's needed." [20]

Some participants in the study encouraged journalists to engage in self-care as a way to take away some of the stressors that come along with covering trauma. Self-care includes going on a run, taking time away from work, covering more uplifting stories, getting a massage, working out, playing video games, or engaging in other activities. One journalist suggested taking a break or limiting social media usage. A reporter who covered the mass shooting in San Bernardino, California, pointed out,

It's up to news organizations to create a workplace culture that emphasizes self-care and addresses trauma head-on. Journalists should have support from the top down and be encouraged to talk about trauma, take time off as needed and seek professional help immediately after a shooting and in the weeks or months that follow. Individual methods

of coping are important, of course, but they usually start with the culture of the institution. [28]

The study findings demonstrate that journalists have many concerns regarding their coverage of mass shootings and suggest that additional planning and protocols should be in place to reduce occupational stress and minimize the impact of covering mass trauma. Moreover, the research found that journalists perceived that coverage of this type had improved over time. The study also expanded knowledge of how professional normative practices have changed over time as a result of an increase in the number of mass shootings in the U.S. Furthermore, this study was able to gain insights into how journalists' use of technology, such as social media, has added dimensions of work and stress to the coverage of mass shootings. Not surprisingly, this study found that coverage of mass shootings had a major impact on journalists professionally and personally throughout and post-coverage.

Discussion

In an era where mass shootings occur more frequently than ever before, journalists have been tasked with covering these tragedies with professionalism and accuracy. This study used the framework of gatekeeping theory and the concepts of trauma and resilience with a qualitative approach to analyze the perceptions and attitudes about the coverage of mass shootings in the U.S. by journalists over the last decade. The research sought to better understand how this type of coverage affects journalists' professional and personal lives. Using firsthand accounts, the study found that mass shooting coverage has become more integrated into routine reporting in most of the newsrooms in the study over recent years as the number of mass shootings has risen. Participants in the study confirmed earlier professional publication reports that newsrooms are changing some of their policies for reporting on mass shootings, such as focusing more on the

victims rather than on the shooter (Urbani, 2019). Journalists in the study stated that they are often conflicted on how much coverage they should give to the shooter and fear that too much coverage might cause more harm beyond the traumatic event. Several participants said they were concerned that their news reports could influence others to commit similar acts of violence. Most participants in the study stated images of the shooter should be included in the initial coverage with limited exposure in follow-up reports. Study participants also noted that in the days to months following a mass shooting, news reports should focus more on the victims and the impacts the shooting had on the community rather than solely on the shooter.

This study also contributes to media sociology scholarship focused upon the coverage of mass shootings and the impacts it may have on the journalists who cover them (Bruce, 2015; Dahmen, 2018; Lankford & Madfis, 2018; McCluskey, 2017; Meindl & Ivy, 2018; Mingus & Zopf, 2010; Murray, 2017; Knoll, 2013; Ruiz-Grossman, 2017; Schildkraut, 2017). This work also advances research on journalism and trauma and resiliency by expanding beyond the very few case studies that have been done by other scholars (Brayne, 2007; Masten, 2001; Novak & Davidson, 2013; Ochberg, 1996; Simpson & Bogg, 1999; Smith et al., 2015) to the 33 professional journalists who, in total, covered 11 different mass shootings.

The theoretical framework of gatekeeping has been transformed in the online environment and the impact it has on how the public obtains news (Schwalbe et al., 2015; Soroka, 2012). Presently, social media has blown through these so-called gates and is a large part of the newsgathering and distributing process. The study currently confirms that social media has had a great impact on the coverage of mass shootings with practically immediate digital access to a plethora of photos, videos, and witnesses as well as people connected to the shooter. This new level of engagement adds to the occupational strain of reporting under trying circumstances.

Study participants stated they now have the role of verifying the information they use from social media. This is because these platforms often are used for gossip, misinformation, disinformation, and trolling.

Much like first responders, journalists often are exposed to suffering firsthand during this type of coverage which can affect their overall health and mental well-being (Smith et al., 2015). Journalists have the difficult job of telling the stories of the victims of mass shootings, which requires a degree of professional detachment to occur over the years based on journalistic practices in the U.S. Several journalists in this study stated that they often suppress their reactions to the trauma they face when covering mass shootings. In fact, journalists may not even know they are experiencing trauma or adapting to their work to avoid trauma because they are doing their job by listening, and often sympathizing, with those most affected. However, this empathy can be detrimental to the well-being of some journalists.

Often, the cumulative effect of covering so many mass shootings has affected not only journalists' state of mind but also the behavior they may display in social gatherings, such as going to the movies or a concert. Research has shown that the longer a journalist covers traumatic stories, the more likely it is for the person to demonstrate symptoms of secondary post-traumatic stress disorder (Simpson & Bogg, 1999). Participants in this study suggested that those covering mass shootings should take time to talk with a professional therapist or counselor about some of the potential traumas they may have faced during their coverage. The respondents indicated that it is also important for journalists to understand what support systems they have in place, like talking to an editor in a newsroom or a colleague who has covered similar tragedies, while figuring out how to manage triggers and cope with the aftermath of covering a mass shooting. The study indicates that it is important for journalists who do not seek help right away

to be monitoring their mental well-being several weeks post-coverage. This research also mentions that some journalists are not aware they are having prolonged feelings of trauma. Other resources for dealing with the potential trauma may be found through journalism organizations, professional magazines, think tanks focused on the profession, and social media groups. Among those organizations cited were the Radio Television Digital News Association, Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, Poynter Institute, *Columbia Journalism Review* and Facebook groups dedicated to journalists covering trauma.

Research suggests that journalists are able to perform their duties in traumatic scenarios while experiencing a low rate of reported PTSD and other psychiatric disorders (Smith et al., 2015). This thesis study found that journalists were also very occupation and task-oriented when covering mass shootings, similar to other news events. It appears that being so task-focused allows many to compartmentalize the coverage, which fits in with the professional occupational task norms of constantly moving from one event to the next event on deadlines. Thus, this study found, the fast pace of the profession does not provide journalists with sufficient time to reflect on the coverage itself. According to the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, it is important for journalists to establish a standard routine of healthy habits to maintain resilience while covering trauma (Brayne, 2007). This routine could include exercising and meditation, taking time away from work, covering more uplifting stories, getting a massage, playing video games, and limiting social media use. Research also suggests that journalists should consider eating at least three meals a day, obtaining adequate sleep, and taking much-needed breaks (Brayne, 2007).

This study has some limitations. Findings based on qualitative work cannot be generalized. Thus, the research reflects only the perceptions and attitudes of journalists recruited

for this study. More than half of the participants were female and individuals from different genders may differ on how they cope with trauma. There was also an absence of digital journalists in this study. I did, however, reach out to several digital journalists but none of whom agreed to participate in this study.

Future researchers should consider recruiting more participants from various news platforms into studies. It would be beneficial to perform a similar study to better understand what is being done by newsroom leaders to combat trauma among journalists following mass shooting coverage. At some point, newsrooms should integrate plans to cover mass shootings for journalists to universally follow. This would create a transformation in the coverage of mass shootings.

Conclusion

As the number of mass shootings in the United States has increased in the past decade, the coverage of these tragedies has become more routine for seasoned journalists. This study highlights how journalists covered 11 different mass shootings as well as how they are coping with the potential trauma they may have been exposed to on the job. The framework of gatekeeping theory and the concepts of trauma and resilience sought to build knowledge about journalists' perceptions of and attitudes towards mass shooting coverage and how this type of coverage may impact journalists' professional and personal lives.

This research reveals gaps in newsroom protocols for the coverage of mass shootings and the need for mental health programs for journalists as reporting on these events often has become inevitable. With access to countless amounts of information through technology, such as social media platforms, journalists are tasked with the verification, corroboration and triangulation of facts and quickly presenting mass shooting coverage without glorifying the shooter in the

process. Journalistic norms in the U.S. require that reporters exhibit professional and often stoic behavior while remaining empathetic to those suffering in the most difficult of circumstances.

This research contributes to the field in that it analyzes both professional and individual effects of mass shooting coverage beyond a single case and provides insights into the mental and emotional impacts this type of coverage may have on journalists. Future scholars could study the potential effects of long-term coverage of trauma as well as how the coverage of mass shootings is changing over time. This research, in turn, may create new ways for journalists to cover mass shootings in the future while minimizing harm.

TABLES: Methodology**Table 1:** Five deadliest mass shootings in the last 10 years

Location	Date	Number killed
Las Vegas, Nevada	October 1, 2017	58 killed
Orlando, Florida, Pulse Nightclub	June 12, 2016	49 killed
Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newton, Connecticut	December 14, 2012	27 killed
Sutherland Springs, Texas	November 5, 2017	25 killed
El Paso, Texas	August 3, 2019	22 killed

Source: [CNN](#), *Mass Shootings in the US Fast Facts* (2019)

Table 2: Five most recent mass shootings

Location	Date	Number killed
Odessa, Texas	August 31, 2019	7 killed
Dayton, Ohio	August 4, 2019	9 killed
El Paso, Texas	August 3, 2019	22 killed
Virginia Beach, Virginia	May 31, 2019	12 killed

Aurora, Illinois	February 25, 2019	5 killed
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Source: [CNN](#), *Mass Shootings in the US Fast Facts* (2019)

APPENDIX A: Articles compiled using keywords

ARTICLE TITLE	AUTHOR(S)	YEAR	MEDIA
<u>'Americans are crazy': Foreign journalists grapple with covering U.S. mass shootings</u>	Claire Atkinson	2019	<i>NBC News</i>
<u>Opinion: How not to report on mass shootings</u>	Melissa Batchelor Warnke	2018	<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>
<u>U.S. TV coverage of Las Vegas attack ignored gun violence solutions, report finds</u>	Lois Beckett	2017	<i>The Guardian</i>
<u>Going home to report on a mass shooting was the hardest assignment I've ever had</u>	Nicole Chavez	2019	<i>CNN</i>
<u>Reporting on mass shootings: A familiar heartbreaking script</u>	Leila Fadel	2018	<i>NPR</i>
<u>How mass media shapes perceptions of mass shootings</u>	Heather Goldstone & Elsa Partan	2019	<i>WCAI Cape and Island NPR Station</i>
<u>In one year as a journalist, I've lost track of all the mass shootings I've covered</u>	Kate Guarino	2018	<i>Refinery 29</i>
<u>The media's week-long attention span for a mass shooting</u>	Adam Harris	2018	<i>The Atlantic</i>

How the media can help prevent mass shootings	Zaid Jilani	2019	<i>Greater Good Magazine</i>
Coverage of mass shootings threatens public safety	Miles Kohrman & Katherine Reed	2019	<i>The Trace</i>
In the year after Parkland, there was nearly one mass shooting a day	German Lopez	2019	<i>Vox</i>
Mass shootings in America: The unavoidable facts	Julia Lurie	2019	<i>Mother Jones</i>
CNN's Brooke Baldwin moved to tears while processing mass shootings	Lee Moran	2019	<i>CNN</i>
Do journalists deserve some blame for America's mass shootings?	Angela Morris	2018	<i>Quill Magazine</i>
How journalists cover mass shootings: Research to consider	Denise-Marie Ordway	2019	<i>Journalist's Resources</i>
Should media avoid naming the gunmen in mass shootings?	Lisa Marie Pane	2019	<i>Associated Press</i>
Covering school shootings? Here's what you need to know	Emily Richmond	2018	<i>Education Writer's Association</i>
Mass shootings: Experts say violence is contagious, and 24/7 news cycle doesn't help	Dennis Romero	2019	<i>NBC News</i>

Does naming the shooter in the media lead to more mass violence?	Ben Rowen	2019	<i>Pacific Standard Magazine</i>
The media should stop making school shooters famous	Jaclyn Schildkraut	2018	<i>Vox</i>
The media's by-the-numbers coverage of gun massacres must change	Margaret Sullivan	2019	<i>The Washington Post</i>
'A time of great shift': Journalists reflect on covering mass shootings and extremism	Shaydanay Urbani	2019	<i>First Draft News</i>
53 people died in mass shootings in August alone in the U.S.	Neil Vigdor	2019	<i>The New York Times</i>

APPENDIX B: Mass shooting cases in the study

NAME OF MASS SHOOTING	LOCATION OF MASS SHOOTING	DATE OF MASS SHOOTING	NAME OF THE SHOOTER(S)	INFORMATION ABOUT MASS SHOOTING
Arizona Safeway shooting	Tucson, Arizona	January 8, 2011	Jared Lee Loughner	Killed: 6 Injured: 13 This shooting occurred at a Safeway in Tucson, Arizona where Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was hosting a Congress at Your Corner event.
San Bernardino shooting	San Bernardino, California	December 2, 2015	Syed Rizwan Farook, Tashfeen Malik	Killed: 14 Injured: 22 A married couple fired automatic weapons at a holiday party for county employees in San Bernardino.
Pulse Nightclub shooting	Orlando, Florida	June 12, 2016	Omar Mateen	Killed: 49 Injured: 53 Shooter Omar Mateen gunned down occupants at a well-known LGBTQ+ nightclub in Orlando. He also called authorities during the attack to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State.
Clovis library shooting	Clovis, New Mexico	August 28, 2017	Nathaniel Jouett	Killed: 2 Injured: 4 Gunman Nathaniel Jouett opened fire at a public library

				in downtown Clovis, New Mexico, killing two librarians.
Las Vegas shooting	Las Vegas, Nevada	October 1, 2017	Stephen Paddock	Killed: 58 Injured: 500+ Shooter Stephen Paddock checked into a suite on the 32 nd floor of the Mandalay Bay hotel in Las Vegas. During Jason Aldean's performance at Route 91 Harvest Music Festival, Paddock began firing shots at concertgoers. This shooting is known as one of the deadliest mass shootings in modern history.
Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting	Parkland, Florida	February 14, 2018	Nikolas Cruz	Killed: 17 Injured: 17 Expelled student Nikolas Cruz opened fire at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.
STEM Highlands Ranch shooting	Highlands Ranch, Colorado	May 7, 2019	Alec McKinney, Devon Erickson	Killed: 1 Injured: 8 The shooters planned to attack STEM School Highlands Ranch weeks before the shooting. The intended targets were classmates

				who had repeatedly bullied one of the shooters.
Virginia Beach shooting	Virginia Beach, Virginia	May 31, 2019	DeWayne Craddock	Killed: 12 Injured: 4 Shooter DeWayne Craddock resigned from his position on the morning of the shooting. He entered a Virginia Beach office and gunned down 12 people.
El Paso Walmart shooting	El Paso, Texas	August 3, 2019	Patrick Wood Crusius	Killed: 22 Injured: 23 This shooting occurred at a Walmart in El Paso where Patrick Wood Crusius targeted Latinos. This mass shooting is known as one of the deadliest attacks on Latinos in modern U.S. history.
Dayton shooting	Dayton, Ohio	August 4, 2019	Connor Stephen Betts	Killed: 9 Injured: 27 This mass shooting occurred outside of a bar in the Oregon District in the early morning hours of August 4. The shooting lasted for about 32 seconds.
West Texas shooting	Odessa, Texas	August 31, 2019	Seth Aaron Ator	Killed: 7 Injured: 22 This shooting began with a traffic

				stop that evolved into a drive-by rampage mass shooting along the highways and streets of West Texas.
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Sources: Attanasio (2019), Chavez (2020), Chuck, Johnson, & Siemaszko (2018), Coronado & Samuels (2019), Epatko (2015), Grieder (2018), Holcombe & Yan (2019), Jamieson & Baer (2019), Kamana (2019), Karimi & Lavandera (2019), Osborne, Hutchinson, & Carrega (2019), Romo (2019), Rosenblatt (2018), Shapiro (2019), Zambelich & Hurt (2016).

APPENDIX C: Questionnaire used in the study

1. Your age.
2. Gender identity.
3. Your highest level of education (in what field(s)).
4. How many years have you worked as a journalist?
5. How many organizations have you worked for full-time? Any freelance work?
6. What type of news organization have you reported for? (international, national, regional, state, local, etc.)
7. What types of platforms have you reported from? (print, audio, online, video, combination, etc.)
8. Could you describe the typical reporting practices for covering a mass shooting?
9. To what extent, if at all, have these practices changed and/or been modified over time?
10. How has social media impacted, if at all, your coverage of mass shootings?
11. If you incorporate social media into your coverage of mass shootings, what ways is this done?
12. Does social media play a role in the coverage of mass shootings? If so, what role does it play and how might it influence the coverage during and following a mass shooting?
13. Within the profession, have there been any conversations about issues with mass shooting coverage? If so, could you describe some of these?
14. How would you evaluate the coverage of mass shootings by news media organizations?
15. How should journalists approach covering a mass shooting? What should journalists include in coverage? What should journalists omit from coverage?

16. To what extent do you feel that covering these events have impacted you personally and or professionally, if at all?
17. How do you think journalists should cope with the potential trauma when covering events such as a mass shooting? What have you done, if anything?
18. Is there anything else that you would like to share about the coverage of mass shootings?

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